

All About the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)

By David R. Caruso

How are you? It's an important question. It's important because the way you feel right now is influencing how you are thinking and what you are thinking about. Understanding the reasons for your feelings and what's happening to you and around you can help you determine how the feelings will change. Whether you are feeling great or lousy is important because these feelings are sending you a message. You can ignore the message at your own peril, or attend to the emotional communication to make better decisions.

Emotions are complex and important, and above all else, they can be *intelligent*. With emotions playing a critical role in our decisions, and actions, wouldn't it be great to be able to objectively measure our emotions in some way? You can - with the Mayer, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (the MSCEIT, which we pronounce "Mess-keet"). The MSCEIT is like an IQ test for emotions. It is a powerful and sophisticated tool which measures a person's actual emotional skills.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotions are a complex and sophisticated form of information and reasoning. This form of reasoning has been known as *emotional intelligence*. While there are many approaches to *emotional intelligence*, the approach I'm talking about here is the original, scientific conception. It's based upon the decade of research and theorizing by psychologists Jack Mayer and Peter Salovey. Mayer and Salovey are the originators of the theory of emotional intelligence. Theirs is an *ability* model of emotional intelligence. They define emotional intelligence as the *ability* to reason with, and about emotions. For them, emotional intelligence combines feeling with thinking and can be described as four related, but different, abilities:

- **Perceiving Emotions**- the ability to recognize how you and those around you are feeling.
- **Using Emotions**- the ability to generate emotions, and to use emotions in cognitive tasks such as problem-solving and creativity.
- **Understanding Emotions**- the ability to understand complex emotions and emotional "chains", how emotions transition from one stage to another.
- **Managing Emotions**- the ability to intelligently integrate emotions in yourself and others to devise effective strategies that help you achieve positive outcomes.

The MSCEIT is based on this intelligent understanding of emotion. We developed the MSCEIT guided by three principles:

- Emotions are critically important to our success
- People vary in their emotional skills
- These emotional skills can be measured objectively

Why EI Is Important

Emotions are critically important to our success

It seems obvious that emotions are important and that they play a critical role in our lives. After all, emotions are integral to healthy and successful personal relationships. At work, however, there seems to be general recognition that we need to have greater control over our emotions when we punch the time clock.

This view of emotions and work is common, and in our view, incorrect. We cannot check our emotions at the door, because emotions and thoughts are linked and cannot, and should not be separated. Emotions influence both what we think about, and how we think. Decisions made “unemotionally” simply do not exist, and we are fooling ourselves if we proceed otherwise.

Emotions are critically important to our success and to our very survival. There are many reasons for this. First, emotions contain data and information about us, other people, and the world around us. Second, emotions assist us in thinking and decision making. Third, emotions are not chaotic, they can be understood and predicted and often follow certain rules or patterns. And fourth, because emotions contain data, we must remain open to our emotions, no matter how uncomfortable it may feel, and utilize these emotional data points in our thinking, decisions, and our actions.

Emotions do matter. We all recognize that even though we may have had a difficult commute or a fight with our spouse, we need to snap out of the negative mood when we sit at our desk. We are paid to do our job, and to do it professionally. Sometimes, that means dispelling nagging doubts or worries, and at other times, we can do our job better if we are in a more neutral or slightly negative mood – this can help us focus on details and find errors and problems. At other times, like when we need to do creative brainstorming, it helps if we are in a more positive, and energetic mood.

People vary in their emotional skills

Trying to read people is not easy. Predicting how emotions change over time can be extremely difficult. There is a great deal of skill involved in managing emotion, and people differ in these abilities.

Some people are superb at differentiating between the forced smile of a person in distress from the genuine smile of a happy individual. Others view the forced smile and conclude that the person is feeling happy. We all know that skills vary from person to person, and emotional skills are no exception.

These skills can be measured objectively

There are many ways to measure people's skills. Consider an example from baseball – not the majors, but from a recent little league experience I had. Coaches evaluate players during spring try-outs. Each batter gets 5 pitches. A miss gets 0 points, making contact yields 1 point, and a solid hit is 2 points, resulting in a possible score of 0 to 10. Danny, a 12 year old, steps into the batting cage with a bit of bravado and swagger.

He gave the coach behind the pitching machine a bored, disinterested look, and took a practice swing. He proceeds to foul off a pitch (1 point each), hits a blooper on 1 pitch (1 point), a weak foul ball on another pitch (1 point), and swings and misses on the last 2 pitches (0 points). It seems clear that Danny's score is about a 4. However, the two coaches who are filling out the evaluation form put their heads together and proceed to give Danny a rating of 7.5. Giving them a quizzical look, one of them replies "You know Dan, the big guy? This is his kid." Dan is another coach, one of the league commissioners, and there was no way that his coaching colleagues were going to give a son of Dan's a "4" rating.

And how did Danny evaluate his own performance? When Danny was asked about his performance by one of his friends, he said, "Well, I was pretty good. I'm a great hitter anyway. I don't know, I'd say a 7 or 8, around there." As the season played out, Danny's hitting was, indeed, not a whole lot better than a 4.

Measuring EI

A MSCEIT score is not based upon self-perceptions, nor is it based upon your reputation or other, external factors. It's based on how many hits and misses you get when you step up to the plate and determine how people feel, understand the cause of emotions, and determine optimal emotional strategies.

Many of us are familiar with people who are extremely self-aware, and aware of other people. The problem is, their awareness is faulty. This is a person who buttonholes you as you are dashing out of the door to an important meeting, oblivious to your look of near panic. Of course, it might be a critical point your colleague wants to raise with you, except that he launches into a broad discussion regarding his upcoming weekend plans – that don't involve you.

That's why it is extremely important that we are able to objectively measure emotional skills – through the use of an ability test. You have to find out what the person's actual skills are, not what they think of their skills, and not what other people think of them.

The MSCEIT

How do we objectively measure emotional skills? With the MSCEIT. The MSCEIT measures the four core emotional abilities defined in the Mayer-Salovey model.

If you want to measure the ability to *accurately* identify how people feel, one way to do so is by asking the test taker what emotions are being expressed in a photograph of someone's face. For example, if you show a photo of a person displaying mild sadness, and the test taker selects an answer indicating that the person is feeling a bit happy and somewhat surprised, then such an answer is considered incorrect.

The MSCEIT includes many such tasks, each designed to test a person's emotional ability. The chart below lists the 8 tasks on the MSCEIT.

Ability	Test Sections	Question Types
Accurately identify emotions in people and objects	Faces	Identify subtle emotions in faces.
	Pictures	Identify emotions in complex landscapes and designs.
Generate an emotion and solve problems with that emotion.	Facilitation	Knowledge of how moods impact thinking.
	Sensations	Relate various feeling sensations to emotions.
Understand the causes of emotions.	Changes	Multiple choice questions about how emotions change over time.
	Blends	Multiple choice emotion vocabulary definitions.
Stay open to emotions and blend with thinking.	Emotion Management	Indicate effectiveness of various solutions to internal problems.
	Emotional Relations	Indicate effectiveness of various solutions to problems involving other people.

Leveraging the Sophistication and Power of the MSCEIT

The point has been made that the MSCEIT is different from other tests. The types of questions are different, the abilities it measures are different, and the way that it's scored is also different.

Scoring

There are two answer keys for the MSCEIT. The first key (General Consensus) is based upon the consensus of thousands of people to converge upon better and worse answers. General Consensus scoring works because emotions communicate information about people.

The second key is based upon the answers of a panel of emotions experts. This is somewhat similar to the process used by standard IQ tests.

You also have the option of comparing a client's responses to a group of people who are similar in age, ethnicity, or the same gender (or any combination). EI does vary somewhat across these groups, and your scoring decision will vary depending upon your application. Not sure which way to go? My preference is to use Expert scoring with no corrections. It's clean and straightforward.

Report

The standard MSCEIT report describes EI and then lists the client's actual EI scores. Because most other tests are self-report, clients are often not terribly surprised by their assessment results. This is another way in which the MSCEIT is different: clients can be extremely surprised, and sometimes upset, by their scores. Very "emotional" clients can have a great deal of sensitivity and awareness, but the awareness lacks accuracy, resulting in low MSCEIT scores.

We've also created a more client-friendly report. This developmental report is more descriptive of the emotional skills. In addition, the developmental report includes questions and suggestions to help your client use the skills they possess, and develop those that they lack.

MSCEIT Applications

We use the MSCEIT in a number of ways. Here are some examples of MSCEIT applications, including:

- Selection and Promotion
- Career Development
- Executive Coaching and Leadership Development
- Counseling and Therapy
- Seminars and Workshops

Using the MSCEIT in Selection and Promotion

Advantages of Using the MSCEIT for Selection and Promotion

The MSCEIT is an ability test. This means that a candidate cannot "fake" their performance. The MSCEIT measures skills that no other test measures.

Example of Using the MSCEIT for Selection and Promotion

As with any test that is used for selection purposes, a Job Analysis is key. Remember that EI is not always important, and that there may be certain of the EI abilities that are more, or less, related to performing a given job.

The MSCEIT must *never* be used as the sole criterion by which a job-related decision is made. We recommend that you use other assessment tools, and as many job performance ratings and recommendations as possible in making such a decision.

Consider the VP of HR of a services firm who wanted to promote Val, a young woman, to replace an older man as the department head. The current head, William, was not an effective group manager, although he was a talented sales person. The idea was to move William into a full-time sales role, and to bring Val in as his replacement.

Given the importance of this position, it was felt prudent to conduct an assessment on Val to determine her strengths and possible problems that she might have in such a challenging, new role. Val received a battery of tests, including a personality inventory, an interest survey, a leadership inventory, and the MSCEIT.

Her assessment results indicated that she was a hard-working, team-oriented professional with a strong desire to manage teams. Val's MSCEIT scores were as follows:

MSCEIT Score	<i>Low</i>			<i>High</i>	
Total	■	■	■	■	■
Perceiving	■	■	■	■	■
Using	■	■	■	■	■
Understanding	■	■	■	■	■
Managing	■	■	■	■	■

Val, at times, was disappointed in people. She was a somewhat trusting person, and while not naïve, she did give people the benefit of the doubt. The result was that there had been occasions when a colleague she was working with had not come through on a project as promised. As a department head, such a style could lead to significant problems. However, Val had a number of important skills. Her MSCEIT results suggested that she had the potential to motivate and inspire the team (Using Emotions), to predict how people would react to various initiatives (Understanding Emotions), and to make effective decisions (Managing Emotions).

The decision was made to promote Val to department head. She also received some training on how to evaluate her perceptions of people when the stakes were high.

Using the MSCEIT in Career Development

Advantages of Using the MSCEIT for Career Development

I use the MSCEIT as part of a test battery which includes interest tests, values, style surveys, and personality. The MSCEIT is not meant to replace these other measures, but to enhance your understanding of a client's skill set.

Typical interest inventories include skill self-ratings. Unfortunately, self-ratings of skills and abilities aren't always accurate. The MSCEIT offers the career counselor an objective means of gauging a client's "people knowledge and skills". Those clients considering a service-oriented, or helping career, may be well-served by higher MSCEIT scores.

Example of Using the MSCEIT for Career Development

Jean was a 56 year old human resources (HR) manager who took a battery of assessments as part of an outplacement program. She was extremely confident in her skills and noted that she could teach, re-enter the corporate world, become an executive coach, or switch areas to leadership development. Jean's MSCEIT scores were as follows:

MSCEIT Score	Low					High
Total	■					
Perceiving	■					
Using	■	■				
Understanding	■	■	■	■		
Managing	■	■				

Jean could speak the language of emotional development and growth. However, it was clear in her interactions with her counselor that she was somewhat "off" and misread others. Jean also had difficulty connecting with people.

What the MSCEIT results added to Jean's career development picture was a suggestion that her self-perception regarding her emotional insight and skills may not be accurate. Career options that involved the need to read others, see their perspective and manage difficult, highly charged situations did not seem realistic for Jean.

Through career exploration activities, Jean was directed toward an administrative role that would best suit her profile.

Using the MSCEIT in Executive Coaching

Advantages of Using the MSCEIT for Executive Coaching

The MSCEIT provides a unique look at a person's management and leadership skills. While most senior executives find the assessment process to be of interest and value, they are often not surprised by their assessment results. Certainly, the results are useful, but the MSCEIT consistently provides information of a *different* sort. In fact,

when we get to the MSCEIT results, it is common for the client to say something like “That was the test that was a little different. What was that all about?”

How To Use the MSCEIT for Executive Coaching

The MSCEIT, like all tests, can help you to develop questions, or hypotheses, about a client. Each of the four, key MSCEIT scores can generate discussion around key coaching objectives.

MSCEIT Score	Questions to ask
Perceiving	Does the person “read” others well?
Using	Do they emotionally connect? Are they idea oriented?
Understanding	Do they perform adequate what-if analyses regarding people?
Managing	Are they effective decision makers?

Example of Using the MSCEIT for Executive Coaching

Jerry was an operations manager for a major Wall Street firm. He was asked to relocate most of his staff from NYC to a new building across the river in New Jersey, about a 10 minute ferry ride. Most of his staff lived in New Jersey and welcomed the move. Jerry was remaining in NYC.

The move itself went well, but there arose a number of unusual personnel problems in the following weeks. The problems consisted mainly of complaints at first. Jerry patiently listened to these complaints, addressed them, and understood their cause.?? Jerry was referred for executive coaching to help him resolve these issues. As each problem was addressed, and resolved, a new one appeared. The problems increased in frequency, and began to have a noticeable impact on the group’s productivity.

Jerry’s MSCEIT scores were as follows:

MSCEIT Score	<i>Low</i>				<i>High</i>	
Total						
Perceiving						
Using						
Understanding						
Managing						

In Jerry’s case, the results of the MSCEIT provided a confirmation and clarification of the issues involved in his leadership at that point in time. Jerry’s scores on the Perceiving and Understanding subscales were superb. That was no surprise: Jerry was excellent at perceiving how his staff felt about the move. He understood *why* his staff felt a loss, and how these feelings were changing (Understanding Emotion).

However, while Jerry was aware of, and understood, the issues, he was not integrating this emotional information into his rational decision making. He did not engage with

these emotions, but instead blocked them out and relegated them to a lesser standing in his decision making.

The MSCEIT results, as well as the ability model, provided Jerry with both the insight and the process by which he could address his leadership style.

Using the MSCEIT for Counseling and Therapy

Advantages of Using the MSCEIT for Counseling and Therapy

Assessment can assist the clinician to better pinpoint the client’s strengths and weaknesses, and the MSCEIT provides an additional set of data in this process. As the MSCEIT uniquely assesses a client’s emotional skills, it is especially suited for use in clinical settings.

Example of Using the MSCEIT for Counseling and Therapy

Will, a 39 year old attorney, was experiencing problems at home. His wife felt neglected and misunderstood by Will. At times he could be smooth and sophisticated, whereas at other times, he was inappropriate and a bit “off”.

Will spoke well. He was verbal, fluent and sophisticated. Will seemed to have a great deal of insight into himself, and others. The therapist who was working with him found him delightful, and Will was brilliantly insightful in his therapy sessions. It was difficult to determine just what it was that gave Will so much difficulty in his life, as he appeared to be emotionally sophisticated and aware. It was at this point that Will took the MSCEIT. His MSCEIT scores were as follows:

MSCEIT Score	<i>Low</i>			<i>High</i>	
Total					
Perceiving					
Using					
Understanding					
Managing					

Will had a great deal of empathy for others (Using Emotions), and could feel what other people felt. His emotional vocabulary was superb, and if his beginning assumptions were correct, Will was able to accurately predict other’s emotional reactions (Understanding Emotions). Will’s decision making was usually right on target. He appeared to get at the heart of the issue, but every now and then, his conclusions would appear to be totally off base (Managing Emotions). The success, or failure, of Will’s judgments and decisions seemed to stem from his initial “read” of himself, or of other’s, feelings. Often, this emotional read would be inaccurate, due either to Will’s lack of awareness or attention, or to some other factor (Perceiving Emotions).

Will’s therapist now had identified the source of Will’s interpersonal difficulties: they did not need to spend time on teaching Will emotion management strategies, nor did they have to help Will develop insight or empathy for others. Instead, the therapeutic

work focused on creating greater initial awareness. Once Will was able to become more open to, and aware of, the emotional world, he was then taught how to accurately attend to others, to pick up on cues subtle and not so subtle, and to integrate this information to reach a conclusion about how other people were feeling.

Using the MSCEIT for Seminars and Workshops

Advantages of Using the MSCEIT for Seminars and Workshops

The MSCEIT provides workshop participants with objective information on their emotional skill set and a better understanding of emotional intelligence.

Some of the group training applications that the MSCEIT can be used for include:

- Emotional intelligence seminar
- Social skills training
- Team effectiveness
- Career development and planning
- Self-exploration workshops

Example of Using the MSCEIT for Seminars and Workshops

A one-day workshop designed to promote greater awareness of emotional intelligence was held for a group of 18 people from a single organization. This one-day session promised to offer some insight, and knowledge, but we were very careful not to promise any sort of lasting change or development based upon a one-day, group workshop! In addition, if this session went well, the plan called for a series of half-day sessions over a 6-month period, as well as individual development planning sessions for the participants.

A letter (e-mail) was sent to the 18 participants asking them to take the MSCEIT online. A deadline was given, along with instructions on how to take the test.

The workshop coordinator monitored people's progress, and a few days before the workshop, he contacted the few people who had not yet taken the MSCEIT. One hundred percent participation prior to the workshop is critical, as the MSCEIT forms the basis of the workshop content.

The day began with a hands-on exercise on people's ability to display a neutral emotion when viewing emotionally-charged material, and for other people to be able to read these expressions. Other exercises and role plays led up to an overview of emotional intelligence. Discussion on the MSCEIT came next, and many people had a lot to say about the MSCEIT! A few people said that the test was "weird" or "kind of strange", mostly noting the designs task, as well as the questions asking what a feeling tasted like.

This was a great introduction to the MSCEIT – what it measures and how it measures it. The best explanations came not from the two instructors, but from other participants. A few high-scoring individuals explained how emotions are literally felt,

and that creative thought and emotional empathy may be tied to our ability to create an emotion and to then actually *feel* the emotion.

With this, a sample MSCEIT report was displayed on the screen, and participants were told how to interpret a few different profiles. The report was a developmental report – which means that test scores were reported in a *relative* fashion, not with high or low scores. In other words, the pattern of relative strengths and weaknesses was the basis for the report. The test results were handed out just before a break. A sign-up sheet was posted so that each participant was scheduled to speak to one of the instructors, and the instructors also stayed in the room to debrief participants.

The instructors used the actual MSCEIT scores to create various small groups, mixing people who were, in one case, strong in identifying emotions, and a few people who were weak in this area. It was also stressed that the results were confidential and that no one would be asked or pressured to share their results with any other workshop participants.

The MSCEIT, and the workshop, raised people's awareness about emotional intelligence. The test results also provided the first step in helping people to better understand their emotional skills.