

Importance of the Alternative Five and Trait Emotional Intelligence for Agentic and Communal Domains of Satisfaction

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Abstract

Many studies supported the importance of trait emotional intelligence (EI) for subjective well-being but specific domains of life-satisfaction were rarely of interest. Our study investigated whether emotional intelligence is more important for interpersonal or communal-related domains (e.g. satisfaction with friends, intimate partners) than for agentic domains of satisfaction (e.g. satisfaction with finances, work). Due to the problematic differential validity of trait EI from personality, the relationship between trait EI and domains of satisfaction was controlled for by personality. Slovene students and young adults ($N=442$) completed the Emotional Skills and Competence Questionnaire and the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire, and rated their satisfaction with 12 aspects of life. Principal component analysis of these domains revealed three components, explaining 62% of total variance. The communal domains included self-reported satisfaction with popularity, respect, influence on others, family relationships, and intimate relationship. The agentic domains included satisfaction with professional carrier, financial situation, academic education, and achieved goals. The physical domains component was comprised of satisfaction with appearance, fitness, and health. After accounting for personality, trait EI explained 16% of variance in communal domain and 10% of variance in agentic domain, thus suggesting greater importance of trait EI for interpersonal domains. However, trait EI seems to play an important role for satisfaction in the agentic domains also, as successful management of our emotions can help us reach our goals and thus be more satisfied.

Keywords: alternative five personality traits, personality traits, emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, domains of life satisfaction

Introduction

When compared with the "classical" construct of intelligence, the main advantage of emotional intelligence (EI) is its supposedly better predictive validity regarding real-life prosperity (Mayer, 1999). In the present research we were interested in associations between trait EI and different domains of satisfaction since emotions-related-abilities are presumably not equally important for all life domains. Previous studies examined the importance of EI for general well-being (e.g. Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005) or for specific domains of satisfaction (e.g. Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2011). In the present study we used the theoretical distinction between agentic and communal orientations to group satisfaction in different domains. We expected trait EI to be related more strongly to communal than to agentic domains of life satisfaction.

Based on a theoretical framework proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) higher levels of EI can improve subjective well-being. In comparison to people with lower EI, individuals with EI above the average are more aware of their emotions and emotions of others, and are more effective at controlling their emotions. These abilities allow them to behave more rationally when confronted with 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; consequently they experience higher subjective well-being (Bar-On, 2000).

Several studies dealt with the relationship between EI and subjective well-being. Bar-On (2006) reported high correlation ($r=.76$) between self-reported EI and subjective well-being, and concluded that abilities to understand and accept one's own emotions, set goals in order to develop one's own potentials, and see events in the right perspective are the most important factors of subjective well-being. Other similar studies report lower but still significant correlations between EI and subjective well-being (Bastian, Burns, & Nettlebeck, 2005; Day, Therrien, & Carroll, 2005; Extremera & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2005; Gallagher & Vella-Brodrick, 2008; Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005; Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002).

However, the importance of EI for satisfaction in specific life-domains was rarely examined. In addition to positive and negative emotions and general evaluations in life, satisfaction in specific life-domains is an important part of a general construct of subjective well-being (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2004). Domain satisfaction refers to the individual's cognitive evaluation of various aspects of his/her life experiences (e.g. leisure or job). Such a subjective evaluation is often based on the person's self-imposed standards and on the "degree to which an individual perceives that his/her aspirations are being met" (Veenhoven, 1984, p. 27). Although it is still not clear how specific life-domains are related to general aspects of well-being (Gonzalez, Coenders, Saez, & Casas, 2010), it is important to

study satisfaction with specific life domains since individuals could be differently satisfied with each life domain (Cummins, 1996).

Previous studies of the role of EI for specific domain satisfaction demonstrated EI to be an important predictor of domains tapping interpersonal relationships, i.e. relationship satisfaction. Indeed, most of the studies found positive association between EI and relationship satisfaction. For example, the higher the participants' scores were for trait EI, the higher were their scores for close and affectionate relationships, and the higher they rated their marital partners' trait EI the higher were the participants' scores for marital satisfaction (Schutte et al., 2001). A study of 82 student couples found that couples with both partners low on EI tended to have the lowest scores on depth, support, and positive relationship quality and the highest scores on conflict and negative relationship quality compared to couples with one or both partners high on EI (Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008). Lopes, Salovey, and Straus (2003) reported that individuals scoring high on managing emotions were also more likely to report positive relations with others, as well as perceived parental support, and less likely to report negative interactions with close friends. EI is also associated with job satisfaction (Kafetsios & Zampetakis, 2008; Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2011). For example, Boštjančič (2010) found that managers who successfully controlled their emotions and impulses were also more satisfied with their work and Platsidou (2010) found that teachers of high-perceived EI also reported greater job satisfaction.

Furnham and Christoforou (2007), who examined the relationship between personality, trait EI and 15 types of happiness defined by Morris (2004), report an interesting approach to well-being. Authors noted that it is not clear whether these types of happiness present psychological types, domains or something else. They expected trait EI to be the best predictor of competitive and cooperative happiness since it is related to abilities such as emotion regulation, relationship skills, and social competence, all necessary for dealing effectively with other people and experience satisfaction through interpersonal processes such as competition and cooperation. Their results supported this hypothesis; trait EI was the best predictor of a composite variable Interpersonal happiness, explaining 9% of variance.

Beside relationship and job satisfaction, satisfaction in many other life domains could be of interest. Cummins (1996) found about 200 different life domains in published studies, for which satisfaction was measured. He grouped them into seven areas: material well-being, health, productivity, intimacy, safety, community, and emotional well-being. Domain satisfactions can also be organized according to the agency – communal distinction which represents "the single most powerful framework for organizing the field of human personality" (Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008; p. 496). Agency refers to the organism as a separate individual, whereas communion entails participation of the individual in a larger social unit of which he or she is a part (Bakan, 1966). Agency is characterized by self-assertion, self-protection, mastery, self-promotion, and self-expansion, while cooperation,

solidarity, openness, caring, intimacy, and connection with others are characteristic for communion. Distinctions between these two modalities are present in many areas of psychology, maybe most distinctively in personality psychology (Wiggins, 1991), but also in gender roles (Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979), values (Locke, 2000; Schwartz, 1992), narrative interpretation (McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996), social psychology (Abel & Wojciske, 2007), and self-presentational motivation (Paulhus & Trapnell, 2008). Job satisfaction, achieved goals and achieved education could be described as agentic orientation, since they demand typical agentic behaviour and orientation toward self. On the other hand, satisfaction with close relationships, e.g. with family, with partner, respect from and influence on others might be the domain satisfaction reflecting orientations toward others, thus communal orientation.

One of the most substantial critiques of the EI construct refers to its discriminant validity with regard to personality traits (Mayer, 1999), as there is a lot of evidence of high association between EI and various personality constructs. Dawda and Hart (2000) reported very high associations between trait EI and all of the Big Five personality factors with the highest correlation ($r = -.72$) between neuroticism and general EI. Other studies found lower correlations (Avsec, Takšić, & Mohorić, 2009; Day et al., 2005; Extremera & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2005; Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005) and showed satisfactory discriminant validity regarding neuroticism, the Big Five factor that is usually the most strongly related to EI (e.g. Shulman & Hemenover, 2006).

Predictive validity of EI for subjective well-being is somewhat reduced if we control for the effect of personality traits, but even in this case EI still accounts 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 accounting for personality traits, EI explained a negligible amount of variance (1 to 6%) in well-being. The authors used the questionnaire which was originally not designed to measure trait EI and this might be the reason for low importance of EI for well-being.

Previous research on the relationship between personality and EI mostly or exclusively relied on the Five Factor Model (FFM), as a dominant model in personality psychology (Larsen & Buss, 2008). In the present research, we used Zuckerman's Alternative Five Factor Model of Personality (AFFM) characterized by a strong biological-evolutionary basis (Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Teta, Joireman, & Kraft, 1993). The AFFM incorporates five biologically based dimensions of personality: neuroticism-anxiety describes a disposition to feel upset and anxious; impulsive sensation seeking includes the tendency to act impulsively, seek exciting experiences and the willingness to take risks; sociability involves characteristics such as interacting with many people and intolerance for social isolation; activity covers the need for general activity and preference for challenging and hard work;

aggression-hostility describes readiness to express verbal aggression, rude, thoughtless, or antisocial behaviour. Studies comparing the AFFM and the FFM concluded that there was a high convergence between the two models (e.g. Aluja, Garcia, & Garcia, 2002; Zuckerman et. al, 1993); neuroticism-anxiety was strongly related to neuroticism, sociability and activity correlated positively with extraversion, impulsive sensation seeking correlated negatively with conscientiousness, aggression-hostility negatively with agreeableness, while openness to experience is not represented in the AFFM. The AFFM has attracted little or no attention with regard to subjective well-being, thus determining the role of sociability, activity, and impulsive sensation seeking as possible facets of extraversion in communal and agentic domain satisfaction is of great interest.

The aim of this study is to examine the role of trait EI in different domain satisfactions. As EI is necessary for dealing effectively with other people and experience satisfaction through interpersonal processes, we assume a greater importance of trait EI for satisfaction in communal domains than for satisfaction in agentic domains. Because of the criticisms concerning problematic incremental validity of trait EI above personality traits, we used hierarchical regression analyses to control for the effect of personality on domain satisfactions.

Method

Participants

Using a snow ball sampling technique, 442 students and young adults (32% male) from different parts of Slovenia were included in the present study. Their age ranged from 17 to 40 years ($M=29.9$, $SD=5.7$). Over half (58%) of the participants were students, 31% were employed, and others were unemployed. Among non-student participants, 65% had a university degree, 32% finished secondary education and 4% primary school. With respect to their relationship status, 45% of participants reported to be single, 8% married, 10% cohabited and 38% were in a committed romantic relationship.

Instruments

Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire (ZKPQ-50-CC; Aluja et al., 2006) was used as a measure of the alternative five personality traits. ZKPQ-50-CC is a short version of the original ZKPQ (Zuckerman et al., 1993) and it includes 50 items combined into five scales (10 items each): Impulsive Sensation Seeking, Neuroticism–Anxiety, Aggression–Hostility, Activity, and Sociability. Participants report whether each item describes them or not. A study with French, Spanish, Swiss, and US students (Aluja et al., 2006) showed congruent factor structure across the four countries and satisfactory internal consistency coefficients, similar

to those obtained with the long version. The validity and reliability of the internet form was found to be equivalent to the paper and pencil form of ZKPQ-50-CC (Aluja, Rossier, & Zuckermann, 2007). In the present study, the scales showed satisfactory internal consistency with alpha coefficients ranging from .60 for Neuroticism-Anxiety to .82 for Activity.

Emotion Skills and Competence Questionnaire (ESCQ-45; Takšić, 2001) is a short version of the ESCQ-136 (Takšić, Jurin, & Cvenić, 2001), measuring 16 basic competencies as defined in the Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence. The short version consists of 45 items combined into three scales: Perceive and Understand Emotions scale (16 items); Express and Label Emotions scale (13 items); Manage and Regulate Emotions scale (16 items). The participant is asked to specify to what degree each item is relevant to her/him using a 5-level scale (1 – *never*, 5 – *always*). The questionnaire was translated into more than ten languages and shows good psychometric characteristics (Avsec & Takšić, 2007; Faria et al., 2006; Takšić et al., 2001). In the present study alpha coefficients of internal consistency for the three scales ranged from .76 to .91.

Satisfaction with 12 aspects of life was rated along a 7-point scale ranging from not satisfied to very satisfied. We have chosen these aspects of life from the Cummins's (1996) list of satisfaction domains. Principal component analysis with a varimax rotation revealed that items combined into three components, explaining 62% of total variance. The first component included self-reported satisfaction with popularity, respect, influence on others, family relationships, and intimate relationship, thus it was named the communal domain. The second consisted of satisfaction with professional carrier, financial situation, academic education, and achieved goals, thus it was named the agentic domain of life satisfaction. The third component incorporated satisfaction with appearance, fitness, and health, thus it was named the physical domain of satisfaction. Scores for the three domains of satisfaction were calculated as sums of ratings on respective items. Internal consistencies obtained were satisfactory with alpha coefficients .79, .82, and .60 for communal, agentic and physical domain, respectively.

Procedure

Participants filled out questionnaires on the website. A mail with a link to the questionnaires was widespread through e-mails of psychology students who were asked not to fill out the questionnaire themselves but to forward the link to their friends, acquaintances, relatives etc. More than half of the participants who started filling out the questionnaire did not finish and they were omitted from further analyses. After completing the questionnaire, the participants immediately received feedback with their results and a short interpretation.

Results

The correlation matrix for all variables is presented in Table 1. Self-reported satisfaction in all three domains was positively associated with emotional perception, expression and regulation with correlations ranging from low to moderate. Satisfaction was also moderately negatively related to neuroticism-anxiety, while the correlations with other personality traits were low.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics and Inter-correlations among Predictor and Criteria Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Perceive and Understand Emotions	-										
2. Express and Label Emotions	.58**	-									
3. Manage and Regulate Emotions	.39**	.43**	-								
4. Neuroticism-Anxiety	-.13**	-.16**	-.38**	-							
5. Impulsive Sensation Seeking	.17**	.05	.21**	-.07	-						
6. Activity	.09*	.12*	.26**	-.09	.12*	-					
7. Sociability	.21**	.26	.30**	-.29**	.33**	.06	-				
8. Aggression-Hostility	-.03*	.07	-.05	.22**	.21**	-.07	.08	-			
9. Satisfaction: Communal	.32**	.45**	.49**	-.34**	-.06	.20**	.28**	-.06	-		
10. Satisfaction: Agentic	.17**	.33**	.41**	-.33**	-.10*	.19**	.13**	-.09	.56**	-	
11. Satisfaction: Physical	.12*	.26**	.27**	-.37**	-.02	.24**	.14**	-.13**	.45**	.49**	-

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

In order to explore the incremental predictive value of personality traits and emotional competences for the three domains of satisfaction, three hierarchical multiple regressions were performed. In the first step, participants' age, gender and student vs. non-student status were entered. Next, five personality traits were entered and in the third step the three emotional competence constructs were added.

Table 2. *Hierarchical Regression Analysis.
Predicting Domains of Satisfaction from Gender, Age and Status (step 1),
Personality (step 2) and Trait EI (step 3)*

	Satisfaction: Communal		Satisfaction: Agentic		Satisfaction: Physical	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Model 1	.02*		.01		.00	
Gender		.14**		.09*		-.03
Age		.04		.01		.03
Status		-.02		-.03		-.03
Model 2	.22***		.18***		.18***	
Gender		.20***		.15**		.04
Age		.03		-.03		-.00
Status		-.04		-.05		-.05
Neuroticism–Anxiety		-.31***		-.34***		-.34***
Impulsive Sensation Seeking		-.16**		-.16**		-.08
Activity		.20***		.20***		.21**
Aggression–Hostility		.05		.04		-.03
Sociability		.22***		.06		.05
Model 3	.16***		.10***		.04***	
Gender		.11**		.10*		-.01
Age		-.02		-.07		-.06
Status		-.03		-.03		-.03
Neuroticism–Anxiety		-.18***		-.23***		-.31***
Impulsive Sensation Seeking		-.19***		-.17***		-.07
Activity		.10**		.12**		.18***
Aggression–Hostility		.02		.01		-.07
Sociability		.12**		-.02		.00
Perceive / Understand Emotions		.04		-.08		-.07
Express / Label Emotions		.22***		.22***		.24***
Manage / Regulate Emotions		.29***		.27***		.03
Total R^2	.38***		.27***		.22***	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The results presented in Table 2 show that the three domains of satisfaction were reliably predicted by the alternative five personality traits and trait emotional intelligence after controlling participants' gender, age and status (student or non-student). The predictors jointly accounted for 38%, 27%, and 22% of total variance in the communal, agentic, and physical domain of satisfaction, respectively. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, these effect sizes are considered medium (R^2 over .15) to large (R^2 over .35).

Satisfaction with communal aspects of life was significantly predicted by gender with female participants reporting on higher satisfaction in this domain than male. With respect to the personality traits, communal domain of satisfaction was significantly predicted by low Neuroticism–Anxiety and Impulsive Sensation Seeking, and high Activity and Aggression–Hostility. Trait emotional intelligence

improved the prediction by additional 16% with emotional expression and regulation emerging as single statistically significant predictors.

With respect to demographic characteristics, gender contributed significantly to the agentic domain of satisfaction with females reporting on higher satisfaction than males. Personality traits accounted for additional 18% of variance in this domain of satisfaction with low Neuroticism–Anxiety, low Impulsive Sensation Seeking, and high Activity as statistically significant predictors. Again, emotional expression and regulation improved the prediction significantly (by 10%).

Self-reported satisfaction with physical condition was predicted predominantly by personality traits, accounting for 18% of total variance. Satisfaction with appearance, fitness, and health was best predicted by low Neuroticism–Anxiety and high Activity. Trait emotional intelligence contributed additional 4% to the prediction of physical domain of satisfaction with emotional expression emerging as a single statistically significant predictor.

Discussion

Our study provided evidence for the incremental validity of trait EI over personality in predicting domain satisfactions. Trait EI explained the largest part of variance in communal domain satisfaction, which is consistent with the hypotheses that EI is the ability crucial for successful interpersonal relationships.

After demographic characteristics of the participants were accounted for, personality traits explained additional 18 to 22% of variance in assessed domain satisfactions. The strongest predictor was neuroticism–anxiety, which is in accordance with previous studies using general measures of satisfaction with life (Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008). The most interesting results pertain to the role of extraversion indicators, i.e. activity, sociability, and impulsive sensation seeking. Previously, extraversion was shown to be an important predictor of well-being and in some studies it emerged as an even stronger predictor than neuroticism (Steel et al., 2008). In our study, activity contributed significantly to all three domain satisfactions, impulsive sensation seeking to agentic and communal domain satisfaction but sociability played an important role only in predicting communal domain satisfaction. These results are in accordance with previous studies, showing weaker associations between well-being measures and extraversion facets gregariousness and excitement seeking (closely related to the trait impulsive sensation seeking) as compared to facet activity (Quevedo & Abella, 2011). Our results thus support the important role of activity, a component of extraversion, for all included domain satisfactions. The need for general activity and preference for hard work probably allow individuals to reach their goals and consequently contribute to individual's satisfaction.

The role of sociability for life satisfaction is more domain-specific. In our study sociability emerged as an important predictor for communal domain satisfaction only. Sociability is a facet of extraversion important for successful interpersonal relationships, as sociable individuals are, for example, more accurate in categorizing facial expressions of emotion (Young & Brunet, 2011) and more likely to seek social support as a means of coping (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1995) than less sociable individuals. Sociability could have an influence on communal satisfaction through better interpersonal relationships.

Aggression/hostility, which corresponds to the opposite pole of agreeableness in the FFM, did not explain a statistically significant part of variance in any domain satisfactions. Previous results also indicate that this personality trait is not very relevant for individual's subjective well-being (Quevedo & Abella, 2011; Steel et al., 2008).

The main assumption of our study was that trait EI should predict the highest proportion of variance in communal domain satisfactions since emotion-related abilities are crucially important for our satisfaction in these interpersonal domains. The results obtained supported our assumption about the incremental validity of trait EI for predicting domain satisfactions over and above personality: the three scales of trait EI jointly explained additional 16%, 10% and 4% of variance in communal, agentic, and physical domain satisfaction, respectively. It seems that life domains such as intimate relationships, family relationships, popularity, respect, and influence on others, etc. all take advantage of the abilities regarding emotions.

Concerning specific EI competencies, competence to perceive and understand emotions did not contribute significantly to the prediction of any domain satisfactions. On the other hand, competence to express and label emotions was an important predictor of all domain satisfactions. This competence can help individuals to be more satisfied in interpersonal relationships: more precise expression and labelling emotions enable others to know how they feel, what to expect from them, how to approach them, etc., and consequently there are less possibilities for misunderstandings and more for satisfying relationships (Lopes et al., 2003; Schutte et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2008). Competence to perceive and understand emotions is not related only to communal domain satisfaction but also to agentic and physical satisfactions. Possibly, understanding one's own emotions helps individuals to be successful and consequently satisfied in many life domains.

The third component of trait IE, emotion regulation refers to the attempts to influence the types of emotions people experience, when they experience these emotions and how these emotions are expressed and experienced. Regulation of one's own emotions (especially through cultivating positive emotions) has beneficial effect on well-being (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007). Our results are in accordance with these findings as the ability to manage and regulate emotions emerged as an important predictor of communal and agentic domain satisfactions.

In sum, results from this study indicate that EI, as measured by a self-report scale based on the ability model of EI, makes an important contribution to domain satisfactions beyond personality. In comparison to agentic and physical domains of satisfaction, EI seems to be especially important for communal satisfaction.

In our study, an alternative measure of the Big Five was used, allowing a more thorough understanding of the association between personality and well-being, at least with respect to the facets of extraversion. Compared to the studies using general measures of well-being, measures of satisfaction in specific life domains were rarely used so far and even so, usually only one life domain tended to be addressed. In our study, satisfaction in different domains was investigated. If we consider the interpersonal aspect of EI we could expect the importance of trait EI only for communal domain satisfaction, but an important part of EI is also the intrapersonal aspect of EI (understanding and managing own emotions), which also helps individuals to be more satisfied in many, if not all, life domains.

Among the limitations of our study, the characteristics of the participants should be noted. The sample is not representative of the Slovene population, especially for the population above the age of 50, since the data for this study was collected via the Internet using a snowball sampling method. Although many studies confirmed the equivalence of paper-and-pencil and web-based formats of the questionnaires (e. g. Meyerson & Tryon, 2003), the problem of systematic dropout and higher average education might occur when individuals are recruited via the web (Birnbau, 2004). Another shortcoming of our study might be the feedback to the respondents, because the sample could be biased with respect to the self-understanding motive. Generalizability of our findings across cultures is also limited. Even though the structural validity of the questionnaire ESCQ used for measuring trait EI was confirmed cross-culturally, some culture specifics regarding the role of managing emotions in making decisions could exist. Furthermore, most of the items used in the questionnaire are related to the regulation of one's own emotions. In the Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model both aspects of emotion regulation are incorporated. In the future studies, it would be desirable to measure regulation of one's own and other people's emotions separately.

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