

Master's Thesis Business Administration
An Observational Measure for Emotional Intelligence at Work

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Abstract

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has gained noticeable attention among researchers and practitioners over the past years, which led to the identification of three main perspectives, which are ability EI, trait EI, and a combined one called mixed EI. However, traditional EI measurement tools lack reliability and validity, due to their self-reported nature being prone to biases. Indeed, these traditional measurement tools are limited to questionnaires and self-reporting assessments, leaving us with no objective ways to understand an individual's observable verbal and non-verbal behaviour. This study thus attempts to develop a descriptive framework that categorizes observable verbal and non-verbal behaviour associated with the key components of EI in a work environment by deploying a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. To create this descriptive framework, a total of 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted based on the critical incident technique in two organisations that made an excellent environment for researching EI. As these organisations both offered a complex environment with multiple layers of management and service-oriented business models, with many potential participants. The participants included both managers and employees and were selected based on their prior knowledge of EI and relevant experience with EI in a working environment. The data was then analysed using thematic analysis and systematically structured using the Gioia methodology, resulting in 1st-order concepts, 2nd-order themes, and 3rd-order aggregate dimensions. The results from this study allowed us to categorize the observable verbal and non-verbal behaviour associated with EI and align them with the ability EI model. The categorization of observable EI behaviour was visualised in a descriptive framework that provides the foundation for a comprehensive codebook to observe EI. The results also suggest the need for two codebooks, one for employees and one for managers. In addition, this thesis allows for training and development programs to be

developed upon the framework, practical implications in real-world situations, and improving team dynamics.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence (EI), Verbal Behaviour, Non-Verbal Behaviour, Observable Measure, Descriptive Framework.

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Introduction

Emotional Intelligence, commonly referred to as EI, has witnessed a significantly growing recognition in recent management studies (Dasborough et al., 2022; Lima et al., 2022; Saha et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2024), some researchers even state that EI should be considered as one of the key constructs of an individual's general intelligence, in which EQ and IQ are strongly related (Petrides, 2011; Treglown & Furnham, 2023). Unlike the traditional intelligence models, EI emphasises the individual's cognitive abilities and personality traits when it comes to understanding, managing, and expressing emotions (Boyar et al., 2023). Academic studies have consistently linked high levels of EI with positive outcomes of leadership (Dasborough et al., 2022; Saha et al., 2023), job performance (Furnham et al., 2021; Liao et al., 2022), psychological safety, and overall organisational success (Côté & Miners, 2006; Mayer, Goleman, et al., 2004). With the growing importance of the role of leadership in organizations these days, EI has proven to have a significant effect on a leader's adaptability and effectiveness (Boyar et al., 2023). Where the leader in an organization should be more adaptable to a continuously changing environment, the personal capabilities of the leader, including EI, play a crucial role. Marking the importance of recognizing the skills that leaders with high EI possess over the leaders who lack these skills (Boyar et al., 2023; Dasborough et al., 2022; Føllesdal & Hagtvvet, 2013; Saha et al., 2023).

Current academic research pointed out that the existing literature on EI measures does not provide a clear and distinctive method to identify the key components of EI in an individual's behaviour in a working environment (O'Connor et al., 2019). Multiple researchers stated that guidance through the current literature is needed and that a modernised measure could simplify the process of identifying EI behaviour demonstrated by individuals (Boyatzis, 2018; O'Connor et al., 2019). Not only was there an urgency to simplify the process of understanding EI, but also the understanding of an individual's behavioural expressions was

crucial in developing and improving the current knowledge of EI. Even though EI is widely recognized, a gap remains in the current measurement models of EI, where the understanding of an individual's behaviour in a work environment is hardly measurable (Boyatzis, 2018). Traditional measures are often questionnaire-based or rely on self-reporting, which can lack validity and reliability due to the potential bias in self-reporting measures, but also the potential of social desirability and self-enhancement (Mayer et al., 2016; O'Connor et al., 2019). Therefore, a different measurement method through observations could be necessary to overcome this problem. To come to this observational measurement method, the verbal and non-verbal behaviour indicating high EI behaviour should be identified. The main research question to answer this problem definition was as follows:

RQ: How is Emotional Intelligence expressed through an individual's verbal and non-verbal behaviour at work?

To answer this broad question, a set of sub-questions was composed that helped us in answering the main research question, the sub-questions are as follows:

Sub-question 1: What are the key components of emotional intelligence present in an individual's behaviour, according to the existing literature?

Sub-question 2: How are the key components of emotional intelligence present in an individual's behaviour currently measured, according to the existing literature?

Sub-question 3: How are the key individual behavioural components of emotional intelligence demonstrated through verbal behaviour, by individuals with high emotional intelligence, at work?

Sub-question 4: How are the key individual behavioural components of emotional intelligence demonstrated through non-verbal behaviour, by individuals with high emotional intelligence, at work?

This master's thesis aimed to develop a descriptive framework that categorizes observable verbal and non-verbal behaviour related to EI in a work environment (O'Connor et al., 2019). The proposed descriptive framework has linked observable verbal and non-verbal behaviour with the current key components of ability EI found in recent literature. To identify the different key components of EI, a comprehensive literature review was conducted. The historic research on EI has taught us that there are two key theoretical conceptions at the foundation of EI, Ability EI, and Trait EI, sometimes a combined version is used in the context of Mixed EI (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Petrides & Furnham, 2000; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). A critical review of the current measures followed by an expert analysis in a working environment has been conducted. These field experts were individuals who had prior knowledge of the concepts of EI, both through their academic backgrounds and current professional roles, detailed criteria were given in the sampling strategy. As mentioned before the goal is to provide the reader with a descriptive framework that can be used to observe EI in a working environment, based on verbal and non-verbal behavioural expressions around the concepts of Ability EI. This research will help present and future researchers in simplifying the observational research of EI. Not only will this thesis identify and categorize the different behavioural expressions of EI, but it will also validate the outcomes through an expert analysis in a work environment. In this way, the descriptive framework will both be valid and reliable. Furthermore, this descriptive framework is an important first step in creating a codebook that can be broadly used to identify EI based on an individual's behaviour, since a comprehensive observational codebook has not been developed yet. Future researchers, bachelor's-, and master's students will be able to use the descriptive framework in their process of understanding and developing new theories on EI. The outcomes of this thesis will not only help future researchers, but also bring value to individuals, policymakers, organizations, and

institutions that see the importance of bringing EI to the workspace and embrace that EI is a key factor in the role of success.

The research is organized into five sections. The introduction provided background information on the topic, the problem definition with the research questions, and the objective of the research. The theory provides a review of the current literature on EI. Followed by the methodology of the research providing the research design, data collection method, and data analysis technique. The results will present the findings of the data analysis including tables and figures, which will be discussed and concluded in the fifth section of this research paper.

Theory

2.1 A Definition of Emotional Intelligence

EI dates back to the 1990s when Salovey & Mayer (1990) defined EI as the ability to recognize, understand, and effectively manage one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others. This early research on EI lays the foundation for understanding EI as a multifaceted construct. In 2000, a distinction was made between *Ability EI* and *Trait EI* purely to clarify the discrepancy between the different types of measure (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Ability EI refers to the cognitive capabilities of an individual to effectively perceive, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others. Trait EI refers to the typical behaviour of individuals in emotion-related situations, where it emphasises the self-perception of emotional reasoning and focuses more on the personality traits of an individual. Ability EI is seen as the more measurable concept of EI, whereas Trait EI is seen as the more abstract concept due to its lack of measurable components. The measurements for both concepts of EI are different and need to be distinguished to get a better understanding of the different types of measures available in the current literature. Ability EI can be measured using performance-based measures, such as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso-Emotional-Intelligence-Test, or *MSCEIT* (Mayer, Salovey, et al., 2004). Trait EI is typically measured through self-report assessments

such as the Self-report-emotional-intelligence-test (*SREIT*) by Schutte et al. (1998), or the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) by Petrides & Furnham (2001) and later refined by Siegling et al. (2015). More recent research has shown that an individual with high EI competencies is not limited to either Ability EI or Trait EI, but rather a combination of both. Therefore, a third so-called “stream” was introduced by Ashkanasy & Daus (2005), they argued that EI research and measurement consists of three “streams” with each of them focussing on different concepts of EI. A third stream, the Mixed EI Model, focuses on a combination of both cognitive capabilities and personality traits that contribute to high EI competencies. The three streams of EI, as categorized by Ashkanasy & Daus (2005), are the Ability model, the Trait model, and the Mixed model. The Mixed Model EI is commonly measured by using the Bar-on model (Bar-On et al., 2000) or a combination of Ability and Trait EI measures. A comparison will be made of the above-mentioned measurement models in the next section. This will simplify and visualize the various models available to this date.

Emerging studies on recognizing EI show that a shift towards behavioural expressions is needed because the performance-based and self-report measures are lacking and have clear limitations (Wang et al., 2023). Furthermore, early staged research is being conducted on using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to recognize and measure EI, by using eye-tracking software. EI is being researched from the perspectives of AI and, the Digital World (Audrin & Audrin, 2024), but also to improve the methods of measuring and observing EI behaviour, highlighting the importance of getting a better understanding of the behavioural expressions made by individuals. For the scope of this thesis, we will be looking into behavioural expressions of EI using the existing literature available (Wang et al., 2023). To get a better understanding of the three existing fundamentals of EI, the next paragraphs have analysed the underlying literature on Ability, Trait, and Mixed Model EI and its measurement methods.

2.1.1 Ability EI

Ability EI, as mentioned before, emphasises the cognitive abilities of an individual in a situation where emotional reasoning is required, it can be described as the theoretical aspect of EI, and it is measurable in the form of tests. More recent literature even suggests that Ability EI should be taken into consideration in the general intelligence frameworks (Evans et al., 2020). Evans et al. (2020) suggest in their article that an individual with higher levels of EI also exhibits greater levels of general intelligence, and vice versa, pointing out the importance of cognitive ability in EI. To get a better understanding of Ability EI, it is important to identify the different components of this EI perspective. Ability EI is commonly used to represent the cognitive abilities of *Recognizing, Understanding, and Managing*, emotions. (O'Connor et al., 2019) point out in their research that the ability-based measure is focused solely on the abilities of an individual, which makes it a weak measure for typical behaviour as well as other trait-based measures, however, it offers a solid theoretical framework for further development. Ability EI is commonly measured by using the MSCEIT model, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.2 (Mayer et al., 2004).

2.1.2 Trait EI

Trait EI, unlike Ability EI, refers to emotion-related self-perceptions and personality traits that support an individual in managing and understanding emotions. Trait EI is defined as the theoretical conception where an individual is aware of their own emotions and conceptualizes this based on self-reporting. It does not consider the cognitive aspects of EI, it is purely a concept of self-efficacy (Petrides et al., 2007). It is commonly expressed through strong personality traits such as a high level of *Self-Awareness, Self-regulation, Motivation, Empathy, and Social Skills*. Trait EI is commonly measured by using the TEIQue by Petrides & Furnham (2000).

2.1.3 Mixed Model EI

Mixed Model EI is the most recent theoretical concept of EI. As the name already suggests, the Mixed Model EI is a combination of both Ability EI and Trait EI constructs. The Mixed Model EI is a more detailed theoretical conceptualization that can be used to get an even better understanding of an individual's level of EI, since this concept takes both the aspects of Ability and Trait EI into account, it gives a far more integrated perspective to the overall theory of EI and how it can be used in further research (Petrides et al., 2007). There are various methods to measure the Mixed Model EI. The TEIQue, which was also introduced before, considers both ability and trait EI but is mainly focused on the trait EI aspects. The Bar-on Model (EQ-i) is a more commonly used model to measure the Mixed Model perspective. This model measures EI in two different aspects of EI, the intrapersonal and the interpersonal (Bar-On et al., 2000).

2.2 Comparative Overview of EI Analysis

To understand and recognize the behavioural expressions of individuals with high EI we must start by defining the distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication is in emotional communication, especially for observational purposes. Based on recent literature, we can define an individual's verbal communication as the use of spoken words, language, and vocal sounds to communicate information, emotions, and intentions (Boyd & Markowitz, 2024; Jacob et al., 2012).

Emotional communication can also be found in an individual's non-verbal behaviour, while verbal communication refers to the content of the message that is being communicated, non-verbal communication refers to how the message is transferred. Non-verbal communication is displayed through an individual's facial expression, body language, and tone of voice (Bonaccio et al., 2016).

In 1996, (Goleman), wrote in his book that EI consists of a set of skills that can be learned and developed over time. He emphasised that a high level of EI is often expressed in great conflict-solving, motivating others, and a high adaptability to change. It, furthermore, can be recognized by well-managed relationships, managing stress, and making sound decisions (Goleman, 1996). To measure the level of EI of an individual, different methods of measurement have been developed over the past years, as mentioned before, Ability EI is measured differently than Trait EI. Starting with the analysis of Ability EI.

Ability EI is typically measured by using the MSCEIT model. Mayer et al. (2004) p. 199 developed a model that measures EI around four areas: (a) perceive information, (b) use emotion to facilitate thought, (c) understand emotions, and (d) manage emotions. The four areas are also known as branches, or the four-branch model. Branch 1, as described by Mayer et al. (2004) p. 199, *“reflects the perception of emotion and involves the capacity to recognize emotion in others' facial and postural expressions. It involves nonverbal perception and expression of emotion in the face, voice, and related communication channels”*. Branch 2, as described by Mayer et al. (2004) p. 199, *“involves the capacity of emotions to assist thinking”*. Branch 3 is, according to Mayer et al. (2004) p. 199, *“the understanding of emotion, reflects the capacity to analyse emotions, appreciate their probable trends over time, and understand their outcomes”*. Finally, the fourth branch, according to Mayer et al. (2004) p. 199, *“reflects the management of emotion, which necessarily involves the rest of personality. That is, emotions are managed in the context of the individual's goals, self-knowledge, and social awareness”*.

The MSCEIT model consists of eight tasks: two to measure each branch. Branch 1 is measured through identifying emotions in (a) faces and (b) pictures. Branch 2 is measured through (c) sensations and (d) facilitations by comparing and identifying the emotions that would best fit a certain scenario. Branch 3 is measured through (e) changes and (f) blends

which ask questions to test whether an individual understands the circumstances under which emotions intensify or lessen. Branch 4 is through (g) emotion management and (h) emotion relationship where the participants are tested on their emotional management in a hypothetical scenario and their ability to manage others' emotions (Mayer et al., 2004, p. 200).

Trait EI measurement tools tend to measure actual behaviour instead of maximal output, this makes the trait EI measures very useful in predicting actual behaviour (Petrides et al., 2000). (O'Connor et al., 2019), states the following about individuals scoring high in trait EI measures; *“Individuals high in various measures of trait EI have been found to have high levels of self-efficacy regarding emotion-related behaviours and tend to be competent at managing and regulating emotions in themselves and others.”* (p. 3). There are two commonly used measurement models to measure an individual's level of trait EI, the first one is the Self-report Emotional Intelligence Test (SREIT) by Schutte et al. (1998). The SREIT, unlike the ability-based MSCEIT, focuses itself on the personality traits of an individual. As the name already suggests, the test is based on self-reporting, a variety of questions will be asked with various statements around EI. Schutte et al. (1998) developed a scale consisting of 33 items, these items are all connected to the categories defined by Salovey & Mayer (1990), 13 of the items are connected to appraisal and expression of emotions, 10 items are connected to the regulation of emotions and the final 10 items are connected to the utilization of emotions.

The second and more commonly used method to measure Trait EI is the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQueu) by Petrides & Furnham (2001). The TEIQueu measures the personality traits and self-perceived abilities of an individual using a self-report inventory. There are two versions of the TEIQueu available, the full versions consist of 144 items and a short 30-item version (TEIQueu-s), divided over 15 facets of EI within 4 factors (Petrides & Furnham, 2003, p. 47). The 4 factors are Well-being, Emotionality, Sociability, and Self-control. Resulting in the following overview (Petrides & Furnham, 2003, p. 47). Table 1 below

gives an overview of the 15 facets used in the TEIQue. These facets represent personality traits, which are used to measure the level of trait EI of an individual.

Table 1 - Factors and facets of Trait EI by (Petrides & Furnham, 2001, p. 428)

Factors	Well-Being	Emotionality	Sociability	Self-control
Facets	Happiness	Empathy	Assertiveness	Emotion Regulation
	Optimism	Emotion Perception (Appraisal)	Social Awareness	Stress Management
	Self-esteem	Relationship Skills	Emotion Management	Impulsivity
	Self-motivation		Emotion Expression	Adaptability

Table 2 combines the 15 facets with the number of questions asked per facet and a characteristic question asked for each item. Which provides us with an idea of the type of questions asked in the TEIQue. These characteristic statements as provided in Table 2 will help us in understanding the behavioural expressions that fit certain personality traits.

Table 2 - Descriptives for the TEIQue (Petrides & Furnham, 2003, p. 47)

Scale	Number of items	Characteristic item
Adaptability	9	I usually find it difficult to make adjustments in my lifestyle. (R)
Assertiveness	9	When I disagree with someone, I usually find it easy to say so.
Emotion expression	10	Others tell me that I rarely speak about how I feel. (R)
Emotion management (others)	9	I'm usually able to influence the way other people feel.
Emotion perception	10	I often find it difficult to recognize what emotion I'm feeling. (R)
Emotion regulation	12	When someone offends me, I'm usually able to remain calm.
Empathy	9	I find it difficult to understand why certain people get upset with certain things. (R)
Happiness	8	Life is beautiful.
Impulsiveness (low)	9	I tend to get 'carried away' easily. (R)
Optimism	8	I generally believe that things will work out fine in my life.
Relationship skills	9	I generally don't keep in touch with friends. (R)
Self-esteem	11	I believe I'm full of personal strengths.
Self-motivation	10	I tend to get a lot of pleasure just from doing something well.
Social competence	11	I can deal effectively with people.
Stress management	10	I'm usually able to deal with problems that others find upsetting.

The final commonly used model to measure EI is the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory model, or EQ-I (Bar-On, 1997a, 1997b). More recently, a revised version of the model was presented by Bar-on in 2018, with the latest version being the EQ-I 2.0 (Bar-on, 2018). The model is a widely used model to measure Trait EI, this model is different from the previous models because this model integrates both social and emotional competencies to come up with a broader perspective on an individual's emotional behaviour. The EQ-I is a self-report measure that looks at the emotional and social intelligence behaviour that together provide an estimated emotional-social intelligence level. The EQ-I contains 133 items and is questioned in the form of short sentences around a 5-point response scale. The individual's score is assessed following five scales: **intrapersonal** which refers to self-awareness and

self-expression, **interpersonal** which is about social awareness and interpersonal relationships, **stress management** referring to emotional management and self-regulation, **adaptability** which contains sub-scales about change management, and the final scale **general mood** which refers to self-motivation. These five scales all have a set of sub-scales (Bar-On, 2006). In table 3 an overview is given that summarizes the scales and sub-scales with a definition; this will function as a comparison to the other measurement tools but will also help in the process of understanding emotional behavioural expressions by individuals related to the EQ-I model.

Table 3 – *EQ-I scales and sub-scales (Bar-On, 2006)*

Scale	Sub-Scale	Description
Intrapersonal	Self-Regard	Accurately perceive, understand, and accept oneself.
	Emotional Self-Awareness	Aware and understanding of one's emotions.
	Assertiveness	Effectively and constructively express one's emotions and oneself.
	Independence	Self-reliant and free of emotional dependency on others.
	Self-Actualization	Strive to achieve personal goals and actualize one's potential.
Interpersonal	Empathy	Aware of and understand how others feel.
	Social Responsibility	Identify with one's social group and cooperate with others.
	Interpersonal Relationship	Establish mutually satisfying relationships and relate well with others.
Stress Management	Stress Tolerance	Effectively and constructively manage emotions.
	Impulse Control	Effectively and constructively control emotions.
Adaptability	Reality Testing	Objectively validate one's feelings and thinking with external reality.
	Flexibility	Adapt and adjust one's feelings and thinking to new situations.
	Problem-Solving	Effectively solve problems of a personal and interpersonal nature.
General Mood	Optimism	Being positive and looking at the brighter side of life.
	Happiness	Feeling connected with oneself, others, and life in general.

Based on the four EI measurement methods discussed, it can be seen that there are noticeable agreements in the scales that the methods used to define EI, however, the choice of words is different for each method. For this research, it is beneficial to compare the scales and facets and to come up with one set of key components of EI that we can use for the remainder of this research. To do so, the overview in Table 4 compares the scales and sub-scales of each method, this overview will act as the foundation of the development of the observable behavioural EI framework.

Table 4 - Overview of EI measurement methods

	Measurement Method	Scales	Sub-scales	
Cognitive Abilities	MSCEIT	Perceiving emotions	Faces Pictures	
		Using emotions	Sensations Facilitation	
		Understanding emotions	Changes Blends	
		Managing emotions	Emotion management Social management	
Personality Traits	SREIT	Appraisal of own & others' emotions		
		Expression of emotions		
		Regulation of emotions		
		Utilization of emotions		
	TEIQue	Well-Being		Happiness Optimism Self-esteem Self-motivation
			Emotionality	Empathy Emotion Perception (Appraisal) Relationship Skills
		Sociability		Assertiveness Social Awareness Emotion Management
			Self-control	Emotion Expression Emotion Regulation Stress Management Impulsivity Adaptability
	Bar-on EQ-I	Intrapersonal		Self-regard Emotional Self-awareness Assertiveness Independence Self-actualisation
			Interpersonal	Empathy Social Responsibility Interpersonal Relationship
Stress Management		Stress Tolerance Impulse Control		
Adaptability		Reality-Testing Flexibility Problem-solving		
General Mood			Optimism Happiness	

After analysing the literature on the three different concepts of EI, we can say that cognitive abilities associated with EI offer a suitable fundament for the development of a descriptive framework that categorizes observable verbal and non-verbal behaviour around the theoretical framework of the ability EI model by Mayer et al. (2004). This is important because the thematic analysis following the Gioia methods, which will be explained in the methodology, requires a theory-centred approach in generating aggregate dimensions (Magnani & Gioia, 2023). The clear distinction between *perceiving, understanding, managing, and using* emotions makes it a suitable structure for identifying and categorizing observable behaviour related to each branch of the model. The ability model aims to be a more objective measurement tool by minimizing the risks for biases, it uses a performance-based method rather than the self-reporting methods used in the trait EI- and mixed EI model (Mayer et al., 2016). Self-report measurement is known to be more prone to biases compared to performance-based measures (Fiori & Vesely-Maillefer, 2018; Mayer et al., 2016; O'Connor et al., 2019). A recent article by Boyatzis (2018) also emphasized the need for a model based on the cognitive abilities of an individual and he proposes the development of an additional fourth stream that creates a behavioural measurement tool.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This thesis aimed to identify the observable verbal and non-verbal behaviour associated with EI to help us recognize and understand behavioural EI expressions by individuals in a work environment. This was done by deploying an inductive exploratory approach using a qualitative research design (Lim, 2024), followed by a deductive approach in the thematic analysis to generate aggregate dimensions in a theory-centred approach (Magnani & Gioia, 2023). The exploratory research design allowed us to explore the research question while there was little prior knowledge and understanding available about the observable behaviour of EI

in recent literature. Furthermore, an inductive research design allowed us to gather and analyse data by using an observational measure, in the case of this research, the use of interviews. Also, inductive research allowed us to analyse the data gathered from the interviews to identify concepts, themes, and aggregate dimensions. This approach helped us in laying the foundation for the development of a behavioural framework for EI. Additionally, this research used qualitative data gathered from the interviews to identify behavioural patterns and themes (Woo et al., 2017). This research design was known for delivering rich and insightful discoveries, alongside individual experiences with EI (Biggerstaff, 2012).

This thesis consisted of comprehensive theoretical research to find the key components of EI relevant to behaviour in a work environment. Followed by a qualitative semi-structured interview analysis with experts in the field, later in this thesis the expert criteria will be highlighted in the sampling strategy and description. The goal of this thesis was to gather observable behavioural expressions of the different components of EI by interviewing individuals with prior EI knowledge in the field, that support the findings of the theoretical research. The use of a semi-structured interview method helped us in the process of gaining insight into the key components of EI by asking in-depth questions around the pre-defined topics but still leaving enough space for unexpected insights due to the flexibility and adaptability of the semi-structured interview research design. The semi-structured interviews allowed for richer data compared to standardized interview questions; it allowed us to dive deeper into interesting topics along the way. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allowed us to a more adaptable approach compared to a structured interview, which turned out to be an excellent fit for the research question (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Magaldi & Berler, 2020; Dolczewski, 2022).

3.2 Sampling strategy & Sample description

This research followed the procedure of a purposive sampling strategy, purposive sampling allowed for smaller and purposively selected samples with an increased depth of understanding of the research topic, which made it more likely to gather trustworthy and useful information (Campbell et al., 2020). With this strategy, the participants of the semi-structured interviews were selected based on their prior knowledge of EI and experience with EI in a working environment. To find the right participants a selection of minimal criteria was defined, the selection profile for a participant was as follows:

- The individual has prior knowledge of the concepts of EI, this was measured by asking a set of control questions to identify their prior knowledge of the concepts of EI.
- The individual has relevant professional experience in which EI was important, the individual has working experience at a strategic or tactical level where concepts of EI played a role within their daily work.
- The individual has completed a bachelor's or master's on an academic level that would imply academic knowledge of EI.

To find more relevant participants outside the scope of our sampling strategy, the snowball sampling strategy was used to extend the setting of the purposive sampling strategy. By using the snowball strategy, participants that matched the purposive sampling strategy could recommend other individuals that would match the selection criteria, after the recommendation of these new potential participants they went through the same screening as the original participants.

To find potential participants who meet the criteria, the author's professional network was used. The author was working within this organization at the time of writing. Sourcing of the participants was done within a medium-sized Dutch municipality, located in the middle of the Netherlands. This setting was relevant out of convenience because the author has an established

professional network within this municipality, but also because the municipality had many potential participants that match the selection criteria of this research. The municipality also made an excellent environment for researching EI, the organization is complex with multiple layers of management and a service-oriented organisation style. This offers insights into how EI is expressed at all organizational levels, including complex interactions with the community.

A second relevant professional network was used by the author for the recruitment of participants. The author was following a traineeship within a Dutch consulting firm with locations in the north and centre of the Netherlands, this firm specialised in providing traineeships in the fields of information and change management and facilitating job placements within government institutions in the Netherlands. This setting was relevant because the consultants working for this consulting firm were mostly academically educated and working within strategic or tactical levels within Dutch government institutions.

The participants were screened through an initial conversation and/or question around the selection criteria before being invited to the semi-structured interview. A total of 12 individual interviews were conducted, each interview gathered information around 2 recent scenarios where the individual needed to interact using their cognitive and emotional abilities. Eventually resulting in 24 unique scenarios that were used in the data analysis. Table 5 shows the characteristics of the participants that were part of the research.

Table 5 - *Characteristics of the participants*

Name + Role	Gender	Age range	Function	Educational level
I1 (Manager)	Male	20-29	Privacy Officer	Master's Degree
I2 (Employee)	Male	20-29	BI Specialist	Master's Degree
I3 (Manager)	Male	30-39	Program Manager IT	Master's Degree
I4 (Manager)	Female	40-49	Project Manager Energy & Sustainability	Master's Degree
I5 (Employee)	Male	30-39	Process & Information Analyst	Master's Degree
I6 (Employee)	Male	20-29	Information Analyst	Master's Degree
I7 (Manager)	Male	40-49	Strategic Advisor IT	Master's Degree
I8 (Manager)	Male	50-59	Head of IT	Master's Degree
I9 (Employee)	Male	20-29	Project Manager IT	Master's Degree
I10 (Manager)	Male	50-59	Managing Director	Master's Degree
I11 (Employee)	Male	20-29	Business Consultant	Master's Degree
I12 (Employee)	Male	20-29	Business Consultant	Master's Degree

The participants and the organizations who cooperated with the research benefited for several reasons. The results of the research allowed individuals to have a better understanding of their interpersonal and emotional interactions in a workplace environment, but also the emotional expressions of colleagues and managers. For organizations, it was beneficial because the results of the research allowed them to improve both leadership- and organizational development. Overall, by improving knowledge on EI, the research participants gained more knowledge and insight into recognizing and improving EI in their personal and professional lives, and for organizations, it was a chance to improve both leadership effectiveness (Boyar et al., 2023; Saha et al., 2023) and organizational productivity (Lopes, 2016).

3.3 Data Collection

The data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews; to guide the semi-structured interviews a technique called the critical incident technique (CIT) was used, the CIT allowed us to code data against an already established ability EI framework, by asking the interviewee about a critical situation at work where strong emotions were present (Boyatzis, 2018; Ryan et al., 2009). Individual interviews following the CIT allowed us for rich qualitative data collection on how EI is expressed, which was found very valuable for the thematic data

analysis that was conducted on the gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Tailored interview questions around the ability EI model allowed in-depth insights into the behavioural expression around the different components of EI. Interviewing individuals instead of groups allowed for a safer environment where trust and confidentiality were ensured, allowing for more honest and insightful interviews, and resulting in richer data collection. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to 60 minutes each. To ensure data quality and validation, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview guide for the semi-structured interviews was created using the already existing key components of EI resulting from the literature reviews and formulating key questions that form the foundation of the interviews, allowing enough flexibility and adaptability during the interview itself. Here is a selection of the questions that were asked during the interviews, the full semi-structured interview guide can be found in Appendix 1.

- *Think about a recent situation at work where you had to deal with a complex emotional situation, can you describe this situation?*
- *How did you pick up on the emotions of the persons involved in the incident? Both verbally & non-verbally.*
- *How did you understand the emotions involved in this situation? Verbal or non-verbal behaviour of the individuals involved?*

These questions are the fundamentals of the semi-structured interviews following the CIT. The questions ensured a clear structure for each interview which created an environment for a rich and deeper understanding of the behavioural expressions of the interviewee, it also created consistency across all the interviews which simplified the data analysis.

Furthermore, ethical precautions were taken during the data collection, informed consent was obtained from all the interview participants, as well as full anonymity and confidentiality

of the gathered data during the research. Before the data collection took place, ethical approval was also arranged by the ethics committee of the University of Twente.

3.4 Data Analysis

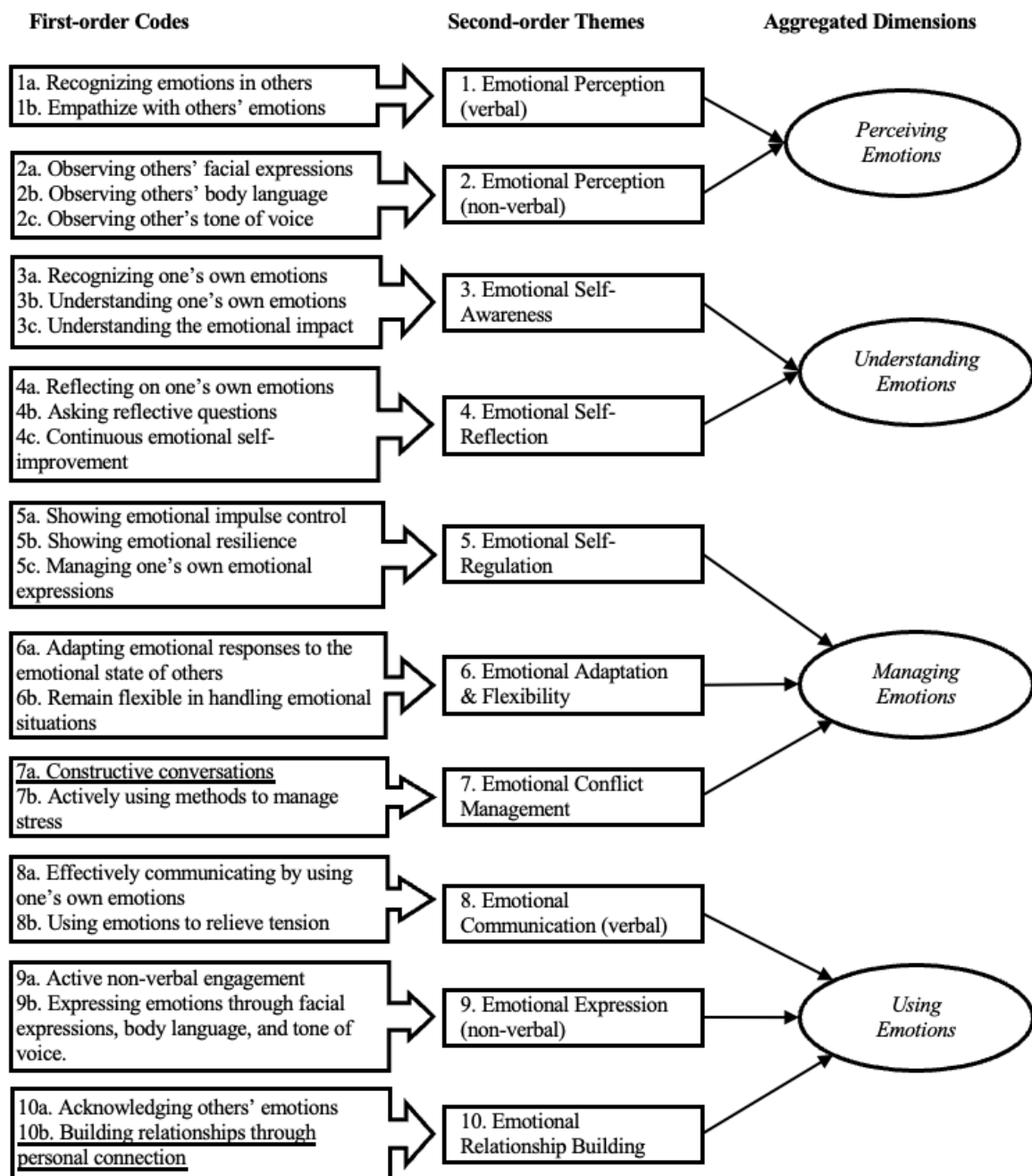
The data analysis was conducted based on a thematic analysis, which means that the gathered data has been analysed with the purpose of finding patterns and recurring themes. This thesis applied a combination of the thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006) and the Gioia methodology by Gioia et al. (2013). The thematic data analysis by Braun & Clarke allowed for a flexible and rich analysis but also uncovered the reasons behind the trends to gain even more insights into the behavioural expressions of EI. Whereas the Gioia methodology was used to structure the gathered data added a systematic approach to the data analysis. By combining the two methods this study leveraged the strengths of both methods. This first step that was taken after the data collection involved a process of generating initial codes, which involved a process identifying and labelling interesting quotes from the interviews, in the Gioia methodology this is referred to as the 1st order coding. The initial codes were then related to each other and categorized into themes, this process combines the strengths of the development of 2nd order themes by the Gioia methodology with the strength of the searching and reviewing of themes in the Braun & Clarke method (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gioia et al., 2013). The final process of the data analysis consisted of forming Aggregate Dimensions out of the 2nd order themes. In the process of generating 2nd order themes and aggregate dimensions, a so-called theory-centred approach was used to systematically combine the findings with the already existing theory to eventually generate the aggregate dimensions (Magnani & Gioia, 2023). The Ability EI model was used as the fundament to generate the aggregate dimensions, as the theory suggested a new behavioural measurement tool around the cognitive abilities of an individual should be developed (Boyatzis, 2018). The Gioia methodology also ensured the credibility of the findings due to the transparency of the coding procedures (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007).

To ensure the validity of the data analysis, the methods to gather the data were externally validated by an independent researcher through a peer review of the methodology, results, and discussion.

RESULTS

The thematic data analysis resulted in a collection of first-order concepts and second-order themes which are presented and explained using the overarching aggregate dimensions. Figure 1 will present an overview of the aggregate dimensions that have been found during the data analysis.

Figure 1 - Data Structure



Note. The *italic* dimensions were derived from the literature, as stated in the research methodology. The underlined statements were only made by managers.

4.1 Perceiving Emotions

The analysis conducted on the interviews shows a difference between verbal and non-verbal perceptions of emotions in others. Therefore, a distinction has been made between verbal and non-verbal behaviour, starting with Emotional Perception observable through verbal behaviour.

4.1.1 Emotional Perception (Verbal)

The interviews pointed out that **recognizing emotions in others** is an important measure in observing how an individual perceives emotions verbally; *“Often, I notice in a group that someone is very dominant. Or that someone is very constructive. Or that someone is very quiet.”* (I10). Indicating that the individual is aware of the emotional state of the other and verbalizes this by pointing out the team dynamics. Furthermore, the analysis showed that individuals should be able to **empathize with the other’s emotions**. By understanding the underlying cause of the emotional state of others, individuals are better able to perceive emotions when shown by others; *“I understood her situation of course, I would also find it disturbing if I knew; okay there is a chance that in my family [...]”* (I1), indicating that this interviewee was using cognitive empathy to recognize and understand the emotional state of the other person, and what that person might be going through.

4.1.2 Emotional Perception (Non-Verbal)

Emotional Perception, as mentioned before, is also observable through the non-verbal behaviour of individuals. The interviews indicated that perceiving non-verbal emotions can be categorized into three components. Starting with **observing others’ facial expressions** to perceive the emotional state of the other person; *“I noticed a change in facial expression, the other person went from neutral to frustrated.”* (I5). Often the perception through facial expression is complemented by eye contact; *“She kept looking away during the conversation, which made me feel she was not interested”* (I3). Furthermore, the interviews pointed out that

perceiving others' emotions is done through **observing others' body language**. Emotional Intelligent people tend to observe the posture to perceive the emotional state of another person; *"The other person also crossed his arms and leaned back the whole conversation" (15) & "I observed hesitation and a nervous body language, indicating discomfort" (19)*, highlighting the importance of both recognizing and interpreting the emotions of others.

Lastly, the recognition of emotions often happens through **observing others' tone of voice**; *"I was noticing a "crack in the throat" as a sign of emotional distress" (12)*, by interpreting the tone of voice, the interviewee was able to perceive the emotional state of the other person involved through these non-verbal cues.

4.2 Understanding Emotions

4.2.1 Emotional Self-Awareness

Understanding emotions is a complex process that happens in a split second, the interviews showed that understanding emotions can be separated into two categories, each highlighting different methods of emotional understanding. Therefore, understanding emotions has been divided into emotional self-awareness and emotional self-reflection. Self-awareness is a process that consists of the ability to **recognize one's own emotions**, the interviews pointed out that recognizing one's own emotions is important in the process of understanding the emotions at play; *"I realized I was getting frustrated, so I took a step back to think about the situation more clearly." (13)*. But also, a deeper **understanding of one's own emotions** has been addressed as a component in showing emotional self-awareness; *"It makes me sad and a bit scared. But once that became clear, [...] Then I thought, okay, I have to do this differently. So, then I really chose to shift those emotions a little more to the background. [...] I have to go into the do mode." (14)*. Furthermore, the results showed that **understanding the emotional impact** is also crucial in emotional self-awareness. By understanding the impact of emotions, a greater self-awareness can be developed that allows a person to understand an emotional

situation better and what impact this could have on other processes; *“I understood that his manager might have been in a "happy mood" due to the success of a project, which might have led to overlooking any concerns (I2)”*. Emphasizing the importance of understanding the impact of emotions on the decision-making process.

4.2.2 Emotional Self-Reflection

Reflecting is an important stage in understanding emotions and recognizing underlying patterns of triggers. According to the analysis **reflecting on one’s own emotions** is an important step in understanding what leads to strong emotions and what can be done differently in other situations. *“I am convinced that you must learn from experiences. And that you also must reflect, even if you have done something well [...] this could have been done even better in a different way (I1)”*. Another method that is used to reflect on emotional situations is by **asking reflective questions**, multiple interviewees pointed out that this is a common practice for them to reflect on a conflict or emotional situation; *“I ask, ‘How do you feel about this?’ Or ‘How do you see this situation? (I10)” & “By asking questions like; How do you see/feel that (I8)”*. Furthermore, an important method of self-reflection was found in the process of **continuous emotional self-improvement**, multiple interviewees stated that various forms of self-development such as reading books about emotional self-improvement helped them in understanding emotions better; *“[...] what I do is, I listen to audiobooks about self-development. [...] for example, how to get out of a conflict situation, what questions do you ask, what methods to use, and how to make a conversation constructive? (I11)”*. Indicating the importance of continuous self-improvement in understanding emotional tense situations.

4.3 Managing Emotions

4.3.1 Emotional Self-Regulation

Besides perceiving and understanding emotions, the results also resulted in three themes around the concept of managing emotions. Starting with the first theme, Emotional

Self-Regulation. Emotional Self-Regulation is an important ability in managing emotions, it involves the management of one's own emotions, behaviour and impulses. Especially **showing emotional impulse control** proved to be an important ability within emotional self-regulation. *"I had to ensure I remained calm and didn't let my emotions affect the conversation (I1)"*, indicating the importance of controlling one's own emotions. But also, maintaining a positive mindset in emotional situations has been mentioned multiple times; *"I told myself to stay calm and not let their negativity affect me (I3)"*. Furthermore, emotional intelligent behaviour is often indicated by **showing emotional resilience**; *"If you can't put that emotion aside, then you never manage to sort of prioritize [...] (I6)"*, indicating the importance of stepping out of the emotional situation and making sure the emotions won't interfere with the decision-making process. Finally, emotional self-reflection involves **managing one's own emotional expressions**; *"If I had continued like this [...] it would have grown bigger and bigger and then it would have gone wrong (I4)"*, showing an understanding of the emotional situation and managing accordingly.

4.3.2 Emotional Adaptation & Flexibility

In addition to emotional self-regulation, the interviews also pointed out the importance of Emotional Adaptability & Flexibility. To manage emotions effectively, it is important to be able to **adapt emotional responses to the emotional state of others**; *"I also tried to put on a co-existent tone. And to be very understanding of the situation (I1)"*, showing the adaptability of the interviewee's tone of voice in an emotionally tense situation. Moreover, adaptation and flexibility involve **remaining flexible in handling emotional situations**; *"When I felt their resistance, I decided to change my approach to be more accommodating (I3)"*, indicating the flexibility of trying different approaches to reach the goal. Another interview emphasized the flexibility even more; *"I tried a more direct approach rather than my usual approach (I9)"*.

4.3.3 Emotional Conflict Management

Besides Self-Regulation and being Adaptable and Flexible in emotionally tense situations, managing emotions effectively in conflicts is crucial. Although conflicts address many of the emotional intelligence abilities, this chapter focuses on Emotional Conflict Management. The interviews showed the importance of having **constructive conversations** in the event of an emotional tense interaction. Especially, when the situation is about to escalate; *“I encouraged myself to stay mindful and calm in conversations about emotions, so that they don't escalate (I7)”*. Another interview pointed out the importance of explaining clearly; *“I explain the situation calmly and suggest solutions, but I make sure not to take over (I10)”*. What is interesting about this theme is that it was only quoted by managers interviewed, indicating that managers find it far more important to facilitate constructive conversations, especially when it comes to emotionally complex situations. Additionally, the interviews indicated the importance of **actively using methods to manage stress**. The results showed that managing stress happens both pro-actively and reactively, pro-active methods to relieve stress are used to relieve and prevent stress before an emotionally tense situation; *“I tried Yoga and other methods of meditations to relieve some of my stress (I9)”*. Reactive stress management methods can be seen in the following quote: *“After the meeting, I took a walk to clear my head and let go of the tension (I3)”*, pointing out the importance of stepping out of the emotional tense situation to manage stress and prevent a potential conflict.

4.4 Using Emotions

4.4.1 Emotional Communication (Verbal)

An important aspect of emotional intelligence is using emotions, or as some theory states, using emotions to facilitate thought. The results showed a clear distinction between verbal and non-verbal use of emotions. Clear and effective use can eventually lead to better relationships; therefore, a separate theme will be addressed about relationship building. First, the verbal emotional communication will be handled. It is important to **effectively**

communicate using one's own emotions, by using positive emotions in communication one can encourage clearer thinking; *"I try to get people into a positive mindset, so they can think more clearly (I9)"*. But also, rationalizing the situation by addressing the facts and setting emotion aside was often found in the results; *"I always try to quantify and step away from the emotion, to rationalize the situation (I6)"*. Furthermore, by **using emotions to relieve tension** an emotionally tense situation can be neutralized or lightened; *"I made a joke to lighten the mood (I5)"*. By combining the understanding and use of emotions as done in the following quote: *"I give people the space to express their emotions, but I also remind them to focus on solutions (I10)"*, it shows that communicating effectively enhances cognitive abilities such as problem-solving and decision-making.

4.4.2 Emotional Expressions (Non-Verbal)

In addition to verbal emotional communication comes non-verbal emotional expression. The results showed that emotionally intelligent individuals use not only verbal but also non-verbal expressions in communication. It is important to show **active non-verbal engagement** in a conversation; *"He showed attentiveness and understanding through his body language when listening to the colleague's frustrations (I5)"*. By active listening and showing empathy through non-verbal engagement, the individual can perceive, understand and manage the emotionally tense situation. Besides showing engagement, the interviews showed that **expressing emotions through facial expressions and body language** plays a crucial role in facilitating thinking and decision-making; *"I smile, nod, and use open body language to create a positive atmosphere (I4)"* & *"Nodding or giving non-verbal confirmation to show understanding and validation of her feelings (I1)"*. This often goes together with **using the appropriate tone of voice**; *"He uses a calm tone and a calm body language when talking about a sensitive topic (I7)"*. Emphasising the importance of using non-verbal expressions, as

non-verbal expressions through body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice can enhance the understanding of emotions in emotionally tense situations.

4.4.3 Emotional Relationship Building

The final aspect of using emotions can be found in using emotions in relationship building. By combining both verbal and non-verbal communication practises effectively this can lead to developing greater relationships. The interviews showed the importance of **acknowledging others' emotions**, one interview showed that comfort is the fundament in any relationship; *“Sometimes I have a direct relationship, sometimes indirect, sometimes I'm just a listener, sometimes I'm a transmitter [...] In general, I think that people should feel comfortable. I try to give everyone a comfortable base (I10)”*. Furthermore, building trust and developing deeper relationships involves a personal connection. Therefore, the final theme is **building relationships through personal connection**, one of the interviews provided a great example of this final aspect of using emotions; *“So in all my conversations with him, I always ask; how is it with your mother, how is the photography, are you still busy, how is it with you? [...] I also tell him how things are going with me (I4)”*, highlighting the importance of developing and maintaining personal relationships. The results also showed that this theme was only quoted by managers during the interviews, which makes it an interesting theme because it indicates that managers emphasize the importance of building relations through personal connection, while employees find this less important since it was not mentioned during the interviews.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research aims to answer the research question *“How is Emotional Intelligence expressed through an individual's verbal and non-verbal behaviour at work?”*. The goal of the research is to develop a descriptive framework that would categorize observable behaviour associated with Emotional Intelligence (EI), which could indicate the level of EI of an

individual. The theory on EI identifies three main perspectives, which are ability EI, trait EI, and a combined perspective called the mixed EI. This research is designed around the perspective of ability EI, consisting of the four branches, perceiving-, understanding-, managing-, and using emotions, aiming to identify observable behaviour for each construct. This approach was taken because of a gap in the existing literature that was pointed out by a recent article. Boyatzis (2018) pointed out the urgency to develop a fourth perspective of EI in which an observational measurement tool should be developed on the fundamentals of the ability model. As a result of the thesis a proposed descriptive framework of such a model has been created, this framework can be found in Appendix 2.

Eventually, this research should allow us to recognize and measure EI through observable behaviour using the framework. The following sections will explain how the findings of this study contribute to the existing theory on EI and how this study contributes to the practical development and implication of EI.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study allowed us to categorize the observable expressions of EI, as found in the results, under the four branches of the ability EI model. These four branches reflect the cognitive abilities of an individual when emotional reasoning is required (Mayer et al., 2004). The results also show that the behaviour reflecting the cognitive abilities of an individual is often expressed through an individual's personality traits. In practice, this could mean that cognitive abilities are interconnected with personality traits when expressing EI. The theory makes a clear distinction between measuring cognitive abilities and measuring personality traits, but there is no clear distinction made in expressing EI. The results of this study show that personality traits are often a reflection of the cognitive ability of an individual. *Understanding emotions* is expressed through self-awareness, while *managing emotions* is expressed through self-regulation and adaptability, these expressions can be found as

personality traits in the TEIQueu (Petrides & Furnham, 2000) for Trait EI. This indicates that ability EI and Trait EI cannot be seen as a separate perspective, emphasizing the debate connecting the current main perspectives into one mixed EI model (Mancini et al., 2022). The mixed EI model, which combines the cognitive abilities from the ability EI model with the personality traits and competencies of the trait EI model, provides more understanding of an individual's emotional intelligence than ability EI or Trait EI alone (Fiori Marina and Vesely-Maillefer, 2018). Furthermore, strengthening the findings of this study, a recent article stated that more research should be done on the relation between the main perspectives of EI (Mancini et al., 2022).

Perceiving emotions, according to the ability model, is measured through non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language (Mayer et al., 2016). This poses a challenge for researchers observing the variable *perceiving emotions*, as these expressions often rely on the context of the emotion and are often a cognitive process of an individual, making it hard to accurately observe this variable. As a result of this research, perceiving emotions can also be observed by verbalising the perception of emotions. The results show that perceiving emotions is an integrated process between non-verbal and verbal cues, where observing non-verbal cues integrates with verbalizing the recognition of emotions in others. This indicates the limitations of current measurement tools that rely only on non-verbal perception of emotions. These limitations to the current measurement tools have previously been mentioned by Fiori et al.'s (2022) article, which emphasized the need for a comprehensive framework that would take both verbal and non-verbal emotional perception into account. The findings from this study support this statement and indicate that verbal emotional perception should be considered in the observable behavioural measurement of EI.

In addition to the initial goal of this thesis, our findings show that there is a noticeable difference between the statements made by employees and managers, compared to the

statements made by managers alone. Suggesting that there is a contextual difference between the groups. Recent literature on the role of EI in effective leadership stated that EI is an essential construct of effective leadership (Dasborough et al., 2022). Characteristics of an effective leader include goal attainment, empathy, and relationship building (Dasborough et al., 2022; Miao et al., 2017). The results show that managers at a tactical or strategic level provided statements around the importance of having constructive conversations when it comes to conflict resolution, providing practical evidence to the claims in the theory that effective leaders are goal attained in a conflict (Dasborough et al., 2022, p.4). Additionally, the results also showed that the interviewed managers emphasized the importance of building relationships through personal connections, indicating that this behaviour can be expected from an emotionally intelligent manager as it is also a characteristic of effective leadership as suggested by Miao et al. (2017). This behaviour is expected from leaders, especially transformational leaders, as they tend to connect with their employees at an emotional level (Pulido-Martos et al., 2024), making it logical to see these results from managers and not from employees.

The proposed descriptive framework that resulted from this study offers a foundation for a future observable behavioural measurement tool; it will be essential to further develop the framework which can be found in Appendix 2. The contextual differences between employees and managers suggest that two different codebooks should be created to observe the EI behaviour of individuals. As a result of the analysis, it was found that behaviour that fits the characteristics of effective leadership was expressed only by the managers who were interviewed. By combining existing measurement tools with new observational tools, research would benefit significantly as recent articles urge to create a new behavioural model (Boyatzis, 2018). Furthermore, this article stated that a distinction needs to be made between the mixed

EI model and the proposed fourth behavioural model, since the behavioural measures show a greater relation to the ability model rather than a correlation to the trait model (Boyatzis, 2018).

These theoretical implications explored and extended the understanding of observable behaviour associated with EI by proposing a descriptive framework for observing emotional intelligence, it also addressed and explained the contribution to the existing literature and how these new findings can lead to the development of a comprehensive codebook for observing EI through a behavioural model.

5.2 Practical Implications

The research conducted in this thesis provided a foundation for the theoretical development of an observational measurement tool. However, this thesis not only contributes to the theoretical development of EI but also contributes to the practical development and implication of EI. The following paragraphs will explore the practical implications of this study.

The descriptive framework can be used to enhance the team dynamics of organisations, and employee training can be developed upon the behavioural components of the framework. Developing tailored training interventions based on behavioural observations could enhance the development of employees' emotional intelligence. Not only will it be useful for training programs developed for employees, but also leadership development programs will benefit from the results of this study. By introducing EI measurement into the development programs of leaders, organisations can enhance their leadership's effectiveness. Leaders with high levels of EI are known to be better in relationship building and maintaining a goal-oriented approach but are also known to be motivators and enablers for team members, enhancing the team dynamics of the organisation (Dasborough et al., 2022; Saha et al., 2023).

Furthermore, practitioners who are often confronted with conflicting situations in their daily work would benefit from the descriptive framework. The setting of this study allowed us

to explore emotional intelligence at different levels and within two organisations. A group that would noticeably benefit from this descriptive framework are change agents and change managers; implementing the results of this study in their daily work would allow them to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions better.

In addition to employee and leader training and development programs, practical implications in real-world situations, and improving team dynamics, this framework can also be used to enhance personal development practices. The descriptive framework offers a deeper understanding of the behavioural expressions of EI, which can be used as a starting point for further personal development. As one of the themes already indicated, continuous self-development is essential in understanding emotions in others, but also in oneself.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

Inevitable in doing research, this study has some limitations that created opportunities for future research. The first limitation derives from the selection process, this study involved a process of asking a set of controlling questions to verify the participant's prior knowledge of EI and an initial set of questions that would ask the participant to think about one or more recent critical incident in which strong emotions were involved. This initial question gave the participants time to prepare and explore the theory of EI, which could have resulted in socially desirable answers. Although this was prevented as much as possible by providing a secure and safe environment for the interviews and ensuring anonymous storage of the results, it is still unavoidable to have some form of social desirability.

Another limitation of the study was found in the sensitivity of the topic. This became particularly clear when a few invitations to participate were denied because of the sensitivity of talking about emotions with a stranger. This was much less of a problem when there was already an established relationship with the researcher. Indicating that talking about such a sensitive topic is easier with someone who is already within the person's network instead of the

person being a total stranger to the researcher. This made the snowball sampling more difficult than initially thought; at least one potential participant cancelled the interview since she did not feel comfortable talking about a recent emotionally strong incident to a someone she did not know.

Furthermore, this research has not incorporated demographical differences, such as gender, age, and cultural background in the sampling strategy, as this was not the goal of this research. However, gender differences could result in different expressions of EI, but also differences between cultures could see different behavioural expressions. In an article by Engelmann and Pogosyan (2013) the differences in emotional perception and expression across cultures are discussed, this article identifies the cross-cultural differences in emotional expression but also emphasizes the need for future research on the relationship between cross-cultural emotional expression and cognitive abilities. This indicates that demographical differences, such as cultural background, lead to differences in emotional expression, as this was not within the scope of this research it would make an interesting future research topic to explore the differences in cross-cultural emotional expression in relation to the ability EI model, but also how gender and age provide differences in emotional expressions.

These limitations thus offered us the opportunity to address future research directions, which partially derive from the limitations, but also came to our knowledge during this process of this research. The following sections will explore future research directions that could help us extend the knowledge about EI and its observable behavioural expressions.

This research paper provides the foundation that can be used to develop a comprehensive codebook for observing EI. To further develop the framework, researchers could conduct longitudinal studies on the themes of the framework to validate the observable behaviour over longer periods. In practice, the researcher could focus longitudinal studies on each theme of the descriptive framework and select only employees or managers in their

sampling strategy, aiming to develop codebooks for both employees and managers. Longitudinal studies are known for providing rich and detailed data by observing the same variable for a long time, which could be an interesting future research topic to develop upon the descriptive framework (Wang et al., 2017). This would explore the different themes even more and provide the researcher with extended knowledge and understanding that could eventually lead to the development of an EI measurement tool through observations.

Finalizing the future research directions, a last direction that can be explored consists of the multidisciplinary research that could be conducted between Business Administration students and Psychology researchers. This thesis has been written from a Business Administration perspective. By collaborating with researchers in psychology to explore the behavioural expressions of EI, a much deeper understanding can be gained. Psychology researchers can enhance the descriptive framework by adding their theoretical knowledge of behavioural expressions by individuals, which will result in a deeper and richer understanding of observable behavioural expressions that indicate an individual's level of EI. Not only will this be beneficial to the additional theoretical understanding, but it will also allow the interviewer to be trained on a deeper level of observable behaviour.

5.4 Conclusion

This study aimed to answer the main research question, "*How is Emotional Intelligence expressed through an individual's verbal and non-verbal behaviour at work?*" and has succeeded in doing so by developing a descriptive framework that categorizes the observable verbal and non-verbal behaviour associated with Emotional Intelligence (EI). This study focussed on the cognitive abilities deriving from the ability model, consisting of perceiving, understanding, managing, and using emotions, thereby providing an answer to the urge to develop an observational measurement tool on the fundamentals of the ability model as stated by Boyatzis (2018).

The results also provided practical support that indicates the relationship between cognitive abilities and personality traits when it comes to expressing EI, as the results showed that behaviour reflecting cognitive abilities is often found in the personality traits of an individual. This provides support for the debate that Ability EI and Trait EI cannot be seen as separate perspectives, but rather combined in a mixed EI model. Furthermore, this study addressed the contextual differences between employees and managers in observable EI behaviour, suggesting the need for different codebooks for observing EI behaviour. Managers provided statements that align with the characteristics of effective leadership, emphasizing relationship building and constructive conversations in conflict resolution.

The descriptive framework resulting from this study can be used in enhancing team dynamics, but also offer fundamentals for employee training courses and management development programs. It offers a practical understanding of EI to change managers and change agents who can implement it in real-world situations.

The study has seen a few limitations, such as the potential of having socially desirable responses and the limitation resulting from the sensitivity of discussing emotions with a total stranger. Also, this study did not incorporate demographical differences such as gender, age, and culture in the research design, these demographic differences could result in different EI-related behaviour. Despite the limitations, this study was able to address future research directions, including the development of codebooks through longitudinal studies to validate the observable behaviour of each theme over longer periods. Combining researchers of Business Administration and Psychology could further enhance the understanding of behaviour related to EI, resulting in a deeper knowledge of observable EI behaviour.

To conclude, this study not only contributed to the theoretical implications of EI but also provided practical implications that enhance the theoretical and practical understanding of EI.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Introduction:

- Briefly introduce me and the study program.
- Explain the purpose of the interview and ensure informed consent.
- Thank the participant for their time and cooperation in the research.

Warm-up Questions: → ensure a safe and comfortable interview.

- What is your current job title and company?
- Could you describe your typical workday briefly?
- What are some of the key strengths and challenges you encounter in your job?

Exploring EI using the critical incident technique (2 to 3 incidents per interview)

1. Identifying the critical incident

- a. *Think about a recent situation at work where you had to deal with a complex emotional situation, can you describe this situation?*
- b. *Probe further on the incident. Can you elaborate on the specific emotions and your actions?*

2. Exploring the incident

- a. *Can you elaborate on how this situation started? What happened in the beginning?*
- b. *Probing questions on cognitive abilities.*

3. Evaluating the outcome of the incident

- a. *Looking back at the situation, how did your actions affect the outcome?*

- b. *Did anything in your approach surprise you? Or would you have done it differently next time?*
- c. *What did you learn from the experience about managing emotions?*
- d. *Is there anything else that you would like to share about this experience?*

Probing questions for exploring the incident (a few questions are selected per incident)

Cognitive Abilities: (Ability EI)

Perceiving Emotions:

- How did you pick up on the emotions of the persons involved in the incident? Both verbally & non-verbally.

Using emotions:

- How did you use your own emotions in this situation? What was your approach both verbally & non-verbally?

Understanding Emotions:

- How did you understand the emotions involved in this situation? Verbal or non-verbal behaviour of the individuals involved?

Managing Emotions:

- Within this situation did you ever feel the need to manage your own emotions to achieve a certain goal? How did you handle this situation? Both verbally and non-verbally.

General Probing Questions:

- (Based on participant responses) Can you tell me more about that?
- Could you give me an example of what you mean by...?
- How did you feel in that situation?

- What was your thought process at the time?
- What would have happened differently if you hadn't acted that way?
- What personal strengths are needed in a situation...?
- How did you behave or express your emotion in a situation...?

Wrap-up:

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with emotional intelligence at work?
- Do you have any questions for me about the study?

Thank the participant again for their time and contributions.

Appendix 2: Proposed Descriptive Framework of Observable EI Behaviour

Category	Definition	Observable Behaviour
Recognizing emotions in others	Involves identifying and interpreting the emotions of others expressed through speech and language to understand their emotional state.	Verbally expresses the emotional state of others. Verbally analyses the team dynamics and/or social dynamics.
Empathize with others' emotions	Expressing a certain form of understanding and compassion for the emotional state of others using words and language.	Verbally expresses understanding. Actively listens before reacting.
Observing others' facial expressions	Involves perceiving the emotions expressed through another person's facial expression, without relying on verbal cues.	Perceives others' facial expressions through visual cues like eye contact, nods, frowns, and face orientation.
Observing others' body language	Involves perceiving the emotions expressed through another person's body language, without relying on verbal cues.	Perceives others' body language through visual cues like posture, gestures, body orientation, relaxation.
Observing others' tone of voice	Involves perceiving the emotions expressed through another person's tone of voice, such as pitch, volume, intonation, and speed.	Perceives others' tone of voice through vocal cues like intonation, volume, speed, distress, and pitch.
Recognizing one's own emotions	Involves identifying and recognizing one's own emotions. This step-in self-awareness helps in labelling these emotions accurately.	Steps back from a tense situation when signs of distress come up. Maintains a positive atmosphere. Focuses on factors that are energizing and motivating.
Understanding one's own emotions	Involves understanding the underlying causes for one's own emotions and recognizing patterns in these emotions.	Shows understanding of emotions and change approach accordingly. Shows empathy by making things personal.
Understanding the emotional impact	This deeper level of emotional awareness involves the understanding of broader consequences caused by certain emotions. Such as the impact it can have on decision-making.	Sees the broader impact of emotional handling, overlooking possible concerns due to a happy mood. Solution-oriented mindset.

Reflecting on one's own emotions	This process involves gaining deeper insight of one's own emotions by recognizing patterns in emotions and understanding causes of these emotions to gain personal growth.	Allows time and space to reflect on an emotional situation. Reflects on one's own emotional expression and learn from these interactions.
Asking reflective questions	In the context of self-reflection, asking reflective questions allow for deeper insights and motivations behind emotions, with the purpose of gaining personal growth.	Facilitates reflection time by asking reflective questions, for personal growth of oneself and others.
Continuous emotional self-improvement	The process of regularly evaluating and improving emotional intelligence through personal development methods, such as reading, journaling, or training.	Applies self-development methods for personal growth in terms of emotional intelligence, by reading, journaling, or training programs.
Showing emotional impulse control	The ability to manage and regulate emotional impulses in challenging and stressful situations.	Calm and composed posture. Remains a positive attitude. Uses a steady and neutral tone of voice. Temporarily suppresses the emotion to remain focused and positive.
Showing emotional resilience	The ability to recover quickly from a challenging or stressful situation or emotional setback.	Being able to come back from an emotional tense situation. Sets emotion aside and focus on de-escalation. Sets clear boundaries in terms of responsibilities.
Managing one's own emotional expressions	Refers to the ability to regulate and control one's own emotions in an appropriate manner.	Refrains from showing cues of emotional distress in challenging situations. Allows time before reacting to manage emotions internally.
Adapting emotional responses to the emotional state of others	The ability to understand and empathize with the emotional state of others by adapting one's own emotions to the state of others.	Shows understanding by using a co-existent tone of voice. Allows time for emotional expression of others. Adjusts non-verbal approach to be more emphatic.

Remain flexible in handling emotional situations	This involves managing emotions in emotional complex situations, by staying calm, composed and remaining flexible in challenging environments.	Adapts verbal and non-verbal approach to the perceived emotion of others. Tries a direct or more accommodating approaches when feeling resistance.
Constructive conversations	The ability to resolve emotional conflicts in a positive and constructive method by actively listening and facilitating conversations that turn conflicts into growth opportunities.	Uses clear communication that is focused on the solution rather than the problem. Stays mindful and calm in conversations about emotions. Listens carefully and doesn't try to solve the problem for the other person.
Actively using methods to manage stress	It involves intentionally applying methods that help in reducing and preventing stress, such as mindfulness, yoga, or going for a walk.	Takes a walk to clear mind and release stress. Performs Yoga or Meditation to relieve and prevent stress.
Effectively communicating by using one's own emotions	This involves the process of using one's own emotions through words and language to express one's emotional state in an authentic way.	Uses verbal communication to express one's own emotions. Rationalizes by verbalizing emotional state and what it does to oneself.
Using emotions to relieve tension	This involves using one's own emotions by carefully choosing words that defuse an emotional tense situation or ease stress in another person.	Uses speech and language to relieve tension. Makes jokes to lighten the mood.
Active non-verbal engagement	This involves using non-verbal behaviour to express empathy and understanding and showing active engagement in communication with others.	Shows attentiveness and understanding through body language. Maintains eye contact to show engagement. Nods to express empathy.
Expressing emotions through facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice.	This refers to using non-verbal behaviour to express one's own emotions, such as using facial expressions, body language, and an appropriate tone of voice.	Creates a positive atmosphere by an open body language, smile, and eye contact. Collaborative and inviting posture when involving others at work. Calm and sensible tone of voice in communication.

Acknowledging others' emotions	It refers to the validation and recognition of the emotions of another person with the goal to gain a deeper connection and great meaningful relations, however this is still on the surface-level of relationship building.	Acknowledges the emotion of others before presenting another point of view. Actively listens and validates others concerns before moving on.
Building relationships through personal connection	This involves creating a personal connection on a deeper level by showing genuine interest and establishing a personal connection with another person.	Establishes a comfortable fundament when discussing emotions. Brings in personal events to gain a deeper connection. Shows genuine interest in another person. Switches between a listener and a transmitter.
