A Closer Look at the Test of Personal Intelligence

John D. Mayer
University of New Hampshire
A. T. Panter
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
David R. Caruso
Yale University

Overview

Personal intelligence is the capacity to reason about personality and personality-related information. To understand more about the structure of the mental abilities involved in personal intelligence, we fit several factor models to an ability-based test of personal intelligence. A two-factor oblique simple structure model fit the data well. The findings inform us about the nature of abilities people use to understand personality in themselves and others.

Introduction

Personal Intelligence (PI): Quick Background

A number of theories in psychology identify key aspects of understanding personality in oneself and others.

a. Psychological mindedness is an ability exhibited by some psychotherapy patients to learn about themselves and others (Appelbaum, 1973).

b. Intra- and interpersonal intelligences include skills for building a coherent identity and understanding other people (Gardner, 1983).

c. The good judge can perceive the personality of other people more accurately than can an average person (Funder, 2001).

Such concepts share a common focus on the capacity to reason about personality and personality-related information. Mayer (2006, 2014) developed a theory of personal intelligence (parallel to social and emotional intelligences) to synthesize these viewpoints.

General and Broad Intelligences

In the Cattell-Horn-Carroll model of intelligences, g (general intelligence), is at the top of a three-tiered hierarchy, with broad intelligences in the middle level and specific skills at the bottom. Figure 1 depicts a schematic illustration.

Figure 1. The General Form of the Cattell-Horn-Carroll Model

Methods

Participants

Participants were drawn from two archival samples:

Study 1: 10,318 test-takers drawn from seven samples, mostly from the United States Military, divided into Exploratory (odd-numbered) and Cross-Check (even-numbered) participant subsamples

Study 2: An independent sample of 8,459 military personnel

Study 3: A reanalysis of a sample of 384 test-takers from Mayer, Panter & Caruso, 2012

Measures

➢ The 93-item Test of Personal Intelligence (Version 1.4) described earlier

➢ Assorted criterion scales in Study 3, including:

   a. A measure of the Big Five
   b. Psychological mindedness
   c. Psychopathological symptom checklists
   d. The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test
   e. The Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (a measure of interpersonal sensitivity), and
   f. An estimate of g (a vocabulary measure)

Results

Could a Factor Model be Fit to the Test?

We began fitting models by conducting a series of exploratory factor analyses. The 2-factor model exhibited the best fit in the exploratory analysis (Table 1) and appeared interpretable.

In order to fit the two-factor model using confirmatory factor analysis, we dropped 25 items, yielding a 68-item test. We then tested a confirmatory factor model. The 2-factor model fit well (Table 1). Subsequently, we dropped one further item based on an IRF model, for a final 67-item test. Model fits for CFI and TLI were around .95 with RMSEA = .02.

Were the New Scales Predictive of Criteria?

Based on an examination of the highest-loading items on each factor, we identified them as follows:

1. Consistency-Congruence Personal Intelligence (CG). Items loading on this factor asked about consistent patterns across traits. The most common items concerned understanding which socio-emotional traits go together (e.g., liveliness with talkativeness) and how mental states and desires reflect motivational patterns.

2. Dynamic-Analytic Personal Intelligence (DA). Items on this factor focused reasoning about personality dynamics and integrating information. The most common two sets of items (20 altogether) concerned recognizing problematic goals and goal conflicts (e.g., “to be able to please everyone”) and the ability to use personal memories to motivate oneself (e.g., “remembering a careless act that turned out badly so as to be more careful”).

Were the Scales and Test Composite Reliable?

Both scales yielded coefficient alpha reliabilities of .75 or higher (as did their composite), and exhibited similar, although slightly lower, marginal reliabilities using an IRT model. The latter result was probably owing to less precision of measurement at the higher end of the test scale. The two factors exhibited obtained correlations of .71 to .70 across studies (see Table 2 for details).

Discussion and Conclusions

The present research enhances our understanding of the mental abilities underlying personal intelligence. The theory already had specified four key areas of problem solving that help to identify relevant test items to use in measurement:

a. Recognizing personality-relevant information

b. Formulating models of personality

c. Guiding choices with such information, and

d. Systematizing plans and goals

Using that division to develop our test-items, we then fit a factor model that concluded that there existed two mental abilities people used to solve such problems: one focused on recognizing the consistencies in personality, and the other more focused on analyzing dynamics and sometimes inconsistent information about a person and making sense of it. The two classifications are depicted together in Figure 2.

Key Sources