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**Manifesting Emotional Intelligence (EI):
An exploratory study of verbal and nonverbal EI
behaviors**

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital and globalized environment, soft skills like emotional intelligence (EI) are more important than ever. EI is usually conceptualized as a trait, a set of abilities, and a mixed model. However, existing measures rely on self-reported questionnaires, which are prone to desirability bias and lack accuracy. This research employs a new approach that focuses on how EI manifests through verbal and nonverbal behaviors by conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with professionals from Germany and the Netherlands. Thematic analysis, following the Gioia method, was employed to identify and structure key themes emerging from the data. Findings reveal three overarching dimensions, namely verbal behaviors (i.e., active listening and understanding, acknowledging and communicating emotions, exchanging support and care, managing conflicts, and setting boundaries or providing feedback), nonverbal behaviors (i.e., facial expressions, eye contact, body language, posture, and paralinguistic cues), and context in which EI manifests (i.e., professional and personal settings). This research expands existing EI literature by providing a behavior-based conceptualization of EI that translates emotional abilities and traits into specific (social) behaviors. Furthermore, the findings emphasize that EI expression is multimodal and situation-dependent, influenced by contextual factors. Practically, these insights offer valuable guidance for organizations aiming to foster emotionally intelligent communication and leadership, highlighting the importance of contextual awareness for success.

Keywords

Emotional Intelligence (EI), Emotional Intelligent Communication, Nonverbal EI Behaviors, Observable Emotional Behaviors, Qualitative Research, Verbal EI Behaviors

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-changing and globalized environment, relationships are becoming increasingly complex, making soft skills like emotional intelligence (EI) important for personal and professional success (Bhat & Chahal, 2023; Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023). EI provides a framework for understanding how some individuals remain calm and solution-oriented while facing high pressure, whereas others feel overwhelmed. Therefore, recognizing, managing, and understanding one's own and others' emotions are important skills that enhance effective communication and collaboration (Bhat & Chahal, 2023).

Emotions strongly influence our behavior, social interactions, and communication (Arora, 2017). Therefore, EI directly shapes communication, how people build relationships, and deal with workplace dynamics. Employees with higher EI tend to collaborate more effectively, cope better with stress, resolve conflicts efficiently, and learn from challenging experiences (Arora, 2017). Furthermore, EI is associated with better mental health, stronger relationships, increased job performance, and improved job satisfaction (Bhat & Chahal, 2023; Miao et al., 2016). These findings highlight the importance of shifting from a concept-based understanding of EI to a behavior-based perspective that captures how emotional abilities translate into practice.

Over the past three decades, researchers have proposed multiple conceptualizations of EI, including the ability-based (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), trait-based (Petrides & Furnham, 2001), and a mixed model approach (Goleman, 1995). Collectively, these concepts define EI as the ability to perceive, use, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2000). However, despite extensive theoretical developments, existing models lack specific observable behaviors that demonstrate how these abilities are translated into observable behaviors in everyday interactions (Dong et al., 2022).

This gap is also reflected in the measurements used to assess EI. Traditional self-report questionnaires and performance-based tools like the MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso, 2003) have been criticized for their overlap with the Big Five personality traits, and for concerns about their validity, reliability, and vulnerability to biases such as social desirability, self-perception, and lack of self-awareness (Dasborough et al., 2019; O'Connor et al., 2019). Consequently, research calls for exploring more objective approaches to assess EI-related behaviors (A'yunnisa et al., 2024).

As a result, recent studies explored new approaches, such as video observation, ethnographies, qualitative interviews, and physiological measures to examine similar concepts to EI, including psychological safety, conflict, and caring behavior, thereby enhancing our understanding of the psychological and behavioral processes related to EI (A'yunnisa et al., 2024; Mårtensson et al., 2020; O'Donovan et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2019). In this context,

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concepts such as respectful inquiry, attentive listening, and caring behavior are crucial for creating an environment of openness and trust (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016; Yip & Fisher, 2022; Mårtensson et al., 2020). Respectful inquiry, such as asking genuine open questions and engaging in attentive listening, encourages psychological safety by facilitating an understanding of empathy, reducing defensive reactions, and promoting constructive dialogue in conflicts (Edmondson, 1999; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016). Similarly, caring behavior expressed through empathy and concern for others' well-being strengthens interpersonal relationships, effective communication, and a positive organizational culture (Cameron, 2012; Edmondson, 1999; Honkavuo, 2019). Since emotions are expressed through verbal and nonverbal channels (Buck, 2005), this gap highlights the need for qualitative methods that can capture the full range of emotional expression in real-life social interactions.

In the absence of a more objective assessment of EI in the literature, such as codebooks for video observations, the use of qualitative research can serve as an alternative method for investigating EI. Indeed, interviews as a qualitative research method can serve as a first step toward a better understanding of behaviors related to EI. Hence, the verbal and nonverbal EI behaviors of individuals are investigated to provide recommendations on how different behaviors associated with EI can help in challenging and demanding situations. Therefore, the objective of this research is to identify and describe verbal and nonverbal behaviors through which individuals express EI in social interactions, answering the following research question:

How do individuals manifest emotional intelligence (EI) through verbal and non-verbal behaviors?

Academically, this study directly responds to two issues in EI research: the lack of specific communicative behaviors in existing models and the limitations of self-report measures (Dong et al., 2022; Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Employing a qualitative research approach using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this research investigates verbal and nonverbal cues to promote an understanding of EI-based behaviors and provide evidence of how EI abilities are expressed in everyday interactions. This approach directly addresses previous concerns about measurement and operationalization, thereby contributing to the theoretical understanding of EI as a set of observable behavior-based expressions. In doing so, this study bridges the gap between the conceptual model and its application in everyday interactions.

From a practical perspective, this research addresses the need for more objective and applicable indicators of EI in organizational contexts. Understanding the behavioral manifestation of EI offers valuable insights for both individuals and organizations. Individuals with high EI are better equipped to handle stress, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts constructively, ultimately leading to increased overall job satisfaction and retention.

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These behavioral perspectives enable individuals and organizations to better recognize and apply EI in everyday practice, ultimately improving communication, collaboration, and performance. Furthermore, they provide actionable insights for better recruitment, talent development, and performance management, offering practical implications and recommendations.

The remainder of this research is structured as follows. The relevant theory and literature are discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 covers the methodology and elaborates on how the data is analyzed and the findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses the theoretical and practical implications. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the limitations and suggests directions for future research, and Chapter 7 concludes the study.

2. LITERATURE

The first chapter introduced the importance of investigating EI manifestations through both verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Accordingly, the following chapter reviews relevant literature on how EI has been defined and conceptualized in prior research to establish the framework for the present study. This is followed by an examination of existing literature on how EI is expressed through verbal and nonverbal communication, drawing on literature from psychology, communication, and language studies.

2.1 Emotional Intelligence Conceptualizations

Emotional intelligence is grounded in the concept of social and personal intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Thorndike (1920) originally defined social intelligence as the ability to perceive the internal states, motives, and behaviors of oneself and others and to act appropriately based on this information (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1993; Joseph & Newman, 2010). Later, Gardner redefined social intelligence in 1983 as a dual concept, known as personal intelligence, comprising intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Pérez et al., 2005a). According to Gardner (2000), “interpersonal intelligence denotes a person’s capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and, consequently, to work effectively with others” (p. 43). In contrast, “intrapersonal intelligence involves the capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself, including one’s own desires, fears, and capacities, and to use such information effectively in regulating one’s own life” (p. 43).

Grounded in these concepts, EI is viewed as a subset of social intelligence. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as the ability to recognize and utilize one's own and others' emotional states to solve problems and regulate behavior. This includes the ability to appraise and express emotions, to regulate them, as well as to use emotions to facilitate thinking and action (Salovey

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& Mayer, 1990). Later, Goleman (1995) popularized the concept, outlining five key concepts of EI: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-regulation, (3) motivation, (4) empathy, and (5) social skills (pp. 62 - 63), thereby blending emotional competencies with personality traits and behaviors in what become known as the mixed model of EI. Lastly, Petrides and Furnham (2000) initially proposed the distinction between ability and trait EI, which was further clarified by Pérez et al. (2005a). Consequently, three main concepts of EI have been established: the ability model (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Salovey & Mayer, 1997), the trait EI model (Petrides & Furnham, 2003), and the mixed EI model (Bar-On, 2006; Boyatzis & Sala, 2004), each offering a different perspective on how emotions are understood and applied in practice. Understanding these concepts provides a theoretical basis for investigating how emotional intelligence manifests itself through verbal and nonverbal behaviors, as individuals express, perceive, and manage emotions in social interactions. To clarify this framework, the following subsections elaborate on these three concepts of EI and their key theoretical distinctions.

2.1.1 Ability EI

The most used model of emotional intelligence is the ability-based model by Mayer & Salovey (1997). As a domain of human performance, Mayer et al. (1999) argue that EI is best studied with ability measures. The ability model was introduced in 1990, proposing four branches of ability EI, each representing one problem-solving area (Mayer et al., 2016). The model categorizes emotional intelligence into four components: perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions (Bhat & Chahal, 2023). Ranging from the cognitively basic to the most complex area, the branches are (1) perceiving emotion (emotion perception), (2) facilitating thought using emotion (emotion facilitation), (3) understanding emotions (emotion understanding), and (4) managing emotions (emotion management) (Mayer et al., 2016).

2.1.2 Trait EI

While the ability model conceptualizes EI as measurable cognitive emotional abilities, scholars have argued that it overlooks individuals' self-perceived emotional abilities. This led to the introduction of the trait model by Petrides and Furnham (2001). This framework describes emotional self-perceptions and dispositions as part of the overall personality structure. Emotional intelligence as a trait refers to our perception of our emotional abilities, such as how well we believe we can understand, regulate, and express emotions to adapt to our environment and maintain our well-being (Petrides et al., 2016).

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2.1.3 *Mixed EI*

Although the trait model addresses the limitations of the ability model, it has been criticized for its reliance on self-reported measures. In response, the mixed model of EI combines both cognitive abilities and personal traits, consisting of skills and competencies such as motivation, social skills, and emotional awareness (Goleman, 1995). With the publication of his book, Goleman (1995) popularized the concept of blending emotional concepts with behavioral competencies and personality traits. While self-awareness refers to knowing one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and values, self-regulation involves the positive management of emotions, desires, and behaviors. Furthermore, the motivation to achieve goals, overcome challenges, and remain positive reflects perspective-taking, whereas understanding and sharing the feelings of others demonstrates empathy. Finally, social skills include relationship management, communication, and conflict resolution (Goleman, 1995). However, this model was expanded by Bar-On (2006), which included components such as intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood, emphasizing both well-being and adaptability. In addition, Boyatzis and Sala (2004) build upon the Goleman model by integrating emotional intelligence into the concept of competencies, which are observable and measurable behaviors associated with workplace performance. The aspects of this model include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004).

2.1.4 *EI Conceptualization in this Study*

Out of these three concepts, the ability model proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997) offers the most suitable theoretical foundation for this study. In this model, EI is defined as a set of measurable abilities such as perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions (Bhat & Chahal, 2023). Unlike trait or mixed models, it focuses on EI as a form of cognitive emotional abilities that manifest themselves in how individuals process and respond to emotional information in real time (Mayer et al., 2016). Furthermore, Mayer et al. (2004) highlighted that understanding EI as an ability enables researchers to investigate how individuals recognize, understand, and manage emotions in task-related or interpersonal situations. Consequently, this framework closely aligns with the aim of this research, examining how EI is manifested through verbal and nonverbal behaviors. These abilities become visible in both verbal and nonverbal expressions when people accurately perceive, utilize, and comprehend the emotions of others, control their own emotional responses, and use them as a guide for interactions. This provides a perspective through which EI can be examined as an observable, behavior-based construct rather than just a self-reported trait.

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To summarize the differences among the three concepts of EI, Table 1 provides an overview of their core focus areas and key variables.

Table 1

Overview of EI Conceptualizations

Model	Core Focus	Key Variables
Trait EI (Petrides)	Emotional self-perceptions and personality	Well-being, self-control, emotionality, sociability
Ability Model (Mayer & Salovey)	Emotional skills (what people can do with emotions)	Perceiving emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions
Mixed Model (Goleman)	Emotional competencies (applied skills in work & life)	Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management

Note. Adapted from Petrides (2001), Mayer & Salovey (1990), and Goleman (1995).

In summary, these models illustrate the development of EI from a cognitive ability model to frameworks that include traits and competencies.

Building on this conceptual foundation of EI, the following section examines how emotions are communicated through observable verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Since EI involves perceiving, understanding, and managing emotions in social interactions, these behaviors provide evidence of emotional abilities in the workplace. Therefore, the following section draws on insights from psychology, communication, and language studies to examine how EI is expressed through observable behaviors, especially verbal and nonverbal.

2.2 Verbal and Nonverbal Communication of Emotions Related to EI

Building on the theoretical foundation outlined above, the present section examines how EI manifests through observable communication behaviors.

Mayer and Salovey (1993) conceptualize emotional intelligence as the appraisal, expression, regulation, and use of emotions, making the ability to communicate emotions central to the construct. Research on emotion communication suggests that emotions are transmitted through verbal and nonverbal channels (Buck, 1984), justifying the investigation of both in understanding how EI is expressed in real social interactions. From this perspective, EI provides the ability to perceive, understand, and control emotions, while communication research

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explains the processes through which these emotional abilities become visible in communication behaviors.

Verbal behaviors convey explicit information through language, while nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures, and posture, communicate emotions and attitude (Jacob et al., 2012; Negrescu & Nicolescu, 2018). Additionally, nonverbal behaviors can reinforce, contradict, or replace verbal messages and often reveal more about a person's emotional state compared to words, as they are more difficult to fake (Jacob et al., 2012; Negrescu & Nicolescu, 2018). Hence, the ability to accurately express and interpret emotional cues can be viewed as the behavioral implementation of EI, a form of communication competence that reflects underlying emotional abilities (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Therefore, the following subsections examine the communication of emotions, starting with verbal communication, followed by nonverbal communication of emotions, through which individuals convey their emotions.

2.2.1 Verbal Communication of Emotions

Verbal communication involves the use of language, syntax, and symbols to express thoughts, emotions, and intentions, thereby facilitating mutual understanding (Knapp et al., 2013). It encloses both face-to-face and mediated forms, including phone calls, speeches, and text messages (Knapp et al., 2013). Through statements such as "I feel good" (Jacob et al., 2012), people can verbally express their emotional experiences directly, or indirectly by using empathic dialogue (attentive listening) and questions (respectful inquiry) that signal understanding and respect for others' feelings.

One verbal behavior that is associated with EI is respectful inquiry. This involves asking open-ended questions and listening attentively to show interest in others' perspectives (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016). Additionally, such dialogue can foster a sense of dignity and worth, enhancing interpersonal trust and positive work relationships (Wodak, Kwon, & Clarke, 2011). Drawing on self-determination theory, respectful inquiry satisfies people's basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016). Asking genuine questions involves formulating inquiries that encourage thoughtful responses and offer a wide range of answers, with the primary purpose of eliciting a meaningful verbal engagement with the person being asked (Hawkins & Power, 1999). Such questioning requires openness to encourage dialogue and the exploration of ideas without limiting the respondent's contribution (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016). Respectful inquiry, therefore, reflects EI, as it requires social awareness and regulation of one's own response to maintain openness and empathy.

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Another concept closely related to respectful inquiry is attentive listening, conveying understanding, and emotional connection. Attentive listeners use both verbal and nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact, appropriate facial expressions, nodding, and occasional verbal affirmations such as “uh-huh” or “sure”, demonstrating emotional resonance through actions like wincing or exclaiming (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016). These behaviors convey empathy and respect and help the speaker feel valued and heard (Hargie & Dickson, 2004; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016). Listening is viewed from three perspectives: (a) perceived listening, referring to how speakers perceive the quality of attention, interest, and understanding from their listeners; (b) the listener’s experience, emphasizing the cognitive and emotional demands involved; and (c) listening structures, which shape the behaviors and experiences of both speakers and listeners, thereby shaping the listening process (Yip & Fisher, 2022). Consequently, emotionally intelligent listening involves all three perspectives to ensure mutual understanding and emotional connection.

Together, respectful inquiry and attentive listening provide a theoretical understanding of how EI manifests through verbal communication behaviors, thereby contributing to the theoretical basis for this study. Nevertheless, much emotional meaning is conveyed beyond words through tone of voice, facial expressions, and other nonverbal cues. Therefore, the following section examines how EI is expressed through nonverbal communication.

2.2.2 Nonverbal Communication of Emotions

While verbal expressions through language can reveal emotional perception and empathy, nonverbal cues often provide more spontaneous, less controllable indicators of EI-related processes such as emotion perception, understanding, and regulation. These nonverbal behaviors, such as facial expressions, touch, vocal cues, and bodily gestures, form an essential channel through which emotions are expressed, making them central to the behavioral manifestation of EI (Buck, 1984; Carmichael & Mizrahi, 2023). In a 1972 study, Albert Mehrabian found that only 7% of a message is communicated verbally, while 38% is expressed vocally and 55% is transmitted through body language, highlighting the importance of nonverbal expressions in emotional communication and EI (Jacob et al., 2012).

The following subsections explain nonverbal behaviors, including facial expressions of emotions, emotional vocal cues, body language, and gestures. Finally, the concept of caring behavior is presented as a practical expression of emotionally intelligent interactions.

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2.2.2.1 *Facial Expressions of Emotions*

Facial expressions are visible movements of facial muscles that reflect emotional states, attitudes, or reactions (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). They are among the most direct expressions and convey a universal interpretation across cultures (Carmichael & Mizrahi, 2023). In addition, facial features play a critical role in social communication, providing immediate feedback on an individual's emotional state or reactions and are therefore essential for emotion perception, a core EI ability (Mehrabian, 1972). For instance, someone can verbally claim to feel “good” while their facial expression shows sadness, contradicting the verbal message (Jacob et al., 2012). Therefore, recognizing facial expression requires sensitivity and emotional awareness, abilities associated with high EI.

2.2.2.2 *Vocal Cues of Emotions*

Emotions are also conveyed through vocal cues, which are strong indicators of emotional states and are often referred to as paralanguage, the nonverbal aspect of voice (Carmichael & Mizrahi, 2023; Hall et al., 2019). Vocal cues encompass elements such as tone, pitch, volume, rate of speech, intonation, and pauses, conveying information beyond the literal meaning of the spoken words (Trager, 1958). Additionally, these cues can clarify the spoken words by raising the pitch at the end of a sentence to indicate a question or contradict the spoken words by using sarcasm (Hall et al., 2019). Vocal cues reflect different states of how emotions are communicated: higher pitch, greater pitch range, increased loudness, and a faster speech rate are associated with joy or elation, whereas lower pitch, reduced loudness, slower rate, and longer pauses are related to sadness (Hall et al., 2019). The ability to decode these vocal cues is an expression of EI in action, as it requires both accurate emotion perception and understanding.

2.2.2.3 *Body Language & Gestures*

Body language refers to physical movements, postures, and positioning, while gestures refer to more specific, conscious movements, typically of the head, hands, or arms, that convey messages and often reinforce or illustrate spoken words (Kumar, 2019; McNeill, 1992).

The term posture refers to our body position while communicating with others, such as leaning forward and backward, maintaining good sitting manners, or slouching in the seat (Kumar, 2019). Open postures, like firmly shaking hands, maintaining eye contact, and sitting upright, generally signal approachability (Argyle, 1988; Carmichael & Mizrahi, 2023). In contrast, closed or defensive postures such as hiding hands and palms, yawning, crossing arms and legs, and looking around signal discomfort or withdrawal (Kumar, 2019).

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Although many gestures are culturally specific, body language and gestures are an important channel through which emotional regulation and expression are manifest nonverbally, linking them closely to EI (Argyle, 1988).

2.2.2.4 *Caring Behavior*

Caring behavior provides an applied expression of EI in interpersonal and professional contexts, commonly studied in healthcare to maintain patients' dignity and well-being and alleviate suffering (Mårtensson et al., 2020). Mårtensson et al. (2020), building on Swanson's Theory of Caring, developed a structured framework to assess and categorize caring and non-caring behaviors, including actions that express presence, understanding, support, and faith in others.

Empathy involves the ability to recognize and understand others' emotions, leading to stronger social relationships and more effective communication (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Similarly, caring behavior enhances relationships by fostering trust and loyalty among team members, thereby increasing collaboration, productivity, and overall job satisfaction (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; George, 2000). Together, such behaviors strengthen interpersonal relationships, reduce conflicts, and improve collective psychological well-being (Honkavuo, 2019; Jordan & Troth, 2004).

From an EI perspective, caring behavior can help to understand how individuals use emotional awareness to create a safe and empathetic environment. Together with respectful inquiry and listening, caring behavior provides a deeper understanding of how individuals can recognize, understand, and manage their own emotions and those of others. Thereby integrating the fundamental components of EI, such as emotion perception, understanding, and regulation, promoting emotional awareness, empathy, and effective communication (Pence & Vickery, 2012; Kaynat et al., 2021; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2016).

Ultimately, both verbal and nonverbal communication channels provide observable indicators of EI in real interactions. Consequently, these behavioral dimensions provide a foundation for investigating how EI is manifested in interpersonal contexts, forming the basis for the present study's research question and methodological focus in the next chapter.

3. METHODOLOGY

The literature review shows that although EI has been largely theorized as a psychological construct, the behavioral dimension, namely, how EI manifests through verbal and nonverbal behaviors, remains unexplored. Therefore, building on the theoretical

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foundations outlined in the literature review, the following chapter describes the qualitative research design, data collection procedure, and analysis method implemented to investigate how EI manifests through verbal and nonverbal behaviors.

3.1 Research Design

Inductive, qualitative research was conducted to investigate individuals' verbal and non-verbal behaviors that can be associated with emotionally intelligent people in the workplace. Since the concept of EI is mostly researched through quantitative studies, with qualitative research, new ways emerge to assess EI more in-depth (Saunders et al., 2012). Furthermore, Yin's (2015) research shows that a feature of qualitative research is investigating topics in real-life situations. Based on the definition of emotional intelligence, it can be argued that EI is based on subjective experience as it includes the appraisal and expression of emotions, emotion regulation, and emotion utilization (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Since qualitative research contributes to an understanding of the human condition in different contexts and of a perceived situation, it is efficient to investigate emotional intelligence behaviors (Bengtsson, 2016). After justifying the choice of a qualitative approach, the next section describes how the data collection methods and sampling strategy.

3.2 Data Collection & Sampling

3.2.1 Sampling

The focus of this research is to investigate the EI behaviors of individuals. The benefit of sampling is to examine a topic in a smaller group, as sometimes data cannot be collected from the entire population. This could be due to time constraints or reasons that make it impractical to survey the entire population. In addition, sampling helps to better organize the data collection, as a smaller sample is more manageable compared to a bigger sample (Saunders et al., 2012; Turner, 2020). In particular, the non-probability method of purposeful sampling was opted for. With purposeful sampling, participants are intentionally selected based on specific criteria such as knowledge and expertise or other characteristics (Creswell, 2007). Thus, with purposeful sampling, you ensure that you select participants who yield the most relevant data and make the best contribution to the study (Yin, 2015). Therefore, heterogeneous purposive sampling is the most appropriate method for this research as it helps reveal key themes within the data and analyze a topic in depth (Saunders et al., 2012). According to Yin (2015), heterogeneous purposive sampling, also known as maximum variation sampling, seeks to obtain the broadest possible range of information and perspectives on the studied subject.

Concerning sample size, research advises that the minimum sample size should be around 5 to 25 participants (Townsend, 2013). Nevertheless, for qualitative research, it is

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recommended to collect data until the point of data saturation is reached (Saunders et al.,2012). Data saturation is also known as thematic saturation (Weller et al., 2018) since additional data collection does not provide any new information for the research (Saunders et al., 2012). In total, 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted, and participants were selected based on the following criteria. (1) Participants should be familiar with the concept of EI and empathy. They should have experienced emotionally challenging situations in a personal, educational, or professional context in which emotional intelligence is used, e.g., conflict resolution, teamwork, or leadership. In this way, participants can recognize or recall moments where people are emotionally intelligent. (2) Participants should be at least 18 years old to ensure they can provide informed consent and have sufficient life experience to reflect on emotions, empathy, and behaviors. (3) Participants should belong to Western cultures, since culture influences emotional expression and perception. (4) Participants ideally work in teams or with colleagues regularly. Following these criteria, Interviewees were selected from Germany and the Netherlands, across different organizations and roles. Out of these 16 participants, 12 (75%) were female and 4 (25%) were male, with an average age of 38 years. An overview of the participants and their attributes is provided in Table 2. This section outlined the sampling strategy and participation criteria. Based on that, the following section elaborated the data collection procedure.

Table 2.

Overview of participants

Participant	Gender/ Age	Nationality	Industry	Function Title
P1	Male, 54	German	Telecommunications	Threat Manager
P2	Female, 22	German	Higher Education	Student
P3	Female, 49	Dutch	Dutch Government	Senior intelligence center
P4	Female, 24	German	Francise and the Leasing Sector	HR Business Partner Intern
P5	Female, 23	Dutch	Automobile	Marketeer
P6	Female, 32	Dutch	Higher Education	Study Advisor
P7	Female, 27	Dutch	Higher Education	Study Advisor
P8	Female, 55	German	Electrical Engineering	Assistant for office management
P9	Female, 23	Dutch	Logistics	Business Support Assistant

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P10	Male, 60	German	Electrical Engineering	CEO
P11	Female, 48	Dutch	Higher Education	Study Advisor
P12	Male; 68	Dutch	Higher Education	Senior researcher
P13	Female, 24	Dutch	Education	Mathematics Teacher for High School
P14	Female, 41	Dutch	Higher Education	Assistant Professor
P15	Male, 33	Dutch	Higher Education	Postdoc
P16	Female, 27	Dutch	Dutch Government	Senior Advisor

3.2.2 Data Collection

The data were collected through 16 semi-structured interviews with participants from the Netherlands and Germany. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour, comprising approximately 14 open questions (see Appendix A for the interview guide). Although face-to-face communication might be less exhausting, online interviews via MS Teams were opted for to reduce time expenditure and travel costs for participants. Preliminary to the data analysis, the video recordings were transcribed into written form using AmberScript. Afterwards, the transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti to conduct thematic analysis. As this research includes collecting primary data, ethical approval was requested from the Ethics Committee BMS of the University of Twente.

3.3 Research Instruments

When conducting qualitative research, three different types of interviews can be employed to examine the topic: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews (Saunders et al., 2012). Among qualitative research methods, semi-structured interviews are the most frequently used type (Doody & Noonan, 2013), as they enable a more in-depth exploration of the topic by allowing additional questions to emerge during the interview process (Saunders et al., 2012). While they allow for adaptability (exploratory follow-ups) and consistency (pre-defined questions), semi-structured interviews build a solid base for comparing and analyzing themes across interviews, since the questions are more or less the same (Bryman, 2016; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Miles et al., 2013; Turner, 2014). Despite this, research may contain biases that need to be considered (Creswell & Cresswell, 2017). According to Sanders et al. (2012), participants may be biased through non-verbal communication by the interviewer. In addition, open questions bear the risk that participants will understand the questions differently, as the

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interviewer does not have to adhere to the exact wording (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Power et al., 2010). However, to counterbalance this bias, probing follow-up questions are used to clarify responses and ensure alignment with the intended meaning of the question (Robinson, 2023). According to Robinson (2023), probing refers to asking questions or prompts that encourage participants to expand on their previous answers to gain deeper insight into their experiences and perspectives.

Following the data collection, the interviews were analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns related to EI behaviors.

3.4 Data Analysis

An inductive approach to thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data from the semi-structured interviews. According to Braun and Clark (2006), inductive coding is a process within thematic analysis in which data is analyzed without attempting to fit into predetermined coding frames. Consequently, thematic analysis can be a data-driven approach as it identifies themes related to the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Moreover, within and beyond psychology, thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analysis method, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes within data (Brooks et al., 1996; Singer & Haunter, 1999). In thematic analysis, the first step is to generate initial codes, such as active listening, naming emotions, offering help, maintaining eye contact, nodding, and maintaining an open posture. Once the initial codes were created, they were sorted into different themes. During the next step, these themes were reviewed to ensure a clear distinction among them (Braun & Clark, 2006). Subsequently, the themes were identified as active listening and understanding, acknowledging and communicating emotions, exchanging support and care, conflict management and de-escalation, boundaries, expectations and feedback, facial expressions and eye contact, body language and gestures, paralinguistic cues, professional environment, and personal environment. In the final step, the themes were summarized into the aggregated dimensions: verbal EI manifestation, nonverbal EI manifestation, and context of EI manifestation (Gioia et al., 2012). For better understanding, the codes were structured according to the terminology of the Gioia method, which includes first-order codes, second-order codes, and aggregated dimensions (Gioia et al., 2012). The data structure is summarized in Appendix C.

In summary, this chapter outlined the methodological framework implemented to investigate how EI manifest through verbal and nonverbal behaviors. A qualitative, inductive approach was adopted, including semi-structured interviews with participants from diverse professional contexts in Germany and the Netherlands. The following chapter presents the

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findings from this analysis, highlighting the most important themes and patterns that emerged from the participants reports of emotionally intelligent behaviors.

4. RESULTS

The following section presents the findings of the data analysis. This research investigated “How do individuals manifest EI in verbal and nonverbal behaviors?”. Appendix C illustrates the data structure, which indicates three aggregated dimensions: verbal EI manifestation, nonverbal EI manifestation, and Context of EI manifestation, which is discussed below. For clarity, the data structure is divided into three figures that serve as the structure for the following subsections. Consequently, the findings are presented beginning with verbal EI manifestations (see Figure 1), followed by nonverbal EI manifestations (see Figure 2). Finally, this section concludes with findings on the contextual environments in which EI manifestation occurs (see Figure 3). For brevity, only selected illustrative quotes are presented in the main text. Additional supportive quotes from participants are provided in Appendix B.

4.1 Verbal EI Manifestation

The data (see Figure 1) indicated different verbal behaviors of how individuals manifest EI. These include active listening and understanding, acknowledging and communicating emotions, exchanging support and care, conflict and de-escalation, and setting boundaries, expectations, and giving feedback.

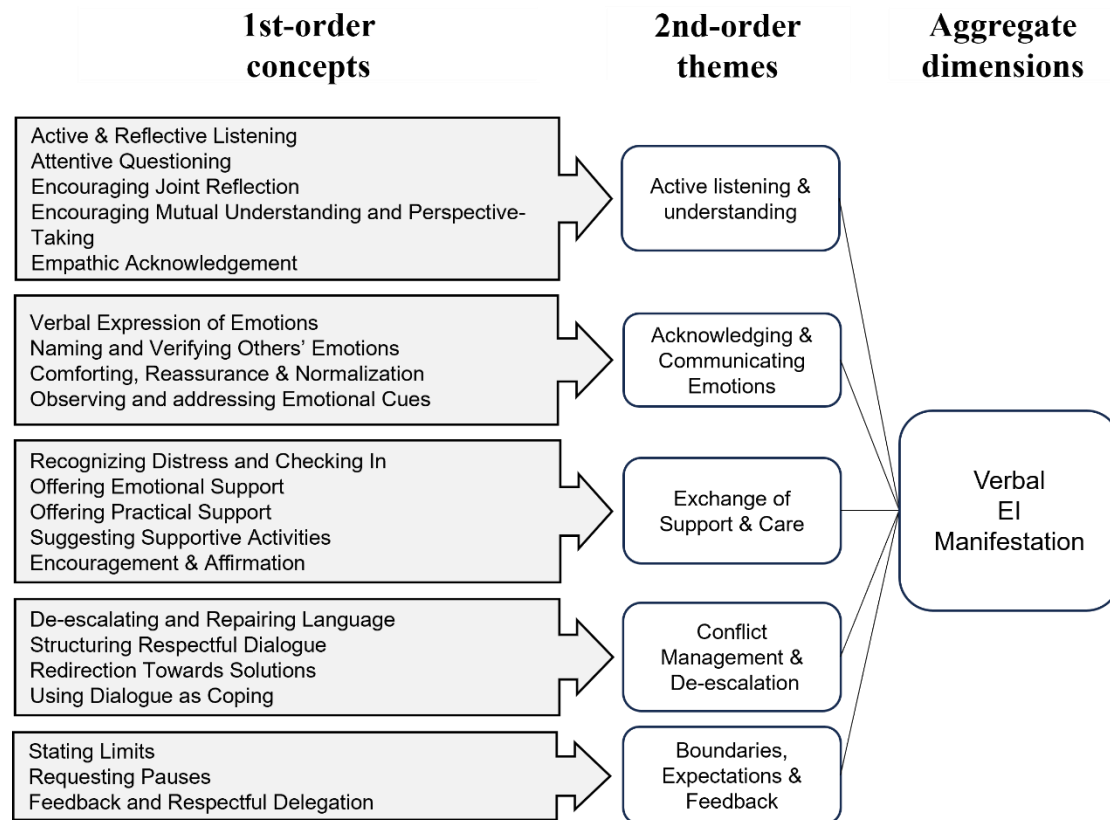


Figure 1: Verbal Manifestation of EI

4.1.1 Active Listening & Understanding

The first theme of verbal EI manifestation is **active listening and understanding**, including behaviors such as active and reflective listening, attentive questioning, encouraging joint reflection, encouraging mutual understanding and perspective-taking, and empathic acknowledgement. These behaviors describe how people use language to convey emotional awareness and understanding to others.

Participants indicated **that active and reflective listening are important EI behaviors**. Overall, participants valued people who genuinely listen and the ability to make others feel heard. Participant 6 summarized someone who shows EI is: *“someone who actually listens”* (P. 6) and *“recaps the things you just said, then you know they understand what was said”* (P. 6). Similarly, participant 16 described how listening fosters a safe, trusting environment: *“Really listening to one another, giving space to one another, making everyone can have their opinion”* (P. 16).

In addition, participants described **attentive questioning** reflecting emotional awareness and empathy. For instance, participant 2 indicated *“Seriously asking people how they are doing”* (P. 2). In contrast, participant 5 noted that regular check-in about both well-

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being and work tasks: *“He always checks in with me, like how are you doing? What is on your to-do list for this week?”* (P. 5), demonstrating openness and willingness to help.

Moreover, **encouraging joint reflection**, such as: *“We always reflect on it with each other. Sometimes just the two people it's with, and sometimes it's the whole team. And we reflect on it, we sit down with each other, talk about it, and give our opinions on why we think it is very important”* (P. 3), and **encouraging mutual understanding and perspective taking** demonstrates emotional understanding. Questions like: *“Do you see it the same way?”* (P. 2) or *“Why do you respond like this? I don't understand it”* (P. 15). It facilitates empathy, understanding, and broadens emotional awareness. As participant 4 summarized: *“Understanding other people's situation, being able to put yourself into other people's shoes and see the situation from their viewpoint”* (P. 4) is crucial for emotionally intelligent communication.

Finally, **empathic acknowledgement** was mentioned as a clear verbal cue of EI, expressing understanding through language like *“I can imagine how you must feel”* (P. 14) and *“I feel you, I understand what you're saying, I get it”* (P. 9). Such language validated others' emotions and strengthened trust. Furthermore, participants linked empathy to self-disclosure, such as sharing similar experiences (e.g., *“I was in the same situation,”* P. 7), which helps others feel seen, supported, and understood.

Overall, these findings indicate that participants viewed active listening and understanding as fundamental expressions of EI, enabling them to perceive and interpret others' emotional cues accurately, and thereby reflecting empathy, openness, and genuine awareness of others' emotions.

4.1.2 Acknowledging & Communicating Emotions

Another verbal expression of EI is the acknowledgment and communication of emotions. Participants identified that **verbal expressions of emotion**, such as *“I feel overwhelmed by the situation right now”* (P. 2) or *“I'm tired”* (P. 3), demonstrate the ability to identify and verbalize emotions, and reflect self-awareness and emotional understanding, two important aspects of EI. Participants also described how openly expressing dissatisfaction, such as *“If you're not happy with something, you should talk about it”* (P. 13), reflects emotional clarity and self-regulation, promoting transparency and trust.

Equally important was **naming and verifying others' emotions**, such as: *“I see that it makes you sad, say that I understand them and let them explain more about why they're feeling that way”* (P.7) and *“I can see that you're ..., you're angry, you're sad”* (P. 16), to validate their

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experiences. Asking questions like *“Are you frustrated that I did this and that?”* (P. 2) illustrates empathy, preventing misinterpretations, and strengthens the relational connection.

Comforting others, reassuring, and normalizing emotions were common strategies that reflect emotional support and relational management. One participant explained that: *“If I have a major setback, I go into some kind of negative spiral, and then I need other people to say, it's not that big of a deal”* (P. 5), while another participant normalized a colleagues situation: *“It's okay if you're not feeling great now, but we'll help you and we'll get there”* (P. 9). Such verbal affirmations demonstrate the ability to recognize and regulate emotions in oneself and others, reflecting core aspects of EI.

Acknowledging and communicating emotions also includes **observing and addressing emotional cues**. Participant 11 explained: *“I also tell students what I see and ask why are you sitting like this?”* (P. 11), or *“I had a student lashing out at everyone and I said, you're lashing out at everyone, but what is going on? I see that something is hurting you, but it's not the teacher”* (P. 11). This shows empathy, builds emotional trust and creates space for open dialogue.

These behaviors demonstrate that emotionally intelligent communication involves constructively expressing and responding to emotions and transforming emotional awareness into interpersonal understanding.

4.1.3 Exchange of Support & Care

Verbal expressions of support and care include **recognizing distress and checking in**. Participants emphasized recognizing when others struggle and checking in: *“If you recognize that someone is not doing well, they will be approached about it”* (P. 1) or *“It starts with when someone is not doing good, that they ask you, what's up?”* (P. 8), demonstrating that you care about others' emotional state and overall well-being. However, participant 10 pointed out that: *“I wouldn't put someone in the spotlight during a meeting, I would rather address it afterwards by asking, like what's going on today, do you want to talk about it?”* (P. 10), indicating a respectful approach offering support and care.

Offering emotional support was another EI indicator. Participant 8 explained that it always helps: *“If the team is there for each other”* (P. 8) and further explained people could offer emotional support by asking: *“Do you want to talk?”* (P. 8). Likewise participant 16 stated: *“Do you want to talk about it? Do you want to say what's going on?”* (P.16), showing others that you are open to help them and provide emotional support.

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Similarly, **offering practical support**, such as asking: “*How can I help?*” (P. 1), “*Can I help you with anything?*” (P. 4), or “*Can I do something for you?*” (P. 8), demonstrates social awareness, builds trust and strengthens relationships

Moreover, participants also explained supporting others by **suggesting supportive activities**. Simply asking: “*Do you want to do...?*” (P. 2), suggest taking a walk: “*I had a student who was so frustrated that he was really angry, and I said, let's take a walk*” (P. 11), or “*Shall we go for a coffee or something?*” (P. 5), can help others regulate emotions, regain mental clarity, and feel understood and supported, demonstrating social awareness and relationships management.

Lastly, participants described how **encouragement and affirmation** can foster team spirit and performance. Statements like “*We can do it*” (P. 2) or supporting and encouraging your friends: “*I taught myself when you're going to be friends, you never criticize the other, you only say, I know you can do better, I'm sure you can do this*” (P. 12), demonstrate empathy and social awareness, fostering trust and interpersonal relationships.

Together, these verbal exchanges of support and care strengthen psychological safety and overall wellbeing, through fostering trust, empathy, openness and a sense of belonging.

4.1.4 Conflict Management & De-escalation

Conflict management and de-escalation is another theme describing how EI manifests verbally. Participant indicated the use of **de-escalating and repairing language** facilitates listening, empathy and lowers emotional intensity in tense situations. Participant 5 explained: “*At some point during a discussion, I just said, let's agree to disagree, since we didn't reach common ground*” (P. 5), similarly to participant 16: “*People were shouting, and I jumped in like, people, calm down, let's just have a normal conversation, this is not helpful*” (P. 16). These behaviors illustrate how emotionally intelligent people use calming language to reduce tensions, build harmony and promote mutual understanding in conflicts.

In addition, participants described **structuring respectful dialogue**, such as: “*If someone tries to interrupt, say no, this is their turn to talk now, you're going to have your turn next*” (P. 4), reflecting social awareness (recognizing the need of others to be heard) and relationship management, as it ensures fairness and psychological safety in group discussions and conflicts.

Furthermore, participants described using **redirection towards solutions** to calm tense situations and guide discussions productively. Participant 6 described: “*Before things got too heated, I was able to say, guys, I'm just a little bit confused because our boss is saying something pretty important, but we never got back to that point*” (P. 6), while participant 4: “*I see this is*

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our problem, but let's try to focus on how we can find a solution to this" (P. 4), demonstrating emotion regulation and relationship management, key components of EI, by redirecting discussions from emotional escalation toward problem solving, fostering cooperation and mutual respect.

Finally, participants used **dialogue as a coping** mechanism through shared talk to de-escalate stress and conflicts, reflecting EI through self-awareness, empathy and relationship management. Participant 2 indicated that initiating open conversations: *"Can we talk about it?"* (P. 2), helps to reduce misunderstandings and clarify the situation before they escalate. Similarly, participant 16 indicated how she processed frustration outside of the workplace: *"I had a phone call at work that frustrated me, and later in the evening, I was telling my boyfriend about my frustration with that phone call. So, then it could come out fine, but not to that person. So that was like, really controlling because otherwise I would not behave professionally."* (P. 16). These examples illustrate EI through shared conversations, reducing stress and misunderstanding, and support calm and constructive conversations and conflict management.

Together, these behaviors demonstrate EI by regulating emotions, structuring dialogues and engaging in open conversations to reduce stress and clarify misunderstanding. In doing so, they demonstrate important EI abilities such as self-awareness, empathy, emotion regulation and relationship management.

4.1.5 Boundaries, Expectations & Feedback

From a verbal perspective, EI was also reflected in how participants communicated boundaries, expectations, and feedback.

Participants explicitly **stated their limits**: *"I am just done"* (P. 2) or *"This is it for me"* (P. 3), demonstrating self-awareness and self-regulation, indicating that they could no longer manage the situation. Similarly, participant 11 described: *"I will say to a student, I have the feeling that I'm not a good study advisor for you, because we are so different"* (P. 11), illustrating emotionally intelligent boundary-setting that prevents burnout and conflict escalation.

Participants also indicated emotionally intelligent regulation through **requesting pauses**, like short breaks: *"Can we do a short break?"* (P. 2), *"Hey, I have to pause this conversation for now, but I will get back to you"* (P. 9) to remain calm during stressful situations, a good working atmosphere and prevent conflicts.

Furthermore, **feedback and respectful delegation** were discussed as expression of EI through empathy and relationship management. Participant 16 described how to give constructive feedback: *"A colleague wrote an email, I checked, and I said: This is pretty harsh,*

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it doesn't have to be that harsh if you use some other words, it could be better” (P. 16). Similarly, managers showed empathy and social awareness when delegating tasks as reflected in the following example: *“I have this job for you. Can you handle it?” (P. 5).* Doing so, leaders communicate their expectations while also caring for their employee’s well-being.

These behaviors demonstrate self-awareness and self-regulation, important EI abilities, when setting boundaries, accepting limits and managing stress through pauses. Empathy and relationship management were demonstrated through giving feedback and delegating tasks with concern for others’ wellbeing.

In conclusion, there are five different themes of verbal EI manifestation: active listening and understanding, acknowledging and communicating emotions, exchanging support and care, conflict and de-escalation, and boundaries, expectations, and feedback. These verbal behaviors serve as communicative strategies to make emotions explicit, demonstrate understanding and empathy, while also offering support and care, thereby fostering trust, understanding, and protecting relationships.

4.2 Nonverbal EI Manifestation

In addition to verbal behaviors, the data indicated different nonverbal behaviors through which individuals manifest EI (see Figure 2). These are facial expressions and eye contact, body language and posture, voice and tone, and physical support.

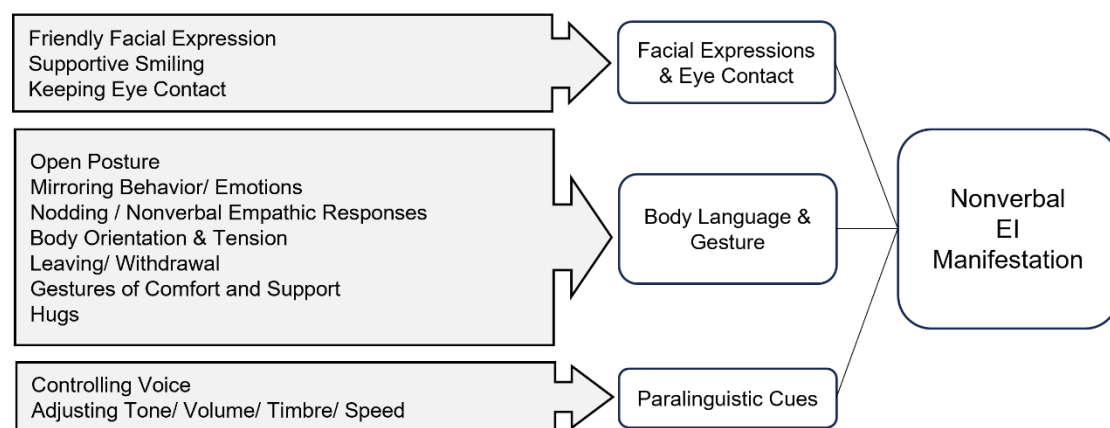


Figure 2: Nonverbal Manifestation of EI

4.2.1 Facial Expressions & Eye Contact

Nonverbal EI manifestation includes facial expressions and eye contact. Participants indicated that emotionally intelligent people tend to have mainly **positive facial expressions**.

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Participant 1 explained that you can tell a lot how people feel based on their facial expressions: “*You can see it in the micro expressions, meaning the eyes and facial features, like do they get shocked?*” (P. 4), which aligns with participant 8: “*You can tell when you are face to face with someone by their facial expression, whether they smile at you or look at you openly*” (P. 8). These behaviors require social awareness and empathy to recognize others’ facial expressions, understand emotional state and to respond appropriately.

Another important indicator is the use of **smile** to convey warmth and recognition. Participant 7 emphasized the importance of making people feel seen: “*Smile to them when you recognize that someone experiences many emotions, make them feel seen*” (P. 7). Additionally, participant 14 described smiling as an expression of empathy: “*ways that show empathy, like a smile, making them feel comfortable*” (P. 14). This illustrates how smiling displays the nonverbal expression of empathy and social awareness, creating a sense of connection and psychological safety and thereby supporting relationships management.

The third behavior participants described contributing to emotionally intelligent communication is **keeping eye contact**. Maintaining eye contact signals interest and attentiveness: “*If you're talking to someone and you're looking at each other's eyes, for example that's showing some interest to the other.*” (P. 9). Similarly, participants 11 supported this by noting: “*By looking at you, and I'm not looking at you because I'm speaking*” (P. 11), indicating that maintaining eye contact reflects social awareness and empathy, communicating attentiveness and understanding.

In a nutshell, emotionally intelligent people are aware of how their facial expressions and eye contact affect others and hence be able to use them to show people their interest and openness to make them feel comfortable.

4.2.2 Body Language & Gesture

Another important emotionally intelligent communication indicated by participants is the use of body language and gesture. They describe how physical cues such as an **open posture** reveal emotional states and shape social interactions. While participant 9 explained: “*I noticed a colleague was not having a good day, because of her body language and the way she was talking*” (P. 9), participant 8 aligns: “*You can tell by ... whether their posture is open or whether they ... have their arms crossed and seem a bit distant.*” (P. 8), demonstrating social awareness through recognizing and interpreting others’ emotions through nonverbal cues.

In addition, participants indicated that **mirroring the behavior and emotions of others** illustrates EI, as it conveys empathy and understanding. Such mirroring helps others to feel comfortable and emotionally supported: “*If someone cries, you are not going to smile, so mirror what they do, make them feel comfortable*” (P. 14). Similarly, empathy can be shown

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through other nonverbal cues such as **nodding** which conveys both interest and understanding for others: *“I think in general ways that you feel empathy. That is how attentive listening, nodding, or if somebody smiles, you are smiling. If somebody cries, you're not going to smile. So, you mirror what they do.”* (P. 14). These behaviors increase connectedness and strengthen social relationships.

Another behavior participants emphasized is the way people **position their bodies and adjust their body tension**, emphasizing interest and engagement. Participant 2 explained: *“When you are turned towards someone, you really enjoy talking to them and being friendly, and maintain eye contact and when someone says something, you nod and show that you are listening and try make the other person feel that you are there.”* (P. 2). In contrast, participant 9 noted: *“like turning their body away”* (P. 9) can signal disinterest or discomfort. Therefore, these examples demonstrate that body posture not only convey emotional states, but also facilitate verbal expressions, reflecting social perception in EI, namely, responding to the feelings of others through physical signals.

Although the following behavior may appear negative, participants indicated **leaving and withdrawal** as nonverbal self-regulation. Participant 8 explained: *“If it starts to escalate, I see that I can leave the situation, so that everyone can take a breath”* (P.8), while participant 9 added: *“If there is a conflict, I might just take a break and come back later”* (P. 9). Therefore, emotionally intelligent people regulate their emotions and prevent conflict, by being aware of their own emotional states.

Gestures of comfort and support signal people understanding, encouragement and help others feel seen and understood. Participants describe how small physical gestures: *“pat someone on the shoulder, like you did it well”* (P. 10) convey empathy, emotional connection and encouragement. In contrast, participant 14 explains how touch can acknowledge and respond to others' emotions: *“If someone cries, I acknowledge their sadness and either put an arm around them, put your hand on the shoulder and later check via eye contact or a smile, if it is better”* (P. 14). This demonstrates empathy and social awareness, communicating care and emotional support and promotes trust and stronger relationships.

Finally, participants indicated giving a **hug**, when appropriate is another important nonverbal cue that emotionally intelligent people use to offer support, show concern, and demonstrate understanding: *“If someone is crying, give them a hug”* (P. 9).

In summary, through body language & gestures, people show empathy to others, indicating that they care about their well-being and overall situation, and help others recognize and understand their feelings and emotions. Additionally, when used appropriately, body language and gestures can facilitate individuals' verbal messages.

4.2.3 Paralinguistic cues

The third nonverbal behavior participants indicated is the use of paralinguistic cues. Participants indicated the ability to **control and adjust one's voice** according to the situation, demonstrating self-regulation. Participant 15 noted: *"I try to behave as normal as possible, and I try to control my voice and do my best"* (P. 15), while participant 4 described the need to *"change the way you speak in a conflict"* (P. 4). These examples illustrate how adapting your tone can support relationship management and interactions, as well as contributing to conflict resolution or preventing escalation.

Furthermore, participants emphasize the importance of **adjusting your tone, volume, timbre and speed**. For instance, participant 1 described how changes in "sound of voice, sound pitch, and timbre" (P. 1) can indicate peoples emotional state, while participant 12 added: *"You can hear from the tone, the height of the tone, the volume, you can hear things, indicating I'm feeling uncomfortable"* (P. 12). Through such behaviors participants demonstrate social awareness and empathy, fostering mutual understanding, emotional connection and better communication.

Overall, paralinguistic cues enable more effective and empathetic interactions through self-regulation and social awareness, which are important EI abilities.

4.3 Context

Lastly, the data points out a third dimension that must be considered when looking at how EI manifests in verbal and nonverbal behaviors. This third dimension can be summarized as the context in which EI behaviors are manifested and includes different situations where people show verbal and nonverbal EI behaviors (see Figure 3). These contextual situations can be divided into professional and personal environments, which are explained below.

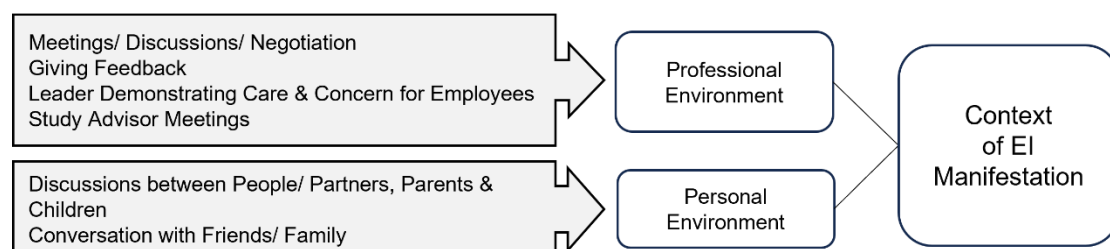


Figure 3: Context of EI Manifestation

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4.3.1 Professional Environments

Throughout the interviews, participants recalled different situations where individuals showed verbal and nonverbal EI behaviors. Within a professional environment, individuals show EI during **meetings**: *“In all my meetings, I also tell them what I’m experiencing, just tell it, because I really hate it when there’s a big elephant in the room.”* (P. 11) and **conflict and discussions**: *“So, conflict, for example, or any type of situation where heightened emotions are in play”* (P. 4), that were described as emotionally charged contexts, demanding regulation, empathy and adaptive communication.

Furthermore, participants also indicated **negotiations** and **providing feedback** as moment requiring empathy and assertive communication. Participants described how they balanced emotional understanding with task-oriented goals: *“Just as there is active listening, there is also active negotiation.”* (P. 1), *“I can understand that you need this, this, and this. But we can only deliver it this way.”* (P. 1), *“This is pretty harsh, it does not have to be that harsh if you use some other words, it could be better.”* (P. 16).

Finally, **demonstrating care and concern for employees** through daily or weekly check-ins as well as consulting meetings of **study advisors** with students were identified as professional environments in which EI behaviors are expressed. Participant 4 explained that: *“There is something that we call the agile way of working, and one positive aspect about that is that you have daily intake moments with your team where you see, where everyone is at? What is your situation like? Can I help you with anything? Furthermore, I think those are behaviors that include checking in, listening, and being on top of what is happening. Those are behaviors of a positive leader”* (P. 4), indicating that EI contributes to positive leadership and psychological safety, combining social awareness (see where everyone stands) with regulation and relationship management (offering help and maintain connection). In addition, participant 6 described a situation that required guidance and sensitivity: *“Then we hear that they have different expectations, and we ask, were you able to talk it out with each other?”* (P6).

Overall, participants emphasized that EI behaviors involve emotion regulation, empathy and adapting communication to maintain constructive and supportive relationships.

4.3.2 Personal Environment

In contrast, participants described personal environments as a place to express their feelings more openly, enthusiastically, and empathically, indicating them as a safe place to share emotions and feelings unfiltered rather than keeping everything to oneself. For example, **discussions** with parents like: *“I had many fights with my mom, one time I just went upstairs,*

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because we were shouting at each other” (P. 13), illustrate emotional awareness and regulation, recognizing the need for distancing before re-engaging in constructive dialogue.

Other personal situations that have been identified as a context of EI are **general conversations with family members or friends**. Here, participant 6 indicates that emotional closeness makes regulation in personal relationships more difficult: *“In my personal life, it can be sometimes difficult to take a step back, because you are so emotionally attached to it”* (P. 6). Such situations demand higher empathy, understanding and self-control, demonstrating that personal context involves both self-regulation and relational empathy, fostering emotional connection, mutual understanding and trust.

Together with professional environments, these findings show that EI adapts differently to situational requirements. Displaying control and composure in the workplace, while facilitating openness and empathy in private life, this reflects a dynamic, adaptable and context-sensitive nature of EI manifestations.

Having outlined the results above, the following chapter discusses these findings in relation to the relevant literature from Chapter 2.

5. DISCUSSION

This research investigated the research question: *“How do individuals manifest emotional intelligence (EI) in verbal and nonverbal behaviors?”*. The previous chapter outlined the findings, which identified three dimensions: verbal EI manifestation, nonverbal EI manifestation, and context of EI manifestation. Verbal EI manifestation emphasizes using language to listen actively, acknowledge emotions, exchange support, de-escalate conflicts, and establish clear boundaries, fostering trust, understanding, and collaborative problem-solving. Nonverbal behaviors demonstrate how emotionally intelligent people use facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice to signal openness, regulate emotions, and reinforce empathy beyond words. Lastly, the context of EI manifestation emphasizes that EI behaviors manifest in professional and personal environments, showing that emotionally intelligent communication is shaped by its context. The following section discusses the theoretical and practical implications by linking the identified behavioral dimensions to existing literature on EI, psychological safety, and caring behaviors.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of EI, addressing the research gap outlined in Chapter 1. Traditional models conceptualized EI as a trait, ability, or

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combination of both (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). However, these conceptualizations are primarily related to perceived levels of EI and lack specific behaviors that show how EI manifests in everyday interactions (A'yuninnisa et al., 2024; Dong et al., 2022). Therefore, this study addresses this gap by providing a behavior-based, multimodal model of EI manifestation that translates EI abilities into concrete communicative behaviors. Through qualitative analysis of verbal and nonverbal EI manifestation, this study contributes to the existing EI literature in three ways: (1) translating emotional abilities into observable behaviors, (2) integrating a multimodal perspective on EI manifestation, and (3) emphasizing contextual adaptability of EI behaviors.

5.1.1 Behavioral Manifestation of EI

First, this research contributes to EI literature by providing a novel set of observable verbal and nonverbal behaviors, translating emotional abilities into an observable behavioral process. Traditional models conceptualize EI as traits, abilities, or a combination of both (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). However, these conceptualizations are primarily related to *perceived* levels of EI and lack specific behaviors through which EI manifests in everyday interactional practices (A'yuninnisa et al., 2024; Dong et al., 2022). In other words, they explain what EI is, but not how it manifests in social interactions. Therefore, this study bridges the gap by providing a behavior-based multimodal model of EI manifestation that translates EI abilities and/or traits into concrete behavioral practices.

Our findings revealed five domains of verbal EI behaviors and three domains of nonverbal behaviors, emphasizing that EI is a multimodal phenomenon. Verbal EI behaviors include active listening, acknowledging and communicating emotions, exchanging support, conflict management and de-escalation, and setting boundaries. Nonverbal EI behaviors encompass facial expressions, eye contact, body language, gestures, and paralinguistic cues. These behaviors often co-occurred and formed behavioral patterns that made emotional perception and regulation observable in everyday interactions. For instance, a combination of active listening, eye contact, nods of understanding, and a calm vocal tone conveyed empathy and composure. Such multimodal behaviors are supported by previous research on multimodal emotional communication, which expands the EI literature by indicating that EI communication is based on a combination of language, tone, gestures, and embodiment (Jacob et al., 2013; Israelashvili & Fischer, 2022). Furthermore, these findings align with other concepts such as psychological safety (O'Donovan et al., 2020) and caring behavior (Mårtensson et al., 2020), which codebooks also emphasize presence, respectful inquiry, and empathetic engagement.

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Although these findings are similar, this study extends those frameworks by interpreting the communicative behaviors as direct behavioral manifestations of EI. The presence of empathy, listening, and support behaviors was expected. In contrast, three distinct verbal manifestations of EI emerged that were somewhat unexpected: explicit emotion labeling, assertive clarity, and the dual function of dialogue as both a problem-solving tool and a means to regulate emotions and de-escalation. Together, these findings suggest that EI not only expresses empathy but also maintains interpersonal structures and regulates emotions through conversation.

Building on that, explicit emotion labeling (e.g., naming and acknowledging others' feelings) contributes to the emotion perception dimension of the ability model, which instead emphasizes emotion recognition rather than expressing them (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1998). Voicing emotions directly supports shared understanding and harmonious relationships, making the emotional atmosphere in interactions visible. Consequently, the dimension of explicit labeling emotions has been identified as a communicative manifestation of emotional awareness and empathy.

The second new insight, assertive clarity, which is expressed through boundary-setting or managing expectation, represents a communicative form of emotion regulation that goes beyond empathy, support, and conflict management (Givargizova, 2024). It involves clearly communicating expectations, providing feedback, and setting interpersonal limits while maintaining connection and clarity in relationships. Furthermore, the findings align with recent studies that EI supports the formation and maintenance of interpersonal boundaries through empathy, such as understanding others' boundaries, self-regulation, and clarity in social interactions, while setting and enforcing healthy personal boundaries is essential for constructive relationships and mental health (Chernata, 2024a; 2024b).

The third new finding, the dual function of dialogue, highlights that emotionally intelligent communication serves both cognitive and affective regulatory purposes. Using dialogue as a coping mechanism serves as a problem-solving tool and a means of emotion regulation and de-escalation. Through dialogue, people reinterpret situations, manage their emotions, and build shared understanding in moments of tension or uncertainty. This dual function aligns with the broader framework of interpersonal emotion regulation (IER), which conceptualizes how individuals use social interactions in real time to influence emotional states through conversation and shared meaning-making (Messina et al., 2021). Identifying dialogue itself as a regulatory process extends EI theory beyond interpersonal control by including communicative emotion regulation and transforming conversations into emotion coping tools.

In summary, these behavioral domains contribute to existing EI theory by demonstrating that emotionally intelligent communication incorporates expressive (emotion

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labeling), regulatory (boundary-setting), and co-regulatory (dialogue coping) functions within social interactions. Together, they reinforce that EI manifests through dynamic, adaptive, and relational behaviors that maintain connection and clarity in interpersonal exchange. Collectively, they provide a behavioral foundation for EI, demonstrating how emotional abilities become visible through specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors, leading to the following proposition.

Proposition 1: Emotional intelligence manifests as a set of observable behaviors, both verbal (e.g., active listening and understanding, acknowledging and communicating emotions, exchanging support and care, conflict management and de-escalation, boundaries, expectations, and feedback) and nonverbal (e.g., facial expressions and eye contact, body language and gestures, and paralinguistic cues), that translate emotional abilities into social actions.

5.1.2 Interrelation of Verbal and Nonverbal EI Manifestation

While the previous section discussed the verbal and nonverbal behaviors through which EI becomes observable, the current section focuses on how these channels interact with each other. The findings revealed that EI is expressed through both verbal and nonverbal behaviors, proposing multimodality of EI manifestation. This includes the alignment between what is said and how it is expressed, emphasizing the congruence of verbal content, tone, and bodily expression. Therefore, verbal reassurance combined with warm eye contact and steady tone was interpreted as genuine empathy, whereas a mismatch between words and expression (e.g., detached tone with supportive language) generated tension or uncertainty.

Therefore, coordinating verbal and nonverbal channels, rather than relying on one of them, demonstrates that EI manifestation is multimodal. Aligning these channels indicates sincerity, stability, and emotional presence, characteristics that are recognized as trustworthy and caring. Such alignment is supported by the psychological safety framework (O'Donovan et al., 2022), where consistent verbal and nonverbal cues create an open and respectful climate, and the caring behaviors codebook (Mårtensson et al., 2020), highlighting caring behavior through empathic gestures and tone. This study expands on these frameworks by presenting such alignments as a mechanism of EI itself, a behavioral process that transforms emotional understanding into credible, trustworthy communication.

This finding contributes to the literature by conceptualizing EI as a dynamic and integrative system of expressions. Previous studies often examined verbal and nonverbal cues separately (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Pantic & Rothkrantz, 2003), limiting the understanding of how EI operates in everyday interactions (Mayer et al., 2008). This study suggests that EI manifests through the interaction and alignment of multiple channels. This multimodal

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perspective reduces ambiguity and improves shared understanding, illustrating why emotionally intelligent interactions are perceived as authentic. This, in turn, fosters authentic, emotionally intelligent communication and psychological safety in social exchange, expanding the work by Israelashvili and Fischer (2022) on multimodal emotional communication. Accordingly, the following proposition is formulated:

Proposition 2: Emotional intelligence is a multimodal concept expressed through the integration of verbal and nonverbal behaviors; an alignment between what is said and how this is expressed signals authentic emotional intelligence.

5.1.3 Contextual Adaptation of EI Manifestation

The third theoretical contribution of this study emphasizes the importance of context in shaping behavioral EI manifestations, addressing the calls for a more context-sensitive perspective on EI (Abbas et al., 2024; Hess et al., 2022; Schmodde et al., 2024).

Our findings highlighted that EI manifests differently in professional and private environments, such as meetings, negotiations, consultations, or family conversations. The findings indicate that emotionally intelligent behaviors are adapted to the situational and relational context in which they occur. While emotions are expressed more controlled and regulated in professional environments to maintain harmony and clarity, they are expressed more openly in personal environments to promote empathy and connection. Consequently, our findings indicate that EI abilities are influenced by contextual information such as body language, facial expressions, and environmental factors, shaping when, how, and to what extent EI is displayed.

Context sensitivity can be better understood through existing emotion theories that help explain why and how emotionally intelligent behaviors adapt differently to different situations. According to Van Kleef's (2009) emotions as social information (EASI) theory, emotional expressions serve as social signals whose interpretation depends on contextual cues such as norms, hierarchies, and relationship closeness. EI is manifested adaptively by adjusting verbal and nonverbal expressions to ensure emotions are interpreted appropriately. Similarly, emotion contagion theory (Hatfield et al., 1994) explains how others' emotions are influenced through nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice. This adaptability enables individuals to maintain a constructive emotional climate. Finally, this finding is supported by the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), providing a long-term perspective, extending EI literature by explaining how positive emotions develop and strengthen the emotional abilities described in EI. Therefore, it suggests that positive emotional interactions promoted by adaptive EI behavior broaden communication and build lasting relational and psychological resources.

Together, these perspectives position behavioral adaptability as the core of behavioral EI manifestation, linking emotional regulation to context-sensitive expressions. Accordingly, EI is seen as a dynamic behavioral skill, allowing individuals to adjust their verbal and nonverbal cues to different emotional demands. Thus, the ability to adapt EI behaviors to different situations promotes harmony across social environments and increases effective communications and relationship quality, leading to the third proposition:

Proposition 3: Emotional intelligence is a context-sensitive behavioral process in which verbal and nonverbal expressions are adapted to the social and situational environment.

5.1.4 Behavioral Model of EI Manifestation

Finally, the recommended propositions are integrated into a behavioral model that illustrates how EI manifests as a dynamic, multimodal system (see Figure 4). This framework conceptualizes EI as a behavior-based, multimodal, and dynamic process, including three domains: verbal expression, nonverbal expression, and context, which mutually influence one another. Furthermore, this model illustrates the dynamic reciprocal relationships between verbal, nonverbal, and contextual manifestations of EI, represented by the circular bidirectional arrows corresponding to propositions 2 and 3.

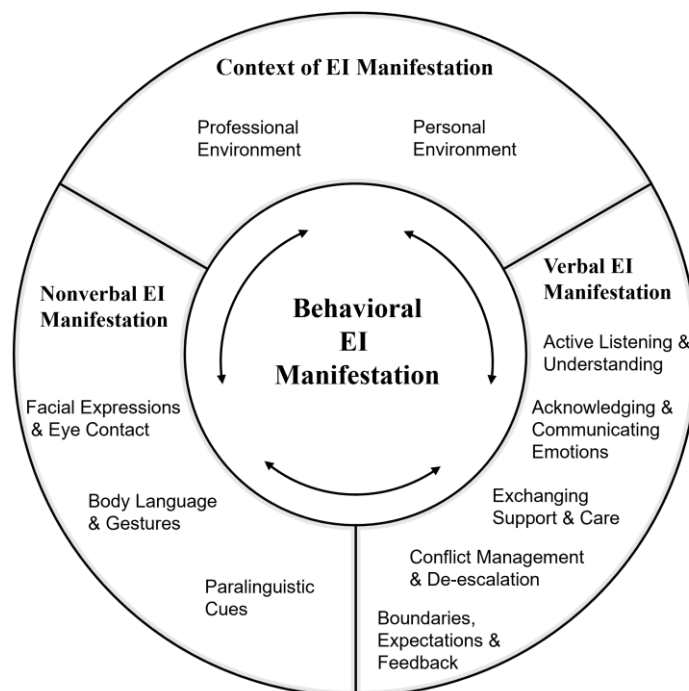


Figure 4: Proposed conceptual model of how individuals manifest EI in verbal and nonverbal behaviors

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Proposition 1 captures the core definition of the behavioral emotional intelligence manifestation at the center of the framework. The horizontal arrow between verbal and nonverbal EI manifestation emphasizes their alignment as the foundation of authentic emotional expression, representing proposition 2. Proposition 3, represented by the upper two bidirectional arrows, corresponds to the contextual influence that shapes verbal and nonverbal behavioral expressions, illustrating how EI behaviors adapt to situational environments.

In summary, these findings advance a behavior-based understanding of EI manifestation, translating emotional abilities into observable social interactions, shaped by its contexts. The following section describes how these insights can be applied in practice.

5.2 Practical Implications

Building on the previous discussion, this chapter provides practical implications for how the identified behaviors can be applied in practice. The findings of this study provide different implications for organizations, employees, professionals' development, and interpersonal relationships.

First, this study presents that EI manifests in verbal and nonverbal behaviors, concluding that EI is trainable. Interpersonal emotion regulation (IER) research shows that specific conversational strategies (listening, reframing, supportive dialogue) are used to regulate emotions (Messina et al., 2021). Therefore, it is suggested that EI training should extend beyond developing awareness to include role-playing and behavioral exercises, such as paraphrasing, de-escalation techniques, and providing constructive feedback. Furthermore, EI training could develop nonverbal awareness modules for eye contact, open posture, mirroring, and tone control. This enables individuals to not only “know” about EI but also to practice and embody it in communication. This is supported by multimodal learning theory, which states that people learn better when multiple sensory and communication channels are engaged (Mayer, 2009; Moreno & Mayer, 2007).

In addition, the study highlights clarity, boundary setting, such as personal and emotional limits and resources, and supportive behaviors as core EI manifestations. Hence, this research suggests leading and teaching with clarity, boundaries, and nonverbal congruence, setting limits respectfully, and providing constructive feedback. This includes clearly communicating expectations and personal, emotional limits, as clear leader communication fosters psychological safety, a precondition for collaboration and learning (Lee & Dahinten, 2021). Furthermore, individuals in leading positions can apply empathetic nonverbal cues (e.g., smiling, nodding, tone adjustment) to foster openness, since leaders' nonverbal displays signal receptivity and trustworthiness and shape the team climate if words and signals align (Keating

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et al., 2020). Another suggestion is that leaders should embed regular check-ins with employees that combine verbal interest with supportive nonverbal cues to help build psychological safety in teams (Lee & Dahinten, 2021).

Finally, this thesis found that behaviors such as dialogue as coping and nonverbal regulation strategies (e.g., pausing, leaving, controlling voice) help to manage emotions under circumstances of pressure. This suggests including dialogue-based coping strategies in mediation and negotiation training, contributing to emotion regulation, constructive conflict resolution, and skill development (Nozaki & Gross, 2025). In addition, it could be an idea to normalize the healthy use of boundary-setting and self-regulation behaviors contributing to emotional safety and well-being (Keating et al., 2020). This could help organizations to reduce burnout and emotional overload. Similarly, physical supportive gestures, where culturally appropriate, can foster belonging and emotional resilience. Working on these suggestions helps to reduce conflict escalation, improve emotion regulation, and enhance well-being at work and in personal relationships.

In conclusion, incorporating the aforementioned practices into leadership development, professional training, and daily interactions helps foster trust and promote collaboration and resilience across both organizational and personal settings.

6. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite contributing valuable insights, this study is not without limitations that should be acknowledged and addressed in future research.

First and foremost, this study is limited to its sample size. Even though the sample size is relatively small, the data is rich in qualitative information, thanks to the valuable insights of the participants, and data saturation was achieved.

Besides that, this study investigated how EI manifests in two countries, Germany and the Netherlands. Research on EI found cultural differences in EI (Ilangovan et al., 2007) as the norms and values existing in societies determine the meaning of emotions, their expression, and their control (Eid & Diener, 2001), arguing that cultural values directly influence EI or its dimensions (Pathak & Muralidharan, 2020). Although these are two distinct cultures, it can be argued that both belong to the Western cultural sphere, making the cultural differences relatively minor compared to investigating the manifestations of EI between Western and Eastern cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede Insights, 2025).

Another limitation is related to the fact that participants had difficulties in recalling and remembering the exact wording and behaviors of EI situations, making conducting interviews

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not the best research method for investigating the manifestation of EI behaviors. To overcome this obstacle, the researcher asked probing questions to prompt participants to think more deeply about it and gather as much information as possible.

Therefore, conducting similar research, future studies on EI manifestations should consider increasing the sample size, gaining more insights, and achieving a deeper understanding of how individuals manifest EI. Furthermore, it is recommended to investigate EI manifestation in various countries in greater detail. Therefore, it could be an option to investigate the topic for each country individually, since EI is sensitive to cultural differences. However, it would be interesting to extend the study by investigating the manifestation of EI in other cultures, such as those in Eastern countries. The final suggestion is to investigate a new, more nuanced approach, such as conducting a diary study. This would allow participants to recall moments of EI in more detail, since they are captured close to that moment.

7. CONCLUSION

This research investigated a new approach to explore the relationship between EI and its manifestation in verbal and nonverbal behaviors to answer the research question:

“How do individuals manifest emotional intelligence in verbal and nonverbal behaviors?”

By conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher found that individuals manifest EI through verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Five domains of verbal behaviors and three domains of nonverbal behaviors have been identified, plus the role of the context in which EI manifests itself. By identifying concrete verbal and nonverbal behaviors, this research contributes, on the one hand, to theory, urging studies to move from *perceived* EI abilities to *observed* EI, and thus more concrete behaviors; on the other hand, to practice, underlying the importance of developing relational-oriented skills, which matter for relationships, collaboration, and well-being across professional and personal life. In conclusion, EI is best understood not only as an ability or trait, but rather as a multimodal concept including both verbal and nonverbal communication.

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9. APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Questions

“How do individuals manifest emotional intelligence in verbal and non-verbal behaviors?”

Reminder: There are no right or wrong answers; I am only interested in your perception.

1. Intro

1. Thank you for your time, participating in this interview. I am Larissa and I would like to know how emotionally intelligent people behave.
2. The purpose is to reveal key behaviors that are associated with emotionally intelligent people and thus contribute to a better understanding of emotional intelligence in social interactions and relationships.
3. Your responses will be kept confidential; there are no right or wrong answers. Please share your thoughts freely.
4. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes. Do you have any questions before we start?

2. Opening

5. Who is in your opinion a good [name of the profession]? What characteristics/skills does somebody need to have for your job?
6. What motivated you to become a [name of the profession]? What do you find most interesting or meaningful about your work?
7. How do you usually handle challenges, manage emotions, and adapt to changing situations?
8. How do you approach social interactions at work or in private life? What do you find most challenging in communicating with others? (e.g., discussing a difficult topic)

2. Interview Questions

Theme

- How would you describe emotional intelligence in your own words, and why do you think it matters in everyday life?
 - **Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage your own emotions while also being aware of and sensitive to the emotions of others.**
- What is your understanding of emotional intelligence in conflict/ challenging situations?
- What are some ways people use words to show emotional intelligence in conversations?

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- Besides words, how can people show emotional intelligence through their body language and facial expressions?

Main Questions

Self-Awareness & Emotional Reflection

1. How do you recognize and understand your emotions in different situations?
 - Follow up: What behaviors help you recognize when you're emotionally strong and when you're reaching your emotional limits?
2. Can you share an example where you were aware or unaware of your emotions? What did you do (How did you behave?), and how did it affect your actions/decision-making?

Emotional Management & Resilience

3. What strategies do you use to manage (your and others) strong emotions like anger or frustration in conflict situations?
 - Follow up: What helps you to maintain a positive mindset when facing setbacks?
4. Can you share an example where you successfully controlled your emotions in a tense situation, and how this reach a positive outcome?
5. What habits or strategies do you think help people (or yourself) become better at managing emotions and developing emotional intelligence

Empathy & Understanding Others

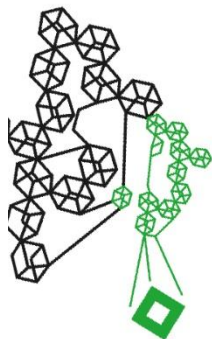
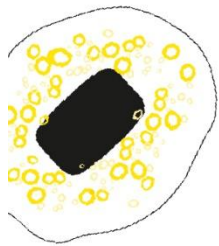
6. How do you typically know when someone is comfortable or uncomfortable in a conversation? What cues do you get? What specific behaviors or signals do you pay attention to?
7. How do you recognize and respond to other people's emotions, support others, and foster positive social interactions and communication?
8. Can you share an experience where understanding someone's emotions helped improve a situation?

Conflict Resolution & Communication

9. Can you recall a situation where you had to navigate a conflict or disagreement with someone? How did you approach resolving it? What techniques did you use?
10. How do you handle difficult conversations while maintaining positive relationships, and what challenges have you faced in such situations/discussions?

Team Dynamics & Leadership

11. How do emotionally intelligent behaviors contribute to effective teamwork and leadership, and how does your team handle and reflect on tensions or conflicts?
12. To what extent do you think your leader and/or colleagues are emotionally intelligent?



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- Can you recall a situation where they demonstrated emotional intelligence or a lack of it? What did they do that made you think this way? How did it impact the group?

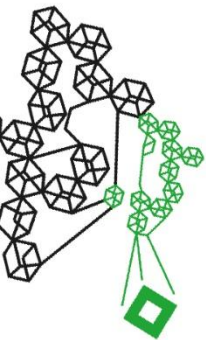
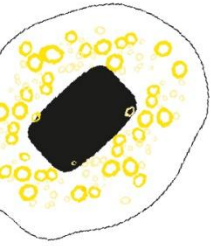
Stress Management & Growth

13. How do you deal with stress, and what do you or others do to improve the way you handle emotions?
14. What strategies do you think help people develop emotional intelligence to navigate conflicts better?

3. Ending

15. Based on our discussion, what do you think is the most important aspect of emotional intelligence in everyday life?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add about emotional intelligence, emotional communication, and how it shapes our lives and social interactions?
17. Can you give an example of how emotional intelligence makes your day-to-day life easier or smoother, and explain why?
18. Who else do you think would be suitable for this interview?
19. Do you have any final thoughts or remaining questions?

4. Thank you for your time!



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Appendix B: Participant Quotes

1. Verbal EI Manifestation

1.1 Active Listening & Understanding

1.1.1 Active and Reflective Listening

- “Listen with interest, listen actively, try to recognize the emotions” (P. 1)
- “Indeed, showing that you listen to someone” (P. 15)
- “When it comes to difficult conversations, always listen first. I have noticed that many people are no longer able to listen properly. In difficult conversations, they immediately take the opposite position or try to express their own opinions. I try to listen first, like what is important to the other person?” (P. 10)
- “I think a good study advisor, in my opinion, is a study advisor who is a really good listener. I think that is one of the main qualities...and I think you also have to be empathetic towards the students” (P. 11)

1.1.2 Attentive Questioning

- “Seriously asking people how they are doing” (P. 2)
- “He always checks in with me, like how are you doing? What is on your to-do list for this week?” (P. 5)
- “I try to include them by asking them directly for their opinion” (P. 10)

1.1.3 Encouraging Joint Reflection

- “We always reflect on it with each other. Sometimes just the two people it's with, and sometimes it's the whole team. And we reflect on it, we sit down with each other, talk about it, and give our opinions on why we think it is very important” (P. 3)
- “I talked to the person I am doing the assignment with, like I do not know, and trying to figure out why I think it is so annoying” (P. 14)
- “Do not think that this is your problem, and you should solve everything yourself. I have also learned to talk to others about it and ask How would you handle the situation? What would you have done in this situation?” (P. 6).

1.1.4 Encouraging Mutual Understanding and Perspective-Taking

- “Do you see it the same way?” (P. 2)
- “Why do you respond like this? I don't understand it” (P. 15)
- “Do you understand why I would do this?” (P. 5)

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- “Why they think they act that way and why they think the other person might act that way” (P. 7)
- “Maybe they reacted in the way, because you did...” (P. 3)
- “Understanding other people's situation, being able to put yourself into other people's shoes and see the situation from their viewpoint” (P. 4)
- “That you can place yourself into someone else” (P. 16)
- “I helped her to see it from her parents' view, I said but maybe it's cheaper that way, if you go with them, they might have to pay more. It's not that they do not want you to come with them, because they asked you if you want to come, but then you had to cancel our vacation” (P. 13)
- “Try to stand in his shoes and try to understand why the other person reacts, give a reaction to you. Try to understand the situation, and then maybe you will understand it and understand your own reactions“ (P. 3)
- “For me, it's always very important that everyone understands each other's position, why they took it, and simply show them that they reacted that way because that's how they saw it. That's how they felt, that's how they reacted, and that was simply their response to it” (P. 10)

1.1.5 Empathic Acknowledgment

- “I can imagine how you must feel” (P. 14)
- “I feel you, I understand what you're saying, I get it” (P. 9)
- “I hear where you're coming from” (P. 4)
- “I understand that” (P. 2)
- “Tell the other person that you understand them and their feelings” (P. 15)
- “If students feel like this you can say that you understand that they're feeling that way” (P. 7)
- “I understand what you're saying because I was in the same situation, and this is how I handled it” (P. 6)
- “I would also explain if I had been in a similar situation, what I did to make sure that they understand that I understand what they're going through” (P. 7)

1.2 Acknowledging & Communicating Emotions

1.2.1 Verbal expression of Emotions

- “I feel like this right now” (P. 2)

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- “I’m tired” (P. 3)
- “I feel this and that” (P. 15)
- “I feel overwhelmed by the situation right now” (P. 2)
- “I feel like you're making me really angry” (P. 7)
- “What you just said makes me feel really angry” (P. 7)
- “Someone says that totally frustrates me somehow” (P. 2)
- “This situation frustrates me” (P. 2)
- “If you’re not happy with something, you should talk about it” (P. 13)
- “Speak out what you feel” (P. 3)
- “I’m very direct and say what I feel” (P. 14)
- “I am not happy with your behavior” (P. 3)
- “I’m sorry that I’m angry, but I am angry because of this reason” (P. 14)
- “This makes me feel this or that” (P. 7)
- “This happened, and it makes me feel like that” (P. 14)
- “If I can't leave, I explicitly announce that I'm feeling that kind of emotion, so that the person I'm talking to is aware of it” (P. 7)
- “If I'm dealing with something personally that affects my job, I will go up to my manager and tell, just so they know that I'm not too focused” (P. 11)
- “I’m sorry to be direct, but this is how I feel, or this is what it makes me do, or how I interpret what you did” (P. 14)

1.2.2 Naming and Verifying Others' Emotions

- “I see that it makes you sad, say that I understand them and let them explain more about why they're feeling that way” (P.7)
- “I see that you get sad” (P. 14)
- “I can see that you're ..., you're angry, you're sad” (P. 16)
- "I see you are angry, I see you are happy, I see this makes you sad" (P. 14)
- “Are you frustrated that I did this and that?” (P. 2)
- “Is it correct that you're feeling this and this way? (P. 7)

1.2.3 Comforting, Reassurance & Normalization

- “Supervising someone and they think they cannot make it, try to understand it, try to comfort them that it's not so bad, it's not as big of a problem as they think and they are capable of more than they think” (P. 15)

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- “If someone cries, I try to bring comfort or at least show, Oh I feel bad for you that you feel this way” (P. 14)
- “If you feel the other one needs to be comforted, try to address the emotion and say that they don't have to worry.” (P. 15)
- “What really offers someone a future is to say it will be good again” (P. 1)
- “It helps if someone say, it's nonsense what you're saying” (P. 2)
- “If I have a major setback, I go into some kind of negative spiral, and then I need other people to say, it's not that big of a deal” (P. 5)
- “See, it was not that bad” (P. 2)
- “It's not necessary to be anxious or sad” (P. 3)
- “Okay, let's not get stressed, just finish what you're doing now, and we will talk later about the other things” (P. 5)
- “It's okay if you're not feeling great now, but we'll help you and we'll get there” (P. 9).
- “Most of the time it is that they say, like they put it in a bigger perspective, and I feel like they are focusing more on the positive things than I would naturally do” (P. 7)
- “It can be very difficult because you feel like this is such a huge setback, and I put all this time and effort, and it's never going to be good again. But I always try to look at the positive thing about it. What we can learn from this. Did the world end? No, it didn't end. I really learned to rationalize things, and I really learned to accept that there are some setbacks, who are bad, but it's going to be fine“ (P. 6),
- “I try to zoom out. I try to take the whole picture in again, for instance, a colleague wants to change the timing of a course, meaning that I must change it unless she wants to go in my time. And I try to say, okay, I hear what you say, because I also like my courses clustered at the same time. Let's zoom out a little bit. I will do this instead of putting her wishes against my wishes” (P. 14).

1.2.4 Observing and Addressing Emotional Cues

- "I hear you, I understand you, I see in you..., I see happening ... in this conversation" (P. 11)
- "I see, your fists are becoming stronger, or you are doing a fist when you talk about this situation, you tense up" (P. 14)
- "I also tell students what I see and ask why are you sitting like this?" (P. 11)
- “I see this, last time you did this, now you're doing this, what changed?” (P. 11)
- “I had a student lashing out at everyone and I said, you're lashing out at everyone, but what is going on? I see that something is hurting you, but it's not the teacher" (P. 11)

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- “I’ve noticed that you’ve been yawning for two weeks, is something wrong?” (P. 1)
- "You look so pale today, have the kids been loud last night?" (P. 8)
- “You seem tired today, are you?” (P. 11)
- “Hey, I noticed this and this, is it correct that you’re feeling this and this way?” (P. 7)
- "When I ask you this, I see your body is changing, why?" (P. 11)
- "I mention it, okay you're angry. I ask what do you need right now to cope with the anger? What do you need right now from me?" (P.11)
- "I see that you have been really stressed all week. What's the reason? Can I help you with something?" (P. 5)

1.3 Exchange of Support and Care

1.3.1 Recognizing Distress and Checking In

- "If you recognize that someone is not doing well, they will be approached about it" (P. 1)
- "If you see that someone is experiencing emotions during a meeting that you recognize it and ask about it" (P. 7)
- "It starts with when someone is not doing good, that they ask you, what's up?" (P. 8)
- “I wouldn't put someone in the spotlight during a meeting, I rather would address it afterwards by asking like what's going on today, do you want to talk about it?” (P. 10)

1.3.2 Offering Emotional Support

- “If the team is there for each other” (P. 8)
- “Do you want to talk?” (P. 8)
- “Do you want to talk about it? Do you want to say what’s going on?” (P.16)
- “I am there for you. I can take that” (P. 1)
- “If you feel somehow overwhelmed, feel alone, you can always call me and then we can work something out” (P. 2)

1.3.3 Offering Practical Support

- “How can I help?” (P. 1)
- “Can I help you with anything?” (P. 4)
- “Can I do something for you?” (P. 8)
- “If I met you in a hallway and you were sad, I would ask...can I help with something?” (P. 5)

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- “What would help you? what do you need?” (P. 7)
- “Is there anything I can help you with?” (P. 8)
- “This is how I can support you” (P. 4)
- "This is how you can find support if I can't support you" (P. 4)

1.3.4 Suggesting Supportive Activities

- “Do you want to do...?” (P. 2)
- "I had a student who was so frustrated that he was really angry, and I said, let's take a walk" (P. 11)
- “Shall we go for a coffee or something?” (P. 5)
- “Something bad happened to the student and asking him what was going on helped to solve the situation and looked at what can we get out of it? What can we transfer to next study year?” (P. 11)

1.3.5 Encouragement & Affirmation

- “We can do it” (P. 2)
- “We are supposed to be a team, and I want us to be a team, so let's work on it” (P. 4)
- “Provide positive support, also if someone is doing fine” (P. 8)
- “I taught myself when you're going to be friends, you never criticize the other, you only say, I know you can do better, I'm sure you can do this” (P. 12)
- "You did it before. Why would it not happen again? Can you maybe go back to your mindset of then? What were your thoughts during that time? And why were you able to say, you know what, guys, we're now going to work on and we're going to make sure that we pass it. What is different three years ago compared to now?" (P. 6)

1.4 Conflict Management & De-escalation

1.4.1 De-Escalating and Repairing Language

- "At some point during a discussion, I just said, let's agree to disagree, since we didn't reach common ground" (P. 5)
- “People were shouting, and I jumped in like, people, calm down, let's just have a normal conversation, this is not helpful” (P. 16)
- "I also see how employees react to what I say, some are pissed off or something, and then I try to calm the situation by praising them or providing something positive" (P. 10)

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- "If you see two people having a conflict, it could be an option to interrupt that conversation in some way, if appropriate, make a joke, or just say we stop this conversation, or it's useless"(P. 15)
- "Say, we take a little walk" (P. 3)
- "We had a big discussion for a whole day, and it wasn't going well. Then someone said, shall we go to the hotel, and then we'll go for an evening walk" (P. 12)
- "We see that you're upset. Why don't we take a break?" (P. 16)
- "Instead of getting heated or getting defensive, you can say, I listen to what you're trying to tell me" (P. 4)
- "Two kids were angry, and I took them out of class, one was crying, and I did what I thought was normal, I said calm down, count to ten, and breathe." (P. 13)
- "What I sometimes do with my kids is that I say, ok now it's 10 Minutes quiet, if we all take a deep breath, we can talk again" (P. 8)
- "I'm sorry if you understood it like this, I meant it well" (P. 3)
- "I'm sorry it was my fault" (P. 13)

1.4.2 Structuring Respectful Dialogue

- "If someone tries to interrupt, say no, this is their turn to talk now, you're going to have your turn next" (P. 4)
- "With conflicts, I do it a lot of times, take both people and ask, what do you think, and what do you think? Can you understand each other's emotions? And from what I hear, I said, but maybe you both can feel different and that's okay" (P. 13)
- "You're going to be heard but we have to listen to each other and there's no point talking over each other" (P. 4)

1.4.3 Redirecting Towards Solutions

- "Before things got too heated, I was able to say, guys, I'm just a little bit confused because our boss is saying something pretty important, but we never got back to that point" (P. 6)
- "I see this is our problem, but let's try to focus on how we can find a solution to this" (P. 4)
- "I can understand that you need this, this, and this. But we can only deliver it this way." (P. 1)

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- “Now you really need to figure this out on your own this morning, but after that, I will have time” (P. 5)

1.4.4 Using Dialogue as Coping

- “Talking to someone about your feelings and emotions” (P. 2)
- “Can we talk about it?” (P. 2)
- “Talk to the person who feels uncomfortable” (P. 4)
- “Talk with someone about a solution, how to get out of the setback, and how to continue” (P. 5)
- “Moving on, talk to someone about the setback. That's always what I do. Talk to someone about it. Show your frustration about it, you know, getting everything out of your system and then moving on again“ (P. 6)
- “I had a phone call at work that frustrated me, and later in the evening, I was telling my boyfriend about my frustration with that phone call. So, then it could come out fine, but not to that person. So that was like, really controlling because otherwise I would not behave professionally.” (P. 16)

1.5 Boundaries, Expectations & Feedback

1.5.1 Stating Limits

- “I am just done” (P. 2)
- “This is it for me” (P. 3)
- "I will say to a student, I have the feeling that I'm not a good study advisor for you, because we are so different" (P. 11)
- "In that situation, I felt I'm getting rushed, I'm getting annoyed and impatient, so I had to stop it and said, I can't help you, you have to go to someone else, I'm not the right person to help you with this" (P. 11).

1.5.2 Requesting Pauses

- “Can we do a short break?” (P. 2)
- “Can we do that later?” (P. 2)
- “Hey, I have to pause this conversation for now, but I will get back to you” (P. 9)
- “I also had some cases where I said, okay, maybe we should stop right now and come back tomorrow, stop now and do something” (P. 11)

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- "I don't want to talk about it now; we will discuss it later" (P. 13)

1.5.3 Feedback and Respectful Delegation

- "A colleague wrote an email, I checked, and I said: This is pretty harsh, it doesn't have to be that harsh if you use some other words, it could be better" (P. 16)
- "I think you're missing that someone is reading that, why are you so offensive?" (P. 16).
- "Oh, you know what? Now, when I step back from the situation and I reflect on everything I did, and reflect on my behavior, I can now look at myself differently, or I can now look at the situation in a different way." (P. 6)
- "Afterwards they came like, that was very good that you came back to that same point before the whole situation got out of control" (P. 6)
- "I have this and this to do for you. Can you handle this?" (P. 5)
- "I have this job for you. Can you handle it?" (P. 5)

2. Nonverbal EI Manifestation

2.1 Facial expressions & Eye Contact

2.1.1 Friendly Facial Expressions

- "You can see it in the micro expressions, meaning the eyes and facial features, like do they get shocked?" (P. 4)
- "You can tell when you are face to face with someone by their facial expression, whether they smile at you or look at you openly" (P. 8)
- "A lot of the times people kind of put their eyebrows together and become a little judgy, or they raise their eyebrows, or wrinkle their forehead, which are normal behavior or facial mannerisms, but it's not necessarily always useful because it will heighten the other person's emotion as well." (P. 4)
- "Keep a resting face, that you try to be a bit more neutral, especially when it comes to situations where emotional intelligence is important." (P.4)

2.1.2 Supportive Smiling

- "Smile to them when you recognize that someone experiences many emotions, make them feel seen" (P. 7)
- "a short smile" (P. 2)

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- *“smile at someone to lighten the mood” (P. 8)*
- *“most of the time, I smile” (P. 13)*
- *“When I don't smile, something is not okay, when I look angry they also know, Oh, shit let's be quiet.” (P. 13)*
- *“ways that show empathy, like a smile, making them feel comfortable” (P. 14)*
- *“By smiling and not looking very angry when you have an argument” (P. 12)*

2.1.3 Keeping Eye Contact

- “If you're talking to someone and you're looking at each other's eyes, for example that's showing some interest to the other.” (P. 9)
- “By looking at you, and I'm not looking at you because I'm speaking” (P. 11)
- “looking at each other or looking away.” (P. 3)
- “Sometimes the atmosphere gets weird because then he says something, and you see people looking at each other from like, okay, did he really say that? Or that was weird, right?” (P. 5)

2.2 Body Language & Gesture

2.2.1 Open Posture

- “I noticed a colleague was not having a good day, because of her body language and the way she was talking” (P. 9)
- “You can tell by ... whether their posture is open or whether they ... have their arms crossed and seem a bit distant.” (P. 8)
- “lifted chest” (P. 1)
- “keep your body posture open” (P.4)
- “I think it's always nice if someone is open, holding an open posture, knowing that someone is more than happy to have the conversation and actually want to listen to what I'm saying” (P. 6)
- “I always stand with my hands like this (folded in front of the body), or just next to my hips, like open posture” (P. 13)
- “I think like an open posture” (P. 16)
- “that you're open, showing physically that you're open to what's going on” (P. 16)
- “If you're talking to someone and you're looking at each other's eyes, for example, you're opening your body and that's showing some interest to the other.” (P. 9)

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- **NOT EI:** “If someone is just sitting over this like (lying in the chair) and then hands like this (crossing arms), I can tell you whatever I want, but I don't think you understand what I'm trying to tell you.” (P. 6)
- **NOT EI:** “Perhaps also crossing your arms, withdrawing a little into yourself, instead of standing so relaxed and easygoing” (P. 2)
- “If someone is sitting next to you and is really interested in what you have to say, you will know. And if they go, like cross their arms and it's like that, then you feel it immediately.” (P. 11)
- “I always use my hands when I want to, to say something, to express it. People can put their legs in a special way or their arms like this (crossing arms).” (P. 3)

2.2.2 Mirroring Behavior/ Emotions

- “If someone cries, you are not going to smile, so mirror what they do, make them feel comfortable” (P. 14)
- “When someone tells you a sad story that you make your face looking a bit sad instead of smiling, to express that you understand their feelings” (P. 7)
- “You can also recognize positive emotions and try to match their energies” (P.9)

2.2.3 Nodding/ Nonverbal Empathic Responses

- “I think in general ways that you feel empathy. That is how attentive listening, nodding, or if somebody smiles, you are smiling. If somebody cries, you're not going to smile. So, you mirror what they do.” (P. 14)
- “That you nod a bit that you are paying attention to someone” (P. 7)
- “Someone is looking at me, making eye contact, nodding” (P. 6)
- “I would nod, just showing that you are paying attention to someone and that you take this person seriously.” (P. 15)
- “looking at each other, nodding, for example, that you understand someone” (P. 9)

2.2.4 Body orientation & tension

- “When you are turned towards someone, you really enjoy talking to them and being friendly, and maintain eye contact and when someone says something, you nod and show that you are listening and try make the other person feel that you are there.” (P. 2)
- “Like turning their body away” (P. 9)
- “Turning away slightly and avoiding eye contact” (P.2)

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- “If people move strangely, slouch, or become demonstrative with their posture” (P.1)
- “I think when they are not comfortable, they just really shut down and maybe also sit like this (low body tension)” (P.5)

2.2.5 Leaving, Withdrawal

- “If it starts to escalate, I see that I can leave the situation, so that everyone can take a breath” (P.8)
- “If there is a conflict, I might just take a break and come back later” (P. 9)
- “And sometimes you notice they are getting more angry, and their body language and the way they voice their statements are becoming more defensive. However, then you see them taking a small break, like counting to ten, or taking a sip of water, and then you begin a conversation again. I think that's often a sign that someone is quickly managing their emotions, trying to start a conversation again” (P.9)
- “When I sense an emotion, I rather take a distance and come back to the point at a later moment when the emotions are gone” (P. 7)
- “There are situations where I consciously have to leave the situation or sleep a night about it, because it's so heated up” (P. 10)
- “Then it is time to breathe or leave the situation for a while and start again after I calmed down” (P.8)
- “First, I tried to give my opinion, but people didn't want to listen to each other, so I just sat on my hands and didn't do anything” (P.11)

2.2.6 Gestures of Comfort and Support

- “Pat someone on the shoulder, like you did it well” (P. 10)
- “If someone cries, I acknowledge their sadness and either put an arm around them, put your hand on the shoulder and later check via eye contact or a smile, if it is better” (P. 14)
- “Maybe that you give someone a hug or touch their leg, just a small touch like hey I see you” (P. 7)
- “Maybe to touch someone quickly at their hand or arm” (P. 8)

2.2.7 Hugs

- “If someone is crying, give them a hug” (P. 9)
- “I also had students who, after leaving the meeting, would like to hug me” (P.6).

2.3 Paralinguistic Cues

2.3.1 Controlling Voice

- “I try to behave as normal as possible, and I try to control my voice and do my best” (P. 15)
- “Change the way you speak in a conflict” (P. 4)
- “I always know if I have a certain student in front of me, I need to change my tone, because not everyone is like you, and some students need more structure and clear answers” (P. 14)

2.3.2 Adjusting Tone/ Volume/ Timbre/ Speed

- “Sound of voice, sound pitch, and timbre” (P. 1)
- “Their speed of voice, are they talking very fast, are they speaking more carefully, weighing their words like, am I saying something wrong or not?” (P. 7)
- “I would lower my voice or tone and try to think a bit about how to formulate the feedback and try to make it constructive” (P. 15)
- “I try to keep my tone very neutral” (P. 12)
- “You can hear from the tone, the height of the tone, the volume, you can hear things, indicating I'm feeling uncomfortable” (P. 12)

3. Context of EI Manifestation

3.1 Professional Environment

3.1.1 Meetings/ Discussions/Negotiation

- “In all my meetings, I also tell them what I'm experiencing, just tell it, because I really hate it when there's a big elephant in the room.” (P. 11)
- “I used to work in supply chain, and we had a very big argument between my then supervisor and a logistics company” (P. 4)
- “I see this is our problem, but let's try to focus on how we can find a solution” (P. 4)
- “So, conflict, for example, or any type of situation where heightened emotions are in play” (P. 4)
- “At some point during a discussion I just said, let's agree to disagree since we didn't reach a common sense.” (P.5)
- “Just as there is active listening, there is also active negotiation.” (P. 1)

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- “I can understand that you need this, this, and this. But we can only deliver it this way.” (P. 1)

3.1.2 Giving Feedback

- “This is pretty harsh, it does not have to be that harsh if you use some other words, it could be better.” (P. 16)
- “Afterwards they came like, that was very good that you came back to that same point before the whole situation got out of control.” (P6)

3.1.3 Leader demonstrating care & concern for employees

- “What he does really good is, he always checks in with me. Like, how are you doing? What is on your to-do list for this week?” (P. 5)
- “There is something that we call the agile way of working, and one positive aspect about that is that you have daily intake moments with your team where you see where everyone is at? What is your situation like? Can I help you with anything? Furthermore, I think those are behaviors that include checking in, listening, and being on top of what is happening. Those are behaviors of a positive leader” (P. 4)

3.1.4 Study advisor meetings

- “Then we hear that they have different expectations, and we ask, were you able to talk it out with each other?” (P6)
- “Let us take a walk” (P.11)
- “Okay, you know, you are lashing out at everyone, but what is going on? Because I see in you someone or something is hurting you, and it is not the teacher.” (P.11)

3.2 Personal Environment

3.2.1 Discussions between People, Partners, Parents, and Children

- “What I sometimes do with my kids is that I say, ok, now its 10 Minutes quiet. If we all took a deep breath, we can talk again.” (P.8)
- “I need to be alone for maybe 30 minutes now” (P. 2)
- “Okay, then we'll take a 30-minute break” (P. 2)
- “Are you frustrated that I did this and that?” (P.2)
- “I had many fights with my mom, one time I just went upstairs, because we were shouting at each other” (P. 13)

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- “After a few hours I went downstairs and asked, why did you do...?” (P. 13)

3.2.2 *Conversations with Friends and Family*

- “In my personal life, it can be sometimes difficult to take a step back, because you are so emotionally attached to it” (P. 6)
- “Yeah, those heated arguments with your parents are always, for example, a thing where afterward I noticed, I let my emotions guide, instead of thinking, what they saying to me and reacting based on that” (P. 4)
- “Being emotionally intelligent or having a high level of emotional intelligence, I think really helps you in a workplace, but also in relationships with friends or family.” (P. 9)
- “When you are friends. You know that we-and-I culture. You build a relationship, you become friends. So, you never criticize the other person. You say, I know you can do better. I'm sure you can do it. You're very good at it, and I've known you for a while. So, you build emotional bonds and get people to do what they should do.” (P. 14)

Appendix C: Data Structure

