



# “EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE – IS IT JUST ABOUT BEING NICE?”

A Qualitative Study on the Perceptions of Emotional Intelligence Amongst Leaders in a Multinational Organisational Context

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Essay/Thesis:	30 hp
Program:	Master's Programme in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations
Level:	Second Cycle
Semester/year:	St 2022
Supervisor:	Thomas Jordan
Examiner:	Jing Wu

# Abstract

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Report No: xx (not to be filled in by the student/students)

Keyword: Emotional intelligence (EI), EQ, understanding, leadership, Daniel Goleman, mental models

**Purpose:** Emotional intelligence (EI) is a popular, highly used concept in organisations worldwide, which has not yet found a unified, central meaning, therefore creating communication errors. This study investigates the understandings and mental models of EI among high positioned leaders in an MNC whose daily tasks involve managing relationships.

**Theory:** Three models stand out in the literature on EI: the emotional intelligence performance model by Daniel Goleman, Bar-On's emotional intelligence competencies model and the emotional intelligence ability model by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, who are the "creators" of emotional intelligence theory. The theory of mental models is used to construct the understandings.

**Method:** A qualitative, exploratory single unit case study with the purpose of exploring the understanding and construction of a phenomenon (EI). The study is based on in-depth semi-structured open-ended interviews with 17 participants, in a high-level leadership position, with relevant leadership experience in an MNC. Participants had international work experience.

**Result:** The study revealed that the understandings differed, mostly between interpersonal or intrapersonal competencies, as the basis of these understandings were seen as related to personal experiences. It was firmly stated that EI is an essential key skill in the leaders' position. Most of the participants agreed that the development of EI depends on inherent prerequisites. EI was mainly understood as a set of different competencies. The understandings of the leaders were partly related to Goleman's theory. Self-awareness was identified as the component of EI that found the highest relevance regarding the vice president level of leadership.

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who supported and helped us in writing this thesis, from our partners and family members to fellow students.

Notably, we would like to express our gratitude to the case company and our contact person, who made this study possible, supported us with guidance and helped us get in contact with the interviewees. We also want to thank our supervisor Thomas Jordan for the support and feedback he has given us during the project.

Last but not least, we would like to thank all of the interviewees for contributing with their time and sharing their knowledge and experiences with us. Thank you for making this thesis possible.

Gothenburg, May 10, 2022

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# 1 Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) has become a fashionable term in the business world, especially when it comes to leadership. According to Northouse (2010, p.35), leadership is “a process in achieving a common goal which starts from an individual who influences a group of individuals in doing so”. Leadership management is a growing part of the research literature and has high importance in nowadays businesses, where the focus is on developing adequate leadership styles and skills. But, when talking about different leadership styles and their improvement, emotional intelligence is often mentioned as a critical key skill, ability, competency, or even mixture.

There is a lot of debate and turmoil around the concept of emotional intelligence in the scientific world. When looking for the definition of EI, it becomes pretty clear early on that it is an area full of confusion without a clear solution. Various methods and models indicate similar yet different definitions on a different basis. Therefore, it is difficult to find the shared “central meaning” of emotional intelligence and whether it is developable or non-developable (Mayer et al., 2008), which could be used in the organisational context. For example, it is found that EI is often formulated as just “being nice” (Goleman, 2009), while by the theorists, it is much more (Goleman 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 2004; Bar-On, 1997).

Regardless, the concept(s) of emotional intelligence have found wide acceptance amongst the working professionals and leaders in organisations and are actively intertwined into the strategies of companies (World Economic Forum, 2016). For example, influential CEOs like Jeff Bezos, Richard Branson and Elon Musk have been consecutively named as highly emotionally intelligent leaders with their behaviour and strategies for communicating with the workforce analysed in detail (Parr, 2020). Prominent leader, spokesperson, and CEO Oprah Winfrey has said that the reason why she has been so successful in her life and career, compared to people who have a lot

higher IQ than her, is thanks to her high EQ (Winfrey, 2020). To confirm these claims, there is a large amount of literature indicating a strong correlation between successful leadership and EI, as, for example, self-awareness, emotional management, empathy and improved social skills act as a facilitator in interpersonal relationships (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Dulewicz & Higgs, 2005; Goleman, 1995; Prati et al., 2003; Sosik & Megerian, 1999).

According to some theories, emotional intelligence has a link to certain qualities of individuals, as well as previous literature supports that those qualities can be taught and developed (Goleman, 1998). Provided that EI is a developable skill, then from the leader's perspective, mastering emotionally intelligent leader's skills could help the leader organise one's team's communication and work better, avoid misunderstandings, and avoid conflicts through increased understanding (Walumbwa et al., 2008). To do so, it is of utmost necessity to start from the beginning - critically analyse the leaders' stance on it and investigate where the understandings of emotional intelligence stem from (Western, 2008), especially as leadership practices and acceptable manners vary across cultures. This raises a question about how this concept is used in real life and the consequences of EI's perceptions on cross-cultural environments such as multinational companies (MNC).

For that, there is a need to ascertain the perceptions and understandings about the concept of emotional intelligence amongst professionals and explore if those perceptions are coherent between and with what the theorists intended. Suppose professionals have certain prior beliefs about the construct of a concept, which are paradoxical to how researchers and proponents have meant it to be understood. In that case, it can significantly hinder the ability to develop new knowledge in the field (Wandersee et al., 1994). Therefore, understanding the leaders' prior beliefs, attitudes and understanding of the construct of emotional intelligence in the given moment is of great importance, as those beliefs might become a barrier to new knowledge. Identifying the leaders'

understanding of emotional intelligence is the first step towards strategically building a possible development plan and moving towards more emotionally intelligent leadership styles in the future (Western, 2008). Moreover, it is interesting to investigate if and why EI is important in the leaders' specific roles and contexts and to explore which aspects within the concept of EI they see of most value.

The main focus of this work is on the leaders in the technology industry as they are in positions with high responsibility, which in turn puts them in a constantly stressful situation, where they need to fulfil the needs and requirements of their subordinates and the organisation (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011).

## **1.1 Objective & Research Question**

In this study, we aim to investigate the mental model and interpretation of the concept of emotional intelligence among leadership positions and hopefully provide some clarity about the concept in the research field of emotional intelligence. The purpose of the study will be twofold. Firstly, to identify the understandings about the construct of emotional intelligence amongst leaders in the organisation and see if these are shared. Secondly, to figure out which aspects of emotional intelligence are relevant and important to the leaders in their particular leadership position and why? Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

1. How do leaders understand emotional intelligence?
2. Which aspects of emotional intelligence do leaders perceive as important in their position and why?

In this work, we will make use of the three most popular and acclaimed models of Emotional Intelligence by the Encyclopaedia of Applied Psychology (Spielberger, 2004): Daniel Goleman (1995), Bar-On (1997) and Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2004).

## **2 Literature review**

This section consists of the explanation of why we chose to write about EI and a brief introduction to the history of the concept. This section also includes an overview of previous research and literature on EI and leadership.

### **2.1 Why Emotional Intelligence?**

Why did we choose to investigate emotional intelligence in soft skills in leadership? Compared to other concepts, EI has been a term in leadership literature that has had a lot of spotlight and usage. It has been named in prestigious interviews and discussed in the most prominent business magazines like Forbes (Neale, 2020) or The INC (Levin, 2017).

Moreover, it has been mentioned to be of very high importance in creating the strategies of worldwide companies. Other terms are found to be not as widely spread, while EI is something that almost every leader has heard something about in some context and followingly has created some kind of an understanding for oneself using one's life experiences, social learning and previous literature. As there is confusion about what exactly EI is in the research literature, the understandings of the term might drastically differ. Therefore, as such importance has been placed on EI, as some great leaders have identified that EI is essential in leadership (Winfrey, 2020), the leaders' understandings need to be investigated first to know that everyone shares a common ground.

### **2.2 History of Emotional Intelligence**

The phenomenon of emotional intelligence was, in all probability, initially identified without a name by Aristotle, as he stated that anyone could be angry. Still, figuring out the right amount of anger, to whom the anger is pointed, and at what time it is appropriate would be a challenge (Goleman, 1995). Throughout the history of humankind, the idea

regarding the connection of emotions and cognition has been influenced by numerous cultural ideas, movements, and theories in different contexts. Those ideas range from one extreme to the other, from the ancient Greek concept of the reason being superior to emotions to the Romantic and Sentimentalists movements, which emphasised pure emotional knowledge and expressions, to the 1960s political turmoil where the balance of emotions and thoughts were ideal (Mayer et al., 2000; Solomon, 2000). Within psychology and philosophy, ideas regarding rationality, importance and relevance of emotions and cognition have been debated thoroughly (Bower, 1981; Leeper, 1948; Nussbaum, 2001).

Intelligence is far from being a new topic within the scientific community. Still, emotional intelligence (referred to as EI) is relatively new, and in a historical context, the research does not date very far back, only a few decades. Salovey and Mayer created the concept of EI in the 1990s (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Since then, there have been many scientific (and non-scientific) articles on the topic published (Cherniss, 2010a). But, where does the origin of EI stem from, and what is all this “buzz” about?

### **2.3 Does traditional intelligence cover the whole spectrum of intelligence?**

In the early stages of research within intelligence, E.L. Thorndike proposed the model of “social intelligence”, published in an article in *The Harper’s Magazine* in 1920 (Thorndike, 1920). This concept included factors that traditional “intelligence” did not cover, such as the elements of behaviour and cognitive thinking. Thorndike’s definition of the concept of social intelligence was that it is the ability to encompass the internal states, motives and behaviours of oneself and others, as well as how one acts towards those, based on the information provided from those abilities (Mayer & Salovey, 1993: Thorndike, 1920). Following the publication, his model did not get much consideration.

Scientific research and articles written on the topic were scarce in the next decades, with only ten published articles until 1937 (Matthews et al. 2002; Thorndike, 1920; Thorndike & Stein 1937). Of those publications, one study attempted to measure social intelligence, which was approximately 15 years in the making and finally not a success (Thorndike & Stein, 1937). The concept of social intelligence was mainly ignored or declined in the following years from Thorndike's proposed model. Almost none of the publications within applied psychology referred to social intelligence for years. The concept of social intelligence was one of the first times mentioned in 1942 (Burt, 1942). He illustrated that the concept had not been developed enough and was yet in experimental stages (Burt, 1942). Psychologists criticised that social intelligence as a concept did not add value to the field and was therefore redundant, leading theoreticians to decline to incorporate it into their work. A few authors supported the construct in the first decades, but it was mainly rejected (Landy, 2005; Matthews et al., 2002).

## **2.4 Emotional intelligence introduced**

In 1966, the first known application of the term “emotional intelligence” was referred to when the term was applied vaguely in literary criticism and psychiatry (Leuner, 1966). In the late 1970s, the ideas of the normative relationship between emotions and thoughts grew amongst theorists and researchers (Bower, 1981) and identified certain aspects of intelligence as interacting with emotions. Interrelation between emotion and cognition increased in interest amongst psychologists, and studies reflected that (Cacioppo, 2002). These studies explored, for example, the ability to regulate one's emotions (Isen et al., 1978), the ability to express emotions (Taylor et al., 1985) and the ability to understand emotions (Mayer, 1986). In 1986 the term “emotional intelligence” was applied more extensively than ever before in Wayne Leon Payne's dissertation (1986). The term was first scientifically published in 1990 when Salovey and Mayer developed a theory on the concept of “emotional intelligence” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Daniel Goleman

popularised the idea of emotional intelligence in leadership amongst the public when his book *Emotional Intelligence* was published (Goleman, 1995), and along came the exponential media attention.

When the interest in emotional intelligence sprung out in the 1990s, scientists and researchers were influenced as well, which led to a swift expansion of scientific articles, theories and models on the concept (Cherniss, 2010a; Roberts et al., 2010). This fast popularisation led to various dissimilar models and research traditions on the topic. However, that caused substantial confusion amongst practitioners, researchers, scientists, and students regarding the concept and how one should approach it (Roberts et al., 2010).

This confusion amongst the scientific community and public about EI may not be surprising, as it is relatively new, and researchers have only studied it for about three decades. Meanwhile, for example, traditional intelligence has been on the maps and researched for over a hundred years. Scientists have still not reached a total consensus on the concept and its measurements (Cherniss, 2010b). EI has come a long way in the last thirty years, departing from having a few articles and one book about the topic and moving into today's active field of promising research. Therefore, it is not surprising that various fields and contexts have a different understanding of EI.

## **2.5 The Obscure Concept of Emotional Intelligence**

In regards to the multiple definitions and research traditions of EI that stem from other researchers, the description which is most often referred to (Cherniss, 2011a) is “the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others” (Mayer et al., 2000, p.396). EI is studied in various fields and contexts, including, but not limited to education, amongst individuals, personal relationships, organisations and workplaces. With those multiple approaches, researchers have put different focus and meanings into

the understanding of EI (Mayer et al., 2008). As Cote and Miners (2006) identified, these misunderstandings of the concept of EI could stem from overlapping the meaning and constructs of different types of intelligence, mainly from traditional intelligence.

Amongst research studies based in education, the primary understanding of EI is either a set of behavioural and motivation skills or abilities which promote students coping mechanisms, stress management and social skills (Qualter et al., 2012; Saklofske et al., 2011). These are skills that play a specific role in students' academic success, enhance well-being and personal growth (Abe, 2011; Ahmad, 2011; Berenson et al., 2008; Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Kingston, 2008; Por et al., 2011; Qualter et al., 2012; Saklofske et al., 2011).

In research studies based on EI amongst individuals and personal relationships, the main focus of understanding the concept is an ability based on perception, understanding, usage, and management of emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). From this point of view, the interpretation of EI is, for example, being able to solve problems and good decision-making by using thoughts, emotions, and logic (Mayer et al., 2000).

Within organisations and workplaces, the reasoning for the importance of EI mainly stems from certain behaviours that affect job performance and enhance organisational effectiveness and job satisfaction (Makkar & Basu, 2017). A strong connection has been found between job performance and EI, as qualities of EI include the ability to communicate and manage relationships effectively (Cote & Miners, 2006; Sabie et al., 2020; Webb, 2009). Factors commonly studied concerning EI in organisational and workplace settings explore the relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness, job satisfaction, job performance, organisational commitment, and work attitudes (Adeymo, 2007; Carmeli, 2003; Makkar & Basu, 2017).

Emotional intelligence has also been seen as an umbrella term that includes many intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities, competencies and skills (Emery, 2020). Those

abilities, competencies and skills are also included in other terms that have been referred to as EI or are closely connected to it, terms such as but not limited to EQ (emotional quotient), social intelligence, emotion regulation, emotion management, and emotional labour. EQ is an assessment tool for measuring EI, stemming from Bar-On (1997). Social intelligence is often referred to as “street smart”, originated from Thorndike (1920) and developed by Gardner (1983; 1993) as one of many types of intelligences. The phenomenon (social intelligence) describes the ability to understand others and manage relationships (Gardner, 1983; 1993). Emotion regulation involves the influence over existence, experience and expression of emotions. Emotions are distinct from thought and behaviour and an essential part of behaviour and its outcome. How one regulates one’s emotions has also been correlated with emotional labour (Mikolajczak et al., 2009), a rising research area in sociology (Humphrey, 2012).

## **2.6 Emotional Labour and EI**

Research studies have found a relationship between emotional labour and EI (Brotheridge, 2006; Scherer et al., 2020), even though EI as a factor in emotional labour has mainly been ignored in the studies related to emotional labour (Bono & Vey, 2005). Emotional labour is the effort to regulate one’s own emotions with the emotions required by the position and role in their work. To display the right emotions which are appropriate when performing one’s job, both evoking and suppressing one’s feelings are included (Hochschild, 1983). The sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) claimed that it negatively affects the person when one performs the external regulation of emotions. Other research studies have indicated that it does not have to have adverse effects, but the main concern is how one regulates their emotions internally. Therefore, it is essential to keep in mind that all individuals do not perceive their emotions the same way, and their internal emotional regulation differs (Bono & Vey, 2005; Scherer et al., 2020).

Amongst research on emotional labour, two primary forms have been found, surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting is when one fakes the required emotions and does not attempt to feel the emotions displayed. Deep acting is when one modifies their own emotions to align with the required emotions and makes an effort to feel and express the emotions required (Brotheridge, 2006; Lu et al., 2019). Studies have found that when displaying surface acting, one experiences emotional exhaustion, but with deep acting, one experiences accomplishment (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). Correlation has been found in a research study between employees with high emotional intelligence and deep acting. They indicate that individuals with higher EI are more prone to displaying deep acting at work and more likely to experience the demands of showing their own emotions as an integrated part of their work (Brotheridge, 2006; Scherer et al., 2020).

As such, it is necessary to consider various individual factors that might influence emotional regulation levels in workers. The role of emotional intelligence and other individual difference variables in performing emotional labour has generally been ignored (Bono & Vey, 2005). On the contrary, as emotional labour is portrayed around the regulation of emotions, which has been found to be one of the components of EI, individuals with high EI are able to use their emotional capabilities as the primary resources when performing emotional labour (Bono & Vey, 2005; Wen et al., 2019).

Within leadership literature, research studies support that emotional labour is of as high use in leadership roles as much as it is for service workers and sales workers (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Leaders use emotional labour to manage their own emotions on the job, as well as it is a tool to manage their followers' emotional states, attitudes and performance (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Humphrey, 2012).

## **2.7 Emotional Intelligence and leadership**

According to many findings, a strong relationship has been found between EI and effective leadership practices and behaviours (Martinez, 2020; Barbuto & Burbach, 2006; Gardner & Stough, 2002). High EI in a leader and the team members correlates with increased team productivity (Martinez, 2020). For leaders to motivate their subordinates, they need to understand and manage their own feelings and their associates (Humphrey, Pollack & Hawver, 2008). In relation to that, high EI in leaders correlates to the quality of understanding others' feelings and therefore building trust. They have also been found to have a particular capability to understand the information in uncertain settings and deliver a solution that is to subordinates' satisfaction (George, 2000). In addition, both the organisations and leadership practices have had a positive influence from high EI (Anand & Udasuriyan, 2010). When IQ and personality traits, such as the big five (John et al., 1991), have been controlled for, there is a significant relationship between EI and roles which include emotional labour work, such as leadership (Joseph & Newman, 2010).

There are various arguments around if EI is a developable quality or if it is a pure personality trait and, therefore, not changeable. Although even if EI were to be the latter, researchers such as Goleman (1995), Cooper (1997), and Martinez (1997, 2020) have illustrated that EI, as a personality trait or a set of competencies, can at least be expanded or broadened. Specific processes and methods have been established through developing EI (Harrison, 1997; Martinez, 1997, 2020).

Certain leadership styles have been identified to correlate to the qualities of EI, and transformational leadership comes first. The way they correlate is that this particular leadership style includes components that are also qualities of EI, according to most theories, in one or another way. Those components of transformational leadership are influence, intellectual stimulation, motivation, and inspiration from leader to

subordinates (Bass & Avolio, 1997). This leadership style has also been linked with organisational commitment and lower levels of job stress (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Podsakoff et al., 1996), to which EI has likewise been correlated (Adeymo, 2007; Goleman, 1995; Makkar & Basu, 2017).

### **3 Theoretical framework**

To start from the beginning, in this chapter of the study, firstly, we will introduce the theory of understanding by David Chart (2000) and the mental models theory (Craik, 1943; Johnson-Laird, 1983) to get an overview on how people understand, as a mental process, and comprehend with new and old information, which is essential in researching how people understand the concept of EI.

Then, we will provide information on how the theories on EI have been divided into two main groups, differing on the unit of analysis: the ability models and the mixed-method models.

From there, we will introduce the most frequently mentioned and applied theories of emotional intelligence identified in the previous literature (Faltas, 2017; Spielberger, 2004). There are three models which stand out from the “sea” of literature: the emotional intelligence performance model by Daniel Goleman, Bar-On’s emotional intelligence competencies model and the emotional intelligence ability model by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso. The chapter will finish with selecting a theory for this study and the reasoning for the selection.

#### **3.1 The learning and understanding of a construct & mental models**

How the human mind operates and learns is a wonder that has been an exciting field of research for decades (Craik, 1943; Johnson-Laird, 1983), with, for example, one of the most famous work from Albert Bandura with Social Learning Theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1977). Multiple theories have been developed in different research fields, from metaphysics to sociology, to understand a person's mind - which raises a question: how do we understand?

In trying to understand how people understand the complex concept of EI, we briefly introduce the theory of understanding and the concept of mental models.

In the psychological and philosophical literature (the ability of), „understanding“ has been described by David Chart (2000) as a psychological process in which we are able to acknowledge an abstracts' or a physical objects' (example: a concept or a computer) "behaviour" under a range of circumstances, while acquiring and actively using the knowledge of which parts of the object are essential in which contexts. In relation to this work - explain which parts of EI are important in which contexts. In other words, one understands an object when one has the knowledge of how it will behave in different contexts and how to, in turn, act upon it. Chart (2000) then argues that individuals comprehend existing and new knowledge in mental models, which are functional, incomplete cognitive representations made of different parts of information, new and existing, thoroughly intertwined in between (Chart, 2000).

The term mental model was first developed by Kenneth Craik in 1943 (Craik, 1943) and further developed by many theorists, for example, Johnson-Laird (1983) - mental model as a reasoning mechanism; Collins and Gentner (1987) - as analogical thinking; Abel et al. (1998) - as cognitive mapping.

Overall, mental models are internal representations, a construction of a person's understandings, values, goals and life experiences. Through mental models, as simplified representations of the actual environment, an individual communicates to the environment around them, with these models providing a sieve for filtering and storing new information. Through the lens of mental models, everyone perceives the world in their own unique way, and the knowledge one develops stems from different kinds of experiences (Chart, 2000; Johnson-Laird, 1983).

As mental models are dynamic and change over time, researchers have roughly described them according to knowledge content and organisation - the lay (or student) and expert

mental models, with the former more drawn from the concrete facts while the latter as more abstract (Jones et al., 2011). In applying the mental model construct to understanding a complex concept, one decomposes the concept into simplified components and sub-components and develops an understanding of the relationships between and in different contexts (Jones et al., 2011; Moray, 2004).

The mental model framework of the ability of understanding and comprehending with information from the external reality has been accepted by many researchers, and this way of thinking is actively used, for example, in human-computer interaction but also in education and organisational studies (Gentner & Stevens, 1983; Revell & Stanton, 2012).

As mentioned before, these cognitive constructions' information is based on the information from one's life experiences. But where does this information come from? Constructivism claims that people learn through activities; moreover, for example, social learning theory argues that people learn from other people's behaviour.

Especially, as there is confusion in the literature and no clarity, one creates its own mental model of the concept needed through experiences, which affect how the complex concept is being understood.

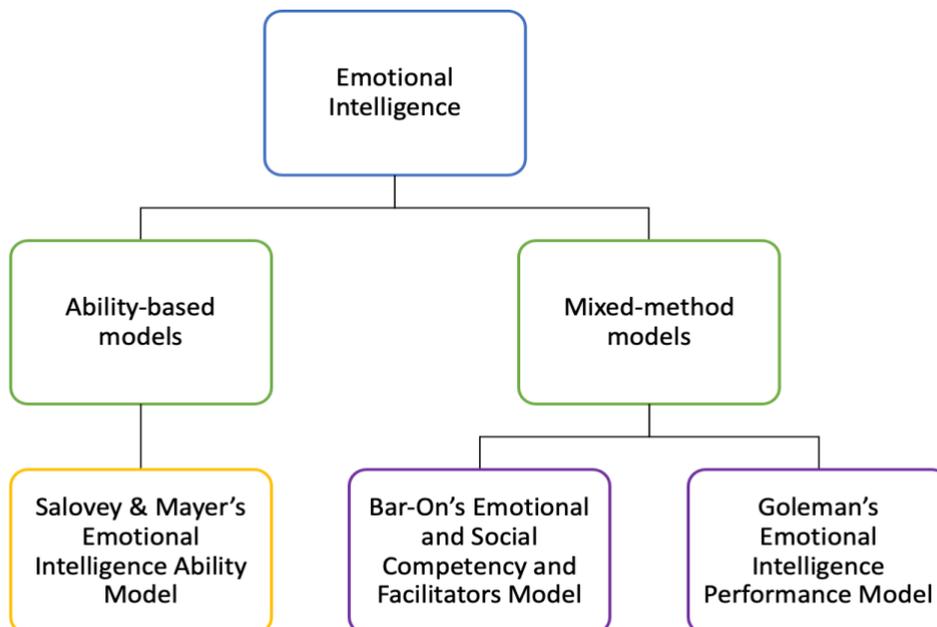
We argue that every leader has a slightly different, personal understanding of emotional intelligence, stemming from their life experiences etc., aka through mental models. We say that the abstract construction of an individual about EI is most relevant to the part of theory it is paralleling, which is an accepted way of "seeing the world" for those individuals through their mental models. Moreover, these views impact the way one empathises with different parts of behaviour and, therefore, also different components of EI, as they might search and focus for information relevant to them.

### 3.2 Models of Emotional Intelligence

It has been stated that there is possibly no construct within the social sciences, which has created more controversy than EI (Spector & Johnsson, 2006). Some of these models of EI have been found to have higher reliability, correlation and validity within the scientific community, as some are more popular amongst the public and/or professionals in the field, and others have been observed to have lower correlation and validity, and are not of the same popularity (Cherniss, 2010a; Roberts et al., 2010). In terms of the construction of EI in today's science, most constructs of EI models fall into one of the two main streams, ability-based models or mixed-method models. Another differentiation between those models of EI within these mentioned categories is how they are measured (which is where the mixed-method models get their name, as the methods to measure the EIs' levels are mixed). Measurements of EI levels are mainly self-reported or assessed through emotional intelligence tests developed by scientists (Cherniss, 2010a; Roberts et al., 2010). Among the numerous EI theories, the three theories that dominate the field and have more public visibility (Spielberger, 2004) will be introduced and analysed in this work, with the stream to where they belong.

**Figure 1**

*Overview of Theoretical Formulations of EI*



### 3.3 The Stream of Ability Models of Emotional Intelligence

The ability model of EI is positioned in the personality domain, claiming that emotional intelligence is a mental ability, as intelligence overall is considered as one, for example, verbal-comprehension intelligence. According to Mayer et al. (2008, p.510), mental ability is “*a person’s capacity to perform a psychological task, such as solving a problem, so as to meet a specified criterion such as correctness, novelty, or speed.*”. Therefore the ability model describes EI as any other ability: “*Emotional intelligence concerns the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought.*” (Mayer et al., 2008, p. 511). More specifically, the ability model can be divided into the specific-ability models, which focuses on a particular part of the mental capability concerning EI or the integrative model, which sees EI as a more cohesive ability (Mayer et al., 2008). As abilities are seen over time as relatively stable traits, so is EI, which in turn implies that according to the ability model, EI is not a genuinely developable competency, although measurable.

#### 3.3.1.1 Salovey and Mayer’s Emotional Intelligence ability model

Emotional Intelligence was first named by Salovey & Mayer as “The subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990 p.185). The model differentiates four “mental” abilities, developing from the early stages of life: (a) perceiving emotions and evaluating emotions accurately (b) using emotions to facilitate thought; (c) understanding emotions and; (d) managing emotions to enhance the advancement of intellectual growth (Allen et al., 2012; Caruso, 2003; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). According to their studies, the ability of EI was found to be relatively stable, but the information that EI works on - the emotional knowledge, is something that could be easily taught. This implies that according to the theory of Salovey & Mayer, the ability of EI is, in fact, not, or only slightly, developable. In order to be able to measure EI, they have developed the MSCEIT

test, comprising of an array of scales used as an assessing tool. The test consists of eight tasks in each domain that are afterwards assessed by the professional. According to the previous literature, the MSCEIT test has been found to be one of the most highly accepted amongst professionals, with its high validity index compared to the other scales on the market (Mayer et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2010). The test has been a popular tool to measure an individual's EI, supported by various studies (Brackett et al., 2011; Cherry et al., 2013; Daus & Ashkanasy, 2005; Legree et al., 2005; MacCann & Roberts, 2008). But, due to its difficulties in the assessment process, it has not been found to be suitable in an organisational context, where the mixed-method, self-reported tests tend to fit better (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Cherniss, 2010a; Mayer et al., 2008).

### **3.4 The stream of Mixed-Method Models of Emotional Intelligence**

The mixed-method stream of emotional intelligence is described as a blend of social and emotional skills which are interrelated - meaning that it consists of various components, for example, personality traits, characteristics and individual capabilities (Allen et al., 2012). Those skills and competencies were developed and identified by Bar-On (1988, 2006) and Goleman (1995) from Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, published in 1983. According to Gardner, these two intelligences are interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1983). The mixed model stream of emotional intelligence was further developed based on Gardner's original definition of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Those skills are a combination of certain competencies and factors that then facilitate and determine (a) the way how one understands and can express themselves, (b) how one can understand and relate to others, and (c) how well one handles social and emotional demands daily (Bar-On, 2006; Goleman, 1995; Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Under the stream of mixed-methods, certain scientists in the field have the highest public visibility and acceptance, both within the scientific community and the public. Those scientists are Daniel Goleman and Reuven Bar-On (Cherniss, 2010a; Van Rooy et al., 2005).

#### *3.4.1.1 Bar-On's ESI Competency and Facilitators Model*

In his work, Bar-On finds it more accurate to refer to emotional intelligence (EI) as emotional and social intelligence (ESI) as these two are interrelated. His model of ESI is also a mixed model, which describes EI as an array of interlinked competencies, skills and facilitators stemming from emotional and social intelligence, strongly impacting the performance and actions of individuals, whereas he finds these competencies both teachable and learnable resulting in increased emotionally and socially intelligent behaviour (Bar-On, 2006).

His work was driven by his interest in social and emotional demands. It overviews the effects of intelligence in the given areas and emphasises the importance of emotional expression. The development of ESI has been greatly influenced by the previous work of Bar-On's Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), which was the first, one of a kind psychological measure to assess emotional intelligence and has found wide usage since the 1990s.

The EQ-i (Bar-On, 1997) consisted of 15 factors that were, over time and multiple factor-analysis later developed into a five scale, ten factor, five facilitator model of ESI (Bar-on, 2006). The five different scales of ESI are intrapersonal skills; interpersonal skills; adaptability; general mood, and stress management (Bar-On, 1997; 2006), which all together describe multiple interrelated competencies, skills and facilitators that affect the ESI of a person.

### 3.4.1.2 Goleman's EI Performance Model

The most popular theory of emotional intelligence stems from the work of Daniel Goleman (1998; 2001; 2009), which was developed in the leadership research area in the organisational context. He explained the concept as an ability to understand one's own and others' feelings and emotions and to regulate them in different situations. Goleman's model of emotional intelligence is a mixed-method model (Allen et al., 2012; Goleman, 1995). His model was inspired by Salovey and Meyer's publications of the ability model of EI and was developed simultaneously with the Bar-On's model of EQ. Goleman developed the EI performance model in 1995, where he divided emotional intelligence into five domains (a) knowing your emotions; (b) managing your own emotions; (c) recognising and understanding the emotions of others; (d) motivating yourself; and (e) managing relationships through managing the emotions of others (Goleman, 1995). Later on, in 1998 (Goleman) in his book "*Working with Emotional Intelligence*", he refined his model of emotional intelligence from 1995 and modified those five domains into a four-core competencies model, which is comprised of components of (a) self-awareness; (b) self-management; (c) social awareness; and (d) relationship management.

Those four core competencies were then divided into 19 core competencies (Goleman, 1998). The first component, "self-awareness", includes the core competencies of (a) emotional awareness, (b) accurate self-assessment, and (c) self-confidence. The second component "self-management" includes the core-competencies of (a) emotional self-control; (b) transparency; (c) adaptability; (d) achievement; (e) initiative; and (f) optimism. The third component, "social awareness", includes the core competencies (a) empathy; (b) organisational and political awareness; and (c) service. The fourth and last component "relationship-management" includes the core-competencies (a) inspirational leadership; (b) influence; (c) developing others; (d) change catalyst; (e) conflict management; (f) building bonds; and (g) collaboration and teamwork (Goleman, 1998).

Goleman developed many of his 19 core competencies based on Bar-On's (1997; 2006) research, where Bar-On identified and described even more core competencies.

### **3.5 One Model Does Not Fit All**

These three models discussed above all have their strengths and weaknesses. None of these models is “the best” for every situation when assessing, measuring and developing emotional intelligence. The ability model of EI by Salovey & Mayer (Mayer et al., 1999) and the assessment test MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2003) have been found to have the highest correlation with the core competencies of EI as an ability and form of intelligence (Mayer et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2010). But at the same time, it has not been found to be of high relevance for organisational context. Reasons for that are as research has found that when looked through the lens of EI as ability, it is hard to develop and that it is relatively stable (Cherniss, 2010a; Mayer et al., 2004). Both of the mixed-models discussed have been found to have little correlation within EI as a form of intelligence, but they have been found to have a higher correlation with the Big Five personality traits and other personality tests (Conte & Dean, 2006; Grubb & McDaniel, 2007; Saklofske et al., 2003; Schutte et al., 1998). That makes the scientific community wonder to what extent the mixed-models and the tests related to them measure what is unique from personality and personality tests (Rooy et al., 2005). But as Salovey & Mayer's model is assessed through a test measured in a consensus fashion, and Goleman's and Bar-On's models are assessed through self-report measurement, it is hard to compare them as they are not designed similarly. For those differences in design, measurement, and more, these three models are not appropriate for all situations. There is no “best-fit” model of emotional intelligence for now. Emotional intelligence can be very situational and the “why” is of importance when it comes to the reasoning for selecting the measurement of emotional intelligence. It will not be taken away from those models, though, that they describe

emotional intelligence well in their own way, but the question is, what are they really measuring.

Nevertheless, Cherniss et al. (2006) report a considerable overlap of the models in terms of getting a primary explanation to EI about all of the models agreeing on having two broad components, “the awareness and management of ones’ (intrapersonal) own and the awareness and management of others’ (interpersonal) emotions” (Cherniss, 2006, p.240).

To be noted, this study’s focus is on the overall understanding of EI but not on measuring EI. Therefore, the problematic area surrounding the measurement of EI is not central to this study but of importance to elaborate on. Nevertheless, to research the understandings of leaders, a framework of EI is needed to explain their understandings. As the three theories overlap in some ways, i.e. inter & intra (Cherniss, 2006) and have strongly influenced each other's development, it is wise to choose one in studying and explaining the leaders' understandings.

As Salovey and Mayers work has been found not to be suitable in the organisational context, the choice will remain between Goleman and Bar-On’s. As Goleman's theory has been seen as the best for organisational matters and is found widely accepted in the business world, especially when it comes to leadership and training, one could assume that working leaders are also most familiar with Golemans’ work. Moreover, Goleman's theory is built on the abilities of a leader. (Goleman, 1998). Therefore, in the making of the interview guide and in the process of analysing the results, Goleman's framework is used to explain the understandings of the leaders and detect the differences. The revised and gathered version of Goleman's components and competencies are presented in Figure 2, which is a combination of the competencies in his theories throughout the years, to have the broadest explanation capacity (Goleman, 1998; 2009).

**Figure 2**

*Revisited Version of Goleman's Components and Competencies of EI*

	<b>Awareness</b>	<b>Management</b>
<b>Self (Intrapersonal)</b>	SA: Emotional awareness	SM: Transparency
	SA: Self-confidence	SM: Emotional self-control
	SA: recognizing how your behaviour impacts others	SM: Adaptability
	SA: how others influence ones emotional state	SM: Achievement orientation (value driven)
	SA: accurate self-assessment	SM: Positive outlook
<b>Social (Interpersonal)</b>	SOA: Empathy	RM: Inspirational leadership
	SOA: Organizational awareness	RM: Influence
	SOA: Service	RM: Developing others
		RM: Change catalyst
		RM: Conflict management
		RM: Building bonds
		RM: Teamwork and collaboration
		RM: communication

*Note. Both of Goleman's models of EI, from 1995 and 1998, are merged together into this revisited version*

## **4 Methodology**

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. It includes the research design, sampling strategy and analytical strategy, amongst justification of chosen method and strategy. Additionally, trustworthiness, limitations and ethical considerations will be discussed.

### **4.1 Research design**

The research approach in this study is qualitative research. We seek to explore and interpret the understandings and experiences of high-positioned working professionals in a multicultural organisational environment who influence others (Creswell, 2013; Greener, 2011). Denzin and Lincoln have phrased it: “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

### **4.2 Case study**

Case studies are relevant when exploring an in-depth description of a particular phenomenon. According to Yin (2018), three conditions should be met when conducting a case study; “(1) The main research questions are “how” or “why” questions; (2) a researcher has little or no control of behavioural events; and (3) the focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon” (Yin, 2018, p.2). As the study aims to reveal an in-depth understanding of the construct of EI, “how” one understands the construct of EI, which is a contemporary phenomenon, and we as researchers have no control over the people’s understanding, it meets the requirements to be a case study (Yin, 2018). Other qualitative research designs, such as narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography, are irrelevant to this study. Narrative research looks into storytelling and individuals’ life

history. Phenomenology is relevant when searching for a shared meaning of a lived experience (such as grief). Grounded theory is relevant when a specific process or action is to be studied, and ethnography is best suited when the aim is to find shared patterns of a certain culture or group (Creswell, 2013). As this study aims to explore the understandings of a certain group of people of a particular construct, none of those research designs are fit.

Furthermore, this is an exploratory single unit case study, as the purpose of this study is to explore the understanding and construct of a phenomenon of the leaders in one organisation (Yin, 2018). The rationale is that this study would be revelatory to describe and analyse how the concept of EI is actually being understood, moreover, to understand its usage in a given context. Therefore, the unit of analysis is leaders' understandings of EI in a multinational organisation (Yin, 2018).

### **4.3 Sampling strategy**

To conduct the study, the sample size included 17 experienced leaders from the international technology organisation, who were chosen cross-department, in a selection, based on a purposeful sampling strategy, which allows us to have an in-depth understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2013; Rapley, 2014). To note, authors gained access to the company through a contact persona in the organisation, and the selection of participants was made by the same contact persona, as one had more information about the participants' knowledge and experience. The participants needed to have at least two years of leadership experience. As this research is based on the perceptions and interpretation of different leaders in the technology industry, semi-structured in-depth interviews with the individuals were conducted. According to Yin (2018), to reach sample saturation, 20 interviews are the approximate number for reaching sample saturation. In this study, 20 interviews were organised, from which 17 of them were conducted, as the researchers agreed on having reached sample saturation.

The average age of the participants was 46, ranging from 30-40 to 60-70, with a gender distribution of 11 males and six females. All participants currently have or have had international working experience, with physically being abroad or had a culturally different background to Swedish (5 participants). All participants had a minimum of 5+ years of leadership experience. The years of leadership experiences of participants differed from 5+ to 20+ years.

**Table 1**

*Overview of Participants in the Study*

Participants	Gender	Nationality (Swedish/other)	Did research about EI prior to the interview?
RE01	Female	Swedish	No
RE02	Female	Swedish	No
RE03	Male	Other	No
RE04	Male	Swedish	No
RE05	Male	Swedish	No
RE06	Male	Other	No
RE07	Male	Other	No
RE08	Female	Swedish	No
RE09	Female	Swedish	No
RE10	Male	Swedish	No
RE11	Male	Other	Yes
RE12	Male	Swedish	Yes
RE13	Male	Other	Yes
RE14	Male	Swedish	No
RE15	Male	Swedish	No
RE16	Female	Swedish	Yes
RE17	Female	Swedish	No

## **4.4 Data Collection**

To access the data and the study participants, the contact who is the head of leadership in the organisation provided us with individuals in leadership positions. A pilot interview was conducted as Yin (2018) recommends. The pilot interview confirmed that the interview guide (see Appendix 1) was appropriate for our study, with open-ended questions that focused on EI's whole phenomenon. Therefore, the pilot interview was considered in one of the 17 interviews conducted. The interview guide consisted of 7 parts, including questions about the background, leadership experience, construction of EI and development questions. The interview guide was developed according to the theories, especially considering the uniform part of the awareness and management of self and others (Cherniss et al., 2006).

The interviews took place in February and March 2022. They were conducted through video meetings, in the communication application Teams, due to the participants' restricted availability and convenience. The interviews were aimed at 45 minutes of length and were recorded for analysing purposes. After the interviews were conducted, they were promptly transcribed, and in this process, the participants were given a code to provide complete confidentiality of the participant. Demographic data (age and gender) was collected to compare if there were differences between the understandings based on gender or age.

## **4.5 Data analysis**

Stemming back to the central research question of how the leaders in an MNC understand EI, the interview guide was developed accordingly, to explore the understandings of the leaders in-depth, descending from the broad question of how EI is being understood to mentally taking it into separate parts and questioning about the sub-components.

Moreover, information from the questions about their background and leadership experience were added to the analysis. For detailed information, see Appendix 1.

Firstly, in the “free description” part of the interview guide, the leaders' initial descriptions of EI were analysed to provide information about their knowledge and understanding of EI and to identify their subliminal (subconscious attitudes) of emotional intelligence in leadership practices or alternative conceptions.

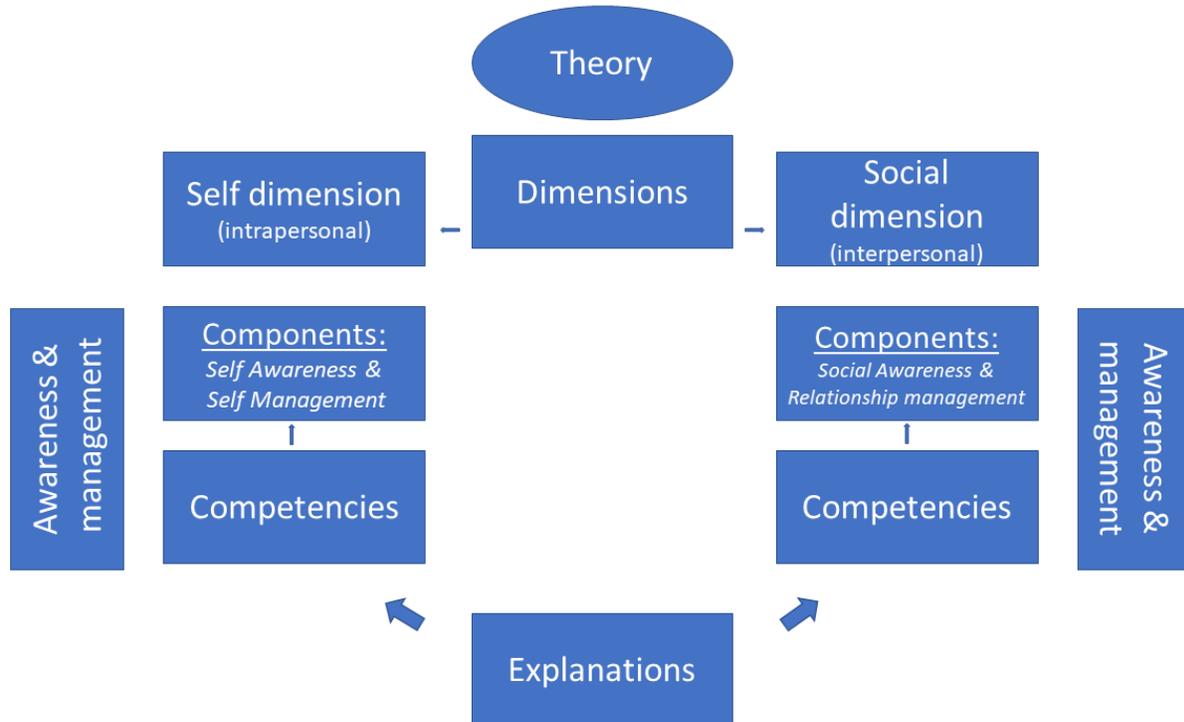
Secondly, the leaders' descriptions of the components of EI, as of relevance to the components, were analysed. For that, the interviews were transcribed. Initial codes were used to comprehend and clarify the enormous amount of data logically. These initial codes allowed for deductive coding and clustering of the initial codes according to the pre-set focused codes, and the density and repetition of the competencies within the descriptions were measured. Therefore, a combination of inductive and deductive coding was used with the descriptions of EI as they were clustered according to the theory to provide a better overview of the competencies mentioned.

Therefore, according to coding categories, thematic analysis was used in consecutive steps to draw conclusions from the data from where the key themes were identified (Schreier, 2014). The key themes allowed the categorisation of the varied understandings. The competencies repeatedly mentioned were identified and clustered in decreasing order. This also allowed us to see how EI's interpretations were compared to the theories on EI supported in the previous literature and to identify the contradictions between ideals and reality and the differences in views.

Perspectives of the participants on how the interview went in their opinion were taken into account as Hesse-Biber & Levy (2011) emphasise the importance of clarity of the interview and the overall comfort of the participant.

**Figure 3**

*Reader's Guide Through the Analysis and Results (for further explanation of the competencies, see Figure 2)*



## 4.6 Trustworthiness and limitations

In terms of trustworthiness, four components were thought of: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bryman, 2016). To begin with, both researchers were present during all interviews. As mentioned before, a pilot interview was conducted to ensure that the questions were appropriate. The interview guide (see Appendix 1) allowed us to collect the data similarly for each interview. Both researchers recorded all interviews to ensure that recordings were clear, and data was transcribed accurately. Finally, quotes are presented in the results and analysis. Those factors all play a part in heightening the credibility of the study. The sample is a good representation of the leaders in the company, for example, in terms of gender and age, and the study can be generalised

to other companies in the sector, which supports the transferability of the study. Transparency and comprehensive information provided by interviewees, as the semi-structured in-depth interviews allow for, ensured dependability of the study. Data was analysed thoroughly, starting with three to five levels of coding, where treatment of data was of importance. Researchers were also aware of the impact they could have on the process and analysis, and consciously strived to be objective, which promotes conformability (Bryman, 2016). The confidentiality of participants and the organisation was of high importance. The case company where the study was conducted is a large multinational company with many diverse teams, and most of the leaders are highly experienced. Alternatives would be to perform the research on a more extensive basis, for example, cross-sector and with a larger sample size.

Regarding limitations, the sample size is relatively small and from one organisation, given that generalising the findings could be hard on a broader level than sector-wide. As the sample was chosen from a purposeful sample strategy, risks could be a misrepresentation or a bad sample. Other limitations lie within the researcher's interpretation and analysis of the content.

Due to the hectic schedule of the participants interviewed, conducting the interviews using the Teams function can be seen as a limitation, as face-to-face interviews provide more non-verbal information. Also, the participant's activities on the day of the interview might have made it more difficult to "switch in" to the topic on EI. Also, questions about previous information gathering ("googling") about the concept of EI before the interview were asked from the participants to take the influence of the information found in accordance with the answers provided. The language barrier of the participants was taken into account in all the steps, from interviews to transcribing and analysing the interviews. As the language barrier can affect how one describes an understanding, we are aware of the influences on the results. To avoid misunderstandings, the researchers consecutively mirrored the descriptions of the understandings that the participants gave.

## **4.7 Ethical Considerations**

Considering the ethical perspective, Creswell (2013) addresses ethical issues in qualitative studies and ways to prevent them, which were used as a guide. Before the interviews, all participants gave informed consent about their participation and recorded the meeting. The interview guide was created with the consideration of the participants' well-being. If they did not feel comfortable answering specific questions or discussing certain topics, they did not have to answer those questions and/or topics. Also, participants were notified about their right to withdraw from the study at any point in the occurrence of inconveniences, as of full confidentiality regarding both participants and the organisation. To ensure the participants' comfort, those terms were also revisited at the beginning of the interviews, before the recording started, as to what would be done with the collected material. All recordings, transcripts and material will be erased when the study is finished. Finally, participants were thanked for their participation at the end of the interview and notified that they were welcome to contact us if they had any concerns or follow-up questions.

# 5 Empirical Findings

In this chapter, the empirical findings from the research are presented. The findings are based on the interviews and the analysis of them. For support, direct quotes were of use. In accordance with and due to confidentiality, all interviewees have a code (see Table 1). The results are presented in two parts. First, the results of interviewees' "free description" understandings of EI are presented. Then, the interviewees' understandings of the four components of EI (see Figure 4) and their relevance (see Table 8) in the interviewees' positions are presented. Other results relevant to the study are presented at the end of the chapter.

## 5.1 Emotional Intelligence descriptions

As previous literature indicates and all three theories seem to agree, there are two sides to emotional intelligence - personal and social. Overall, the interviewees' answers were mainly divided into two, where EI was seen more as a social- or a self-competence (inter or intrapersonal). The interviewees' answers were interpreted and divided according to the theory of Goleman into self-centred and social dimensions, which in turn were divided into two parts of awareness and management. Significantly, the most mentioned and empathised component of EI in the "free description" part of the study was Social Awareness (SOA) with 81 mentions, which competencies altogether were mentioned more than twice as much as the second most mentioned component of Self-Management (SM) with 38 mentions, followed by Relationship Management (RM) with 36 mentions and lastly Self-Awareness with 33 mentions. The average mention of competence of EI was approximately 11 per person. In the analysis process, three themes of understanding emerged: social and aware focused, social and managing focused, and self-centred and aware focused, which will be discussed later.

**Table 2**

*Interviewees Understandings of EI According to Components & Competencies of EI, Based on Figure 2.*

<b>Participant Nr. (RE)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Mention sum</b>	
<b>Self Awareness</b>		2	1	1	1	1		1	10	1	4	1	8			2		33	11 participants	
SA: Emotional awareness		x									x		x							
SA: Self-confidence										x										
SA: recognizing how your behaviour impacts others		x		x		x		x	x		x	x	x							
SA: how others influence ones emotional state					x															
SA: accurate self-assessment			x								x				x	x				
<b>Self Management</b>			1	4	1		6		1	3	5	4	4	2	1	3		35	13 participants	
SM: Transparency														x						
SM: Emotional self-control				x			x				x	x	x	x	x	x				
SM: Adaptability			x	x	x		x							x						
SM: Achievement orientation (value driven)				x			x			x	x					x				
SM: Positive outlook							x				x									
<b>Social Awareness</b>		2	4	4	8	6	4	10	5	12	6	5	5	1	1	3	2	3	81	17 participants
SOA: Empathy		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x				x	x			
SOA: Organizational awareness		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x			
SOA: Service										x										
<b>Relationship management</b>		8			5	1			3	3	1		6		4		1	4	36	10 participants
RM: Inspirational leadership													x			x				
RM: Influence				x											x		x			
RM: Developing others																		x		
RM: Change catalyst													x							
RM: Conflict management		x																		
RM: Building bonds		x			x									x						
RM: Teamwork and collaboration		x			x			x						x		x			x	
RM: communication		x				x		x	x	x										
<b>Social / Personal (focus)</b>		s	s	s	s	s	s	s	s	s	p	s	p	s	s	p	s			
<b>Aware / Managing (style)</b>		m	a	a	m	a	a	a	a	a	a	m	a	m	a	m/a	m			

Followingly, examples of quotes from the interviewees which characterise the results in the “free-descriptions” of EI are presented:

“I mean, for me, emotionally intelligent people are people who think beyond a task and achievement and think more about the implications of decisions, the implications of those decisions on others” (RE07).

“It's about understanding the human nature behind things, understanding why we act in a certain way and, and perhaps be able to walk a mile in other people's shoes” (RE02).

“EI is about getting to know people and therefore making faster decisions” (RE10).

“I think it's probably my awareness and ability to identify my own emotions and really having almost stepping outside of myself and realising how I felt then. And how I felt when I had a reaction to that and having an understanding of the emotions that are going on in my head around the various situations, that's part one of it for me. The second part of it is then, um, knowing how to deal with them, have to handle them and how to best use them and control them and, um, have ownership of them” (RE13).

“In a leadership situation, it's actually to get the people you need, to want to do what you want them to do, if you understand how to make it, but actually motivate them enough. So they see the same as you see, and they want to do it” (RE14).

“EI is like if you come into a room, you can understand. Um, not exactly how people are feeling, but how the atmosphere is in the room. How..., if people during a dialogue feel that they are trusted, if you can kind of measure from your gut feeling the psychological safety... you will then also try to bring out the best in people and to make them feel safe” (RE17).

#### *5.1.1.1 Self-awareness*

Self-awareness and/or its five competencies were mentioned as a part of EI altogether 33 times by 11 interviewees out of 17. The most mentioned competence of self-awareness was “Recognizing how your behaviour influences others” with eight mentions (RE2, RE4, RE6, RE8, RE9, RE11, RE12 and RE13). The second most mentioned competence was “Accurate self-assessment” with four mentions, then “emotional awareness” with three mentions and “how others influence one’s emotional state”, and “Self-confidence” with one mention.

#### *5.1.1.2 Self-management*

Self-management and/or its competencies were mentioned as a part of EI altogether 35 times by 13 interviewees out of 17. The competence that was talked about the most was “Emotional self-control”, which had mentions by eight interviewees (RE4, RE7, RE11, RE12, RE13, RE14, RE15, RE16), with “Adaptability” and “Achievement orientation” followed by five mentions, then “Positive outlook” with two and “Transparency” with one mention.

#### *5.1.1.3 Social awareness*

Social awareness (SOA) and/or its competencies were mentioned as a part of EI altogether 81 times by all the participating interviewees. The competence of “Empathy” was mentioned by 13 interviewees, whereas “Organisational awareness” was mentioned by 16 and “Service” by one. These results made Social Awareness by far the most mentioned competence of EI.

#### *5.1.1.4 Relationship management*

Relationship management (RM) and/or its competencies were mentioned as a part of EI altogether 36 times by ten interviewees out of 17. “Teamwork and collaboration” was mentioned by six interviewees, which made it the most mentioned competence, after that

“Communication” with mentions by five interviewees, “Building bonds” and “Influence” by three, “Inspirational leadership by two and “Developing others”, “Change catalyst” and “Conflict management” by one interviewee.

## 5.2 Is EI developable?

Regarding the developability of EI, four interviewees out of 17 found that EI is a fully developable quality, whereas only one found it not developable. One interviewee did not answer. The rest, ten interviewees said it to be developable with prerequisites, meaning that one needs to have the traits or genetic prerequisites to be highly EI. In another case, one can only develop to a certain level. Four interviewees counted EI mainly as a trait, three counted it primarily as an ability, one purely as a skillset and nine people as a mix of the latter ones.

**Table 3**

*Developability and Origin of EI*

Developable:	RE2, RE4, RE10, RE12, RE3	Trait	RE7, RE15, RE13, RE12
Not develop:	RE15	Ability	RE9, RE16, RE2
Developable with prerequisites:	RE5, RE6, RE7, RE8, RE9, RE11, RE13, RE14, RE16, RE17	Skillset	RE4
No answer	RE1	Mix	RE1, RE3, RE5, RE6, RE8, RE10, RE11, RE14, RE17

In regards to how the interviewees saw how EI could be/is developed, three main themes were mentioned:

1. Development by experience with age & intuition - through experiencing various situations and people (13x).
2. Development by learning & reflecting - learning from others, learning about the concepts, participating in training programmes and reflecting on oneself (9x).

3. Development by performance management - through thorough, quality feedback from others, development plans, and assessments (8x).

All interviewees identified EI to be of importance in their role, and in six interviews (RE5, RE8, RE10, RE12, RE13, RE17), interviewees claimed EI to be a key skill in their position. One interviewee thought of EI as a superpower.

“It depends on how I can work with it, but I tend to kind of think it's a superpower” (RE1).

“I say that EI is one of my key skills to be able to do a lot with people” (RE10).

15 out of 17 interviewees stated that EI is not being communicated in the company, and three interviewees stated that it is spoken about to some degree, although it is not labelled as EI. All interviewees except one said that they would appreciate the company contributing more to EI and soft skills.

“I think it would definitely, definitely help, and I'd see it. I mean, it is very closely connected to leadership and good leadership in my mind. Um, so it would definitely make sense to have that as well as part of training and so on” (RE5).

“Yeah. But then again, if all familiarisation doesn't understand it (EI). And you can't do it in a broad sense. It has to be in small teams, maybe one to one or three or four people discuss this. It's because EI is not even accepted by some people. For some people, they think, why do you even bring it up” (RE15).

“Ironically, we've got a lot of leadership competencies that we're meant to be using, and we should be using, and emotional intelligence is not one of them that we are using, actually” (RE7).

“I think it could be helpful, but it's one of these things where I'm not sure explaining the concept is going to help very much. I think that you'd have to do

it through training, for example, and more hands-on practical training and exercises and things like that” (RE4).

### 5.3 Origin of understanding

When asked about the origin of the understandings that the leaders hold about EI, five main themes emerged in the analysis process. Followingly presented in decreasing order from the most mentioned: Personality (values & personal background) (9x), Learning from others (experiences) (5x), Interest in people (4x), Social media (1x), Educational platform (1x).

### 5.4 Components of EI

Interviewees were asked to explain their understanding of each component of EI (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management). Results of understandings and importances are described under each respective chapter below. The answers were then clustered into themes based on Goleman’s theories (Goleman 1995; 1998) and fit into the revisited model, as illustrated in Figure 2. Interviewees’ main understandings of the four components of EI are summarised in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Interviewees’ Most Common Understandings (cross interviews) of the Four Components of EI, Based on Figure 2.*

<p><b>Self-awareness</b>            Emotional awareness            Accurate self-assessment            Recognize how own behaviour impacts others</p>	<p><b>Self-management</b>            Emotional self-control            Achievement orientation            Adaptability</p>
<p><b>Social awareness</b>            Organizational awareness            Empathy</p>	<p><b>Relationship management</b>            Building relations            Teamwork and collaboration</p>

Interviewees were also asked about the most relevant components in their position and why they thought so. The answers were then clustered into groups to find patterns in the answers and if interviewees thought the same components were of relevance or maybe of no relevance.

### **5.4.1 Self-awareness**

According to the theory, the component of Self-awareness includes *emotional awareness, self-confidence, recognising how your behaviour impacts others, how others influence one's emotional state and accurate self-assessment* (Goleman, 1995; 1998).

Three main themes were identified amongst the interviewees' descriptions of self-awareness (see Table 4). The first theme, *emotional awareness*, was identified in all 17 interviews (constructed from the sub-themes of *emotional awareness, reflecting on self, and understand own behaviour and reactions*). The second theme is *accurate self-assessment*, identified in 12 interviews (constructed from the sub-themes *accurate self-assessment, aware of own strength, aware of own weaknesses, and aware of own limitations*). The third theme is *recognising how your behaviour impacts others*, identified in 12 interviews (constructed from the sub-themes *understand how one is perceived by others, and recognise how your behaviour impacts others*). Four smaller themes were also found, *curiosity* (3), *adaptability* (3), *self-control* (2), and *empathy* (2).

The themes *how others influence one's emotional state* and *self-confidence* were not identified amongst interviewees.

In terms of the total understanding of self-awareness, five interviewees had a common understanding, comprising of *emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and recognising how your behaviour impacts others*, which were found to be described together in eight interviews (RE4, RE7, RE9, RE14, RE17). In three interviews, *emotional awareness* and *recognising how your behaviour impacts others* were described

as a total understanding of self-awareness (RE3, RE6, RE9). *Emotional awareness* and *accurate self-assessment* were described as a total understanding of self-awareness in two interviews (RE3, RE6).

**Table 4**

*Interviewees' Understandings of Competencies of Self-Awareness*

Self-awareness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total	
Emotional Awareness	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	12
Accurate self-assessment	■	■		■	■		■		■	■	■	■		■		■	■	■	12
Recognizing how your behaviour impacts others	■		■	■		■	■	■	■		■	■		■	■		■	■	11
Curiosity	■							■								■			3
Adaptability					■							■				■			3
Self-control					■						■								2
Empathy					■						■								2

### 5.4.2 Self-management

Five main themes were identified amongst interviewees' descriptions of self-management (See Table 5). The first theme is *emotional self-control*, identified in 13 interviews (constructed from the sub-themes *emotion control* and *behaviour control*). The second theme is *adaptability*, identified in nine interviews (constructed from the sub-themes *adapting* and *improving and learning from experience*). The third theme is *achievement orientation*, identified in eight interviews (constructed from the sub-themes *deliver expectations*, *self-care*, and *prioritise and discipline*). The fourth theme is *transparency*, identified in four interviews (constructed from the sub-themes *address issues*, *act on things*, and *honesty*). The fifth theme is *positive outlook*, identified in four interviews. Other descriptions with two smaller themes were identified, *empathy* (1) and *curiosity* (2).

**Table 5**

*Interviewees' Understandings of Competencies of Self-Management*

Self management	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
Emotional self-control				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	13
Adaptability	■		■	■	■			■				■	■			■	■	9
Achievement orientation	■	■			■				■	■		■				■	■	8
Transparency	■		■	■			■											4
Positive outlook	■		■		■			■					■					4
Empathy													■					1
Curiosity	■												■					2

In terms of total understanding of self-management, the unified common understanding was not identified. However, specific themes were commonly identified amongst interviewees.

In two interviews, self-management was described as *emotional self-control*, *adaptability*, and *achievement orientation* (RE12, RE16).

Two interviewees only described self-management as *emotional self-control* (RE6, RE17).

Three of the most identified themes, *emotional self-control*, *adaptability*, and *achievement orientation*, also appeared the most often together as part of the interviewees' description of self-management. Still, those were not the total understandings of self-management but part of the understandings. *Emotional self-control* and *adaptability* appeared together as part of self-management in six interviews (RE4, RE5, RE8, RE1, RE13, RE16). *Adaptability* and *achievement orientation* were found together as a part of the description of self-management in five interviews (RE1,

RE5, RE12, RE15, RE16). *Emotional self-control* and *achievement orientation* were only found together in interviews where *adaptability* was also found (RE5, RE12, RE13).

All those who identified *positive outlook* as part of self-management also mentioned *adaptability* as part of self-management.

Amongst those who identified the smaller themes, *curiosity* (RE1, RE13) and *empathy* (RE13), the only similarity found was that those who mentioned *curiosity* as part of self-management also identified *adaptability*.

### **5.4.3 Social awareness**

Looking into how interviewees described social awareness, three main themes were identified across the interviews and named: organisational awareness, *empathy*, and *service orientation*. The first and largest theme, *organisational awareness*, was identified in 16 interviews (See Table 6), consisting of the sub-themes, *aware of culture and rules*, and *read situations*. Of those sub-themes, *understanding social dynamics and rules* were most often mentioned in total (20 times) of the sub-themes. The second theme, *empathy*, was identified in 11 interviews, and the third theme, *service orientation*, was identified in five interviews. One smaller theme was identified, *adapt*, which was found in two interviews.

The most common total description of social awareness was *empathy* and *organisational awareness*, identified in eight interviews (RE3, RE4, RE7, RE11, RE12, RE13, RE14 and RE17). Only one interviewee described social awareness as altogether consisting of all the three main themes of *empathy*, *organisational awareness*, and *service orientation* (RE5).

*Adapt* was identified in two interviews as part of a description of social awareness (RE1, RE16), and in both of them, social awareness was described in the same way as *organisational awareness*, *service orientation*, and *adapt*.

**Table 6**

*Interviewees' Understandings of Competencies of Social Awareness*

Social awareness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
organisational awareness	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	16
empathy		■	■	■	■		■			■	■	■	■	■			■	11
service orientation	■	■			■			■								■		5
adapt	■															■		2

Interviewees' description of social awareness can also be divided into two groups. One group of nine interviewees where they describe social awareness from a personal perspective (RE1, RE6, RE7, RE10, RE13, RE14, RE15, RE16 and RE17). Then another group of seven interviewees describe social awareness from both personal and societal perspectives (RE2, RE3, RE4, RE5, RE8, RE9, RE11 and RE12). The interviewees who only identified social awareness from a personal perspective, they only talked about competencies related to self and people around them but did not mention any competencies related to social and political issues.

**5.4.4 Relationship management**

According to the theory, the component of relationship management includes *inspirational leadership, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, teamwork and collaboration, and communication* (Goleman, 1995; 1998).

Five recurring themes within relationship management were found in the interviews (See Table 7). Those were *building bonds* (15), *teamwork and collaboration* (9), *conflict management* (4), *communication* (3) and *developing others* (2). One interviewee did not give input to this component. Therefore, a total of sixteen interviews are included in these

results. The themes of *building bonds* and *teamwork, and collaboration* had a few sub-themes under each, as they were the largest themes identified. *Conflict management* also consists of sub-themes.

According to the theory (Goleman, 1995; 1998), three of the themes included in relationship management were missing from the interviewees. Themes of *change catalyst*, *inspirational leadership* and *influence* were not identified in any of the interviews.

Under the theme *building bonds* were sub-themes such as *needs lot of investment*, *foster personal relationships*, and *build long-term relationships*. The theme of *teamwork and collaboration* consists of sub-themes such as *collaboration* and *find the right people to work with*. Under the theme of *conflict management* were sub-themes such as *feedback* and *psychological safety*.

The theme of *building bonds* was most often mentioned across interviews, in all except for two (RE10 and RE17). *Teamwork and collaboration* was mentioned in nine interviews (RE1, RE2, RE3, RE4, RE5, RE6, RE8, RE9 and RE17). Altogether, these two themes were mentioned together in eight interviews (RE1, RE2, RE3, RE4, RE5, RE6, RE8 and RE9), but in seven of those, these two themes were a total understanding of relationship management (not RE3).

Other compatible themes were *conflict management* and *building bonds*, which were mentioned together as part of the component understanding in three interviews (RE3, RE11 and RE15).

**Table 7**

*Interviewees' Understandings of Competencies of Relationship Management*

Relationship management	1	2	3	4	5	6	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Building bonds	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		■	■	■	■	■	■		15
Teamwork and collaboration	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■								■	9
Conflict management			■							■				■		■	4
Communication					■				■						■		3
Developing others										■					■		2

### 5.5 Relevance of components

Interviewees were asked to rank the significance of each of the four components (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management) according to their level of position and identify two of the most relevant components.

Overall, according to interviewees, the most relevant component in their level of position was self-awareness, identified as the most important of the four components by seven interviewees (See Table 8). When interviewees were asked to identify two of the most relevant components for their level of position, self-awareness was identified as one of the two most relevant components in sixteen out of seventeen interviews (not by RE7).

“Self-awareness is absolutely key” (RE11).

“You need them all (the components) in a way. I think that everything starts, I think, with self-awareness, that you are understanding how and who you are, what makes you tick and how you act in different situations” (RE14).

“Self-awareness is the basis for other components” (RE5).

“I would actually say that self-awareness is the most important one, that is the base of all the other ones” (RE17).

**Table 8**

*Interviewees' Most Relevant Components According to Position*

Most relevant components	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	Total
Self-awareness	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow		Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	16
Relationship management						Magenta					Magenta	8						
Social awareness		Green	Green	Green			Green							Green	Green			6
Self-management	Cyan												Cyan				Cyan	3

Self-management was identified by three interviewees (RE1, RE2 and RE17) as one of most relevant components. In all three cases where self-management was identified as one of the two most relevant components, it was in combination with self-awareness. Relationship management was identified by eight interviewees (RE6, RE7, RE8, RE9, RE10, RE11, RE12 and RE16) as one of the most relevant components. Social awareness was identified by six interviewees (RE2, RE3, RE4, RE7, RE14 and RE15) as one of the most relevant components.

“I would probably say that in my role, it will be the most important one would be the social awareness one, because that's the one I connect with empathy the most, and understanding the people. At least from my perspective, I'm not in this position for myself. I'm in this position to help other people” (RE2).

Self-awareness and self-management together were identified by four interviewees (RE13, RE17, RE1 and RE5) as the most relevant components for interviewees' positions.

“I would say it starts with yourself. You know, you have to have that awareness and open-mindedness in yourself and that's where it starts for, from, for me. And then that way you can start then to lookout. So I would say self-awareness, and self-management, is crucial” (RE13).

Self-awareness and social awareness together were ranked as the most relevant components in the interviewees' level of position by five interviewees (RE2, RE3, RE4, RE14 and RE15). Where social awareness was identified as one of the two most relevant components, five out of six times, it was in combination with self-awareness.

A combination of relationship management and self-awareness together was identified in seven interviews (RE6, RE8, RE9, RE10, RE11, RE12 and RE16) as the most relevant components for interviewees' level of position. One interviewee identified a combination of social awareness and relationship management as the most important components (RE7).

A combination of components which were not identified in any interviews as of most relevant components were self-management and relationship management, as well as self-management and social awareness.

### ***5.5.1 Mix across the understanding of components***

There were a few instances in interviewees' understandings, and descriptions of the components where some competencies described did not fit under the themes found with the majority of interviewees. These descriptions of what competencies are included in a particular component are contrary to what the majority of the interviewees described as competencies of the component, which can create confusion.

The competency “Adapt” was described as part of self-awareness by three interviewees (RE5, RE12 and RE14), which had been identified as a theme in the component of self-management. Those same interviewees had also recognised self-awareness as one of the

two most relevant components of EI in their level of position, but none of them identified self-management as one of the most relevant components.

“It's really having really good self-awareness means that you see how you react in the situation...and actually take a counteraction or adjust that in the moment” (RE7).

“Adapt” was also described by two interviewees (RE1 and RE16) as a part of the component social awareness, but neither of them identified social awareness as most relevant component. As mentioned, “adapt” had been identified as a theme of self-management.

“Social awareness is adapting to situations” (RE1).

“Social awareness is how you can handle things in a social environment” (RE16).

The theme “self control” was described as part of self-awareness by two interviewees (RE5 and RE11), which had been identified as a theme in the component of self-management. Both of those interviewees had identified self-awareness as most relevant component for level of position. “Empathy was described as part of self-awareness by the same interviewees (RE5 and RE11), RE2 also described “empathy” as part of self-management, but “empathy” had been identified as a theme in the component of social awareness.

“I think you need empathy for self-awareness” (RE11).

According to RE5, their understanding of relationship management included competencies such as “understand others”, which had been identified as a competency of social awareness, and “understand yourself”, which had been identified as a competency of self-awareness.

“It's (relationship management) about understanding yourself and understanding the other party” (RE5).

The understanding of RE5 of self-awareness included as well “act according to own ethics” and “act according to own belief”, which had been identified as a competency of self-management.

## **5.6 Change and Development**

Almost all of the interviewees stated a need for greater emphasis on soft skill development and organisation support (one interviewee did not). A few interviewees expressed that one should not become a leader just because they want to or for their own sake. Instead, those leaders are there for others, and that you, as a leader, earn the respect of others who decide to follow.

“Don't become a leader because you want to become a leader. Become a leader because people decide to follow you... The people do not follow the person, they follow the goal or the vision the leader has set out to achieve” (RE5).

In terms of leadership, five themes were identified amongst interviewees regarding change or improvement in the organisation. These were trust: empowerment of teams; hierarchical control; communication and; people-centric. Moreover, three interviewees stated that they would like more and better communication within the organisation. Three interviewees stated that they would like to see less hierarchical control, and nine interviewees stated that they would like to see more people-centric leadership in the organisation.

“To really believe would help to modernise ways of working is much more focused on people and leadership of how people develop and progress. Rather than almost what we have in our organisation is an almost complete focus on the

end result that we, that we obsess over the result. I really believe that if you focus on, developing people, on their ways of working and empowering people and leading people in the right direction, the results will be better anyway, or the end, the end outcome will be better anyway. I think that it's much more sustainable to focus on leading people rather than being the boss of a task or a project” (RE3).

Four interviewees stated that they would like to see an increased trust towards the teams. Seven interviewees stated that they would like to see an increase in empowerment.

“I would like to have more trust, transparency and dialogue, and less follow-up ... I'm totally convinced that when you have more of that and you have teams that feel that they are trusted, they will perform a thousand times better than they are chased and so on...” (RE15).

## 6 Discussion

In this chapter, analysis and discussion of the gathered data are presented, with the research questions as a base to answer the aims of this study. Due to the confidentiality of interviewees, all have been given a code (see Table 1). The analysis of the content was conducted independently in two parts. First, in the “free description”, where the interviewees explained EI in their own words, the understanding of EI was analysed. Then the understanding and relevance of the four components, where the interviewees were provided with the names of the four components (see Figure 2). The chapter starts with the general understanding of EI, which was analysed through cross-interviews. The development, communication and changes are identified as well. Afterwards, the three different profiles of understandings of EI are discussed. Finally, the relevance of components, amongst other interesting findings, is discussed. During the discussion, an attempt is made to answer the research questions from the data, findings and analysis with the application of the theory and the help of previous research.

### 6.1 Overview & universal understanding of EI

To answer the first two research questions, “*how do leaders understand emotional intelligence?*” and “*how do leaders' understandings compare to the relevant theoretical formulation of emotional intelligence?*” from an overall point of view, the understandings of the leaders were coherent but inconsistent, meaning they had somewhat of a connection but not in any logical manners, except for one. Overall, the collective understanding of the leaders was quite complete compared to the theory, as all the components and competencies got covered in the descriptions of EI but not the complexity of the theory - the different parts (dimensions, components and competencies of it). Nevertheless, it was found that on the individual level, in the descriptions of EI, most of the leaders mainly focused on one of the components out of the four mentioned

in theory, i.e. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness or relationship management. This might have come from the fact that none of the leaders admitted to being familiar with the theory or theories and therefore were not aware of the complexity of these. Instead, they described the part most familiar and important to them in the context of their work and position. Also, it shows that there is a lack of communication around the studied topic within the company. Otherwise, we could expect the understandings to be more unified. These already show the differences in the views and justify the importance of this study.

On average, most of the interviewees identified the two dimensions of inter-and intrapersonal (self and social) to EI, covering topics related to oneself and others. Overall, the leaders described or touched upon approximately three out of four components in each interview, focusing on one of them, as mentioned above. Whereas EI was mostly explained through Social Awareness, with most of the people mainly talking about the competencies of organisational awareness and empathy as the key parts of EI. The two competencies of Social Awareness together were the only consistently mentioned competencies by all the interviewees. The second most covered component of EI was Self Management, which was mentioned 35 times, nearly half the times compared to the latter one. Nevertheless, most of the interviewees focused on Self-Management as a part of EI, with the most covered competence being emotional self-control.

To give a more evident answer to the first research question, an example of an average, universal understanding of EI has been created by the authors (the colours differentiate between the components of social awareness and self-management):

“EI is an ability connected to a trait of a person that allows one to read the room, to perceive the power relationships within and therefore to understand the groups' emotional currents (organisational awareness) by sensing and taking an active interest in peoples feelings and perspectives supporting on the personal experiences and intuition (empathy). EI also includes therefore

modifying oneself according to the information perceived from the environment after conscious/subconscious analysis of the past experiences of self and others (emotional self-control)".

#### (Social Awareness/Self-Management)

These results are in connection with Humphrey et al. (2008), who described the importance of understanding others' points of views and feelings when motivating subordinates in EI leadership. As all the leaders participating in this study also claimed to mostly spend a large part of their days coaching & motivating others, it is logical for them to focus on the Social Awareness part of EI. Moreover, Social Awareness competencies have been found to be behaviours that positively affect job performance and therefore enhance organisational effectiveness. (Makkar & Basu, 2017).

Another explanation could stem from the culture of Swedish "Lagom" leadership styles, which have been described to be all about team success, compared to the American, Asian, Arab or Eastern European models (Williams & Devine, 2005). To be team-centric, the competencies of Social Awareness are crucial, whereas one could assume different focus points from the leaders of other cultures.

In contradiction to the most common understandings of EI, when the interviewees were introduced to the components of EI, 16 out of 17 identified self-awareness as one of the most relevant components for their position, but they only identified social awareness in 6 out of 17 times as one of most relevant components.

The main descriptions of self-awareness were emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and recognising how your behaviour impacts others. The main descriptions of self-management were self-control, adaptability and achievement orientation. The main descriptions of social awareness were empathy and organisational awareness. The main description of relationship management was building bonds and teamwork, and

collaboration. These descriptions all fit under Goleman's models (1995; 1998) but do not explain the whole capacity of the components. For self-management and social awareness, all competencies of the components, according to Goleman (1995; 1998), were mentioned. In terms of self-awareness, competencies of self-confidence and how others influence one's emotional state were not mentioned. For relationship management, competencies of inspirational leadership, influence and change catalyst were not identified (Goleman, 1995; 1998).

Comparing the answers of the interviewees who had "quick check" and the ones that had not - no differences in the description of the responses were detected.

Not to be misled, these results were the average answers, meaning there were also differently focused views of EI.

The universal understanding of EI covered only a part of the leaders' understandings and was very much simplified. Therefore, it is important to focus on the three focus groups that emerged during the data analysis to have a complete overview of the understandings and the differences in between, as these differences in the point of views can create communication errors. Also, it is essential to bring out that regardless of the understanding one had, all the interviewees claimed EI to be highly important or even a "key skill" in one's position.

## **6.2 Developing EI**

When talking about the properties of EI and what is it perceived to be in connection to a person by the interviewees, as can be expected, different points of views emerged. Clearly, the most popular view on EI's attributes was that it is a mixture of a trait, ability and a skill set, where the trait of a person creates the interest (curiosity), and the ability refers to the potential of one (prerequisites), and the skillset to the skills actually learned and executed from experience (mental models). This perspective was supported by nine

interviewees out of 17, whereas five claimed it to mainly be a trait, three said it is an ability, and one purely a skill set one acquires. The differences in views couldn't be explained by age, gender or cultural background, as no reliable connections were found.

When checking if the interviewees found EI to be developable, nearly all of them found EI to be developable, but high EI can be reached only if one has particular prerequisites.

Nevertheless, development to a certain level was found possible, primarily through experience with age, which creates better intuition, but also active learning and reflecting and performance management were found to be effective.

Examples of either Aspergers, in case of no developability or professional football, in terms of high EI, were brought.

One explanation for the differences in points of views, once again, stems from the theory of mental models, where the experiences one has had and learned from the surrounding environment shape the understandings one has. That is also in accordance with the claims of getting better in EI by age - where one's mental models are just more thorough. One could assume that when one is in an environment where the competencies of EI are needed, one tends to support the view of developability, whereas when these skills are actively not required, they are mostly seen as a part of a person's personality, therefore not developable. As in leadership practises, EI is seen as highly important, the mindset on the developability might be inclined to their benefit.

But all these stances and understandings of the interviewees raised the question, where do these stem from? We claimed that according to the theory of mental models (Chart, 2000), people's understandings stem from the perceived information and different experiences, which can be accepted in this case, as most leaders stated that their point of view on EI does not stem from reading literature or training programs, as much as it stems from the experiences they have had and heard of others.

Another way of explaining the differences in the understandings and the contrast to the theories could be explained through Social Learning Theory (SLT), where the leaders have learnt socially acceptable behaviours, reactions and even emotional responses from others, where age and experience play a crucial role that was seen as the most important factor in developing EI. This would also follow the findings of Decker (1986), who describes how SLT is effectively being used in teaching leadership practises.

### **6.3 Communication and changes**

EI was identified as very important or even a key skill by many interviewees, but at the same time, the results indicated that EI is vaguely or not at all communicated in the company. Interviewees reported that they would like the company to communicate EI and other soft skills more as great importance was placed on it. Almost all of the interviewees identified the need for changes in the organisation, where soft skills were in the front seat of the change. Increased empowerment and trust, which comes hand in hand with less hierarchy and top-down control, were most mentioned as needing change. Those changes identified and the need for communicating EI within the company are in line with the findings of Martinez (2020), who found a correlation between team productivity and EI of teams and leaders. It has also been illustrated that EI can be broadened or expanded, even though it were to be a trait (Cooper, 1997; Goleman, 1996; Martinez, 2020).

### **6.4 The three types of profiles (types of mental models)**

In the analysis process, three themes of focused understandings emerged according to Goleman's theory (1995; 1998). By focused understanding, we mean the topic that is getting the most attention in an explanation, compared to the others (if they were mentioned). Within these groups, some participants also mentioned competencies belonging to other components, but the main focus of the explanation remained on the

topic they're clustered according to. Named in the order of quantity in interviewees involved: The Socially Aware focus, the Relationship management focus and the Self-aware focus.

#### ***6.4.1 The Socially Aware focus-profile***

The Socially Aware focused point of view mainly centred around the capabilities of being aware of others in a hierarchical and emotional but also personal perspective, taking into account the feelings, needs and concerns of others, which was supported by eight interviewees, which was also the most popular point of view and was in harmony with the universal stance. This included competencies like empathy and organisational awareness.

An example of the Socially Aware focused explanation would be technically the same as the universal one:

“EI is an ability connected to a trait of a person, that allows for one to “read the room”, to perceive the power relationships within and therefore to understand the groups' emotional currents (organisational awareness) by sensing and taking an active interest in peoples feelings and perspectives supporting on the personal experiences and intuition (empathy)”.

No reliable connections were found in terms of age, gender, or culture.

#### ***6.4.2 The Relationship management focus-profile***

This point of view was supported by five interviewees out of 17. The Relationship management focus concentrates primarily on the social dimension of EI, whereas the style is centred around competencies involved in Relationship Management. Therefore, the interviewees in this theme mainly focused their description of EI on the competencies that are needed to manage one's social network - from teamwork and collaboration skills,

communication, building bonds to influencing etc. This point of view is mainly focused on making other people around one act beneficially, regardless if it is mutual or not as Goleman (1998) has stated, “Inducing desirable responses in others”.

One way of exemplifying the understandings of the leaders would be (researchers' interpretation):

“EI is an ability connected to a trait of a person, that allows for one to nurture meaningful and beneficial relationships while working towards a common goal with actively listening but also tactically and effectively persuading”.

In terms of age, gender or whether the interviewees saw it as a trait, ability, skill or a mix - no reliable connections were found. To notice, all the interviewees in this group were Swedish.

### ***6.4.3 The Self-aware focus-profile***

The Self-aware perspective was the point of view of three interviewees, where they mainly focused on the capabilities of being aware of self emotionally and behaviorally in describing EI. In this, considering how others perceive one and how others influence oneself but also knowing one's “self-worth”, including strengths and limits, through any kind of reflection. Therefore, this point of view focuses on the personal dimension of EI, where one sees it primarily as something connected to oneself and, therefore to others.

One way of exemplifying the understandings of the leaders would be (researchers' interpretation):

“EI is an ability connected to a trait of a person, that allows for one to understand and observe one’s emotions and the reactions one is having, considering one's assets and limits which one is aware of with an understanding of self-worth”.

It is noteworthy that two out of three interviewees were with different cultural backgrounds, and one had a comprehensive international experience that included living abroad for a more extended time.

Nevertheless, no other differences in terms of gender or age were identified.

To sum up, in the process of analysis, three different types of themes emerged from the data. In these themes, the interviewees' focus in the description of EI was mostly either on the Social awareness, Relationship management or the Self-awareness part of EI, according to the theory from Goleman (1995; 1998), which means that with either of these profiles, the main focus of EI is different. Therefore, they're focusing on and valuing different competencies in themselves and others. For example, all leaders reported participating in the recruitment process where their perceptions of EI might drastically differ from their colleagues or even from the person in recruitment.

Moreover, in the organisational context, it is important to be aware of the differences in various activities, from communications in team-building and collaborations to the prevention of a conflict or in performance management feedback. Exploring these differences between the stakeholders' understandings helps to improve communication significantly (Abel et al., 1998). Moreover, it gives knowledge about the stance of the leaders on particular topics within and a more firm basis for the integration of perspectives company-wise when trying to improve the shared understanding of a system (Ozesmi & Ozesmi 2004). In this case, the importance and skills of EI, as soft skills are gaining popularity in the management of organisations. This is especially important to consciously work within the MNC-s, where the cultural backgrounds and the contexts of the leaders can be very different, as it has been found that the leadership styles vary culturally and therefore, as EI is connected with the leadership styles, one might focus on parts of EI, that are relevant for oneself in EI leadership, which might not be in favour with the companies views of EI leadership.

If EI is strategically focused on from the organisational point of view, a training program or an introduction seminar of the different dimensions and parts would be suggested to get a balanced and shared understanding across the company and its employees. This, for example, would create awareness about other components of EI rather than the one component that was focused on before and create an understanding of how others might focus on other components. This could enhance mutual understandings, avoid communication errors and therefore conflicts.

## **6.5 Perceived importance of competencies**

To answer the second research question, “*Which aspects of emotional intelligence do leaders perceive to be important in their particular position and why?*”, the components and competencies of EI are revisited.

As mentioned earlier, participants identified self-awareness as the single most relevant component of EI overall. Relationship management second, social awareness third, and self-management fourth and last. The reason interviewees gave why self-awareness is the most relevant component in their position was unison, that it is the base for all the other components, the building block, and that the other components cannot exist without self-awareness. This can be supported by Goleman, which has claimed in his work that “self-awareness is indispensable in leadership, allowing leaders to harness their own competencies for the greatest positive impact on others” (Goleman et al., 2017, p.35). Additionally, the findings of Humphrey et al. (2008) about emotional labour stated that leaders need to understand and manage their own feelings to be able to motivate subordinates. Therefore, it is not of surprise that interviewees identified self-awareness as the most relevant component of EI, as that is where it “all starts” and the prerequisites for the other components.

Nevertheless, the understandings which interviewees have about the components do not always fit with the theory. For Example, competencies such as *adaptability* and *self-control* were consistently mentioned as self-awareness but belonged under self-management according to the theory. Other competencies were consecutively reported as competencies of self-awareness but belong under self-management (Goleman, 1995; 1998). This case was true to all the other components as well that they were described partly as the theory states, as well as competencies were mentioned which did not belong under the right components. *Curiosity* was mentioned as a competence a few times as different components, but it does not belong under any components (Goleman, 1995; 1998).

Relating those understandings to the theory of mental models, according to Chart (2000), people have different realities, backgrounds, understandings and outlooks on life. This results in the interviewees having different mental models for understanding concepts, e.g. the total understanding of the components of EI (Chart, 2000). Therefore, it has been revealed that interviewees' understanding does not always match the theory. The components were described by interviewees' understandings, and the relevance of the components was ranked according to their pre-set beliefs of what each component meant. It is unknown which competency (theme) of the component described has the biggest value in interviewees' decision-making regarding the relevance and importance of components.

Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the identified components of interviewees are the actual components which are of most and least relevance for their position, i.e. as the competencies of self-awareness were in some cases described as what theory has stated to be competencies of self-management and social awareness. This is of importance because self-management and social awareness were mentioned the fewest times as components of relevance in interviewees' positions. This also supports the problem under

discussion in this study, that there is an ambiguity amongst people about what EI and its components actually are.

It is of value to identify that there is a difference among interviewees' understandings and perceptions of what the components of EI actually stand for. For the purposes of teaching and developing EI in an organisation (given that EI can at least be expanded (Goleman, 1998; Martinez, 2020)), understanding the concept itself is the start, as different prior beliefs about the concept of EI could be a barrier for new knowledge (Wester, 2008). The knowledge that leaders have different understandings and mental models (Chart, 2000) of EI and its components, as to how those different understandings are portrayed, can be advantageous for the organisation to manage the knowledge misconceptions perceived by the leaders (Morgan et al., 2002).

To summarise, amongst the four components of EI, self-awareness was perceived to be the most relevant one in interviewees' positions, but the understanding of those components was, in some cases, in contrast with what the theory states (Goleman, 1995; 1998), which in turn does not provide an accurate answer of relevance. This can be caused by different understandings, beliefs, realities and their mental models (Chart, 2000). Therefore, in regards to broadening interviewees' knowledge of EI - to know for sure which component interviewees think are of most relevance, their understanding and knowledge of each component needs to be accurate.

## **6.6 Interesting findings**

The results were checked in terms of age and gender, but no reliable differences in the understandings were identified in the process of analysis. This might've been because of the smaller sample size. A quantitative study with a larger sample size is suggested to check the differences.

Throughout the interviews and analysis of the data, some repetitive patterns appeared in the “free description” part of the descriptions and in the descriptions of the components that couldn't be connected to Goleman’s (1995; 1998) theory used for analysis.

Firstly, the quality of curiosity or being curious was repetitively mentioned throughout the interviews as an important part of EI, and their feelings about it did not lie, as curiosity has repeatedly been found to be a predictor - the best predictor of EI (Leonard & Harvey, 2007). Therefore, meaning in EI development, a sense of curiosity is an excellent drive for higher emotional intelligence.

Secondly, it was brought out that the EI that the participants perceived to have, was largely “fed” by their intuition stemming from their past experiences. As the theory of mental models (Chart, 2000) claims, people learn through their experiences which can be based on different backgrounds, situations etc.

Thirdly, EIs connection to traditional intelligence was briefly discussed by some participants, whereas the relationship of these was seen both ways, i.e. some claimed that the higher the IQ, the higher the EQ, but also the other way around. In his work, Goleman (1995) studied the relationship between EI and IQ and found that higher levels of IQ do not necessarily indicate higher levels of EI, whereas higher levels of EI might predict higher levels of IQ. To be critical, one needs to be aware of tests and theories used to measure EI, as it was discussed before - the tests don't always measure the same thing.

Lastly, when discussing the parts of EI, a topic connected to the “dark sides” of EI was touched upon, and a connection between high EI and manipulation was seen by the participants. According to Ngoc et al. (2020), there is a correlation between EI and emotional manipulation, which has been described as an ability to have an influence over others' feelings and behaviour for self-interested reasons, and this ability may be used for selfish reasons to “advance own agendas” (Austin et al., 2007). Therefore, people who might not seem to be “nice” and are more seen as egoistic might actually be very highly

emotionally intelligent, which is a controversial view on the “nice” people who are often seen as emotionally intelligent.

There were no connections found between the competencies mentioned in the “free description” and between the relevance of the four components mentioned, i.e. in the “free description”, social awareness was mentioned most by interviewees as the description of EI, meanwhile, in the components, self-awareness was identified as most relevant.

## **6.7 Introduction of EI into the organisation**

In nowadays companies, it is significantly harder to be successful within one’s market, moreover, especially in the field of technology where the speed of work is high and competition intense due to the constant improvement of the area and technology itself. To have that edge cutting lead, a company needs a competitive advantage. One way of having that advantage is through astute HR strategy, as the personnel is the backbone of the company (Boxall & Purcell, 2016), whereas EI within that strategy could be the competitive advantage needed, as EI of the staff has been found to be in a high correlation with the success of the company, in financial but also emotional terms (Goleman, 1998; Martinez, 2020). Moreover, in an MNC, where various people with different cultural contexts need to work together effectively - one could argue that a strategy on EI is crucial.

Nevertheless, EI is a complex term, combining various competencies, skills, and behaviours in different combinations according to various theories, which is why it is of importance to first study how EI is being perceived and understood by the working professionals within the company and see if these understandings are shared, before implementing it to the strategy of HR. This study contributes to these understandings and offers a ground for further work.

Throughout the study, we have learned that the area of EI in an organisational and in a scientific area is at least to say, confusing, and this complication has its implications on the working professionals. We have learned that the leaders are very much aware of the term EI. Moreover, all of the participants valued EI as highly important, or even a key-skill in their high-level working position, which is in a correlation with previous studies that claim EI's importance increases with the level of the position (from bottom to top) (Goleman, 1998; Humphrey et al., 2008; Martinez, 2020). Also, we have revealed that the knowledge the leaders hold about EI differs in between the leaders and when compared to the theory of Goleman, is primarily incomplete, as their understandings mostly focus on a construct relevant to their context. Nevertheless, no controversial or completely off-topic ideas were detected. Therefore, we can say that how the leaders understand emotional intelligence differs and therefore, also, what they value in it. There might be multiple explanations for the different points of views, from the context of work to the background of the person, as their mental models differ (Chart, 2000). Three different profiles with differently focused understandings were identified (as explained in section *The Three Types of Profiles*), so now, a question about how to go from here remains.

Followingly, we offer an idea of how to strategically begin introducing EI to the company, as this work did not focus on creating a strategy but more on investigating the field and providing a solid ground from where the strategy creation can start.

To start with, a comprehensive introduction seminar to highly positioned leaders about EI, the complexity, and what it means in the organisational context to why it matters is suggested. The seminar contributes to the leaders' knowledge to provide more information about the concept or argue against controversial understandings that can act as a barrier further in developing oneself and others. Also, collectively communicating about the given topic within the company helps to set the organisation's focus, raise awareness, emphasise its importance in leadership and, last but not least - avoid

communication errors. Moreover, this gives the leader an opportunity to discuss one's concerns related to the topic or provides space for overall feedback.

As the highly positioned leaders should be the advocates of EI, it is of importance that the leaders participating clearly understand, value, and believe in this topic to be successful advocates of EI and coaches to its coachees. Through the leaders' one-to-one activities and continuous, supporting seminars, the knowledge can be distributed to the lower parts of different units to create an overall common understanding to avoid communication errors and controversial understandings. An investigation of the perceptions and understandings of EI within different units at the mid-management level is also suggested.

The results of this work set the ground for building a strategy to implement EI in the company, but creating a strategy itself exceeds the limits of this study and would be a project on its own.

## **6.8 Critique of our work**

The interviewees' answers might have been affected by their own prior “research of the topic” before our interview with them. That means they might have “googled” emotional intelligence and refreshed their understanding of EI. By this, their conceptions of EI might be affected by what the mainstream media - for example, Wikipedia, writes about EI, which mostly writes about the theory from Daniel Goleman. Nevertheless, one could assume that their understanding prior to the “googling” had to be similar or the same as the knowledge or perception they had before for the info from “googling” to be accepted and used in the interview with us.

The results of the focused understandings of the leaders might have been affected by the low level of knowledge about the term and its components and competencies within.

## 7 Conclusion

This study presented a qualitative case study on leaders' understandings of emotional intelligence (EI), how the understandings compared to the theory of Daniel Goleman (1995; 1998), and which components of Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence leaders perceive of most relevance for their respective position. The study was conducted in a multi-national technology company in Sweden. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 interviewees, where 12 of them were Swedish, and the gender ratio was six females and 11 males. All participants identified themselves as either female or male. All interviewees hold the leadership position of a Vice President or "Head of..".

The study revealed that in the given MNC, there are differences in the leaders' understandings of EI. Moreover, according to the theory of Goleman, three different profiles with focused understandings emerged - focus on the Social Awareness, focus on the Relationship Management and focus on the Self-Awareness. It was found to be of importance to acknowledge these differences in points of views, as a need for more communication on and development in the area of soft skills was identified, as EI was perceived as very important or even a key skill in high-positioned leadership.

In terms of the components of EI, the leaders perceived self-awareness to be the most relevant component for their position, as they portrayed it to be the base and prerequisite for the other components. Relationship management was ranked as second, social awareness third and self-management to be the least relevant component. The study also revealed that the leaders' understanding of each component did not always compare to what the theory states (Goleman, 1995; 1998). Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the ranking of the components which the leaders chose to be of most, and least relevance is true.

The results of leaders' various views and understandings of EI can be supported through the theory of mental models (Chart, 2000), as individuals perceive and understand their own realities in a certain way, which can be different from others.

As we could see from the previous literature and the theories, EI is a rigorous term which can mean and comprise multiple different factors, starting from differentiating theories and the focus of these theories. Moreover, in a single theory, it can include multiple dimensions with, in turn, many components within. If these sentences already aren't confusing enough, it couldn't be more than obvious that there is a big mess around the concept itself, the understandings, and the actual usage of emotional intelligence as a term.

The study indicates that the uncertainty in the scientific field about the concept of EI might have an impact on the knowledge and the understandings of the working professionals. As among the theorists, EI has not found a collective understanding, yet it has been repeatedly stated that EI is very important. Working professionals have created their own understanding of EI, based partly on the theories but also on their experiences and intuition in the context relevant to them.

Future research ideas would be to conduct similar research and compare all the three theories (by Goleman, Salovey & Mayer, and Bar-On), not just the one (Goleman). Another idea is to conduct mixed-method quantitative and qualitative research on the topic with a greater sample size and look at how EI is understood and the views about it, from all levels of positions in an organisation.

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# 9 Appendix 1

## Interview Guide

### Origin questions

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself? (Example: age, gender, education, working background)
2. What is your position at the moment, and how did you end up in this position in this company?
  - a. How long have you been working in this position?

### Leadership questions

3. Which are the most important tasks or functions you have in your role as a leader?
  - a. Would you say that your days revolve more around leading people or concluding tasks?
4. Is there anything you find particularly challenging in your role as a leader?
  - a. If so, what, and how?
5. Would you say that you have a certain leadership style?
  - a. How would you describe it?
  - b. Why do you think that style is appropriate?
6. Do you think you act more intuitively or consciously when leading?
  - a. If consciously, what type of a model/framework are you following?  
Please describe.
  - b. If intuitively, where does that information stem from?
7. Does good leadership mean different things in different kinds of work? How?
  - a. If yes, what is important for good leadership in your particular setting?

- b. How do you decide which style to use?

### **Nature of Emotional Intelligence**

- 8. What is your understanding of emotional intelligence?
  - a. Can you think of someone you know that is emotionally intelligent in your view? What aspects of that person would make you think that person is particularly emotionally intelligent?
- 9. In your view, is emotional intelligence a trait, ability, or skillset, and do you think it is developable competency?
- 10. In your view, do you think that EI has multiple components? What components are included in emotional intelligence?
  - a. Would you say that you clearly understand the meaning of the concept? If so, how? Could you describe EI in your own words?
  - b. Where does it stem from?
- 11. Do you talk about emotional intelligence with your “team” or people that you are leading?
  - a. How do you talk about emotional intelligence yourself to others?

### **EI in an organisational context**

- 12. Is emotional intelligence communicated in the organisation?
  - a. If yes, how?
  - b. Would you feel that the organisation should contribute more to EI?
- 13. Do you find emotional intelligence of importance in your position?
  - a. If yes, in what way?
- 14. Do you feel that in your position, there are certain parts of the job where emotional intelligence is not relevant?
  - a. If yes, could you bring examples?

15. What difference does emotionally intelligent leadership make to the performance of your team, if any, do you think?
16. When in the recruitment process, do you feel that your understanding of EI affects your decisions when in the recruitment process? Can you elaborate on that?

### **Components of EI**

17. Please describe what self-awareness means in your words?
  - a. What competencies does self-awareness include?
18. What role does self-awareness play in your specific position?
  - a. Please bring examples of moments when you needed to use the capability of self-awareness?
  - b. Is self-awareness important in your position? If yes, what part?
19. Could you describe what self-management means in your words?
  - a. What competencies would you say that self-management involves?
20. What role does self-management play in your specific role?
  - a. Please bring examples of moments when you needed to use the capability of self-management?
  - b. Is self-management important in your position? If yes, what part?
21. Could you describe what social awareness means in your words?
  - a. What competencies does social awareness involve in your understanding?
22. What importance does social-awareness play in your specific role?
  - a. Could you bring examples of moments in that you have used the capability of relationship management?
  - b. Is social awareness important in your position? If yes, what part?
23. Could you describe what relationship management means in your own words?

- a. Could you bring examples of moments when you have used the capability of relationship management?
  - b. Is relationship management important in your position? If yes, what part?
24. Considering all four aspects that we've discussed, which of these would you say, is most relevant in your specific role?
- a. Why?

### **Development and change questions**

25. In terms of leadership in the future within the organisation, are there any changes you would like to see?
- a. if so, what?
26. Is there anything in particular that you have learned about being a good leader in your time as a leader?
- a. If yes, what?
27. Do you have a role model or a manager colleague that you admire for his or her skilfulness?
- a. If so, what would that be about?

### **Concluding questions**

28. Did you do any research on the topic of EI before our interview today?
29. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not asked you about?
30. Can we contact you if there are any follow up questions needed?
31. Did you do any previous research about the concept before today's meeting?
32. Did you prepare for today - if yes? How?