The wisdom of letting go and performance:  
The moderating role of emotional intelligence and discrete emotions

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Drawing upon cognitive appraisal theory and affective events theory, we develop and test a model of discrete emotions, coping, and performance that contains both within- and between-person components. We argue that when employees feel angry, guilty, joyous, or proud at work, those with higher levels of ability-based emotional intelligence will turn to emotion-focused coping as a means to deal with the immediate aftermath of the emotion. This form of coping requires the least amount of cognitive resources and facilitates performance by helping individuals to meet their task demands. Random coefficient modelling findings from daily diary data collected in a law enforcement setting support our proposed ideas concerning the interactive effects of emotions and emotional intelligence on coping, as well as the effects of coping on task performance.

Practitioner points

- The findings from this study conducted in a law enforcement setting suggest that coping strategies such as venting, denial, and disengagement might be adaptive for short-term performance.
- Organizations could manage employee emotions via awareness of appropriate coping responses and selecting higher ABEI individuals for jobs that involve emotions on a routine basis.

Emotion feelings are unique in their ability to capture and dominate the mind, to preempt information processing channels, color perception and cognition, and influence our actions (Bower, 1981, 1987; Isen, Johnson, Mertz, & Robinson, 1985; Izard, Wehmer, Livsey, & Jennings, 1965; Niedenthal & Kitayama, 1994; Zajonc, 1980)


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Izard’s summation of the potency of emotions in every domain of human functioning has been well documented and researched in psychology for almost one hundred years now (e.g., Freud, 1930; James, 1884; McDougall, 1912). Following this attention in other areas of psychology, emotions research has taken a dominant position in occupational and organizational psychology as well (e.g., see Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Barsade, Brief, & Spataro, 2003; Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Briner & Kiefer, 2005; Elfenbein, 2007 for reviews). These reviews and recently emerging findings suggest that emotions and affect play an important role in organizational life, affecting a range of workplace attitudes (such as person-environment fit – Yu, 2009; commitment to organizational change – Seo et al., 2012; self-efficacy – Seo & Ilies, 2010) and behaviours (such as learning from errors – Zhao, 2011; pro-environmental behaviour – Bissing-Olson, Iyer, Fielding, & Zacher, 2013; feedback-seeking and interaction avoidance behaviours – Nifadkar, Tsui, & Ashforth, 2012; value creation in dyadic negotiations – Overbeck, Neale, & Govan, 2010). Despite these advances in emotions research, however, we contend that the current scholarly treatment of discrete emotions suffers from three challenges that seriously hinder knowledge in this domain.

First, and as Seo, Barrett, and Bartunek (2004) caution, the predominant assumption in the organizational literature is that positive emotions are beneficial and that negative emotions are detrimental. This might, however, be an oversimplification of emotion effects in naturalistic settings (see also Gooty, Gavin, & Ashkanasy, 2009). In this article, we challenge this simplistic yet fundamental assumption by drawing upon a forgotten tenet from cognitive appraisal theory (CAT: Lazarus, 1966) and affective events theory (AET: Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996): both theories suggest that emotions (unlike moods or trait affect) have a salient cause in the form of an event, are intense when they are first induced and then taper off, and motivate coping strategies (see also Cheshin, Rafaeli, & Bos, 2011; Izard, 1991). Despite this core idea that emotions and coping both change with time, the extant literature in coping resides at the between-person level (see Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004 for a review and Fugate, Kinicki, & Prussia, 2008 for an example) and posits that resolving emotion-inducing events through problem-focused coping (PFC) is most beneficial to the individual.

In contrast, we suggest that emotion-focused coping (EFC) responses such as denial, mental and behavioural disengagement, and venting could be functional short-term responses (e.g., Beal, Weiss, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005; Isen, 1984; Kerns & Berenbaum, 2010; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). This position derives from early work in CAT and AET suggesting that EFC is less effortful and more adaptive in the shorter term than many other forms of coping, as it frees up cognitive resources (e.g., Lazarus, 1966, 2000). Indeed, as Weiss and Cropanzano note, ‘affect strategies which involve denial might be more efficient in the short run as they allow the person to focus on the job’ (1996, p. 56). In summary, rather than suggesting that the valence of the emotion directs performance implications, we suggest that the use of EFC in the short term positively relates to task performance, a position that has yet to be tested in the organizational and occupational psychology literature. Thus, our study contributes to the extant research on coping by examining one potentially beneficial correlate of EFC in the workplace: task performance.

Second, although ability-based emotional intelligence (ABEI: Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999) has emerged as a significant individual difference variable that explains how individuals reason through and manage emotions (see Joseph & Newman, 2010; O’Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2010 for reviews), empirical research scarcely addresses how ABEI (a stable individual difference) affects the within-person relationship
between discrete emotions and EFC. Our second contribution thus lies in casting ABEI (an individual difference variable) as a between-person moderator of the within-person relationship between emotions and EFC. Specifically, we suggest that ABEI acts as an automatic regulatory resource that affects the within-person relationship between experienced discrete emotions and EFC (e.g., Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). We posit in particular that those with higher levels of ABEI, who have a capacity for abstract reasoning regarding emotion information (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), will be more likely to let go of emotion-inducing work events in the short term.

Third, despite numerous theoretical treatises that strongly argues that emotions and coping are dynamic phenomena (see Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004), studies that explicitly model emotion and EFC as within-person phenomena with ABEI as a between-person individual difference are notably absent. Gooty et al. (2009), along with several others (Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Beal et al., 2005; Briner & Kiefer, 2005; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), have discussed in detail the limitations associated with studying emotions as static constructs. This type of investigation (i.e., a between-person investigation only) neglects the variability inherent in emotions and aggregates emotion phenomena over time. Such an aggregation causes a serious misalignment of theory (e.g., emotions are defined as organized fleeting responses to an event or entity, see Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), measurement (e.g., emotions captured over a week or month suffer from retrospective biases, see Robinson & Clore, 2002), and methods (e.g., between-person designs simply neglect the definition of emotion as an intraindividual phenomenon and treat within-person variance as error). In this article, our third contribution lies therefore in examining discrete emotions, EFC, and performance as within-person phenomena, thus aligning the definitions of these constructs with subsequent measurement, research designs, analyses, and inference drawing. This contribution complements emerging findings in the moods and performance literature (Beal et al., 2005; Miner & Glomb, 2010) that suggests within-person variations in affective states and performance are substantial and important.

In summary, we argue that our research contributes to the emotions literature via two routes: (1) providing theory and empirical findings suggesting that those higher in ABEI engage in more EFC after intense emotion experiences and (2) showing that EFC is positively related to task performance in the short term. In this study, we focus on four specific emotions: anger, guilt, pride, and joy. Our choice of these four emotions is driven by emerging empirical findings in organizational research that suggest their potential in motivating behaviour in work settings. For example, anger has been related to workplace deviance (e.g., Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005; Geddes & Callister, 2007; Gibson & Callister, 2010; Rodell & Judge, 2009); guilt has been related to prosocial motivation and helping behaviours (Gino & Pierce, 2009; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Judge, Ilies, & Scott, 2006; Lee & Allen, 2002); joy has been associated with helping and performance (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001; Lee & Allen, 2002); pride has been cast as an important work emotion because it is achievement oriented (Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999).

**Ability-based emotional intelligence**

Mayer et al. (1999) defined emotional intelligence as an ability defined in terms of a higher-order, multidimensional construct with four underlying dimensions or ‘branches’: (1) perceiving emotion, (2) using emotion to facilitate thought, (3) understanding emotion, and (4) managing emotion (see also Côté & Miners, 2006). Each of these
branches of emotional intelligence contributes sequentially to an individual’s overall ability to deal with emotions (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Perception refers to the ability to perceive emotions accurately. The ‘using emotion to facilitate thought’ branch concerns ability to reason through emotion information. Understanding emotion reflects ability to understand the patterns in which emotions occur, and to discern complex emotions and transitions between them. Finally, managing emotion is defined as the ability to manage emotion in self-beneficial ways. An impressive body of research now supports the scientific standing of ABEI and its validity in predicting work outcomes (e.g., see Brackett, Lopes, Ivcevic, Mayer, & Salovey, 2004; Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Côté & Miners, 2006; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Lyons & Schneider, 2005; O’Boyle et al., 2010; Rode et al., 2007; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005).

**EFC and its usefulness**

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioural strategies used to deal with an emotion (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These coping strategies are enacted immediately after an event occurs, after which different strategies can be enacted at various points throughout the longer-term process of dealing with an emotion (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Thus, while many different forms of coping have been studied, and there is some disagreement regarding the usefulness of any one strategy across time and across situations, the consensus is that PFC is the preferred mode of coping at the between-person level and in the longer term (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge, & Scott, 2009; Lazarus, 1966, 1991; Ortony et al., 1988; Roseman, 1984).

Emotion-focused coping represents a constellation of strategies used to manage the emotion itself. It can be contrasted with PFC, which represents strategies used to deal with the emotion-inducing event itself (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). EFC includes four elements: (1) denial of the occurrence of the event, (2) behavioural disengagement from the event, (3) mental disengagement from the event, and (4) venting (e.g., Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Taken together, EFC reflects an individual’s attempts to deal with the experience of the emotion itself via denial and detachment from the actual occurrence of the event. Although it may sound counterintuitive that the use of venting as an EFC strategy requires fewer cognitive resources than some other strategies, research indicates that the suppression of emotions, for example, requires far greater cognitive resources than venting and, in turn, leads to ruminative thoughts. This rumination that follows suppression leads to even further resource depletion (see Beal et al., 2005; Wallace, Edwards, Shull, & Finch, 2009). Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) note in particular that EFC, captured via abandoning attempts to alter emotion-inducing events, serves to free individual cognitive resources that can then be directed towards meeting immediate task demands.

In a similar vein, Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) note that emotion-inducing events at work almost always occur along with pressing task demands, and the use of EFC allows an individual to more fully prioritize task demands. Thus, EFC might facilitate meeting task goals immediately after the occurrence of an event (see also Bond & Bunce, 2003; Bond & Hayes, 2002; Sprangers & Schwartz, 1999; Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz, & Carver, 2003). What then might differentiate among individuals who can and cannot detach from emotionally laden work events? Consistent with emerging conceptual works casting ABEI as a stable coping resource (e.g., Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2006), we argue that the within-person relationship between emotion and EFC is likely affected by ABEI, a between-person ability.
Emotions, EFC, and ABEI

Anger

One of the most frequently studied emotions in the work domain (Gibson & Callister, 2010), anger, is often induced when an individual perceives an insult. Anger is accompanied by an overwhelming behavioural motivation to correct the perceived wrongdoing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Ortony et al., 1988). It is not clear, however, as to how and when anger translates into actual behavioural responses aimed at correcting the perceived cause of anger. Nor is it clear what role individual differences play in this respect. In particular, research has yet to identify the individual differences that might help direct the choice of coping after anger, be it changing the event (PFC) or letting go of insults (EFC).

Here, and in line with Matthews et al. (2006), we posit that ABEI is a regulatory resource that allows higher ABEI individuals to cope with felt anger in self-beneficial ways better than lower ABEI individuals. The key notion here is that, in any given context, higher ABEI individuals are better able to reason through the information provided by anger and to choose coping responses that are adaptive in the short term (the focus of this paper). For example, Matthews et al. noted that higher ABEI individuals choose coping strategies such as disclosure of feelings rather than maladaptive rumination when faced with ongoing stressors. Drawing upon this literature (see also Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Härtel, 2002), we posit that higher ABEI individuals are more likely to choose EFC in the short term as they disengage from the causes of felt anger while attending to ongoing task demands (cf., Geddes & Callister, 2007; Jordan et al., 2002; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

In effect, higher ABEI individuals turn to EFC so that they do not invest attentional focus in non-task-oriented activities (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Siegall & McDonald, 2004) such as resolution of anger-inducing events. As such, ABEI acts as a self-regulatory resource that directs attention to immediate self-beneficial goals subsumed in ongoing work tasks (Beal et al., 2005). ABEI therefore becomes a regulatory resource allowing higher ABEI individuals to choose the strategy that requires the least amount of time and resources to cope. Individuals lower in ABEI, on the other hand, will likely not be able to decipher the information afforded by anger as easily. They might yet engage in EFC in the short term after anger, but not with the same intensity as higher ABEI individuals. Lower ABEI individuals can be expected to struggle with disengaging from the causes of felt anger. Thus:

Hypothesis 1: ABEI moderates the positive relationship between anger and EFC such that this relationship is stronger for higher ABEI individuals (as compared to lower ABEI individuals).

Guilt

Like anger, guilt results from a perceived displeasure at a specific action, event, or interpersonal interaction. Lazarus (1999) explains that guilt is distinct from anger because of its blameworthiness. Thus, the guilt-feeling actor assigns responsibility for the specific displeasure to her or himself, and guilt is induced after a perceived failure of living up to certain personal or societal standards (Lazarus, 1999). In particular, two consequences of guilt have been reported in the literature. The first is that guilt leads to compliance. In a series of experiments designed to induce behavioural responses to guilt, Izard (1991) found that individuals experiencing higher levels of guilt were more likely to comply with requests that demanded time and resources even if there was no immediate material...
benefit to compliance. Similarly, Ilies, Peng, Savani, and Dimotakis (2013) conducted a field experiment in which participants were made aware of their undesirable behaviours at work, thus inducing guilt. The experience of guilt led such participants towards more voluntary helping behaviours. The second consequence of guilt is intense self-reproach (Ortony et al., 1988; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007), where self-reproach serves to debilitate the normal functioning of the human mind (Izard, 1991).

In work settings therefore, as with anger, higher ABEI individuals, when compared with lower ABEI individuals, should rely more heavily on EFC in response to guilt. Moreover, compared with lower ABEI individuals, higher ABEI individuals are more likely to accurately perceive the information afforded by guilt (self-reproach) and therefore temporarily choose to disconnect from the causes of guilt in order to focus on meeting ongoing task demands. In this sense, ABEI acts a regulatory resource that directs attentional focus towards the demands of the ongoing tasks rather than towards making amends for the felt violation of personal or societal standards (Beal et al., 2005; Hobfoll, 1989). For lower ABEI individuals, the ability to decipher emotion information adeptly might not come as easily as it does for the higher ABEI individuals. That is, lower ABEI individuals do not possess the same regulatory resources in the form of ABEI to self-regulate their attention to the immediate demands of their tasks. Instead, they might be more likely to direct attentional focus towards managing the guilt-induced self-reproach (e.g., Tangney et al., 2007). As such, lower ABEI individuals would be expected to have a harder time than their higher ABEI counterparts when it comes to disconnecting from the causes of felt guilt. Thus:

**Hypothesis 2:** ABEI moderates the relationship between guilt and EFC such that this relationship is positive for higher ABEI individuals and negative for lower ABEI individuals.

Joy

Although coping has typically been associated with distress and negative emotions (see Fugate et al., 2008), there is also evidence that positive emotions necessitate a coping response (e.g., Izard, 1991; Lazarus, 2000). For example, joy is associated with both physiological (e.g., increased heart rates and systolic blood pressure) and psychological changes (Izard, 1991; Ortony et al., 1988; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) that may require coping responses. In this respect, Beal et al. (2005) note that all emotion requires resource deployment in its immediate aftermath. Moreover, in an empirical demonstration of this effect, Forgas and East (2008) reported deleterious effects of joy on decision-making and performance. Forgas and East’s findings plausibly point to the inability of joyful individuals to disconnect from the joy-inducing events and focus on performance. The enactment of EFC in response to joy thus seems to involve momentarily expressing joy and temporarily disconnecting from cognitions and behaviours directed at seeking recurrence of this pleasurable emotion via recurrence or extension of the joy-inducing event.

Mayer et al. (1999) further note that higher ABEI individuals are better able to perceive joy accurately and to understand the information provided by joy, which causes a certain degree of contentment with the status quo and a motivation to remain in that state (Izard, 1991; Ortony et al., 1988). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that when higher ABEI individuals experience joy at work, they are more likely than their lower ABEI colleagues to abandon attempts to enact an encore of joy, seek its recurrence, or prolong the state (Lazarus, 2000). Instead, higher ABEI individuals, at least in the short
term, simply disconnect from the attempts to prolong or seek recurrence of joy-inducing events and instead focus on experiencing the symptoms of joy itself (i.e., EFC; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). Lower ABEI individuals, on the other hand, are likely to perceive goal congruence (the relational meaning of joy) as an end in itself and to bask in the pleasurable state of mind afforded by the joy-inducing event (Forgas & East, 2008; Melton, 1995). As such, we expect lower ABEI individuals to engage in less EFC in response to joy because they are unable, just as with guilt, to let go of the joy-inducing event. Thus:

Hypothesis 3: ABEI moderates the relationship between joy and EFC such that this relationship is positive for higher ABEI individuals and negative for lower ABEI individuals.

Pride

Pride is a self-conscious, moral emotion that is considered the polar opposite of anger (Lazarus, 2000). Unlike anger, which induces motivation to correct a wrongdoing, pride leads to taking credit for an achievement and a feeling of superiority. Pride is considered especially important to organizational research because of its potential to initiate action towards achievement (Weiss et al., 1999). Pride is similar to joy in that it includes a primary appraisal of goal congruence (Lazarus, 1991, 1999). Pride differs from joy, however, in that an attribution of self-agency occurs for such goal congruence (Lazarus, 1991, 1999; Ortony et al., 1988). Pride is also a self-attribution emotion. It emerges when one perceives that she has done something praiseworthy and it typically leads to self-satisfaction (Ortony et al., 1988). The experience of this self-conscious emotion is associated with confidence, higher self-esteem, and self-satisfaction (Izard, 1991). Ortony et al. (1988) point out that when pride is not regulated (especially when it first occurs and is intense), it manifests as self-absorption.

Higher ABEI individuals will be more likely than those with lower ABEI to regulate their pride such that it does not interfere with task-related goals or hurt their immediate interpersonal relationships. Adopting the same rationale as with joy, we suggest that higher ABEI individuals are more likely to accurately and perhaps automatically perceive that connecting with and/or basking in the pride-inducing event at work might hurt their immediate-valued task goals. By adopting EFC, higher ABEI individuals might express their pride and/or disengage (e.g., not attempting to prolong the experience of pride or seeking its recurrence), thus conserving cognitive resources that can then be directed towards their tasks. On the other hand, lower ABEI individuals might not be able to identify the smugness afforded by pride and might give in to that state of mind more easily (Ortony et al., 1988). As they bask in the glory afforded by that pride, they may lose sight of and fail to direct the resources required by the demands of the tasks. Thus:

Hypothesis 4: ABEI moderates the relationship between pride and EFC such that this relationship is positive for higher ABEI individuals and negative for lower ABEI individuals.

EFC and task performance

Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) suggest that EFC can have beneficial effects on task performance immediately after the experience of emotionally laden work events. This is because EFC (as an immediate response to felt emotion) allows individuals to
concentrate cognitive and behavioural resources on task completion – by letting go of attempts to resolve/prolong events that cause emotions (Beal et al., 2005; Hobfoll, 1989; Wrosch et al., 2003). Hay and Oken (1972) found that nurses routinely used denial of emotion-laden events, mental and behavioural disengagement, and venting to significant others, as a way of coping and performing better in highly demanding intensive care units. To this point, Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) and other scholars (e.g., Carver et al., 1989; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004) note that failing to resolve or to capitalize on causes of an emotion might have negative effects on longer-term performance, health, and well-being outcomes, even though EFC is essential to facilitating task performance in the short term. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) note further that capturing coping, as an intrapersonal phenomenon, is crucial insofar as the usefulness of a particular coping strategy varies by the timing of measurement. Thus, when assessing task performance immediately after a work event, EFC is likely to be positively related to task performance. This is because EFC does not interfere with task requirements and it causes people to be more cautious in protecting their own goals (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) – goals that are presumably tied to meeting immediate task demands. Thus:

Hypothesis 5: EFC is positively related to task performance.

Method

Participants, setting, and procedure

The setting for our study was a municipal police department (Site 1) and a college campus police department (Site 2). At the time of the study, Site 1 had 107 active employees, consisting of 71 sworn police officers and 36 civilians. Ninety-three were Caucasian, 3% were Native American, 3% were African-American, and 1% were Asian or Pacific Islanders. The average age of our participants was 39 years, and 75% were male. Their average job tenure was 11.5 years. Site 2 had 42 full-time employees at the time of the study (with four employees deployed in conflict or on medical leave). Demographic data for this site were not available. We had no conceptual reasons, however, to expect meaningful differences between the two sites with regard to study variables, and no significant mean differences were found between the two sites on any study variables. As such, we pooled the data from both sites. The total possible number of participants across both sites was therefore 145.

We used the daily reconstruction method (DRM: Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004) for data collection. This procedure requires participants to reconstruct a critical event for the day as a series of actions. Amabile et al. (2005) and Kahneman et al. (2004) suggest that individuals can recall emotions reliably at the end of the same day, and these reports can be largely thought of as valid reports of emotion occurrences and untainted by retrospective biases (see Robinson & Clore, 2002, for a detailed review). Participants completed 5 days of daily diaries and surveys in which they reconstructed the most critical work event (as determined by the participant) for that day in as much detail as possible. They reported their emotions and coping in response to that event. Furthermore, we allowed participants to choose 5 days of a possible 4 weeks to report on such critical incidents, their emotions, and coping. We did this because we wanted participants to report events that were of personal significance to them. Such events did not necessarily occur every day.
Participants were assured of confidentiality and cash gifts of 20 dollars were given to each participant after completion of daily diaries and surveys for 5 days, as well as a one-time measure of ABEI. Further, the participants completed daily surveys at the end of their shift at work, and this took anywhere between 10 and 20 min depending on the detail they provided for describing the critical events. The first author retrieved completed questionnaires from both sites every day for the study duration. This ensured that no participant could complete multiple surveys on the same day. The employee’s name and badge number were used for purposes of matching of surveys to their ABEI measures and peer-rated performance. Each participant was instructed to give a packet containing the task performance measure to the fellow employee that they most closely worked with during the critical event. The packet that each employee gave to the coworker included a cover sheet that described the critical event the target employee had referred to as well as the time and location of the event. On occasions where employees worked alone, they were instructed to fill out the task performance survey themselves. Thirty-three percentage of all returned behavioural surveys were self-rated, while the remainder were other-rated. No significant mean differences were found between self- and other-ratings. Participants were given a 4-week window to complete the ABEI measure online and during their off-work time.

Twenty-nine sets of returned surveys with five critical events could be matched to the ABEI data, yielding a usable response rate of 20%. These twenty-nine surveys (24 from Site 1 and five from Site 2) included five critical work events for each individual, yielding 145 (29 individuals*5 critical events) within-person reports of emotions, EFC, and task performance. From a multilevel perspective, our level-2 (between-person) sample size is 29 and our level-1 (within-person) sample size is 145.

**Instrumentation**

All measures used in the study were developed and validated in previously published studies. Discrete emotions were measured using a scale developed and used in Weiss et al. (1999). Participants indicated the extent to which they felt each of the listed emotion adjectives following the critical event (1 = ’not at all’ to 7 = ’very much’). Anger was measured via nine words (anger, rage, outrage, wrath, fury, bitterness, hostility, hate, and ferocity; α = .90) previously used in Weiss et al. (1999) and Spencer and Rupp (2009). Guilt was measured via four words (guilt, shame, regret, and remorse; α = .81). Joy was measured using 13 words (joy, delight, enjoyment, happy, glad, elation, jubilant, elation, ecstasy, euphoric, jovial, jolly, and gleeful; α = .96). Pride was measured with three words (pride, triumph, and self-satisfied; α = .90).

The MSCEIT v.2.0 (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003) is the most up-to-date operationalization of the recommended measure of ABEI (Côté & Miners, 2006; Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Härtel, 2003). It is a proprietary, 141-item mental ability test with eight different sets of tasks. A complete description of its content can be found in Mayer et al. (2004). In our study, and following established practice (Côté & Miners, 2006), we employed expert scoring and used an overall ABEI score that collapsed the four dimensions. The MSCEIT v.2.0 correlates (r = .30) with general mental ability (GMA), as it should, because it falls within the nomological net of cognitive intelligence (Côté & Miners, 2006; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2001). Yet, it has discriminating power beyond GMA and the big five personality dimensions (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Côté & Miners, 2006; Mayer et al., 2001, 2003).
It demonstrates acceptable reliabilities at the individual factor and overall scale level, with the overall and all subscale alpha reliabilities exceeding .80 (Côté & Miners, 2006; Gignac, 2005; Mayer et al., 2003). Brackett and Mayer (2003) reported high 2-week test–retest reliability ($r = .86$).\(^1\)

We used 12 of the 16 EFC items from the COPE inventory (Carver et al., 1989) to measure coping responses. The four omitted items were not relevant to event-specific coping enacted in the short term, which was the focus of this study (e.g., ‘I go to movies or watch TV, to think about it less’; ‘I sleep more than usual’). The instructions for this inventory asked respondents to think about the strategies they used in immediately dealing with the critical work event. Sample items from the EFC scale are ‘I admit to myself that I can’t deal with it, and quit trying’ and ‘I pretend that it hasn’t really happened’. The scale is responded to using a 4-point scale (1 = ‘I did not do this at all’ to 4 = ‘I did this a lot’). Alpha was .82. Task performance was measured using a seven-item measure developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). A sample item is ‘Adequately completed assigned duties’. The response format was a 5-point scale ranging from ‘1 = strongly disagree’ to ‘5 = strongly agree’. Alpha for this scale was .79.

Results

Descriptive statistics for all study variables, reliabilities, and bivariate correlations are shown in Table 1. As noted earlier in the manuscript, one of the main goals and contributions of our paper is to align the conceptual definitions of emotions, EFC, performance as changing constructs and ABEI as a stable individual difference with measurement (as evidenced by the DRM method) and analyses. The analytical technique for this study was a repeated-measures analysis using the random coefficient modelling (RCM) framework (e.g., Bliese & Ployhart, 2002). RCM is superior to basic regression in this context for two important conceptual reasons. First, data using repeated measures capture intraindividual variability over time, and the observations at each period (e.g., time $T_1$) are not independent of observations at another time point (e.g., time $T_4$). Multiple responses from an individual will tend to be correlated. As such, the assumption of independence of observations that underlies most statistical techniques is violated. Failing to account for this violation can result in biased significance testing. RCM can account for this non-independence. Second, repeated measures with non-independence can often yield complex error structures that, if not accounted for, can bias significance testing. RCM allows for such complex error structures. Regression cannot accommodate these methodological factors of non-independence of study observations and complex error structures. RCM allows level-1 coefficients to randomly vary across individuals. We tested our hypothesized repeated-measures model using RCM with the HMLM option via the HLM 6.0 software (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Bryk, Raudenbush, & Congdon, 1994). The level-1 data in our study comprised within-person ratings on emotions, EFC, and performance across 5 days. RCM not only accommodates the non-independence of data at level 1, but also allows for the nesting of these level-1 (within-person, or repeated) observations within level-2 units (persons). In doing so, level-2 variables can be incorporated as antecedents of level-1 variables (by modelling the variance in

\(^1\)For more information on the MSCEIT v2.0, please refer to the test website http://www.mhs.com/product.aspx?gr=cli&prod=msceit&id=resources. For examples of MSCEIT items, see http://www.emotionaliq.org/MSCEITExamples.htm.
level-1 intercepts) and/or as moderators of the relationship among level-1 variables (by modelling the variance in level-1 slopes). Such was the role of ABEI as a between-person individual difference variable in our model. The following HMLM equations, with time as a covariate as indicated in the two level-1 equations, depict the relationship between emotions, EFC, and ABEI. Note that these equations look very similar to traditional 2-level HLM models except for the inclusion of time as a covariate ($T_1–T_5$).

**Level-1 Model:**

$$EFC = T_1 EFC_1 + T_2 EFC_2 + T_3 EFC_3 + T_4 EFC_4 + T_5 EFC_5$$

$$EFC^* = P_0 + P_1 (Anger) + P_2 (Guilt) + P_3 (Joy) + P_4 (Pride) + e$$

**Level-2 Model:**

$$P_0 = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01} \text{(ABEI)}$$

$$P_1 = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11} \text{(ABEI)}$$

$$P_2 = \beta_{20} + \beta_{21} \text{(ABEI)}$$

$$P_3 = \beta_{30} + \beta_{31} \text{(ABEI)}$$

$$P_4 = \beta_{40} + \beta_{41} \text{(ABEI)}$$

From the above set of equations, the $\beta_{11}, \beta_{21}, \beta_{31},$ and $\beta_{41}$ coefficients provide tests of Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3, and Hypothesis 4, respectively.

Likewise, the following HMLM equation, again with time as a covariate as indicated in the two level-1 equations, depicts the relationship between EFC and task performance. Note that these differ from the previous set of equations in that there are no level-2 variables incorporated into this set of equations, as ABEI was not hypothesized to affect the relationship between EFC and task performance.

### Table 1. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Anger</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Guilt</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td></td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Joy</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>-.55**</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pride</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>-.40**</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.75**</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ABEI</td>
<td>96.46</td>
<td>15.27</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. EFC</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>.68**</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Task performance</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.51**</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ABEI, ability-based emotional intelligence; EFC, emotion-focused coping. Cronbach alphas are reported on the diagonal in parentheses. All variables except ABEI were aggregated within person. These correlations are reported in the interest of completeness only, and they should be interpreted with caution as the within-person relationships might be masked in aggregated correlations. $N = 29, *p < .05, **p < .01.$
Table 2. Random coefficient modelling results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimates</th>
<th>Null model</th>
<th>Full model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between-person variance component</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within-person variance component</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intraclass coefficient</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.15**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger(^1)</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt(^1)</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy(^1)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABEI(^2)</td>
<td>0.003(^\dagger)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger*ABEI</td>
<td>0.01**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt*ABEI</td>
<td>0.02**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy*ABEI</td>
<td>0.01**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride*ABEI</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ABEI, ability-based emotional intelligence.
The superscript 1 indicates level-1 variables, and superscript 2 indicates a level-2 variable.
Level 1 \(N = 113\), Level 2 \(N = 29\). *\(p < .05\); **\(p < .01\); †\(p < .10\).

Figure 1. Interaction between anger and ability-based emotional intelligence (ABEI) on emotion-focused coping.

Level-1 Model:

\[
\text{Task performance} = T_1 + T_2 + T_3 + T_4 + T_5 + P_0 + P_1(EFC) + e
\]
From the above set of equations, the $\beta_{10}$ coefficient is used to test Hypothesis 5.

For each set of analyses, we first estimated the null model, specifying just the outcome and no predictors. This model allows the outcome to be partitioned into its within-person and between-person variance components, facilitating the calculation of an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) as a marker of the amount of between-individual variance contained in the outcome of interest. From the null model, if the ICC value exceeds .10,
examination of the RCM model is justified (Bliese & Ployhart, 2002). After testing the null model, we tested the fully specified models. Where EFC served as the outcome, we included discrete emotions as time-varying (level-1) predictors, ABEI as a cross-level (level-2) predictor, and the cross-level interactions between ABEI (level 2) and each emotion (level 1). With task performance as the outcome, EFC served as the sole predictor at level 1. All level-1 predictors were centred within person as per the recommendations of Hofmann and Gavin (1998) for the testing of cross-level moderation. Further, we estimated progressively complicated error structures in HMLM (e.g., homogenous, heterogeneous, and autoregressive) and conducted nested model tests to determine the most appropriate error structures as recommended when examining repeated-measures models using HMLM (e.g., Bliese & Ployhart, 2002).

The results with EFC serving as the dependent variable are reported in Table 2. The ICC value for EFC exceeded the suggested .10 cut-off. The interaction effect of ABEI with each of the emotions was significant, except for pride. The interaction plot of anger and ABEI (Figure 1) shows that as anger increased, higher ABEI individuals engaged in more EFC, while lower ABEI individuals showed no change in EFC, thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. The interaction plot of guilt and ABEI (Figure 2) shows that as guilt increased, higher ABEI individuals engaged in increased EFC and lower ABEI individuals engaged in decreased EFC, thereby supporting Hypothesis 2. Concerning the moderating effect of ABEI on the relationship between joy and EFC, the interaction plot (Figure 3) shows that as joy increased, higher ABEI individuals engaged in increased EFC and lower ABEI individuals engaged in decreased EFC, thereby supporting Hypothesis 3. The interaction between ABEI and pride was not significant. Hypothesis 4 was therefore not supported. The results with task performance serving as the outcome are reported in Table 3. The ICC value for task performance exceeded the suggested .10 cut-off. As can be seen in Table 3, EFC was significantly and positively related to task performance, thus supporting Hypothesis 5.

### Discussion

Drawing upon CAT and AET, we examined EFC as a potentially useful strategy associated with short-term task performance (e.g., Hobfoll, 1988, 1989; Kerns & Berenbaum, 2010). EFC represents thoughts and behaviours that disengage from significant emotion-inducing work events and an individual’s attempts to resolve or prolong them (Weiss &

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**Table 3. Random coefficient modelling results for EFC and task performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Null model</th>
<th>Full model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$\tau$</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Sigma^2$</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intraclass coefficient</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.51**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFC</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.39**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. EFC = emotion-focused coping.*

*Level 1 N = 85; Level 2 N = 24.* $^*p < .05; ^{**}p < .01.$
Cropanzano, 1996). As we expected, we found EFC to be positively related to task performance immediately after such events. This finding is especially noteworthy because, while this idea first appeared in AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) and the early stress and coping literature (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), it has not been empirically examined until now. EFC represents an individual’s coping strategy focused on the symptoms of the emotions while letting go of resolving (for anger and guilt) or prolonging (for joy and pride) the emotion-inducing event. Our findings thus indicate that this ‘letting go’ can be beneficial for task performance in the short term.

Our results are also encouraging regarding the nexus of emotion, ABEI, and coping. Apropos the interaction between anger and ABEI on EFC, we found anger to be associated with EFC only in the presence of high ABEI. Our findings regarding anger thus suggest that ability to let go of anger-inducing events (as an immediate coping strategy in the aftermath of anger) only occurs in the presence of high ABEI. Our findings for the interaction between guilt and ABEI relating to EFC showed an even stronger effect. Specifically, we found evidence of a positive relationship between guilt and EFC when ABEI is high and a negative relationship for low ABEI. The interesting aspect of these findings is that higher ABEI seems to be associated with not trying to resolve the causes of guilt, while lower ABEI appears to indicate a propensity for not letting go, most likely focusing on the self-reproach afforded by guilt.

Similar to our findings for guilt, the interaction between joy and ABEI revealed a positive relationship between joy and EFC for high ABEI and a negative relationship for low ABEI. These findings are novel in the organizational literature in that there is a dearth of empirical findings regarding coping strategies that allow individuals to let go of intense, emotion-inducing events first discussed in AET. Further, our study clearly demonstrated the usefulness of ABEI as a regulatory resource that allows individuals with higher levels of this ability to let go.

In summary, our findings across anger, guilt, and joy are consistent with our hypotheses. In response to each of these emotions, high ABEI was associated with more use of EFC, while low ABEI was associated with less use of EFC. Moreover and importantly, EFC was positively related to task performance. Note, however, that we did not explicitly test a moderated mediation model here. Thus, while this is the model that emerges from CAT theoretically, we are careful to refrain from claiming that our findings empirically support the position that EFC, in response to emotions, leads to better performance for higher ABEI individuals.

Interestingly, we found no effects (either interaction or main effects) for pride. We probed the relationships between pride, ABEI, and EFC further via supplemental analyses. It appears likely that the high correlation between joy and pride (.75) does not allow significant interactions to emerge when both variables are present in the model runs. We reran RCM models with EFC as the outcome but without joy as an antecedent. These models revealed a significant interaction between pride and ABEI in predicting EFC. The interaction plot was very similar to the one shown for joy and indicated that high ABEI was associated with more use of EFC as pride increased, while low ABEI was associated with less use of EFC. With that said, we note that future research is needed to isolate empirically pride from joy in naturalistic settings. Conceptually, joy and pride are distinct, as noted

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2 We did not implement advanced multilevel-moderated mediation procedures described in Bauer, Preacher, and Gil (2006) as their procedures apply to HLM. We could find no concrete guidance on the applicability of their procedures to HMLM. Further, our small sample size made it restrictive to implement such advanced procedures given the increasing number of parameters that would need to be estimated. We thank the editor and reviewers for this suggestion, however.
earlier. Empirically, however, we suspect that participants did not distinguish between these two emotions, at least in our sample.

In summary, our work offers three findings relevant for the emotion literature in organizational behaviour. First, contrary to the conventional wisdom in the extant literature that says EFC is a maladaptive strategy (Rodell & Judge, 2009), our results suggest this is not necessarily so. Sometimes it might be better for an individual to disengage from emotionally laden events by engaging in EFC in the short term, particularly when other demands (such as task demands) are present. Second, our work offers initial predictive validity evidence for the role of ABEI as a regulatory resource in a field setting. Our findings indicate that the wisdom imparted by ABEI is perhaps in knowing when to let go of emotionally laden work events. Third, our work points to the importance of examining emotions, coping, and behaviours as dynamic constructs. Recently, Miner and Glomb (2010) underscored this point, and our work empirically examines the within- and between-person effects in emotions, ABEI, coping, and performance called for by these scholars.

**Limitations and future research directions**

Strengths of our work include novel theoretical ideas and a repeated-measures field design. Our theory and design offered a rich and in-depth view of emotions, coping, and performance in real time. The downside of such an examination is the burden it placed on our participants in terms of their time. The daily diaries included free-response, rich qualitative event descriptions and the survey portions, and took between 10 and 20 min of participant’s end-of-work-shift time to complete (depending on the detail of their event descriptions). As such, our response rate (i.e., level-2 sample size) was lower than we had hoped, and could be seen to be a potential limitation of our study. Scherbaum and Ferreter (2009) note that standard errors could be biased and, hence, significance testing affected in designs where the level-2 sample size falls below 30. If anything, however, having a level-2 sample size that meets the bare minimum should lower our power and decrease the likelihood of detecting our hypothesized interactions. Moreover, the 20% response rate in our study is typical of organizational field survey research (Schalm & Kelloway, 2001).

The use of self-ratings in one third of the performance ratings is also a potential limitation of our study. In instances where officers worked on an incident alone, we simply had no choice but to employ self-reports. We had 145 ratings on behaviours and, of these, 47 were self-rated. We note, however, that no mean differences were found between self- and other-reports on performance ratings. Of course, where other-ratings were provided, there may be some concern that the target officer chose the fellow officer who provided those ratings. This would naturally raise concerns that the target officer’s choice might be made in a way that could bias the ratings (e.g., giving the rating packet to a fellow officer who is also a friend) and, subsequently, the results. Choice here is illusory, however. Target officers were constrained in who they could give the rating packet to in that dispatch determined what fellow officer would be on the scene with them. Nonetheless, we acknowledge this might be a potential limitation.

Finally, we acknowledge our inability to infer causality. While we have attempted to keep our use of causal language to a minimum, the fact that we employed a causal chain (emotions → coping → outcomes) obviates the causal underpinnings of our model. Owing to our desire to examine the effects of emotions, coping, and performance in a naturalistic setting, however, we were unable to utilize an experimental design. Experimental designs are the most conducive designs for inferring causality due to the
ability (1) to temporally order variables and (2) to use random assignment to help rule out confounds (Stone-Romero & Rosopa, 2008). Although we could not manipulate the emotions and coping responses of the police officers in our study, we drew upon strong theoretical arguments and attempted to use a design (i.e., in recall, work events and emotions preceded coping, and behavioural ratings followed these) that bolstered the conditions for inferring causality within the short time frame of the phenomena under investigation (short-term coping and behavioural responses to emotions). Nonetheless, our design and analysis were still correlational in nature and are a trade-off for obtaining ecologically valid field data.

Beyond limitations, we also offer some directions for future research. Our research only focused on four emotions. Other emotions (e.g., fear, anxiety, sadness, shame, compassion, pride, and gratitude) routinely occur in organizational settings, however, and these are worthy of future research inquiry. In this research, we used the ability-based conceptualization of emotional intelligence because it most closely aligned with our theory. Future researchers, however, might consider using sound psychometric measures of the mixed-model conceptualizations of emotional intelligence (i.e., what Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005 termed ‘Stream 2’ models). Similarly, other constructs such as positive/negative affect, political skill, job tenure, and age might be worthy of future inquiry as well.

There is growing evidence that emotions affect health and psychological outcomes (Herrald & Tomaka, 2002; Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006). It might therefore be interesting to investigate the nexus of emotional intelligence and emotions with regard to such health and psychological outcomes. Our findings suggest that ABEI is related to coping, yet the research on how training and development interventions might be designed to compensate for lower emotional intelligence in applied settings is scarce. Such interventions that focus on managing lower emotional intelligence would appear to be a fruitful future research avenue. Research suggesting that the adaptive nature of a specific coping strategy can vary by timing and context has only started to emerge (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007). Here, we found that EFC facilitates short-term task performance, but we call for studies examining longer-term effects of other forms of coping (e.g., PFC), not only on performance but on contextual performance, workplace deviance, attitudinal outcomes, health, and well-being.

Despite the limitations of our research, we are encouraged by our findings from a naturalistic and ecologically valid field setting that suggest ABEI helps people to decode emotion information accurately, in that they choose EFC in response to three intense emotions, irrespective of whether the emotion itself is positive or negative. In addition, in turning to EFC, task performance is facilitated. Stemming from a complex theoretical model and empirical design necessitated by the complexity inherent in emotions, our findings perhaps tell a very simple story. ABEI helps individuals to disengage from emotionally laden work events in the immediate aftermath of intense emotion-inducing events. The choice of EFC as a coping strategy allows for better task performance to emerge.

Acknowledgement

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References


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