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3 COMMENTARIES  
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5 **A Call to Context**  
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22 In this reply to Cherniss (2010), we call for  
23 emotional intelligence (EI) scholars to direct  
24 more attention to the role of context. Before  
25 embarking on this endeavor, however,  
26 we first briefly respond to Cherniss’s  
27 distinction between the ability model of  
28 EI and models based on emotional and  
29 social competencies (ESCs). We provide  
30 further evidence for the superiority of the  
31 ability model of EI, and discuss issues  
32 of predictive validity in relation to both  
33 models. Following this discussion, we  
34 address the importance of context, which  
35 is the main point of our commentary.  
36 Arguing that EI may have differential effects  
37 depending on the situation in which the  
38 ability is being utilized, we proffer that this  
39 under-explored issue should be a priority  
40 for future EI research.  
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22 **Evidence for the Superiority of the**  
23 **Ability Model of EI**  
24

25 In the focal article, Cherniss differentiates  
26 between EI (as epitomized in the ability  
27 model by Mayer and Salovey) and ESCs  
28 (as represented in mixed models, such  
29 as those by Bar-On and Goleman). We  
30 agree with Cherniss that the argument  
31 over which is the most pure definition  
32 of EI has probably reached the point of  
33 overkill. We also agree with Cherniss that  
34 ESC models, while pragmatically useful,  
35 particularly in work-related contexts, are  
36 *not* EI. As Ashkanasy and Daus (2005) point  
37 out, even the authors of the ESC models  
38 tend nowadays not to refer to them as  
39 EI. From our perspective, this argument is  
40 moot, and we are perplexed as to why so  
41 many commentators appear to have missed  
42 this distinction.

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43 As far as we can ascertain, the great  
44 majority of articles in the academic litera-  
45 ture (and many of the popular press writings)  
46 consider Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) defi-  
47 nition and model as the “gold standard”  
48 for defining EI. The points of disagree-  
49 ment seem to arise when we examine  
50 purported measures. In our opinion, mea-  
51 surement arguments clearly have plagued,

1 dominated, and muddled the EI definition  
2 discussion for too long.

3 A simple way to put this issue to  
4 rest is to look at what Mayer himself  
5 considers EI to be. For example, in a  
6 recent *Annual Review of Psychology* article  
7 (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008), Mayer  
8 and his colleagues do not see ESC models to  
9 comprise even a portion of the EI construct.  
10 Instead, they view these competencies as  
11 fitting within the personality domain. Their  
12 review of EI highlights *ability specific*  
13 tests such as the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso  
14 emotional intelligence test (MSCEIT), the  
15 diagnostic analysis of nonverbal accuracy  
16 scale (DANVA), and the levels of emotional  
17 awareness scale (LEAS), all of which are  
18 solidly ensconced in the study of emotional  
19 abilities.

20 EI, as Mayer and Salovey (1997) point  
21 out, requires a link between emotion  
22 and cognition. ESCs go beyond this,  
23 and we see them as a differentiated  
24 set of constructs incorporating aspects of  
25 personality. Later in his article, Cherniss  
26 notes that ESC models provide more  
27 predictive validity of work performance  
28 than EI measures. Indeed, this conclusion  
29 is similar to the one reached by McClelland  
30 (1973) regarding the efficaciousness of  
31 measures of IQ when compared with  
32 competency measures. Thus, we agree  
33 with the essence of Cherniss's conclusions  
34 regarding the efficacy of the ESC models.

35 What Cherniss has not done, however,  
36 is to provide an explanation as to why  
37 measures of ESCs should provide greater  
38 predictive validity on job performance  
39 than EI measures. We offer a simple  
40 explanation. As Jordan (2008) pointed out,  
41 ESC models are composite measures that  
42 include aspects of personality, attitudes, and  
43 personal preferences. On this basis, it seems  
44 reasonable to expect a broad measure  
45 to have more predictive ability than a  
46 narrow one (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996).  
47 Unfortunately, predictive ability does not  
48 directly translate to the percentage of  
49 variance explained by EI. Although the  
50 overall predictive validity of EI may be less  
51 than the ESC models, research has found

1 that ability EI exhibits greater incremental  
2 validity over personality variables than the  
3 ESC models (Côté & Miners, 2006). Thus,  
4 ESC is best characterized not as a different  
5 form of EI, but rather as a personality  
6 construct. We argue that this explanation  
7 strengthens Cherniss's prescriptions for  
8 more clearly distinguishing the EI and ESC  
9 approaches.

10 To investigate this point further, we  
11 looked at publications in a range of  
12 respected industrial–organizational (I–O)  
13 and management journals published in  
14 2009. We wanted to ascertain what authors  
15 (and reviewers and editors), especially those  
16 who publish in the high profile journals in  
17 our literature, consider to be EI. Following  
18 an examination of 2009 citations in Social  
19 Sciences Citation Index® regarding EI  
20 published at the time of writing this  
21 commentary, we found a strong preference  
22 for the ability model: The authors of 16 out  
23 of 21 articles approached EI from an ability  
24 perspective.<sup>1</sup> When we considered only  
25 top-tier journals<sup>2</sup> published since 1999, the  
26 picture that emerges is even clearer: *All*  
27 the empirical work and theoretical writing  
28 in these journals (10/10) was based on the  
29 ability model of EI.

30 Thus, and as Ashkanasy and Daus (2005)  
31 point out, while the ESC models may  
32 work well in industry for diagnosis and  
33 development, the academics who publish  
34 in the higher profile outlets have steered  
35 away from this type of construct. Put simply,  
36 it is clear that researchers in respected  
37 journals are using the ability model of EI as  
38 a framework for examining EI in preference  
39 to ESC models.

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42 1. Measurement tools vary widely, however, from  
43 the MSCEIT, to discrete ability tests such as the  
44 Situational test of emotional understanding (STEU:  
45 MacCann & Roberts, 2008), to self-report measures  
46 based on the ability model, for example, the Schutte  
47 et al. (1998) SREIT and the Wong and Law (2002)  
48 WLEIS.

49 2. The journals we considered were those included in  
50 the *Financial Times* list: *Academy of Management*  
51 *Journal*; *Academy of Management Review*; *Admin-*  
*istrative Science Quarterly*; *Journal of Applied*  
*Psychology*; *Organizational Behavior and Human*  
*Decision Processes*.

## 1 Importance of Context

2 As we foreshadowed in our introduction,  
3 the main point we wish to make con-  
4 cerns the need to take more account of  
5 context in EI research. Although Cherniss  
6 raises relevant issues about construct defi-  
7 nitions, he appears to give the impression  
8 of adopting an altruistic perspective, as if EI  
9 always has a positive effect. Our concern  
10 is that this may be interpreted by detractors  
11 of the EI construct (e.g., Antonakis  
12 in Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough,  
13 2009; Landy, 2005; Locke, 2005) as further  
14 evidence that EI advocates naively regard EI  
15 as a Holy Grail. We credit Goleman (1995)  
16 for stimulating such perceptions by making  
17 overstated claims regarding the importance  
18 and effectiveness of EI in his popular book,  
19 *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter*  
20 *more than IQ*. Although a close reading of  
21 Cherniss's article reveals that he did indeed  
22 adopt a critical approach, we feel that it  
23 is necessary to clarify this point further, in  
24 particular by highlighting the role of context  
25 in EI research.

26 As such, Ashkanasy and Dasborough (in  
27 Antonakis et al., 2009) put forward the  
28 idea that the positive effects of EI may  
29 be principally associated with situations  
30 involving stress or social interactions.  
31 Moreover, there may even be a "dark  
32 side" to EI in some situations. For example,  
33 in the particular context of leadership,  
34 Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) argue  
35 that leaders might use their EI ability to  
36 carry out negative self-serving intentions in  
37 certain situations. There appear even to be  
38 some circumstances where *low* EI may be  
39 useful. For example, Foo, Efenbein, Tan,  
40 and Aik (2004) found that low EI contributed  
41 to better outcomes in a negotiation task.  
42 Shiv, Loewenstein, Bechara, Damasio, and  
43 Damasio (2005) found in the context  
44 of investment decisions that investors  
45 suffering from neurological deficiencies in  
46 processing emotions made better decisions  
47 than investors without such deficits.

48 In this case, a legitimate research  
49 question is: When does *low* EI lead to better  
50 performance outcomes? Perhaps even more

1 intriguing is the possibility that *within the*  
2 *same situation*, some branches (or tasks) of  
3 EI may be helpful and some may be harmful.  
4 For example, Cage and Daus (2006) found  
5 that customer service salespersons' ability  
6 to read faces was related to fewer items  
7 sold, and that the "understanding changes  
8 in emotional state" task of the MSCEIT was  
9 related to better sales performance.

10 A further compelling alternative is the  
11 possibility of a *curvilinear* relationship  
12 between EI and performance, at least for  
13 some EI branches and in some circum-  
14 stances. For instance, although it is intuitive  
15 that too little emotional awareness might  
16 be debilitating when dealing with others,  
17 too much also may be problematic.  
18 For example, in the context of leader-  
19 ship, Antonakis (in Antonakis et al., 2009)  
20 raised the specter of "the curse of emotion"  
21 (p. 250), where a leader's over-attentiveness  
22 to maintaining agreeable emotions might  
23 be conducive to *less* effective leadership  
24 when a challenging situation calls for a  
25 hard-headed approach. Thus, emotionally  
26 intelligent leaders might be seen to have a  
27 tendency to avoid the challenging situations  
28 that lead to negative emotions for both lead-  
29 ers and followers (e.g., providing corrective  
30 feedback or taking necessary disciplinary  
31 action). Similarly, for the emotional man-  
32 agement branch of EI, Blagden and Craske  
33 (1996) found that excessive rumination led  
34 to greater experiences of negative affect.  
35 Thus, too much emotional awareness or too  
36 much emotional management might have  
37 the potential to be as debilitating as too  
38 little depending on the context and the task.

39 Accordingly, it appears that context  
40 should be a critical consideration in both  
41 EI research and practice. Although we  
42 acknowledge that Cherniss does raise an  
43 interesting question about the role of  
44 context in relation to EI at the very end of  
45 his commentary, our primary contribution  
46 is to give specific emphasis and examples  
47 from research regarding how context can  
48 influence the expression of EI and its  
49 concomitant outcomes. Our enthusiasm  
50 regarding examining context mirrors the  
51 most up to date thinking, research, and

1 writing among both management scholars  
2 in general (e.g., Ashkanasy, 2007; Johns,  
3 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001), as well as EI  
4 and emotions researchers (Antonakis et al.,  
5 2008; Blagden & Craske, 1996; Dasborough  
6 & Ashkanasy, 2002; Foo et al., 2004; Shiv  
7 et al., 2005), and we are excited to see how  
8 this perspective influences future EI thought  
9 and research.

## 10 Conclusions

11 We agree with Cherniss' differentiation of EI  
12 and ESC models and posit that ESC models'  
13 greater predictive validity is likely because  
14 they tap a broader personality construct  
15 than EI models. However, we believe that EI  
16 and ESC models differ in their contribution  
17 to incremental validity in the scientific study  
18 of emotions and emotional management.  
19 The academic community clearly prefers  
20 the ability model of EI over the more  
21 populist ESC models. The important next  
22 step in the study of EI is greater attention  
23 to the role of context in assessing the  
24 efficacy of EI and its role in organizational  
25 settings. By explicating when high EI (and  
26 what branches of it) would be helpful and  
27 harmful, the explanatory power of EI is  
28 likely to continue to increase.

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