

# Predicting Job Success Using EI: Higher Is Not Always Better

Henry L. (Dick) Thompson, Ph.D., High Performing Systems, Inc.



Henry L. Thompson, Ph.D.  
HPS, Inc., President & CEO



Connect with Dr.  
Thompson on LinkedIn



Follow High Performing  
Systems on Twitter

*“EI is too complex, too intricate and dynamic, to be boiled down so simply.”*

Many HR and organizational development professionals are familiar with Emotional Intelligence (EI) and some common applications of EI such as increasing self-awareness, leadership assessment and coaching, professional development or training. Research has shown a link between a candidate's EI and his/her potential for job success. The problem is that organizations often think that *higher* EI is better and try to select candidates with higher scores. The good news is that there is a way to use EI as part of a developmental process, but it's not as simple as it might appear on the surface.

One reason for the complexity is that in reality, Emotional Intelligence is not *just a number*. If we say someone has high EI, it can't be measured by a single number on an assessment. EI is too complex, too intricate and dynamic, to be boiled down so simply.

To explore this concept more closely, let's begin with a review of what EI is. EI can be defined as a person's innate ability to perceive and manage his/her own emotions in a manner that results in successful interactions with the environment and, if others are present, to also perceive and manage their emotions in a manner that results in successful interpersonal interactions. You can see from this definition that there are many components, and that's why a person's EI can't be described as a single number.

There are many different models and assessments available to measure EI. All of these models break EI into components or scales, e.g., self-awareness. Some scales tend to overlap across different assessments (e.g., empathy will almost always be included in EI models), but every model has some variations. EI is a complex mix of skills that can't be narrowed down quite as easily as one might think.

Another factor that adds to the complexity is that "good" EI will vary depending on the circumstances of a particular job or situation. EI is *situationally dependent*. To define a person's behavior and skills as "successful" depends on the context in which you are viewing the person. For example, in one situation, having high assertiveness might be appropriate, while in another, the most successful approach might be to hold back and remain more passive. Being able to understand the situation and adapt as appropriate is part of what Emotional Intelligence is really about. Many models don't account for this dynamic variability in how they define EI "success." It's easier for people to assume that the higher the scores, the better and that being balanced across all scales is ideal\*.

**If EI is not a number and higher isn't always better, how can an organization use EI as part of their leader development (or hiring and selection) programs? For each job, you must create an EI success profile.**

Multi-Health Systems Inc. (MHS), the publisher of the EQ-i 2.0 assessment, created what they called star performer profiles for many different jobs. The profiles identified the pattern of EQ-i subscales that would predict success in specific jobs. In addition, Dr. Steven Stein, the CEO and founder of MHS, conducted research where he looked at 76 company CEOs in terms of their EQ-i results. He identified the subscales in which the CEOs scored higher than the general population. This step is where most HR and OD professionals usually stop. Fortunately, Dr. Stein analyzed the data in greater depth. By using more sophisticated techniques than looking just at average scores, he determined which specific subscales were able to predict job success (in this case, as measured by financial performance of the companies).

\*In an upcoming article in this EI success profile series, we will explore other aspects of EI success profiles, for example the concept of EI balance and what it really means to have a balanced profile.

*“EI can predict job success, and using an EI success profile for selection will have a direct impact on your company's bottom line.”*

The finding that tends to surprise many people is that the highest scales are not necessarily the scales that predict performance. This reinforces the fact that higher isn't always better when it comes to EI scores and performance.

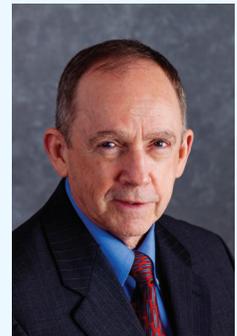
When using EI to build a success model, remember that it's the combination of some subscales, not necessarily the highest scales (or *all* of the scales), that predict performance. A statistical analysis will identify the combinations. Other examples of job success profiles include those created for the U.S. Air Force and American Express, among others. What you will discover when using profiles is that not only does a profile vary by job, but it will also vary by company. For example, an HR manager in one company may have a very different profile from an HR manager in a different company. It's imperative to create a model for a specific job in a specific company.

Over the last 30 years, we've been creating job success profiles for clients for positions such as HR managers, engineers, long-haul truck drivers and others. In most cases, we use our Leadership Potential Equation, but sometimes we use primarily EI. What we've found is that an organization can significantly increase hiring accuracy and job success by applying a success profile. The model has a very high predictability in terms of the person's success in that job. If you create the model and hire candidates who are as close to the model as you can, then your likelihood of having a successful hire increases, and you will see positive outcomes in retention, employee satisfaction, engagement, productivity and profit. EI can predict job success, and using an EI success profile for selection will have a direct impact on your company's bottom line.

### **Meet the Expert**

***Dr. Dick Thompson, President & CEO of High Performing Systems, Inc.***

Henry L. (Dick) Thompson, Ph.D., is an award-winning Organizational Psychologist, OD Consultant, Coach, Leadership Researcher and Author, and President & CEO of High Performing Systems, Inc. He is a frequent speaker for business and professional groups around the world on topics related to EI, leadership, team development, systems and high performance. He has also published numerous articles and training manuals on these topics. Dr. Thompson is the author of *The Stress Effect: Why Smart Leaders Make Dumb Decisions - And What to Do About It* (Jossey-Bass, 2010).



Henry L. Thompson, Ph.D.  
*HPS, Inc., President & CEO*



Follow High Performing Systems on Twitter



Connect with Dr. Thompson on LinkedIn