

Predicting performance and positive functioning at work using emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is related to a wide variety of outcomes. Across general professional settings, EI, often measured with the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) and the EQ-i 2.0[®], has been used to predict performance and general positive functioning in the workplace. EI is a positive predictor of performance across a variety of professions (e.g., managers, debt collectors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, medical professionals, educators, athletes, sales professionals, and law enforcement).

Below, information about EI and performance in the workplace is presented first; afterwards, details on particular occupations are provided.



Meta-analyses of the relationship between EI and overall job performance

Performance in the workplace is often known as job performance. Many researchers have looked at the relationship between EI and job performance, and a handful of researchers have compiled the information from these studies to create a summary of the findings thus far. The analysis of a compilation of multiple studies is known as meta-analysis. By combining multiple studies together, a meta-analysis can rule out conclusions that might have been based on a researcher's unique circumstances and thus provide more comprehensive and compelling evidence of an outcome.

A review of the literature identified four meta-analyses that support a positive relationship between EI and job performance. The individual studies analyzed in the meta-analyses used a variety of EI tools, with the EQ-i being one of the most common tools reported.

The oldest of the four meta-analyses is a 2011 paper that reviewed 17 studies on the relationship between emotional intelligence as measured by the EQ-i and a variety of performance domains (e.g., objective performance and ratings of performance by a supervisor)ⁱ. This meta-analytic research found that EI was a significant positive predictor of job performance and accounted for 19% of the variance in performance at a job.

The author of the 2011 paper, O'Boyle Jr., collaborated with other researchers to work on another meta-analysis on EI and performance—in this case, job performance as rated by managersⁱⁱ. This updated meta-analysis reviewed 36 studies (N = 2,168). As in the 2011 meta-analysis, this 2015 paper confirmed that EI is positively and meaningfully associated with managers ratings of job performance.

More recent meta-analyses, both reported in 2017, looked at EI and job performance in different ways. One reviewed three studies (N = 546) and found that higher EI scores were related to more frequent helpful behaviors that improved the culture at work and led to fewer destructive behaviors in the workplace (e.g., stealing or intentionally being unproductive)ⁱⁱⁱ. The other meta-analysis reviewed 41 studies (N = 7,076) and found that higher EI scores were related to higher job performance, which led to higher job satisfaction^{iv}. Overall, the results of these four meta-analyses support the finding that across a variety of work contexts, a positive relationship exists between emotional intelligence and job performance, suggesting that people higher in EI also tend to demonstrate higher job performance.



Managers

A study by Dries and Pepermans found that the EQ-i skills of Optimism and Emotional Self-Awareness positively predicted self-reported job performance in 133 managers; Total EI scores predicted career commitment^v.

Finance

Another study investigated the EI scores of 100 front-line bank employees as they related to their managers' work appraisals. The researcher found that EQ-i scores accounted for 27% of the variance in employees' performance scores^{vi}.

Debt Collectors

A study by Bachman and colleagues found the EQ-i to be predictive of job performance in debt collectors. When the debt collectors were divided into top performing and under performing groups, the researchers found differences in their Total EI scores as well as specific groupings of subscales (Assertiveness & Independence, Self-Actualization & Problem Solving, Optimism & Happiness). During a three-month follow-up after using the EQ-i tool in hiring and training, new hires that exhibited higher EQ-i scores met, on average, 163% of their debt collection quotas; in comparison, those who scored lower on the EQ-i met, on average, 80% of their quotas^{vii}.

Lawyers

Top performing lawyers were consistently found to achieve above average Total EQ-i scores. These successful lawyers also tend to score higher in Independence, Optimism, Reality Testing, and Stress Tolerance^{viii}.

Entrepreneurs

Another study looked at entrepreneurs and found that those who scored higher on the EQ-i 2.0 subscales of Empathy, Interpersonal Relationships, Social Responsibility, Flexibility, Stress Tolerance, and Optimism were twice as likely to increase their scores on a measure of overall success^{ix}.



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References

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