The Geneva Emotional Competence Test (GECO): A Situational Judgment Test to Measure Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

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Proponents of an ability model of Emotional Intelligence (EI) describe EI as a set of multiple and partly independent cognitive abilities. Some of these scholars even suggest dropping the term intelligence in favor of competence, to remark that this is a dynamic ability that can vary between situations and over time. Despite the increasing support for this view, most EI measures are self-report measures that are in many respects confounded with personality questionnaires. Adopting the ability EI model, conversely, implies that questionnaires should be designed as performance-based tests in which the competence level of the person is assessed by means of ability-specific tasks. This approach resulted in very few tests so far (e.g., Situational Tests of Emotion Understanding and Emotion Management - STEU, STEM), and only one considers several branches of EI, the Mayer Salovey Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). This test has been widely adopted and became the standard measure for ability EI. Nevertheless, several authors criticized the MSCEIT for its a-theoretical approach and for its scoring rubric based only on group consensus.

In this contribution, we will present a newly developed performance-based test of EI that is hard-wired in contemporary emotion theories and targets different facets of EI: emotion understanding, emotion regulation, emotion recognition, and emotion management. The Geneva Emotional Competence (GECO) test uses a situational-judgment approach targeted at measuring EI in the context of work activities. The items were built based on realistic emotional scenarios collected through individual interviews with professionals. Scoring is based on a combination of theoretical assumptions (e.g., appraisal theory), consensus, and expert scoring.

We will present the structure of the test, the item generation process, and the results of validation studies with different populations of respondents. In particular we will discuss the results of the construct validation study in which 149 students of the University of Geneva completed the GECO along with other questionnaires relevant for the different facets of the test. Results showed that the four scales have satisfactory internal consistency (alpha .60-.75) and are substantially correlated with other measures, confirming its construct validity. The test also has a higher difficulty level than previous tests and therefore is better able to discriminate between individuals with higher levels of EI. The GECO is the first instrument specifically dedicated to measure EI in the context of the work activities. Potential applications for training and assessment will be discussed.