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Personality traits and emotional intelligence as predictors of teachers' psychological well-being

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Abstract: We examined predictive validity of the Big Five personality traits and three dimensions of emotional intelligence (EI) regarding psychological well-being on the sample of primary and high-school teachers. Notwithstanding relatively high correlations between personality and EI scales, reported by other studies, we predicted that EI still accounts for a significant amount of variability in psychological well-being. This prediction originates in idea that different abilities concerning emotions should help individuals to be more effective in various aspects of positive functioning. One hundred fifty two teachers filled out the Big Five Inventory (BFI), Emotional Skills and Competence Questionnaire (ESCQ), and the short version of Riff's Psychological Well-Being Scales (RPWB). Results showed good predictive validity of personality traits, for they accounted for 22 to 43% of variability in different psychological well-being scales. Predictive validity of EI is also excellent, but when controlling for personality traits is far worse, since it accounts for only 1 to 3% of variance in well-being scales. Discriminant validity of EI scales measured by ESCQ is therefore unsatisfactory.

Key words: emotional intelligence, personality traits, psychological well-being, predictive validity, teachers, Big Five Inventory BFI, Scales of Psychological Well-Being PWB, Emotional Skills and Competence Questionnaire ESCQ-45

Osebnostne lastnosti in emocionalna inteligentnost kot prediktorji psihološkega blagostanja učiteljev

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Povzetek: V raziskavi smo preverjali napovedno veljavnost petih velikih faktorjev osebnosti in treh dimenzij emocionalne inteligentnosti za psihološko blagostanje učiteljev osnovnih in srednjih šol. Kljub temu, da več raziskav poroča o precejšnjem prekrivanju samoocenjevalne emocionalne inteligentnosti z osebnostnimi lastnostmi, smo predvidevali, da emocionalna inteligentnost vseeno pojasnjuje pomemben delež variance blagostanja, saj konstrukt emocionalne inteligentnosti vključuje različne sposobnosti ravnanja z emocijami, pomembne za posameznikovo uspešno funkcioniranje v življenju. Skupaj 152 učiteljev in učiteljic je izpolnilo vprašalnik osebnostnih lastnosti BFI, vprašalnik emocionalne inteligentnosti ESCQ in skrajšano obliko vprašalnika psihološkega blagostanja RPWB.

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Rezultati so potrdili napovedno veljavnost osebnostnih lastnosti, saj napovedujejo 22 do 43 % variance različnih področij blagostanja. Napovedna veljavnost emocionalne inteligentnosti pa ob kontroliranju vpiva osebnostnih lastnosti sicer doseže nivo 1-odstotnega tveganja, vendar je praktična vrednost tega doprinosa zanemarljiva, saj pojasnjuje le 1–3 % variance. Lahko zaključimo, da naši rezultati kažejo na preveliko prekrivanje med osebnostnimi lastnostmi in emocionalno inteligentnostjo, če jo merimo z vprašalnikom ESCQ.

Ključne besede: čustvena inteligentnost, osebnostne lastnosti, psihološko blagostanje, učitelji, Vprašalnik petih velikih faktorjev osebnosti BFI, Vprašalnik psihološkega blagostanja RPWB, Vprašalnik emocionalne kompetentnosti ESCQ-45

CC = 3120, 2220

When compared with the "classical" construct of intelligence, the main advantage of EI is its supposedly better predictive validity regarding real-life prosperity (Mayer, 1999). One of the aspects of a prosperous, successful life is the subjective satisfaction with life, and also positive functioning on specific areas of one's life. The classical intelligence construct is not the most appropriate predictor of such aspects of one's performance in life. On the other hand, there are several studies that show significant correlation between EI and satisfaction with life (e. g., Gallagher & Vella-Broderick, 2008; Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005; Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002). One of the goals of our study was to explore the aforementioned relationships on the sample of teachers, since their constant interaction with students demands high level of interpersonal intelligence. Past studies on teachers demonstrated the importance of EI for teaching activities (e. g., Chan, 2008; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2008; Landa, Lopez-Zafra, de Antonana, & Pulido, 2006; Perry & Ball, 2007).

On the basis of a theoretical framework proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) we can assume that higher levels of EI can improve psychological well-being. Individuals who have EI above the average are more aware of their emotions and emotions of others, and are able to effectively control their emotions. Such behavior raises the probability that a person will put more effort in self-realization and personal growth and not in seeking short-term enjoyment which often leads to undesired states when emotions control a person and not the other way around. Above average emotionally intelligent individuals are also supposed to experience higher levels of subjective and psychological well-being (especially in the areas of personal growth, positive interpersonal relationships, and self-acceptance). Because they are able to understand and control their emotions, they tend to behave more rationally when confronted by problems, have internal locus of control, perceive everyday troubles as less stressful, perceive themselves as more efficient, experience more positive than negative emotions, and receive more social support from closer as well as more distant members of their social network (Bar-On, 2000).

There are several studies that dealt with the relationship between EI and

subjective well-being. Bar-On (2006) reported high correlations (r = .76) between self-reported EI and subjective well-being, and concluded that the abilities of understanding and accepting one's own emotions, setting goals in order to develop one's own potentials, and seeing events in the right perspective are the most important factors of subjective well-being. Other similar studies report lower but still significant correlations (Bastian, Burns, & Nettlebeck, 2005; Day, Therrien, & Carroll, 2005; Extremera & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2005; Gallagher and Vella-Broderick, 2008; Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005; Palmer et al., 2002).

While the hedonistic view of well-being focuses on outcomes of happiness or enjoyment, eudaimonic view emphasizes the process of "living well" and the contents of one's life (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). Ryff (1989) defined psychological well-being as "striving toward perfection that represents realization of one's potentials". Shulman and Hemenover (2006) conducted an extensive study in which they also explored the relationship between EI and psychological well-being. They discovered low to moderate correlations between EI and different dimensions of psychological well-being. Psychological well-being was most highly correlated with the forth level of EI (i. e., "control of emotions"), the second highest correlation was obtained with "understanding of emotions", and the third highest correlation was discovered with "perception of emotions".

One of the most substantial critiques of the construct of EI refers to its discriminant validity with regard to personality traits (Mayer, 1999), for there is a lot of evidence of high association between EI and various personality constructs. Dawda and Hart (2000) reported significant correlations between total score on EI questionnaire EQ-I (Bar-On, 1997) and all Big Five personality factors. Day et al. (2005) have also shown that there is high correlation between the score on EQ-I, extraversion, and conscientiousness. By using different questionnaires for measuring EI, namely EIS (Shutte et al., 1998) and TMMS (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995), some studies found evidence of better discriminant validity. Shutte et al. discovered significant correlation between the score on EIS and openness, whereas the correlations with other Big Five factors proved insignificant. Similarly, studies that used TMMS (e. g., Extremera & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2005; Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005) showed satisfactory discriminant validity regarding neuroticism, the Big Five factor that is usually most highly correlated with EI (e. g., Shulman & Hemenover, 2006). Shulman and Hemenover reported the highest negative correlation between neuroticism and self-acceptance (i. e., a dimension of psychological well-being). Lower correlations were found with extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, and the lowest correlation was obtained with openness. Avsec and Sočan (in press) discovered the highest correlations between dimensions of psychological well-being, openness, and agreeableness, somewhat lower with conscientiousness, and the lowest with extraversion and neuroticism. It is worth noting that these findings contradict those of Shulman and Hemenover, for they found the highest correlations between EI, extraversion, and neuroticism. In both mentioned studies, openness

was most highly correlated with personal growth scale of psychological well-being. Schmutte and Ryff (1997) reported that self-acceptance, environmental mastery, and purpose in life are significantly correlated with extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism, personal growth with openness, positive relations with agreeableness and extraversion, autonomy with neuroticism.

Predictive validity of EI for subjective well-being is somewhat lessened if we control the effect of personality traits, but even in this case EI can still account for a significant amount of variability in subjective well-being (Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003). Regarding prediction of psychological well-being, Shulman and Hemenover (2006) discovered that after controlling the variance in well-being that is accounted for by personality traits, EI explained a negligible amount of variance (1 to 6%). The authors used the TMMS questionnaire, which was originally not designed to measure EI, and this fact of course renders their findings questionable.

The main goal of the present study was to examine the predictive validity of ESCQ questionnaire (Takšić, 1998, 2001) for measuring EI. We assumed that EI is an important predictor of well-being, for it is necessary to understand one's emotions and emotion of others for successful personal growth and achieving autonomy. In order to successfully control one's environment and to maintain positive interpersonal relationships one must possess an ability to control emotions. Also, to perceive life as meaningful and to accept oneself, one must accept her/his emotions. Due to justified critique regarding overlapping of EI and personality we controlled the effect of personality traits when investigating the predictive validity of EI for well-being.

Method

Subjects

One hundred fifty two teachers (29 male, 115 female; 8 participants did not report their gender) from two elementary and three high schools participated in the study. The subjects' age ranged from 23 to 60 years (M = 39 years). Most of the participants (n = 109) finished university education (7th level of education).

Instruments

Emotion Skills and Competence Questionnaire ESCQ-45 (Takšić, 1998, 2001) is based on the model of EI developed by Mayer and Salovey (1997). ESCQ-45 is a shortened version of the ESCQ-136 questionnaire, which was adapted for the Slovenian environment (Avsec & Takšić, 2007). It consists of 45 items, out of which 16

comprise the Ability to perceive and understand emotions scale, 13 items comprise the Ability to express and label emotions scale, and the remaining 16 items form the Ability to manage and regulate emotions scale. The participant's task is to specify to what degree each of the items is relevant to her/him on a 5-level scale (1 – Never, 2 – Seldom, 3 – Occasionally, 4 – Usually, 5 – Always). Information regarding metric characteristics of the original Slovenian version can be found in a publication by Avsec in Takšić. Coefficients of internal consistency obtained in the present study were as follows: the Ability to perceive and understand emotions scale (α = .90), the Ability to express and label emotions scale (α = .88), the Ability to manage and regulate emotions scale (α = .76), the overall scale (α = .93).

The short version of the Ruff's Psychological Well-Being Scales RPWB (Ryff, 1989) consists of 27 items. Environmental Mastery, Self-Acceptance, Positive Relations, and Purpose in Life scales are composed of 4 items, 5 items refer to the Personal Growth scale, and 6 items measure the Autonomy scale. The participants' task is to specify their level of agreement to each item on a 6-level scale (1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Mostly disagree, 3 – Partly disagree, 4 – Partly agree, 5 – Mostly agree, 6 – Strongly agree). 10 items are keyed in the opposite direction than others. Coefficients of internal consistency obtained in the present study were as follows: Self-Acceptance scale (α = .75), Positive Relations scale (α = .60), Autonomy scale (α = .69), Environmental Mastery scale (α = .71), Purpose in Life scale (α = .69), Personal Growth scale (α = .80).

The Big Five personality questionnaire (BFI; John, Donahue, and Kentle, 1991) consists of 44 items. It measures five Big Five personality scales, namely Extraversion (8 items), Agreeableness (9 items), Conscientiousness (9 items), Neuroticism (8 items), and Openness (10 items). The participants' task is to specify their level of agreement to each item on a 5-level scale (1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 - Neither agree nor disagree, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly disagree). 16 items are keyed inversely. Coefficients of internal consistency obtained in the present study were as follows: Extraversion (α = .79), Agreeableness (α = .71), Conscientiousness (α = .72), Neuroticism (α = .80), and Openness (α = .77).

In our research we included also a test for measuring EI – TOESUS (Takšić, Arar in Molander, 2004) – but it did not relate to any other variable and did not predict any scale of well-being so we omitted it from analyses.

Procedure

The participants received the set of questionnaires in their own schools. The instructions were written on the first page of every questionnaire. The time allotted to each questionnaire was not limited. The majority of participants required around 30 minutes to fill out all questionnaires.

Results

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics for scales of all used questionnaires*

	M	*SD*
BFI		
Extraversion	28.34	5.19
Agreeableness	36.05	4.44
Conscientiousness	34.81	4.50
Neuroticism	21.34	4.98
Openness	36.25	5.17
PWB		
Environmental Mastery	18.80	3.06
Self-Acceptance	19.51	3.11
Positive Relations with Others	19.74	2.95
Autonomy	24.44	4.42
Personal Growth	26.07	3.35
Purpose in Life	19.80	3.59
ESCQ		
Perceive & Understand Emotions	57.77	8.24
Express & Label Emotions	47.91	7.35
Manage & Regulate Emotions	58.46	6.29

In Table 1 we present descriptive statistics for the used questionnaires. We calculated correlations between personality traits, psychological well-being scales and EI scales (Table 2). Personality traits are moderately correlated to almost all psychological well-being dimensions, except for the correlation between autonomy, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Extraversion was most highly correlated to self-acceptance scale, openness to personal growth, conscientiousness to environmental mastery and purpose in life, neuroticism to self-acceptance and environmental mastery, and agreeableness to positive relations and personal growth.

We obtained similar results when calculating correlations between personality traits and EI measured by ESCQ, i. e., we also found low to moderate correlations personality traits with almost all EI scales. The only exceptions were conscientiousness and neuroticism that did not correlate significantly with the ability to express and label emotions.

Correlations between dimensions of EI and psychological well-being were found to be mostly low to moderate and always had a positive sign. The highest correlations were obtained between all three EI scales and positive relations dimension of well-being.

Table 2. *Correlations between the dimensions of psychological well-being, EI, and personality traits*

Psychological well-being scales	Personality traits					Emotional intelligence scales		
	E	A	C	N	O	Perceive & Understand	Express & Label	Manage & Regulate
Environmental Mastery	.38**	.28**	.48**	–.51**	.28**	.12	.19*	.32**
Self-Acceptance	.49**	.29**	.39**	–.51**	.35**	.24**	.35**	.43**
Positive Relations	.37**	.41**	.33**	–.29**	.38**	.27**	.40**	.40**
Autonomy	.28**	.09	.15	–.37**	.32**	.09	.18*	.21*
Personal Growth	.27**	.41**	.17*	–.20**	.47**	.25**	.35**	.38**
Purpose In Life	.41**	.25**	.46**	–.47**	.29**	.15	.20*	.36**
Perceive & Understand	.17*	.30**	.17*	–.10	.37**		.74**	.65**
Express & Label	.31**	.33**	.13	–.11	.43**	.74**		.66**
Manage & Regulate	.30**	.39**	.22**	–.35**	.37**	.65**	.66**	

Note. E – Extraversion, A – agreeableness, C - Conscientiousness, N – neuroticism, O – openness.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Table 3 shows the results of a hierarchical regression analysis, with personality traits (step 1) and EI scales (step 2) as predictors of psychological well-being. Personality traits account for 22% to 43% of variability in various psychological well-being scales. Because these results are very similar to those obtained by simple correlation analyses, we will focus on the contribution of EI dimensions to explained variance in psychological well-being. In spite of moderately high correlations between EI dimensions and psychological well-being scales, the regression analysis revealed low, practically negligible relative importance of EI dimensions when controlling for personality traits. This was due an issue of multicollinearity, i. e., EI scales were highly correlated; therefore it was hard to reliably assess the relative importance of each of the EI scales.

Discussion

The present study discovered significant predictive validity of personality traits regarding psychological well-being of primary and high-school teachers, whereas EI proved to be less important when predicting psychological well-being.

The construct of personality is one of the most relevant predictor of well-being (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener & Lucas, 2003; Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008). The present study also confirmed the important role of personality for psychological well-being. The relative importance of a particular personality trait depends on the

Table 3. *Results of hierarchical regression analysis with personality traits and EI scales as predictors of six psychological well-being scales*

Step	Predictor	β	R	R^2	ΔR^2 in %
Dependent variable: Environmental mastery					
Step 1	Gender	–0.05			
	Age	–0.10	.11	.01	1%
Step 2	Extraversion	0.16			
	Agreeableness	0.07			
	Conscientiousness	0.34**			
	Neuroticism	–0.28**			
	Openness	0.08	.64	.40	39%
Step 3	Perceive & Understand	–0.17			
	Express & Label	0.07			
	Manage & Regulate	0.08	.64	.41	1%
Dependent variable: Self-acceptance					
Step 1	Gender	0.01			
	Age	–0.18*	.81	.03	3%
Step 2	Extraversion	0.26**			
	Agreeableness	0.09			
	Conscientiousness	0.19**			
	Neuroticism	–0.30**			
	Openness	0.13	.66	.44	41%
Step 3	Perceive & Understand	–0.08			
	Express & Label	0.14			
	Manage & Regulate	0.13	.68	.47	3%
Dependent variable: Positive relations					
Step 1	Gender	0.11	.24	.06	6%
	Age	–0.22**			
Step 2	Extraversion	0.24**			
	Agreeableness	0.27**			
	Conscientiousness	0.15			
	Neuroticism	–0.04			
	Openness	0.14	.58	.33	27%
Step 3	Perceive & Understand	–0.10			
	Express & Label	0.21			
	Manage & Regulate	0.08	.60	.37	3%
Dependent variable: Autonomy					
Step 1	Gender	–0.17			
	Age	0.04	.17	.03	3%
Step 2	Extraversion	0.00			
	Agreeableness	–0.01			
	Conscientiousness	0.04			
	Neuroticism	–0.32**			
	Openness	0.30**	.50	.25	22%
Step 3	Perceive & Understand	–0.21			
	Express & Label	0.15			
	Manage & Regulate	0.02	.52	.27	2%

Step	Predictor	β	R	R^2	ΔR^2 in %
Dependent variable: Personality growth					
Step 1	Gender	0.22**			
	Age	–0.13	.26	.06	6%
Step 2	Extraversion	0.12			
	Agreeableness	0.22**			
	Conscientiousness	–0.03			
	Neuroticism	–0.03			
	Openness	0.34**	.56	.32	26%
Step 3	Perceive & Understand	–0.13			
	Express & Label	0.14			
	Manage & Regulate	0.14	.58	.34	2%
Dependent variable: Purpose in life					
Step 1	Gender	0.00			
	Age	–0.13	.13	.02	2%
Step 2	Extraversion	0.16			
	Agreeableness	0.07			
	Conscientiousness	0.28**			
	Neuroticism	–0.28**			
	Openness	0.10	.61	.37	35%
Step 3	Perceive & Understand	–0.12			
	Express & Label	–0.02			
	Manage & Regulate	0.19	.63	.39	2%

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

dimension of well-being. We identified neuroticism, conscientiousness, and extraversion as the most important predictors of psychological well-being, which is in accordance with previous studies (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997; Shulman & Hemenover, 2006). Therefore, individuals who experience higher well-being are more likely to be energetic, dynamic, meticulous, hard-working, reliable, and able to exhibit efficient self-control and control over their emotions, to influence others around them and rarely experience negative emotions and concerns.

The ability to influence others and stimulate social attention as components of extraversion (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005) are correlated to successful environmental mastery, whereas excitement, energy, dynamism, self-assertion, tendency to experience positive emotions, and enjoying social attention are associated with the development of positive attitudes towards oneself and one's own past life. Shulman and Hemenover (2006) derived similar conclusions from their data. Therefore, individuals who are often anxious, vulnerable, angry, in a bad mood, easily frustrated, and tend to feel guilt, also have more negative attitudes towards themselves and their past life, and have more trouble accepting different aspects of themselves.

All correlations between EI and psychological well-being scales were significant, except for the correlation between autonomy and ability to perceive and understand emotions. These results indicate that self-reported EI is highly related to psychological well-being, which is in accordance with previous studies (Gallagher & Vella-Broderick, 2008; Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005; Palmer et al., 2002). Although we did not include measure of work satisfaction in our investigations, we can implicitly assume an indirect association of work satisfaction with general well-being since it is derived from satisfaction with specific aspects of one's life (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2004). Regarding the assumption that EI is very important for occupations that require constant and direct contact with people, it seems that EI should be very important for well-being of teachers. This view is corroborated by the highest correlation obtained in our study, namely the positive correlation between well-being and ability to manage and regulate emotions. This association supports the idea that efficient control of our emotions and emotions of others helps us with achieving goals and thus makes us more satisfied with our lives.

As we have already pointed out, the main problem of trait EI construct is its overlapping with personality traits. For example, the ability to manage and regulate emotions is moderately correlated with neuroticism (it affects one's ability to control emotions) and agreeableness (it affects one's ability to establish positive relations with others). The highest correlation was obtained between EI and openness, which seems reasonable, since openness is often named "intellect" (Goldberg, 1990) and is the trait which is most highly associated with "classical" intelligence. Although many studies confirmed high interrelations between EI and personality (for a review see Avsec, Takšić and Mohorić, this issue), the correlations between personality traits and EI are not as high as to doubt the discriminant validity of EI. As reported in the study of Avsec and coworkers (this issue), the BFI could explain up to 33% of variance in the ESCQ, while in our study it could explain up to 28%.

But the results of regression analyses showed that the variance of well-being accounted for by EI (when controlling for personality traits) is practically negligible (1 to 3%). It seems that the constructs of trait EI and of the Big Five are overlapping substantially as far as prediction of well-being is concerned. Shulman and Hemenover (2006) reported similarly low proportions of explained variance in well-being by different EI scales (up to 6%) although these percentages were statistically important. In our study EI could also explain a significant amount of variance only in positive relations and self-acceptance. In our study the problem might be in the measure of psychological well-being, i. e., RPWB questionnaire. We used the short version of the questionnaire and reliabilities of some scales are much lower then in the original questionnaire.

We could conclude that EI does not have a very good incremental value in predicting psychological well-being at least when we measure it with the ESCQ. The same variance of psychological well-being could be explained with personality traits. To avoid the issue of overlapping constructs, a test measure of EI could be used; but with the MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) the correlations with psychological well-being were also very low and insignificant. In the case of measure of EI as ability, the most probable cause of low correlations are the methods of EI assessment. This fact puts the importance of EI as a predictor of different criteria measures into question, but since the results of most other studies supported its importance, psychological well-being merits further investigations to gain deeper insight into the construct itself and its relation to EI.

The present study represents an attempt to examine the predictive validity of EI regarding psychological well-being of primary and high-school teachers. We discovered that EI scales, specifically ability to manage and regulate emotions, and ability to express and label emotions are significantly related to all aspects of psychological well-being, but after controlling for personality traits, these correlations became practically negligible. Some limitations of the study should be mentioned. Much more female than male teachers were included in our sample and although we controlled for the gender in regression analyses the sample of males is probably not representative. The problem of unsatisfactory discriminant validity of trait EI can be avoided with direct measuring of EI with a test. We planned to include a measure of ability EI, but as we have already mentioned in the Method section, despite its high reliability, we found no significant correlations with other used measures, and therefore, we omitted it from further analyses.

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