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The impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry

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A research proposal submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to explore *the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry.* Although previous explorative research denotes an enriching impact of programmes that train leaders about intelligence, it remains unclear whether these emotional intelligence programmes effectively teach emotional intelligence to corporate leaders who operate within the retail industry in South African. To address these gaps, a case study was conducted at one of the largest retailers in sub-Saharan Africa, examining leaders who have participated in executive emotional intelligence programmes.

The research is guided by the theoretical framework of emotional intelligence, as proposed by Goleman (2009). Through in-depth interviews, data was collected for the exploration of the causal relationship observed in executive leaders after attendance of emotional intelligence learning programmes. Thematic analysis techniques were adopted where data trends and themes were scrutinised.

The research's primary outcomes reveal that corporate leaders' emotional intelligence experiences enhancement through emotional intelligence programmes, with the extent of improvement contingent upon organizational support and leader exposure to varying work environments. Furthermore, the findings note the necessity for continuous refresher training and periodic updates to the course content to effectively instil and perpetuate desired leadership behaviours. These insights underscore the nuanced interplay between emotional intelligence initiatives and organizational factors, providing valuable considerations for the ongoing development and sustainability of effective leadership practices.

KEYWORDS: ***Emotional Intelligence, Corporate Leadership, Human Resource Metrics***

DECLARATION

I, **Raquelle Zanele Bhengu**, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgments. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Name: Signature:__**Raquelle Zanele Bhengu**_____

Signed at Durban

On the …29…….. day of …February……2024…..

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family who have been pivotal in supporting me fulfil this work. To my husband Siyabonga Ngobese, who held down the fort on the many days when I could not be home whilst I was on the journey to completing this body of work. I appreciate you, I see you and I could not have done this without your unwavering support.

To my sons , Aphelele and Auta, thank you both for your understanding, patience, and love whilst you waited for me to fulfil my own destiny. I love you both so much and I pray that this work inspires you one day.

To my friends, extended family, colleagues, and acquaintances who were along this journey with me, thank you for your support and contributions.

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I would like to thank, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as my life belongs to Him.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of purpose

Recent talent trends indicate that the war for talent is commonplace for the foreseeable future (Ahuja,ViKram, 2022), while the global rhetoric ascertains that emotional intelligence (EQ) is the "remedy" for all challenges in talent. Scholars such as Chin assert that a higher EQ is necessary for good decision making, which is critical for executives (Suan Chin, 2021). In the South African arena, researchers such as Harricharan have demonstrated that EQ is positively correlated to leadership performance (Haricharan, 2022).

Since the global COVID-19 pandemic, the relationship dynamics between team members and their leaders have changed. The employee's positive experience with their leader could determine retention versus the perception of greater monetary benefits (CHRO, 2022). It is with this view that TechNavio estimates that organizations will increase global investments for executive leadership development programmes by $ 18.59 billion throughout 2021 to 2026 (TechNavio, 2022); in the same breath, TechNavio confirms that over $ 50 billion has already been spent globally, for the leadership training Programmes.

Drigas and Papoutsi demonstrated in their study when these scholars concluded that in organizations that have EQ as a standard practice, there is improved overall organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Papoutsi et al., 2019).The intention of this qualitative research study is to explore ***the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry.***

Golemans framework of emotional intelligence has been adopted as the conceptual framework in this study. The study will explore the observed affect the EQ executive programmes on the emotional intelligence of corporate leaders who operate within the retail sector of South Africa, and to identify foundations needed ensure successful implementation and outcomes.

This research is of great significance to the business world, practitioners, and organizations. Through an in-depth exploration of emotional intelligence (EQ) programmes on corporate leaders in retail, this research aims to enrich our comprehension of methodologies for enhancing emotional intelligence among corporate leaders within South Africa. The study will also provide insights into the strategies that can be implemented to enhance effectiveness of EQ executive programmes. The study will attempt to address a notable void in current literature through scrutinising the correlation between EQ executive programmes and the emotional intelligence (EQ) levels of corporate leaders within the South African retail sector. This research will provide practical recommendations for organizations within this context to design and implement effective EQ executive programmes that promote corporate well-being.

This study is important for organizations because it offer a better understanding of the significance of EQ executive programmes for corporate leaders and to design interventions that enhance emotional intelligence. By doing so, organizations can improve the overall well-being and productivity of their employees, leading to improved organizational performance and success in the competitive business world.

1.2 Background of the study

The CHRO has noted that since the COVID19 pandemic, employees have actively sought work environments where they are fulfilled (CHRO, 2022). These employees' need assumes that leaders can create fulfilment. Research by Cuéllar-Molina affirms that high EQ in HR decision-makers resulted in high performance in HR metrics (Cuéllar-Molina et al., 2019) As a result, corporate leaders (the executives) making the HR decisions must have EQ as a minimum requirement for assuming leadership roles. The expected return on investment is to retain, promote and grow talent. Further, a growing body of knowledge suggests that EQ in leadership teams positively impacts that organization and the employees (International Institute of Social and Economic Sciences, 2013).

The employment indicator of the South African context represents a bleak environment where various social challenges compound a shrinking economy. The current unemployment statistics indicate that close to 7.8 million people were unemployed at the end the last of 2022 (StatsSa, 2023). Included in this figure are approximately 70 % are matriculants, and 69 % are graduates (StatsSa, 2023). It can be derived that there is an education crisis, which is undoubtedly compounding the global talent crisis. Therefore, organizations continually seek creative ways of retaining their crucial talent.

An immediate challenge for organizations is that in SA the gross domestic product (GDP) is growing at an average of 0.62 % for the period from 1993 to 2022 (Trading Economics, 2023). This means the country operates in a suppressed economy, resulting in most organizations experiencing financial constraints. When organizations face financial constraints, the automatic response is to disinvest in training Programmes, such as those earmarked for executives. Because leadership changes are slow, and the world is moving faster, often, the HR practitioner must defend why these Programmes are critical for the continued sustained growth of the organization. Critically, for South Africa, most jobs are labour intensive, and organized labour does not have an appetite for job losses. This

context amplifies why the call to train leaders in EQ continues to be at the forefront of business continuity.

Government structures such as the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) 2030 have been gazetted to address skills and unemployment challenges faced in the country. This policy incentives organizations to conduct training for employees and non-employees by offering rebates for those identified skills gaps within the country (Pandor, 2019). Although EQ and leadership have been globally highlighted as key differentiators, the NSDP 2030 does not address leadership outcomes. It is therefore left to organizations to identify and fund their executive leadership programmes. Critically, South African organizations require reassurance that these emotional intelligence-focused executive programmes can yield the expected returns.

1.3 Research Context

The South African retail sector started to come into its own when the sanctions that were restricting the export and imports of the then-apartheid government were lifted (Miller et al., 2009). What comes into play thereafter is a noticeable increase in the number of shopping malls targeted at middle-class consumers (Miller et al., 2009). Around 1994, the South African retail sector opened up its borders to international brands such as Nike and local brands such as Woolworths began to expand their territories (Games, 2012) An increased amount of players in the market, saw a rise in competition forcing retails to fight for customers. By then, the government continued its plans for the Rural Development Programme (RDP) which drove formal retailers into townships as the RDP created a cluster of "new" consumers in the previously marginalized communities (Turok, 2015). It is with this that retailers began to realize the importance of customer service in retaining their business.

The South African retail sector contributes billions of rands annually to the country's GDP. According to the most recent quarterly report, this industry is a significant contributor to employment in South Africa (StatsSa, 2023). The nature of work in this industry is predominantly manual and requires an elevated level of interaction between teams and their managers, even at the senior levels. The retail industry's contribution to the South African GDP is crucial for the growth of the country as it is estimated to have a 2.8 % contribution to the GDP in 2021(StatsSa, 2023).

In the early 2000s, South Africa saw the onset of the fourth industrial revolution, termed 4IR, where notably, the availability of high-speed internet and smartphones increased exponentially, thus facilitating the rise of e-commerce investments (Magwentshu et al., 2019) These online platforms had to be supported by improved logistical delivery systems to meet customer demands (Magwentshu et al., 2019). The customer experience is the current focus for many retailers as competition has intensified among retailers (Magwentshu et al., 2019). Retailers are gravitating toward a personalised customer experience and post-purchase (Magwentshu et al., 2019).

South African retailers have also begun exploring trade in other African countries to diversify their revenue streams by growing in new markets (Bienabe & Vermeulen, 2007).The South African retailers, are also adopting the international drive of the environment, sustainability, and governance (ESG) conversation whilst investing in new technologies that allow for realistic customer analyses and enablement to future growth (Worthington-Smith, 2019).

Some leadership training programmes offered by retailers in South Africa include the Retail Leadership Development Programme (RLDP) offered by the South African Council of Shopping Centres which focuses on developing skills of retailers in leadership (SASC, 2023). The delivery method includes coaching, workshops, and mentoring.

Another popular programme is the Retail Management Development Programme (RMDP) offered by the wholesale and retail sector training authority (WRSETA) (WRSETA, 2023). This programme focuses on courses that focus on finance , customer service and team leadership (WRSETA, 2023). Other retail organisations such as Pick n Pay, Massmart and Woolworths also boast of leadership programmes tailored for their organisations.

Research has highlighted earlier indicates that despite the above leadership training programmes, retailers are still facing mass resignations and severe skills shortages, which begs the question of how effective are programmes which are in place as well as those that are still being developed.

Organizations within the South African (SA) context are driving leadership practices that require emotional intelligence. In contrast, generally, in the country, the leadership landscape overall is plagued with a culture of unaccountability and poor leadership (Tshenkeng ,Lorato, 2022). This makes driving the correct behaviours in an organization quite challenging as leadership modelling is generally hard found. It is therefore left to organizations to try to bridge the leadership gap. Thus, organizations must spend time strategizing how emotionally intelligent leaders can be developed to contribute effectively to the organisation and greater society.

1.4 Research Problem

As outlined earlier, South African organizations face financial constraints and must choose what to invest in. Post-COVID-19, they have invested in executive EQ programmes with the expectation that there will be an improvement in their leadership's emotional intelligence, which should translate into enhanced corporate leader emotional intelligence.

The government and organizations must now decide if executive emotional intelligence leadership programmes targeted at improving leader emotional intelligence have yielded the expected results and if there is value in the continued investment. Accordingly, this research paper intends to *explore the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry*.

1.5 Perspectives of Emotional Intelligence

There are at least three perspectives of EQ that are prevalent in modern literature. The works by Goleman, Mayer and Salovey, Bar-On have offered clear definitions and analyses of EQ (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2023). Dana Ackley captures these perspectives in her paper and summarises the perspectives below: (Summarized by Ackley (2016):

> **Peter Salovey and Jack Maye**r attest that emotional intelligence encompasses the capacity to recognize, utilize, and generate emotions to support cognitive processes, comprehend emotions and emotional information, and regulate emotions deliberately to encourage both emotional and intellectual development (Ackley, 2016).
>
> **Goleman (as defined in 2001)** holds that emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify and acknowledge one's own emotions and those of others, to inspire oneself, and to competently manage emotions in oneself and others. Emotional competence, which is developed through emotional intelligence, plays a crucial role in achieving successful work performance (Ackley, 2016).
>
> **Bar-On (1997)** believes that emotional Intelligence comprises a range of non-cognitive capacities, proficiencies, and aptitudes that impact an individual's aptitude to effectively handle and manage environmental demands and pressures, leading to success (Ackley, 2016).

In this research study, a perspective from Goleman related to emotional intelligence will be applied to the identified organization. Goleman's approach to understanding EQ is most suited for this study, as it unpacks concepts familiar to the organizational language, such as development, organizational awareness, teamwork, collaboration, etc.(Kanesan & Fauzan, 2023).

1.6 Research Question

While prior research can prove that increased EQ results in better strategic decision-making, as proven in the research by Alzubi and Aziz (Alzoubi & Aziz, 2021), and researchers such as Navas and Vijayakumar have proven the positive correlation of EQ to job satisfaction (Sharfras Navas & Vijayakumar, 2018), the vast majority do not address specific HR metrics, more especially in SA's context. For organizations, the requirement is that investments in EQ leadership development programmes for their teams must yield tangible results.

Writers such as Navas and Vijayakumar have already proven that EQ in leadership results in improved overall job satisfaction for the employees, and accordingly organisations should strive to improve job satisfaction influences improved performance (Sharfras Navas & Vijayakumar, 2018). Research conducted by Haricharan has proven that EQ improves leadership performance by equipping leaders with the necessary skills to mediate the relationships with teams and allowing performance to improve (Haricharan, 2022). Research by Harunavamwe and Chikobvu in the medical field, revealed that increased EQ in the nurses themselves allowed them to be resilient during times of crisis (Chikobvu & Harunavamwe, 2022).

Finally, research conducted by Alzoubi and Aziz demonstrated that leaders with increased EQ were able to make better strategic decisions (Alzoubi & Aziz, 2021). Literature is thus affirming that the role of EQ extends beyond the HR practitioners' scope, rather it

influences all aspects of the organisations, whether it be strategy or performance, and it is on this premise that EQ executive programmes can support organisations in differentiating themselves in the market.

Therefore, the research question is as follows:

1.6.1 *Research Question*

What is the impact on the emotional intelligence of corporate leaders after participating in the executive emotional intelligence programme?

Accordingly, the research objective is as follows:

1.6.2 *Research Objective*

To determine if corporate leaders exhibit increased emotional intelligence following their participation in the executive emotional intelligence programme.

The aim is to equip organizations with a proven scientific method of deciding when to invest in EQ executive programmes, how to design the EQ executive programmes, and possibly signal when the investments should be redirected.

1.7 Rationale

South African organisations operate within the constraints of an inconsistent power supply coined as loadshedding and a decrease in overall consumer spending due to macro-economic challenges and retail employment trends growth only reaching preCovid levels in 2023 (NEDLAC, 2023). Many leaders rely on accurate decision-making concerning their employees as these decision often impact how the employees are able to service customers (L. Miller & Miller, 2020). Decision-making related to leadership is sensitive,

and errors must be managed proficiently. Organisations will benefit from this study by producing clear guidelines on the institutionalisation of EQ executive programmes and the benefits thereof. Much of the retail related work in South Africa will continue to take place manually as the infrastructure required for adequate access to technologically advance retailing is not yet available for the majority of customers (Gwagwa et al., 2021), and human insights are still required to interpret digitally generated retail information (Li, 2022). As such emotionally intelligent leaders who adopt leadership practices such as empathy and self-regulation are critical to the retail industry as studies indicate that teams lead by emotionally intelligent leaders exhibit superior job performance (Alheet & Hamdan, 2021).

Writers like Alhamani (2020),have influenced organizations to pursue and invest in these EQ executive programmes for their teams (Alhamami et al., 2020). However, there is no indication of how much investment should be made as these programmes are expensive. Organizations have also not indicated how long these investments should be made to yield the desired outcome. Some literature by Bradberry and Greaves agrees that EQ in the leadership of an organization would facilitate growth even within a constrained environment (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Investing in these EQ executive programmes should result in greater profits; more work should follow suit, indicating that through emotionally intelligent programmes, an organization might be able to create new jobs and contribute positively to society by addressing unemployment.

For policymakers, this study will assist them in designing and implementing emotional intelligence programmes which yield the improvement of corporate leader EQ. An example of an approach to the above being that of Gorgens and Roux research findings that indicate a correlation between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership, affirming the beneficial impact of this leadership approach on follower attitudes and perform (Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021). The writers affirm that the efficacy of emotional intelligence programme design can be elevated by incorporating

targeted interventions that improve transformational leadership. According to the authors, transformational leadership is the concept that leaders can motivate followers to strive for a shared objective by prioritizing collective goals over self-interest, transformational leaders effectively articulate visions and objectives, empowering subordinates in their pursuit of their goals (Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021). This approach can be applied to multiple leadership styles across the retail industry, dependent on organisational needs. Where relevant policy makers may mandate executive EQ programmes as a prerequisite for leadership positions for business purposes rather than a training programme. Bodies such as sectoral education and training bodies (SETA) might be swayed to offer greater investment to organizations for EQ executive programmes. HR practitioners will benefit by having a framework that removes the ambiguity of the return on investment of executive EQ programmes and further a simplified means to understand how to respond to the organization's EQ needs.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

The intention of the study is to affirm that executive emotional intelligence programmes introduced for executive teams in South African organizations enhance corporate leader EQ. The study is not meant to redefine emotional intelligence; instead, it aims to position it as a critical business tool that can influence business success. This study will focus on organizations with an executive training programme that incorporates emotional intelligence and has existed for at least 18 to 24 months, which is a fair amount of time to evaluate if the executive programmes have had a considerable impact. Because the study adopts Goleman's perspective of EQ as amended in 2001, it will focus on the outlined subfields of EQ being, 1) *self-awareness*, 2) *self-management*, 3) *social awareness*, and 4) *relationship management* (Ackley, 2016)

1.9 Definition of terms

The definition of emotional intelligence as defined by Goleman will guide the research, Dana Ackley summarises this concept by stating that EQ, is the intelligent use of emotion (Ackley, 2016). This study does not divorce itself from the writings of Curosa, Mayer, or Bar-On. Instead, the Goleman stance is the best tool for this specific study as its definitions speak to the issues of development, organizational awareness, readiness to act, etc., which are commonly understood terms in organizations and can be evaluated easily within an executive EQ programme. An overarching understanding fundamental to this study is that the emotional intelligence of the corporate leaders, is not the single factor influencing the HR metrics; however, the immediate focus within this study is to explore the perceived effect of executive programmes on the emotional intelligence of the corporate leaders within organisations in retail within the South African landscape.

In the study, ***emotional intelligence*** shall mean the ability to identify and acknowledge one's own emotions and those of others, to inspire oneself, and to competently manage emotions in oneself and others. Emotional competence, which is developed through emotional intelligence, plays a crucial role in achieving successful work performance (Ackley, 2016)

Corporate Leader pertains to the cohort of executives and managers responsible for the operational oversight of an enterprise. It materializes because of an organization's anticipation of attaining paramount prosperity through the adept stewardship of these capable leaders, who diligently administer its day-to-day functions (Raven, 2023).

Human Resource Metrics refer to the general measures of HR performance within an organisation such as costs to hire, employee turnover, and engagement (Betterteam, 2023).

1.10 Assumptions

This study assumes that organizations have begun introducing executive programmes with an EQ element; further, the study assumes that these programmes are structured in a manner that allows the executive teams to learn and apply EQ behaviour in the workplace. For this study, it is also assumed that the individuals in the executive teams have had an opportunity to reflect on their own EQ after completing the EQ programme. The EQ executive programmes can be from within the organizations or run by an external service provider. The study assumes that there will be access to corporate leaders to verify whether they perceived an enhancement to their EQ after completion to the EQ executive programme, and that there are perceived behavioural changes to support this perception.

1.11 Chapter Outline

This chapter will be proceeded with a probe into previous relevant literature to attest to the effect that executive EQ Programmes have had on South African organizations. The literature review will frame scholarly perceptions of the effect of executive EQ programmes. The rationale for the research study will be expanded, and use a qualitative research approach, within a case study will be adopted, through Goleman's interpretation of emotional intelligence as the conceptual framework. The preferred research tool for the study is structured qualitative interviews. Through a thematic analysis, the research outcomes will be reviewed, analysed interpreted. The chapter will be concluded with recommendations for South African retail organisations, policymakers, and HR practitioners.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The extremely competitive and ever-shifting retail trading climate has compelled organisations to adopt new strategies to survive. The task of developing a learning organisation that incorporates all workers at all organisational levels, is something that leaders should already have embedded. It can be said that involving their team members in the formulation of the corporate vision is one of the most influential ways for enthusiastic leaders to motivate their team member. Empowering employees calls for leaders who intentionally prioritize the time, effort, and energy require to mature a business to having a shared set of core values for the organisation. The foundation of an emotionally intelligent business is laid by leaders who are willing to dedicate their time, money, and energy to enhancing their own emotional intelligence. Increasing emotional intelligence (EQ) requires leaders to develop a wide variety of soft talents, all of which may be used to the benefit of their organisation.

In modern corporate environments, having high emotional intelligence (EQ) is seen, as necessary. This differs from the intelligence quotient (IQ) in that the IQ of a person is a number that is determined by taking standardised intelligence tests (Murphy, 2019). According to Murphy (2019), the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is directly tied to intellectual talents such as how successfully an individual can assimilate, grasp, and apply current information. By differentiation, emotional intelligence (EQ) is concerned with how an individual is able to use their emotions to solve problems. It is also used to refer to the use of one's own body as a tool for learning and growth. When hiring new employees, many businesses nowadays put a significant emphasis on candidates' emotional intelligence (EQ).

In this chapter there will be an effort to expand on a critical literature review which frames the research topic and key concepts and builds the foundation for the research methods to be included in chapter three. Accordingly, this chapter will focus on the notion of emotional intelligence and its transformation into the currently accepted practices. Through the critique and evaluation of these concepts, this chapter intends to relay to the reader a justification of why this paper is relevant to the modern South African organisation. This chapter also frames the South African retail sector and elaborates on why this research study interest in the context of the employment challenges currently faced within the country. As previously established, this paper seeks to study the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry.

2.2 Definition of topic and background discussion

This section of the paper outlines the challenges in business which warrant the exploration of how emotional intelligence programmes affect corporate leaders operate in the retail trade of South Africa**.** Here the focus is on the trends analyses of the challenges prevalent within the South African retail sector which have spurred the shift in perspective of how EQ executive programmes effect the EQ of corporate leaders.

2.2.1 *Defining Emotional Intelligence*

Goleman and Boyatzis understood emotional intelligence (EQ) to denote an individual's capacity to recognise and respond to one's own and other people's emotions (Goleman and Boyatzis 2017). The writers assert that *self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,* and *relationship management* are defined subfields which are included within the paradigm of EQ. According to Kreitner and Kinicki the first two subfields are personal skills that have an impact on how we behave ourselves, while the second two

subfields are social competences that have an impact on how we conduct ourselves in interactions with other people (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2020).

2.2.2 *Earlier understanding of Emotional Intelligence*

The earliest writing for emotional intelligence date back to the early nineties when Peter Salovey and John D Mayer introduced this paradigm in literature. These writers were embedded in the psychological perspective and likened EQ to the ability to know and understand one's emotions, and the emotions of others and derive meaning from this process, make accurate decisions and respond appropriately (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2011). These scholars were concerned with the relationship of EQ and decision-making and growth (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2011).

The key arguments of this perspective are that EQ uses both cognitive and affective processes to identify, manage and interpret emotions. These writers hold that EQ is a collection of learnable abilities rather than a single characteristic that apply to all aspects of life (Mayer et al., 2001). The scholars clarify that since EQ can be learned, all people have access to it and thus it can be a tool to improve the overall standards of life (Mayer et al., 2001).

This perspective of EQ is not without criticisms, even from scholars who have generally accepted the perspective. Such a writer is Goleman who purports that though useful, Salovey's perspective is too concerned with controlling rather than experiencing an emotion (Howe, 2008). Matthews, Roberts, and Zeidner have also criticised this perspective as they felt that the foundational definition of the concept was inadequate, thus exceedingly difficult to interpret due to it being quite broad. Further, the writer's point of departure is whether EQ can be taught (Matthews et al., 2002).

2.2.3 *Benefits of Emotional Intelligence Skills*

Suliman and Al- Shaikh highlight the interconnectedness of constructive conflict resolution and emotional intelligence. The researchers found that leaders with high EQ levels are adept controlling their emotions when addressing conflict with their colleagues and team members (Suliman & Al-Shaikh, 2007).

According to Lopes (2016) , training on emotional intelligence can aid the leader become more employable, improve overall health, improves overall well-being and improved social relationships (Lopes, 2016). It is therefore both organisationally crucial and beneficial for the individual leader to acquire the emotional intelligence capability. Organisations that embrace and implement EQ programmes in today's fast-paced and erratic working environment are able to make long-lasting adjustments to a current corporate culture and in parallel define a new culture of joint liability and joint goals. This is because EQ allows organisations to appropriately comprehend understand and pinpoint the emotional needs and motivations of their employees. A leader that is emotionally competent must combine increased flexibility with an inspiring vision for the future of the organisation they are leading.

The ability to predict high-performing individuals and teams using soft skill skills connected to EQ has been shown by Goleman and Boyatzis' (2018) research with many types of firms over a period of several years. It has been shown that providing organisational on education on emotional intelligence (EQ) for leaders may boost staff productivity, reduce employee apathy, and raise employee happiness and job stability.

2.2.1 *Emotional Intelligence Programmes*

Recently, there has been a global shift towards improving leadership competency as research indicates the direct correlation of good leadership with superior performance. Organisations are investing in various formats of programmes geared at landing emotional intelligence. Such programmes use a combination of theoretical and practical learning frameworks, tools, personality assessments and feedback mechanisms. In this section we will briefly discuss the enneagram personality assessment, multipliers framework, neuroscience leadership framework, crucial conversations, and the Braving leadership framework, as formats of emotional intelligence programmes.

The Enneagram is a personality assessment tool that categorized individuals into nine distinct personality types, each characterized by specific motivations, fears, and patterns of behaviour. The Enneagram aimed to provide insights into individuals' core motivations and highlight areas for personal growth. Its purpose lay in fostering self-awareness, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and guiding individuals toward a more profound understanding of their own psychological dynamics (Riso & Hudson, 1996).

Multipliers refers to a leadership concept introduced by Liz Wiseman and is a framework where multipliers were viewed as leaders who amplified the intelligence and capabilities of those around them by encouraging collaboration, unlocking individuals' potential, and fostering a culture of growth. The purpose of the Multipliers concept was to guide leaders in maximizing the collective intelligence and effectiveness of their teams, ultimately leading to increased innovation, productivity, and overall organizational success (Wiseman, 2010).

Neuroscience leadership, is informed by principles from the field of neuroscience, is an approach to leadership that incorporated an understanding of how the brain functions to

enhance organizational effectiveness. Drawing on the idea that leadership behaviours could impact brain function and, subsequently, team performance, neuroscience leadership aimed to optimize leadership strategies for better decision-making, communication, and employee engagement. Research by scholars such as David Rock, author of "Your Brain at Work," were pivotal in formulating neuroscience-informed leadership practices, highlighting why aligning leadership behaviours with the brain's natural processes can foster a positive and productive work environment (Rock, 2009).

The communication methodology developed by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler, termed crucial conversations is an approach that focuses on navigating high-stakes and emotionally charged conversations effectively by employing specific tools and strategies. The purpose of Crucial Conversations is to empower individuals to skilfully address challenging topics, resolve conflicts, and enhance relationships, both personally and professionally, by promoting open dialogue and mutual understanding (Patterson et al., 2011).

BRAVING Leadership was a concept introduced by Dr. Brené Brown, and the acronym BRAVING stood for boundaries, reliability, accountability, vault, integrity, non-judgment, and generosity. The purpose of BRAVING Leadership was to foster trust and create a culture of courage, vulnerability, and resilience within organizations, emphasizing the importance of building trust through these core elements (Brown, 2018).

2.2.2 *Management Theories of Emotional Intelligence*

Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer

Salovey and Mayer's (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) research on emotional intelligence (EQ) aimed to introduce and define the concept of emotional intelligence, a term that has since

gained widespread recognition and popularity in the fields of psychology, education, and business. Their primary objective was to investigate individual perception, understanding, and management of emotions, and to assess the impact of emotional intelligence on various aspects of human behaviour and success (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Salovey and Mayer's research identified four key components of emotional intelligence:

Perception of Emotion: This component involves the ability to accurately perceive and recognize emotions in oneself and others. It is the foundational skill of emotional intelligence.

Facilitation of Thought: Emotional intelligence enhances thinking and problem-solving by using emotions to guide cognitive processes. It helps individuals harness their emotions to make better decisions.

Understanding Emotion: This dimension relates to the comprehension of complex emotions and their causes, leading to empathy and effective interpersonal relationships.

Management of Emotion: The final component involves the regulation of one's own emotions and the ability to influence the emotions of others. Effective emotional management can lead to improved interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes.

While Salovey and Mayer's seminal research on EQ significantly advanced understanding of EQ, some critiques have surfaced regarding its conceptualization (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Critics highlight challenges in measuring emotional intelligence, citing concerns about the lack of standardization and reliability across various assessment tools and models. Moreover, some scholars argue that an overemphasis on individual emotional skills neglects the critical influence of contextual and cultural factors (Mikolajczak, & Luminet, 2008)

The debate extends to the predictive power of emotional intelligence, with certain studies indicating weak correlations in its ability to forecast outcomes like job performance or academic success (Matthews et al., 2002).These critical perspectives of EQ underscore the ongoing discourse surrounding its application and in various domains.

Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer's (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) study of emotional intelligence laid the foundation for a concept that has become influential in various domains. Their identification of the four components of emotional intelligence provided a framework for understanding and measuring this construct. Nevertheless, debates persist regarding measurement, contextual factors, and the predictive accuracy of emotional intelligence in real-world situations.

Dr. Reuven Bar-On

Dr. Reuven Bar-On's significant offerings regarding emotional intelligence underpin the inception and popularization of the emotional quotient inventory (EQ-i) and related models. The purpose of his work has been to assess and understand emotional intelligence, focusing on how it influences various aspects of human behaviour, including personal and professional success (Bar-On, 1997).

Bar-On's EQ-i model defines emotional intelligence as a multifaceted construct consisting of various skills related to emotions and social skills. Some key aspects of the EQ-i model include:

> **Intrapersonal Skills**: The EQ-i model highlights self-awareness, emotional self-expression, and emotional awareness as critical components of emotional intelligence.

Interpersonal Skills: Recognizing the importance of interpersonal relationships, the EQ-i emphasizes empathy, social responsibility, and interpersonal relationships.

Adaptability: Bar-On's model acknowledges adaptability, including problem-solving, reality testing, and flexibility, as a crucial facet of emotional intelligence.

General Mood: Assessing the overall mood and well-being of an individual is another dimension of emotional intelligence in the EQ-i model.

Stress Management: Bar-On's model recognizes stress tolerance and impulse control as crucial factors in emotional intelligence.

Bar-On's work significantly contributed to the understanding and measurement of emotional intelligence though some critiques of this writer in the field of emotional intelligence research, include lack of consensus, limited predictive validity , overemphasis on self-report. Critics argue that the field of emotional intelligence lacks a standardized definition and framework, leading to variations in measurement tools and conceptualization. Some studies suggest that emotional intelligence measures, including the EQ-i, may have limited ability to predict real-world outcomes, such as individual work execution and academic positive results (Mayer et al., 2008). Emotional intelligence assessments often rely on self-report measures, raising concerns about self-presentation biases and the subjectivity of responses (M. Brackett & Salovey, 2006).

Reuven Bar-On's contributions to the exploration of emotional intelligence, specifically through the EQ-i model, have significantly advanced the understanding of this multifaceted construct. However, debates regarding measurement and the predictive power of emotional intelligence continue to be subjects of discussion in the field.

Using Daniel Goleman Framework of emotional intelligence

In 1995 Goleman broke the functional silos between science and psychology when he released his writing on emotional intelligence (Goleman,2009.)This perspective holds that EQ is the recognition of emotions in ourselves and other for the purpose of motivating ourselves and the emotional regulation of ourselves and others. EQ according to this perspective can be taught / learned for the improvement of work performance. Goleman effectively popularised the EQ concept as his approach was written in lay terms which allowed individuals outside of academia to understand the writings (Ackley, 2016).

Increasingly the use of the word emotional intelligence is being observed in the workspace, and often in the context of human resource departments where the term emotional intelligence (EQ) has become synonymous with the process of determining whether a person is a good fit for a position in a position of authority. According to Dries and Pepermans (2007), the difference between an individual's personality and their emotional intelligence lies in the fact that an individual's personality influences their tendencies and behaviours, but emotional intelligence may identify an individual's thinking patterns and empower them to make appropriate, intelligent choices (Dries & Pepermans, 2007) .

Employees that have a high emotional intelligence can connect productively with people, adapt to change, regulate their emotions and impulses, maintain their composure when faced with challenging situations, display empathy, have an optimistic attitude in the face of hardship, and manage customer complaints (Suan CHIN, 2021).

The Goleman theory of EQ confers that EQ is the process whereby an individual is able to introspect about their feelings and can identify feelings in others with the intent to motivate the individual and manage the feelings appropriately in the self and others

(Aamir, 2023). The writer asserts that EQ is learned and once establish can contribute to improved performance at work (Ackley, 2016). Goleman categorises EQ into four quadrants of emotion, which are self- awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management (Ackley, 2016).

Self-Awareness

Self-Awareness concentrates on the internal processes such as understanding own emotion, understanding the individuals predisposition, resources and intuition (M. A. Brackett et al., 2004). This piece of Goleman's theory is supported by three distinct competencies which are emotional awareness, accurate assessment, and self – confidence. Emotional awareness is considered the process of identifying one's own emotions, and how one responds to them (Singh et al., 2022). For self-awareness to occur, the individual must first be able to hone in on how a situation has made them feel within themselves. The second pillar of accurate assessment is the process of understanding one's behavioural advantages and disadvantages. This competency requires an honest self-reflection to foster a realistic view of oneself as the consequence of a biased view may render the individual overextended and unable to respond to emotional stimuli appropriately. The self- confidence pillar follows the common definition of the term, which is related to a sense of self -efficacy and a belief that the individual is able to accomplish all that they set out to do, with the resources they have within themselves, and that they are deserving of the positive experiences (Goleman, 2009).

The competencies of the first cluster of competencies in Goleman's theory are profound and require an emotional maturity as they cannot be divorced from the greater social impacts that build them. For instance, an executive who is only encountering these concepts 20 years into their job role, may not have developed self -awareness due to a lack of exposure, in turn the process of becoming self-aware may take longer to be established within them. In an organisational setting the expectation when conducting the executive training Programme is that the leader will continue to deliver on the job

requirements as well as build this capability, which can prove challenging, especially where one is not ready to be critical of themselves.

Self-Management

Goleman's second cluster of competencies is self- management, which is concerned the process of internal regulation of impulses and resources. Here there are six competencies that are expanded on, which are emotional self-control, transparency, adaptability, initiative, achievement, and optimism. Emotional self-control is the process of sense checking negative emotions and thoughts before they become disruptive to the individual (Aamir, 2023). This is most needed when the circumstances are stressful, and pressure is high. Transparency refers to behaving in a manner which is aligned to ones values and ethically (Goleman, 2009). This competency is crucial in leadership decision making as acting dishonestly can make the individual carry a sense of discomfort which may affect their ability to interact with others.

When unpacking adaptability Goleman referred to this competency as the change managing process and the level of flexibility of the individual (Goleman, 2009). The initiative competency concerns itself with the individual's ability to take measures to leverage opportunities. This competency is invaluable at the executive level as the primary function for a leader is the ability to identify opportunities as well as knowing when the landscape is opportune to act. For the achievement competency of self-management, the individual is measured by their propensity to develop themselves and gravitate towards superior levels (Goleman, 2009). This competency allows the individual to move in a positive direction of self-improvement, and the development of those around them. From the Goleman's perspective of EQ, the optimism competency refers to the ability for the individual to continue pursuing an objective in the midst of opposing forces (Goleman, 2009). Self-management in Goleman's theory is focused on the regulatory function of EQ.

Social Awareness

Social awareness can be understood as the process of navigating relationships and tuning in to the needs, concerns and feelings of others (Barinua et al., 2022). This concept consists of three competencies which are , empathy, organisational awareness and service orientation. (Goleman, 2009). Empathy can be summed up as the process by which an individual can reflect on a circumstance from the perspective of others and be affected by their concerns (Goleman, 2009). Organisational awareness is the process of recognising the power dynamics of relationships of groups (Goleman, 2009). Finally in this cluster of competencies, service orientation can be understood as good customer service where the needs of others are pre-empted and met accurately (Goleman, 2009) The concept of social awareness is mostly related to the activities which occur externally, but ae impacted by internal emotional practices.

Relationship Management

Relationship management is the skill of influencing and soliciting a positive outcome from others (Rechberg, 2020). This concept is underpinned by six competencies, including developing others, teamwork and collaboration ,inspirational leadership, change catalyst , influence and conflict management (Goleman, 2009). The competency of team-work and collaboration centres around a collective process of pursuing a shared and accepted vision (Goleman, 2009). This competency is useful in an organisational setting within the retail sector as most retailers are structured as a collection of teams (departments) and truly little (if any) work occurs with just an individual. Developing others focuses on how one is able to identify potential in others and enhance them (Goleman, 2009). From this perspective, inspirational leadership refers to the ability to energise and steer others (Goleman, 2009). A change catalyst from this perspective can be understood as the process of bringing about change and facilitating its process (Goleman, 2009). When unpacking influence, Goleman framed it as the act of convincing others of a viewpoint (Goleman, 2009). The conflict management competency is

understood as the process of facilitating the pursuit of a common goal within a group and brining synergy (Goleman, 2009).

Whilst Goleman's theory of EQ has become popular, it is not without criticisms, notably Roberts (Matthews et al., 2007) (and colleagues) and Konstantino who argued about the fluidity of definitions and the expansiveness of behavioural aspects of EQ which are not limited to EQ (Petrides et al., 2016). Nevertheless, Goleman's perspective holds the commonly understood organisational language, which serves to application within the organisational context as envisaged in this paper.

2.2.3 *A South African Perspective of Emotional Intelligence*

In 2023, 25 or so years since the inception of the concept of EQ, much of the literature hasn't progressed into a working definition of what EQ is, however scholars such as Ackley have tried to unpack the concept and relay it simply to being the "intelligent use of emotion (Ackley, 2016). Critical to this paper is how EQ is relayed in the organisational setting. In the context of South Africa, work has a history that cannot be divorced from a traumatic experience, especially since during apartheid, labour was in essence forced. This means leaders are operating in the context of an alienated labour force, meaning that they will have to leverage on internal competencies to navigate labour. However, due to the vulnerable and intrinsic process of developing EQ, sometimes efforts are abandoned.

In the retail trade of South African is intertwined within political history of the country, where the nature of the employment relationship has evolved based on the political landscape. Specifically, since the inception of employment, minorities migrated for forced labour, apartheid labour practices were designed to marginalise workers and maintain the status quo. In the modern employment relationship, the workforce maintains the status quo. To date, whilst there are policy reforms on the treatment of labourers such

as the basic conditions of employment act, no programmes have addressed the divisive mindset which is set in the employment relationship. Coupled with this employment remains a huge challenge for the South African government as statistics reflect a declining employment market (StatsSa, 2023). It is then left to business leaders to redress the symptoms of the negative psychological impact that employment or lack of it has caused in general.

In the context of this research, we have embraced Goleman's perspective as a theoretical framework for comprehending emotional intelligence. This selection is motivated by the notion that Goleman's framework offers a particularly suitable foundation for exploring emotional intelligence within a corporate environment.

2.2.4 *Embedding Organizational Emotional Intelligence*

Emotional Intelligence transcends mere emotional management; it necessitates the fusion of EQ principles and the functionalities of contemporary logical technologies. The process of enhancing emotional intelligence follows a logical pathway. Initially, senior leaders must exhibit confidence in employing EQ skills, such as self-awareness, to foster empathy, mentorship, conflict resolution, and enhance collaborative abilities. Organizational leaders bear the responsibility of ensuring all staff members grasp the critical importance of EQ through comprehensive self-assessment of their EQ competency skills. This endeavour cannot be accomplished within a mere week-long session; it demands consistent application of essential emotional intelligence skills in various contexts—be it at home, in the workplace, or in social settings.

This is reiterated by Alzoubi and Aziz, who in their research on the how quality strategic decision making can be impacted by the practice of effectiveness of emotional intelligence, found that leader emotional intelligence, is core to the functions ability to

affect relationships with the teams, which in turn shapes the employees motivation, performance and overall experience of the workplace (Alzoubi & Aziz, 2021).To ensure tangible progress and a substantial return on the organization's investment in long-term cultural enhancement, leaders and managers should offer coaching or mentoring assistance and establish a feedback mechanism equipped with 360-degree capabilities.

Writings by to Freedman et al., highlighted that employees who actively practice their emotional intelligence principles, have greater aptitude for communication regarding human capital challenges and change response methods. This is since they are better able to understand others' perspectives (Freedman et al., 2005). This supports Goleman and Boyatzis (2017) research finding which denoted, elevated leader emotional intelligence contributes favourably to skills improvement, trust, data collaboration , and positive risk-taking. Additionally, the research indicates that improvement of emotional intelligence is associated with a variety of favourable business outcomes such as the frequent and random evaluation of talent retention, employee performance, and customer service, followed by the implementation of suitable modifications, is beneficial to organisations that are involved in EQ reform projects (Livesey, 2017).

2.3 Research Question

2.3.1 ***Research question:*** *What is the impact on the emotional intelligence of Corporate Leaders after participating in the Executive Emotional Intelligence Programme?*

A study conducted by Raquel Gilar-Corbi, and her colleagues indicated a mixed outcome of retention of the EQ programme training in a corporate company. The study found that some EQ traits were improved immediately after the training was conducted, however

not all traits had improved (Dippenaar & Schaap, 2017). Literature regarding the long-term retentions of EQ training programme learning have not yet been established and thus some further research is required to establish this. Several factors could also influence the ability to retain the learnings.

In recent years, numerous studies and evaluations have focused on emotional intelligence programmes and their outcomes. These programmes often aim to enhance emotional intelligence skills, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. The key findings state that emotional intelligence programmes have been effective in enhancing individuals' emotional awareness (Ciarrochi et al., 2003). Participants in these programmes tend to exhibit a greater understanding of their own emotions and those of others, which is a fundamental aspect of emotional intelligence (Ciarrochi et al., 2003)

Brackett and his colleagues in their study about EQ programs found that of significance, that relationship skills are often enhanced of the completion of an emotional intelligence programmes. Participants who have undergone such programmes often report improved interpersonal relationships, including better communication, conflict resolution, and empathy towards others (M. A. Brackett et al., 2011). Dropperts' study of EQ programmes found that emotional intelligence programs have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing stress and psychological distress. Participants who have undergone these programs tend to cope better with stressors and exhibit fewer instances of expereincing anxiety and depression (Droppert et al., 2019).

2.3.2 ***Research Objective :*** *To determine if Corporate Leaders exhibit increased emotional intelligence following their participation in the Executive Emotional Intelligence Programme*

2.4 Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature review has explored Emotional Intelligence, with the intention to explore ***the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders' emotional intelligence within the South African retail industry***. The literature has established a strong relationship between EQ in leadership and improved strategic decision making, leadership performance, overall efficacy and efficiency and job satisfaction. The retail sector of South Africa is a crucial contributor to the country's GDP and possibly the highest contributor towards employment in the country. Thus, the aforementioned study is necessitated by the continued expected relationship of corporate leaders in retail and their ability to acquire, demonstrate and coach for emotional intelligence.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter is structured to delineated the research approach, design, and data collection method employed to investigate the ***impact of emotional intelligence programs on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry***. As previously noted, the research focused on qualitative methods, adopting a case study approach. Subsequent sections expanded on the justification for the research approach and present arguments for the chosen research designs and methods to analyse the data.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

In terms of the conceptual framework, this study was constructed from the post-positivism paradigm, as adopted by Kuhn, which posited a departure from the positivist stance of science based on empirical observation and objective truth. Instead, this approach focused on human interpretation, the social context, individual values, and historical context when applying scientific methods (Kuhn, 1994) .

The post-positivism paradigm was selected ad an appropriate philosophical stance for the research, enabling a nuanced exploration of the impact of executive emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders' emotional intelligence. Post-positivism acknowledged the existence of an objective reality while recognizing the influence of subjectivity in interpreting that reality (Guba & Lincoln, n.d.). This paradigm aligned with the multifaceted nature of emotional intelligence, where qualitative approaches were deemed necessary to comprehensively assess its development.

Applying the post-positivism paradigm allowed for the incorporation of qualitative insights derived from structured interviews, recordings, and researchers' notes through triangulating data from various sources, the research provided a more holistic understanding of how executive emotional intelligence programs impacted leaders' emotional intelligence in real-world organizational contexts.

Goleman's perspective on emotional intelligence was highly relevant to the study *of the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry*. It provided a contextual understanding of emotional competencies required in the industry and contributed to leadership development and industry competitiveness. Integrating Goleman's framework into the research conceptual framework ensured a comprehensive and effective approach to addressing the research topic.

By unpacking Goleman's subfields of emotional intelligence which are self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship -management, it was possible to then focus on the dimensions most relevant to the industry's challenges, such as collaboration and customer service. Executive emotional intelligence programs were designed to address the unique requirements of the South African retail context.

3.2 Research Approach

As outlined in the research topic, this paper adopted the qualitative research methodology. A working definition of qualitative research, as offered by Patrik Aspers and Ugo Corte (2019), is that qualitative research is a process that involved generating and analysing empirical data through an iterative approach, resulting in new and significant distinctions that enhanced the scientific community's understanding of the research phenomenon (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This approach combined two essential criteria: (i) a method for conducting research that involved making distinctions and getting closer to the subject matter through iteratively collecting and analysing data, and (ii) the outcome, which was an improved understanding that was novel and contributed to the scholarly community's knowledge (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

This approach used non-numeric data, such as words, images, and sounds, and utilized data commonly found in various sources, such as interview recordings, researcher notes, and company documents (Smythe & Giddings, 2007). Qualitative data was the primary type of data produced by research methods like case studies, ethnography, and action research (Sawatsky et al., 2019). Because the research question aimed to capture individual experiences, a summary of the advantages of using a qualitative research approach were summarized in the following paragraph.

The qualitative research approach had its advantages, which included providing an extensive evaluation of the research question by focusing on exploring meanings, experiences, and perspectives. This research method, when applied accurately, could provide rich data by collecting data using multiple techniques, including interviews, observations, and document analysis, resulting in rich and detailed data(Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Accordingly, qualitative research usually occurred in the participants immediate environment, and thus provided a precise understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Leavy, 2017). This research approach offered flexibility and could be adapted to suit the research question, context, and scope of the study. Qualitative research approaches could have high validity, as they allowed for the examination of the research question or phenomenon in its natural context (Yin, 2018).

While qualitative methods were an accepted form of research study, these methods had some limitations, such as a restriction on the extent of generalisability to a larger population since the focus was on individual experience and perspective (Terrel, 2016). This research approach could also be time and resource-consuming as it required rigorous data collection and analysis (Terrel, 2016) Qualitative research could be subject to the researcher's biases and interpretations, which could impact the validity of the study. As the study method relies of researcher data interpretations, it might have had limited reproducibility (Taylor, 2016).

To leverage the benefits of a qualitative data approach and mitigate the disadvantages of this research approach, this paper adopted the case study research design so that there was a focus on key issues within the selected organization. Selection of the qualitative research methodology was adopted for this study due to the inherent benefits and capabilities of this approach, which comprehensively investigate and to fathom the phenomena under study. According to Flick (2018), one of the key advantages this research methodology was that researchers could dive into complicated and abstract topics like emotional intelligence. These constructions were not readily measurable, but they were amenable to in-depth investigation using qualitative approaches, which might provide a comprehensive, in-depth, and nuanced comprehension of the phenomena (Flick, 2018). To explore *the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry,* qualitative research was a viable method for investigating behavioural factors as well as interpersonal dynamics.

The exploratory character of the study fit very well with the qualitative research methodology. According to Sawatsky et al. (2019), qualitative research was the method that was best appropriate when there was little known about the issue, and the research being conducted was exploratory in nature (Sawatsky et al., 2019). This methodology gave a meticulous appreciation into the experiences, views, and attitudes of executives and workers who participated in EQ programmes. This resulted in the generation of relevant data in response to the research question.

As the qualitative method was fundamentally interpretative, it had the flexibility to be adapted to the settings of organizations in South Africa. According to Nassaji (2020), this technique enabled the examination of contextual elements, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and socio-economic considerations, which played a significant role in the research. It permitted the subjectivity of human experiences and viewpoints, acknowledging the fact that the meanings that individuals ascribed to phenomena were

formed by the circumstances in which they found themselves and the interpretations they made of those contexts (Nassaji, 2020).

In addition, the qualitative methodology encouraged the use of a numerous techniques for data gathering, which included interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, which made it easier to collect detailed and rich data (Flick, 2015). The employment of such a wide variety of approaches enabled the researcher to triangulate the data, which in turn increased the validity of the conclusions (L. Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). The study obtained firsthand thoughts and narratives from people participating in EQ executive programmes via structured interviews, leading to a more comprehensive assessment of the benefits of these programmes on corporate leader EQ.

Considering the information presented above, the study used a qualitative methodology to accomplish its goals. This method allowed for the generation of a nuanced interpretation of the dynamics of emotional intelligence in the work environment, the impact of EQ executive programmes on corporate leader EQ, and the strategies that could enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives in South African retail organizations throughout the study (Quinlan et al., 2019). This research methodology gave the depth and flexibility required to investigate this complicated phenomenon within its unique context, making it the most suited strategy for this study. Because of this, the study was able to make important additions to the current body of information and provide organizations practical insights.

The capacity of a qualitative study to evaluate and quantify the effects of a certain intervention or phenomenon, such as the influence of EQ executive programmes on corporate leader EQ, as presented in this study, was a capability that was not shared by quantitative research. Qualitative approaches, on the other hand, enabled researchers to study effects in more depth and detail, capturing the richness, complexity, and subtle

features of experiences and perceptions (Silverman, 2016). Quantitative methods, on the other hand, depended on predetermined variables and measurements.

Contextually, this qualitative research study has provided a platform for rigorous investigation of the experiences, insights, and perceptions of the EQ executive programmes held by the participants. This empowered the researcher to quantify the effects of the EQ executive programmes in a manner that was both complete and nuanced. Participants were able to offer extensive assessments of their experiences and perspectives using approaches that include interviews or focus groups, revealing the benefits that these initiatives had on their EQ, work satisfaction, productivity, and general well-being (Kumar, 2019).

The opportunity to investigate unintended or unanticipated effects was also offered by qualitative research. As a result of the adaptability and openness of qualitative research methodologies, it was possible to identify outcomes that may not have been expected at the beginning of the study, thus offering a more comprehensive picture of the effects of the EQ executive programmes (Quinlan et al., 2019).

In addition, qualitative research helped to contextualize the effects by comparing them to particular organizational or socio-cultural settings. As a result, it provided a better understanding of how the influence of context could be seen in the effects that were observed (Flick, 2015). This was especially pertinent to this study since it intended to investigate the effects of EQ executive programmes inside South African organizations that engaged in the retail industry.

3.3 Case Study

A approach was adopted for this study was that of a case study, where the immediate concern was to gather comprehensive information about a particular subject, which could be an object, an event, or an activity, with a specific focus on a particular business unit or organization (Rashid et al., 2019). This research method involves exhaustive examination of a specific phenomenon or case, often within its real-world context. Case studies could be used to explore complex issues, generate hypotheses, or provide insight into a specific problem (Heyeres et al., 2019).

Since the case, in a case study, referrers to the individual, group, organization, event, or situation that the researcher intended to investigate, accordingly the rationale behind conducting a case study was to capture a thorough grasp of a problem by examining the real-life situation from multiple angles and perspectives, utilizing various data collection techniques (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Some characteristics of a case study included a focus on single or multiple cases, the use of a collection of sources of evidence, an analysis of the context, and an emphasis on the description and interpretation of data (Vernon-Dotson, 2013).

The case study took place within the large retail organization where a team of twenty executives who had undergone the tailored emotional intelligence programme training, were approached to willingly contribute their time in to the case study. Due to the nature of the study relying heavily on the experiences of the individuals who had been impacted by the EQ programme, the case study method was applied. This approach focused on examining the case within a larger context (Yin, 2018). For the case in this research paper, it referred to the examination of the executive EQ programmes' impact on corporate leaders within the South African retail sector.

Yin summarized the benefits of the case study to include contextualization, as a case study enabled researchers to examine the subject in its authentic context, allowing comprehensive and accurate understanding of the situation. Case studies used multiple techniques for collecting information, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, resulting in rich and detailed data. This research method was flexible and could be adapted to suit the specific research question or objective. Case studies provided an opportunity to study unique and rare cases that might not be feasible to investigate using other research methods. Case studies could have practical implications, as they could inform policy or decision-making in specific settings. The method of conducting a case study provided the opportunity for researcher to gain a thorough appreciation of a particular subject by examining it meticulously from various perspectives. A hypotheses could be generated through a case study and that hypothesis could be tested in future research studies (Yin, 2018).

Alternative qualitative research methods that could have been considered in the research, included surveys, experiments, observational studies, quasi-experiments, and meta-analysis, however the case study approach seemed most appropriate (Gerring, 2017). A case study approach as a qualitative method was most suited for the research topic as it unpacked the relationship between the EQ executive Programme and EQ of the corporate leader after completing the Programme. In addition to the benefits listed above, a case study has permitted the participants to express their perceptions and experiences using their own words to derive meaning, context, and explanation of causality (Welch et al., 2011).

3.3.1 *Large Retail Organisation case study overview*

The case study took place within a large retail organisation across all its divisions, scrutinizing the internal executive EQ programme. This organization was registered on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and employed well over 15,000 employees. The

geographical footprint of the organization was widespread, including all South Africa's provinces and at least three neighbouring countries, thus providing a good reflection of the South African Retail industry. The retailer's 12-to-18-month Programme was targeted at senior management and executives within the organization. For this study, the focus was on South African managers based in the KwaZulu-Natal area, as this is where the head office was located.

3.3.2 *The emotional intelligence programme at the case site*

The programme structure was such that leaders from across the business were nominated to attend the programme. This was based on assumed leadership role and succession. Once a candidate had been nominated, they were scheduled to attend in person class sessions with other leaders across the business. An existing leader nominated the programme participants to attend, and thus, the program was viewed as aspirational in the business. Furthermore, the programme was supported at the most senior levels of the organization, which had a positive impact on social status.

The programme was designed to teach emotional intelligence to corporate leaders by equipping them with various practically applicable tools. Some of the tools used in the program included an enneagram personality assessment, multipliers, neuroscience, crucial conversations, and braving leadership.

The programme structure began with a psychological assessment to establish each participant's social style. The next step included eight in person class sessions which required pre and post work activities required for discussions. Further the programme granted all participants access to a coach during this time, to assist with unpacking some of the concepts outside of the classroom setting. This was intended to assisted participants translate learnings into practical skill. On completion of the modules and exercises,

participants graduated at a ceremony officiated by the Chief executive officer and the chief people officer. The graduates received an award and feature in the organisation newsletter distributed to all users in the organisation.

3.4 Data collection methods

3.4.1 *Research to address Emotional Intelligence*

Structured interviews were considered to be best suited for the case study as they allowed participants to respond in their own words. The interviews were held with twenty executives who had completed the executive EQ programme during their tenure within the organization. The format of the interview was a set of twenty-two open-ended questions covering Goleman's four clusters of EQ. Interview duration was expected to be one hour long and the interviews were scheduled at a time that suited the participant to avoid business disruptions. The questions focused on how the EQ programme had impacted the leaders' EQ in terms of Goleman's subfields of emotional intelligence, self-awareness, self – management, social-awareness, and relationship management. These interviews were recorded digitally. The structured interview questionnaire was designed in a thematic sequence that grouped the questions according to Goleman's clusters of EQ subfields, creating synergy when the data was analysed.

Both online and in person interviews were held at a neutral location to protect participants' identities. Participants were required to consent to participation and the confidentiality of the interview process. This research paper recognized that there were multiple languages within the population, however the interviews were conducted in English which both the participants and the researcher were fluent. Due to the confidentiality of this study, no interpreters were used, and thus the study excluded participants who were not comfortable with the above languages. After the interview, participants were permitted to ask additional questions and gratitude was extended for their participation. The researcher

and notified the participants that they would have access to the research findings when they were available.

3.5 The research Instrument

A structured interview guide was used as the preferred instrument in this study. The structured interview guide related to the research question, *what is the impact on the emotional intelligence of corporate leaders after participating in the executive emotional intelligence programme?* and adopted Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence to establish the impact of the emotional intelligence executive programme on the executives' understanding and behaviour after programme completion.

The intended outcome of the questionnaire was to establish if executives perceived themselves as more emotionally intelligent because of attending the EQ programme and consisted of twenty-two questions aligned with Goleman's clusters of EQ subfields, : self-awareness, social-awareness, self-management, and relationship management.

Though effectual, structured interviews had strengths and weaknesses, such as Yin's view that these interview guides helped with consistency and time; however, they may at times limit flexibility and can miss some important information (Yin, 2018). Similarly, Stake suggested that interview guides could enhance validity but might not capture the full range of participant experiences (Stake, 1978). Finally, Merriam (1998) argued that interview guides could help reduce bias and ensure consistency but might lack specificity and may not capture the complexity of the research topic (Yazan, 2015).

3.6 Population and sample

3.6.1 *Population*

The executives who have completed the executive EQ programme in the large retail organisation across all its divisions is the population sample, which consists of 176 leaders. This population is only based on the South African teams and focuses mainly on the employees who are based in the KwaZulu-Natal province as this is where the organisations head office is situated.

3.6.2 *Sample and sampling method*

A useful sampling method for a case study was purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method that involves selecting participants based on a specific purpose or criterion (Leavy, 2017). Since the research method of this paper was a case study, this paper selected only participants who were directly involved in the case being studied, such as employees and their executive managers. This was because these participants had in-depth knowledge and experience and provided valuable insights into the research question. A sample of twenty executives was approached as per the below table:

Function	**Gender** **(male, female, Other)**	**Age**	**Tenure in Executive roles**
Human Resources	**7 (5F, 2M)**	35 – 55	4 + years
Merchandise	**4 (3F, 1M)**	35 – 55	4 + years
Finance	**3, (2F,1M)**	35 – 55	4 + years
Technology	**2 M**	35 – 55	7 + years
Operations	**4, (1F, 3M)**	35 – 55	4 + years

Table 1: Sample of Participants

The sampling frame for this study was carefully built to establish a rich and robust data set that allowed a detailed assessment of the impact of EQ executive Programs on corporate leader EQ across South African organizations in the retail sector. This inquiry was possible because of the rich and robust data set that was generated. According to Quinlan et al. (2019), the criteria for the sample selection were meticulously selected to strike a compromise between the requirement for representative participation, the need to manage time and availability restrictions, and the need to avoid any biases that may confuse the results.

The sample was made up of twenty executive managers, and it was composed 10 associates who identified as male in gender and eleven participants who identified as female in gender to ensure gender balance. This decision to have a gender split of 60/40 was made to account for any potential gender-based differences in the way executives perceived and applied the learnings from the EQ executive programmes, as well as to guarantee that the research did not inadvertently skew towards one gender's experiences and insights over the other (Flick, 2018). This decision was made to account for any potential gender-based differences in the way executives perceived and applied the learnings from the EQ executive Programs.

The requirements of two years spent in a management role and five years spent working in a retail business were both included to meet the selection requirements for the executives. These criteria were designed to control for experience and knowledge about the business, both of which might impact the attitudes and behaviour of executives linked to EQ, thus possibly distorting the results (Kumar, 2019). Experience and knowledge about the industry were both possible factors that could influence executives' attitudes and behaviours. In particular, the purpose of these experience criteria was to reduce the possibility that a lack of experience in executive management or a lack of awareness of the retail business would be mistakenly ascribed to a lack of EQ.

The participants of the study were all citizens of South Africa and were executives located in KwaZulu-Natal. According to Quinlan et al.'s 2019 research, the localisation of research is important to control the possible regional or cultural variations that might bring bias into the results by focusing on a single geographic location. Also, since the study was focused on South African residents, it was in a better position to investigate the influence of EQ executive Programs within the specific socio-cultural and economic environment of South Africa because it concentrated on South African citizens.

Though purposive sampling is useful in instances where the research question is focused on a specific phenomenon or group of people and it also allows researchers to select participants according to their knowledge or expertise, which can enhance the quality and relevance of the data collected, some limitations exist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This sampling method has the potential for researcher bias and the lack of generalizability to other populations (Leavy, 2017). To address these limitations, this paper carefully documented the sampling procedures and provided a detailed rationale for selected participants and used multiple methods of data collection to improve the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.7 Procedure for data collection

Permission to conduct the research was granted by the organisation in writing, following which, the People team, consisting of the Heads and Directors of People, was notified about the research. They were asked to nominate participants from their divisions likely to participate in the research. The Director of learning and development then contacted all previous beneficiaries of the executive EQ programme to encourage participation. Once an initial list was provided the Heads and Directors of People were given a week to mention the that a study was being conducted to the potential participants. This was done to give the research credibility and buy-in at the most senior levels of the organization, through trusted team members with good rapport with the intended participants.

After the week passed, the potential participants received an email from the Head of Learning and development, detailing the purpose and process of the research, and requesting their voluntary participation. This was to position the research study as legitimate and supported by the business. Within 24 hours, the participants received a phone call confirming participation and a suitable interview time and date. An email was sent to participants who indicated interest in the study, and it was reiterated that participation was voluntary, which required all the participants to complete the consent form. A day prior to the interview, the participants were reminded of the date and time of the interviews, as well as asked for their alias for the data collection process to ensure that they felt at ease during the interview.

The interviews were recorded via apple notes, Microsoft teams and data were stored in the cloud, including one master copy of participants and aliases. In terms of interviewing techniques, this paper employed the following strategies. As mentioned earlier, it was important to establish rapport with the participants, so prior to the interview, the researcher introduced themselves, explained the purpose of the study, and established a comfortable and non-threatening environment (Stratton, 2021). To ensure the conformance to qualitative data methods, all questions were open-ended to ensure the participant responses were as in-depth as possible (Terrel, 2016).

To ensure that data was not lost during the interview process, the interviews were recorded and stored on the cloud for reference and interpretation. During the interviews, the researcher used active listening, meaning that they fully engaged with the participant and paid close attention to their responses. This involved asking follow-up questions, clarifying responses, and reflecting back on what the participant had said (Stratton, 2021).

The interview process involved asking probing questions and follow-up questions to elicit more information or clarification. This helped to deepen the interpretation of the participant's experiences and perspectives (Taylor, 2016). During the interview process, the researcher avoided leading questions as they could influence the participant's response and might lead to biased or inaccurate data. It was important to avoid leading questions and to ask neutral and non-judgmental questions (Flick, 2018).

3.8 Data analysis strategies and interpretation

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, and adopted the case study approach through structured interviews, content analysis and thematic analysis were used as its data analysis strategies. The analysis of content was systematically exercised to review the content of texts, videos, audio recordings, documents, and transcripts, identifying patterns, categories, themes, and data (Leavy, 2017). This data analysis strategy was beneficial and relevant to the study as it provided a structured and systematic approach to data analysis and interpretation , enhancing the objectivity and reliability of the findings (Flick, 2018).

Content analysis assisted the researcher in identifying patterns that emerged from the data, providing useful insights into the research topic. Additionally, content analysis was particularly useful for exploring new areas of research or identifying new research questions (Anandarajan et al., 2019).

Despite its benefits, content analysis had some challenges, including being limited to the content being analysed and potentially not providing the bigger picture (Mayring, 2014). Subjectivity in coding was also a limitation, as the process of selecting particular themes was often subject to the researcher's lenses (Taylor, 2016). Content analysis could be time-consuming when processing copious amounts of data, hence for the study, the sample size was limited. Further concerns regarding content analysis were related to

validity and reliability in relation to coding, meaning that, for the study to minimize these concerns, coding had to be well-defined (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The study also utilized a method for identifying and analysing themes or patterns in qualitative data which is termed critical thematic analysis. This method is concerned with the identification recurring pattens or themes in the data and organizing them into meaningful categories (Flick, 2018). The benefits of critical thematic analysis included its flexibility, due to its applicability to a vast data sets, including interviews, written text, and focus groups (Terrel, 2016). This data analysis method enabled the researcher to provide a meticulous overview of the data through emerging themes or patterns (Flick, 2018). Thematic analysis was useful for gaining a better understanding of a topic, serving as a form of exploratory research (Mayring, 2014). For the study, thematic analysis was useful as it could be applied across cultures, as the researcher and the participants did not need a common language for the research to occur (Taylor, 2016).

Similar to content analysis, some concerns regarding critical thematic analysis pertained to reliability and validity, as the identification and interpretation of themes could be influenced by biases and assumptions which the researcher may have had (Sundler et al., 2019). The thematic analysis process could be influenced by the research question, thereby limiting the interpretation of the data (Sundler et al., 2019). This process of analysing data was often difficult to replicate, particularly when themes were ill-defined (Costa et al., 2019).

3.9 Possible limitations and challenges of the study

The limitations of this included only the executive level of management within large retail organisation based in Kwa-Zulu-Natal, South Africa, and did not assume to represent any other population. The study was confined to participants who could

communicate in English. Possible biases of the executives regarding their self-perception could have limited the study findings. Participant availability was also a notable challenge as the research study occurred in the November months of 2023 which is peak trade season in the retail trading calendar, meaning that leader availability was a concern. This was mitigated by working closely with the network of the People team. Confidentiality was reiterated, a structured interview guide was used, leading questions were avoided, and rapport was established prior to the interviews taking place.

3.10 Quality Assurance

The study's nature was that of a case study which used interviews as the research instruments. Since the study was qualitative, quality assurance is measured in terms of transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability. The following section summarises the four criteria of the quality assurance process according to Lincoln and Guba, as highlighted by Cameron (2011).

3.10.1 *Transferability*

Qualitative studies must ensure transferability which refers to how the study can be generalised to other settings (Cameron, 2011). Maxwell argues that a good measure that can be set in place to ensure transferability involves extrapolate a detailed description of the case, its context, the desired participants, and data collection procedures (Maxwell, 2021) . In terms of purposive sampling, the focus of the study was solely on executives within the set population that being the executives who had completed the EQ programme. Open ended questions were included in the structured interview guide which facilitated the participants ability to express themselves from firsthand experience.

3.10.2 *Credibility*

Credibility is understood as how specific the findings are in relation to the participants perception and experience (Cameron, 2011). This can be ensured by running a pilot to try eliminating biases and cross-checking findings with participants. Daniel offers that a process of triangulation of evidence will assist to identify irregularities. Of particular use, is a reflexive journal which can record researcher biases and assumptions which that possibly effect the data collection and analysis (Daniel, 2019).

3.10.3 *Dependability*

In terms of dependability the study must exhibit consistency and stability in terms of its findings (Cameron, 2011). As proposed by Haven and Groote, this means an audit trail must document any modifications to documents and detailed protocols must be documented during the collection and analysis of data, and the study may require some peer review on the analysis of findings (L. Haven & Van Grootel, 2019) .

3.10.4 *Confirmability*

When a research study is shown to have objectivity and impartiality in its findings, as well as the absence of researcher bias, that study is said to be confirmable (Cameron, 2011). Nassaji recommend that to ensure confirmability include the use of an independent auditor to review the research study as well as the interrogate various data points support findings. The study must also clearly document the data collection and data analysis methodology and have on record concise audit trail of interpretations made in the analysis (Nassaji, 2020).

3.11 Ethical considerations

Research ethics were critical to the research process, as their omission could result in unintended negative outcomes, particularly when it related to leaders and their peers. As

such, this research paper mitigated unethical methods by ensuring the following principles, as outlined by Pruzan, were in place.

Firstly, only voluntary participation was accepted, and participants could refrain from participating without any negative implications. All participants completed a consent form for the mutual protection of the participants and the researcher. All benefits and risks associated with the study were communicated upfront with the participants. During the research process, all data collected was filed onto an encrypted drive where that only the researcher had access. Additionally, the participants were given aliases to provide anonymity and protect their identity. Participants were treated with respect and were not coerced nor exploited during the research study. Further, should a participant feel distressed by a question, they were free not to answer that question. During the research process, the benefits or harm anticipated in the study were minimized by anonymity. The study methods, design, and reporting were readily available to the participants to minimize the risk of unintended deception. The researcher invited participants to ask clarifying questions and, on completion of the study and it was relayed to the participants that they would be informed about the research findings once they were available (Pruzan, 2016).

As this study was set within the employment relationship, the above principles assisted with the responsible and respectful manner of the studies application, and this protected the rights and well-being of the participants.

3.12 Proposed schedule and timelines

#	Action	Start date	Completion date
1	Notify HR heads and obtain list of potential participants	01.11.2023	01.11.2023

2	Send email from Director of L&D to participants	01.11.2023	01.11.2023
3	Call participants and confirm interview date	06.11.2023	07.11.2023
4	Get written confirmation of voluntary participation	09.11.2023	09.11.2023
5	Send reminder email to participants	1 day prior to interview	
6	Conduct interviews	14.11.2023	30.11.2023
7	Send the thank you email	1 day after the interview	
8	Collate data	01.12.2023	08.12.2023
9	Interpret the data	11.12.2023	15.12.2023
10	Present the findings to the organisation	10.03.2024	10.03.2024
11	Share findings with participants	11.03.2024	11.03.2024

4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter is a presentation of the research findings extracted from the research participants during their semi-structured interviews on *the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry*. Particularly, in answering the following research question:

- What is the impact on the emotional intelligence of Corporate Leaders after participating in the Executive Emotional Intelligence Programme?

4.2 Background of Data Collection

The data was collected from a sample of twenty leaders within the organisation who had completed the emotional intelligence programme. The interviews were conducted in person and online on Microsoft Teams. In alignment with confidentiality and the POPI (Protection of Personal Information) Act, all interviews were recorded on an encrypted phone and Microsoft Teams, then transferred onto an encrypted server which is password protected. All interviews were conducted within November 2023.

4.3 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research methods, the researcher must ensure the trustworthiness of the collected data. Accordingly measures set in place to ensure trustworthiness of analyses by articulating key principles (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). These principles are capture on the below table.

Principle	**Measure Applied**
Transferability	To ensure transferability the researcher asked allowed the participants to express their views verbatim

	through the use of open ended questions. The participants were allowed to say as much as they needed to. The researcher also probed and used clarifying questions, where phrases such as " can you unpack your statement" , "is there anything else that you would like to mention," were used to ensure alignment. The researcher relayed that questions could be rephrased for participants as requested and questions were permitted. Ample time was allowed for answers was and questions were repeated in some instances where either the participant or researcher needed further clarity.
Credibility	In terms of ensuring credibility, the researcher used recorded audio files, transcripts as well as journaling throughout the interviews process. This ensures that there is an analysis of various forms of data pertaining to the corporate leaders within the retail industry.
Dependability	The researcher has stored all data forms on a backed-up cloud and online platform to ensure that verification and reviewing is possible if so required.
Confirmability	In terms of confirmability, all recordings and transcripts were captured on reliable software and stored securely. All research conclusions have been verified and cross-referenced to the participant responses.

Table 2: Measures of trustworthiness of research

4.4 Background of participants

The participants ranged from diverse professional backgrounds within a corporate setting and were in positions of leadership where they managed at least one person directly. The structured interview questions were conveyed to participants within the literature context and background of the literature expressed in chapter two. To comply with the precept of anonymity, the researcher used the aliases as selected by the participants.

Using structured interviews for this method of research topic is important as it allows the researchers to iterate the data with the participants and clarify any misinterpretations (Alamri, 2019). Of interest to this study, some of the key themes that have been gleaned include gravitation towards moderating responses to the external world related to the self-awareness concept. Under self-management an apparent theme is that most participants already had a sense of self-management prior to attending the programme. With regards to social awareness, two themes dominated the data analyses, firstly empathy was seen to improve, and secondly, the programme has created a social system of networking and support within the organization. In relationship management, two key themes of teamwork and conflict resolution have shown a significant improvement for the participants.

The Dedoose 9.0.107 data platform was used for data analyses and thematic interpretation of responses. Using this data platform, the below set of data tables are a breakdown of the participants profiles by age , gender, tenure, function, and years since programme completion.

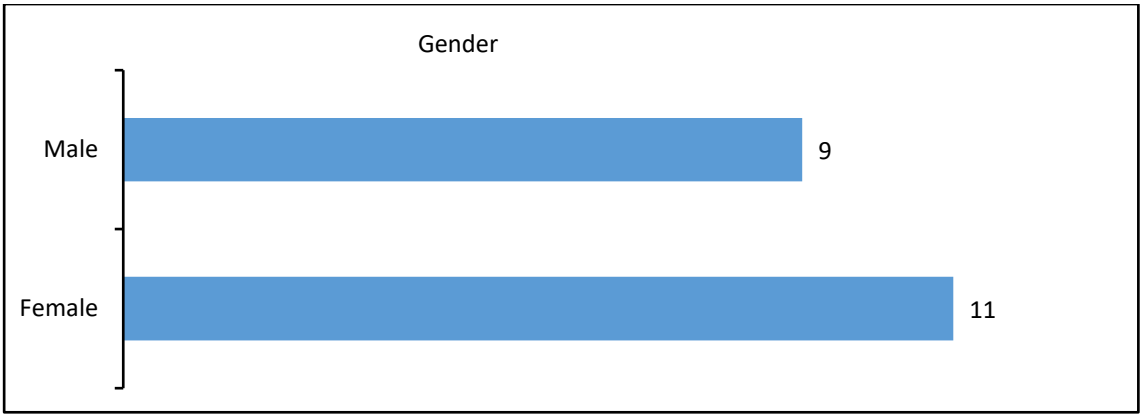


Figure 1: Gender of participants

In the study, twenty participants provided response, of the 20, 11 were female and nine were male, creating a 60/40 female and male gender split of participants. No other gender categories were shared by the participants.

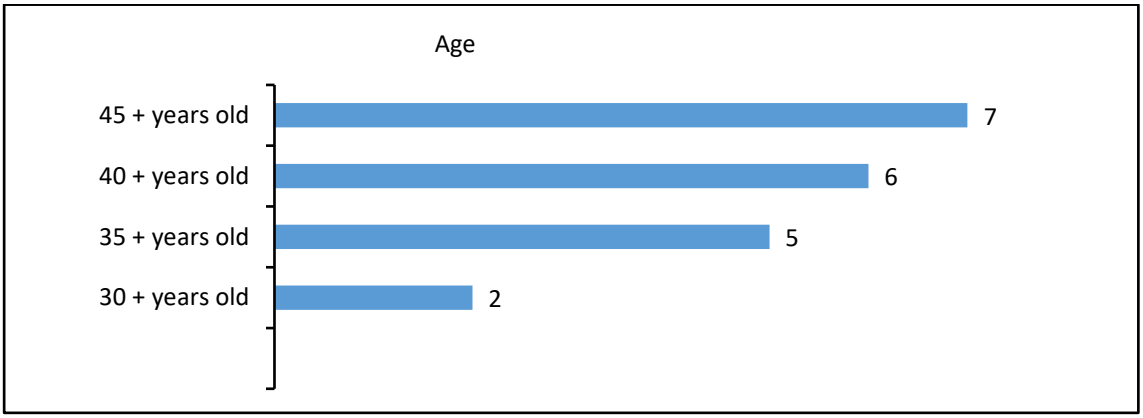


Figure 2: Age of participants

The research study participants age range was from over 30 years old to over 45 years old and consisted of four tiers. In the 30 years old to 34 years old, there were two participants. From 35 years to 39 years old there were five participants. Six participants were older than 40 years but younger than over 45 years old. The majority of participants, being seven were older than 45 years old.

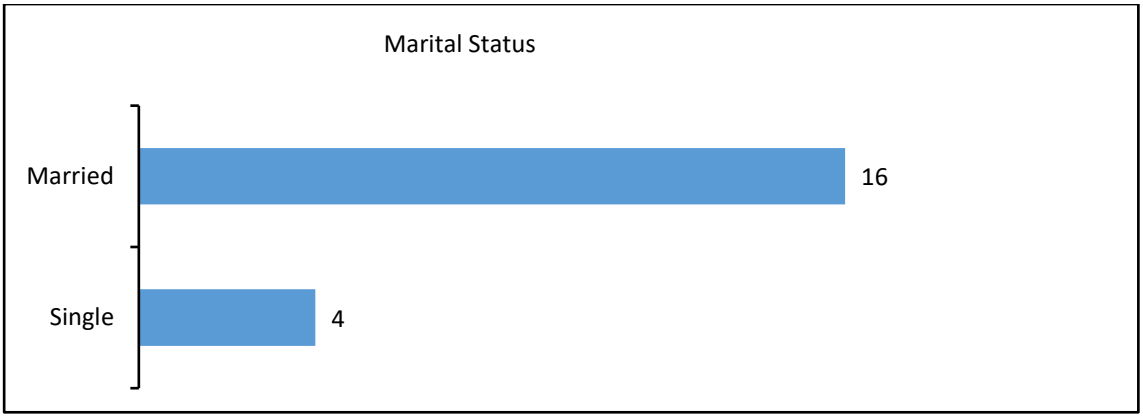


Figure 3: Marital status of participants

Concerning the marital status of the participants, sixteen of the participants indicated that they were married and four were single.

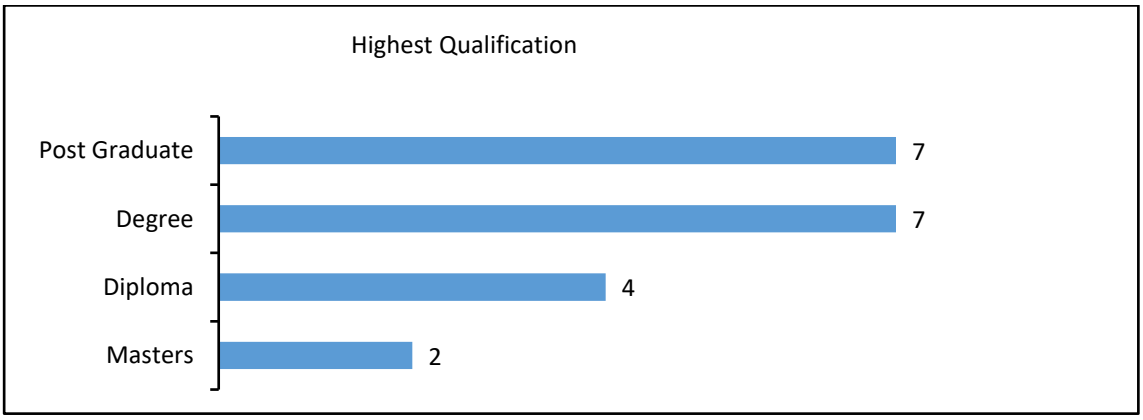


Figure 4:Highest Qualification of participants

Four levels of qualifications were indicated by the research participants, that being, a post graduate degree, and undergraduate degree, an undergraduate diploma, and a master's degree. The participants were subdivided into these levels of education, of which two had competed their master's degree, four completed their undergraduate diploma, seven had an undergraduate degree and postgraduate diploma, respectively.

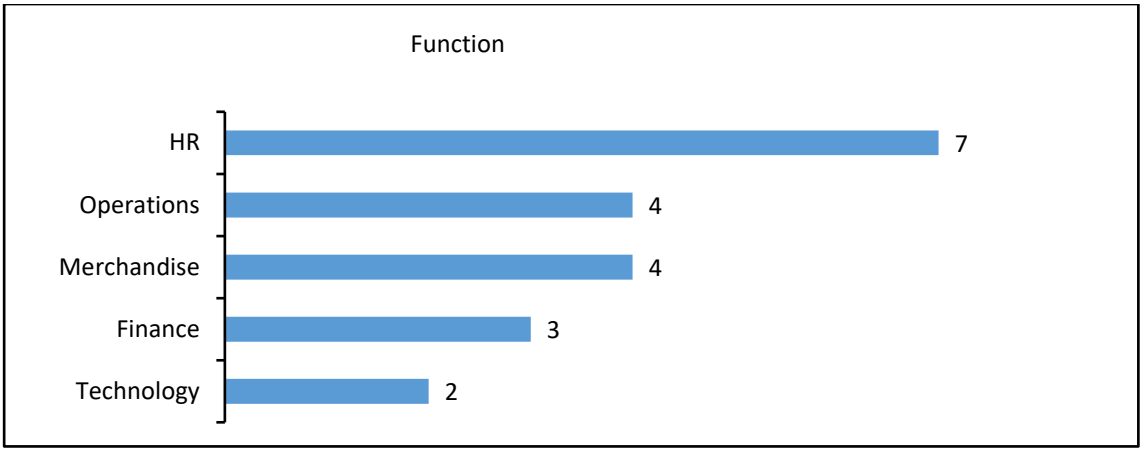


Figure 5: Functional Areas of participants

The participants denoted five functional areas. Seven participants were from the human resource (HR) function, four were in operations and merchandise respectively, three belonged to the financial function and two were from technology.

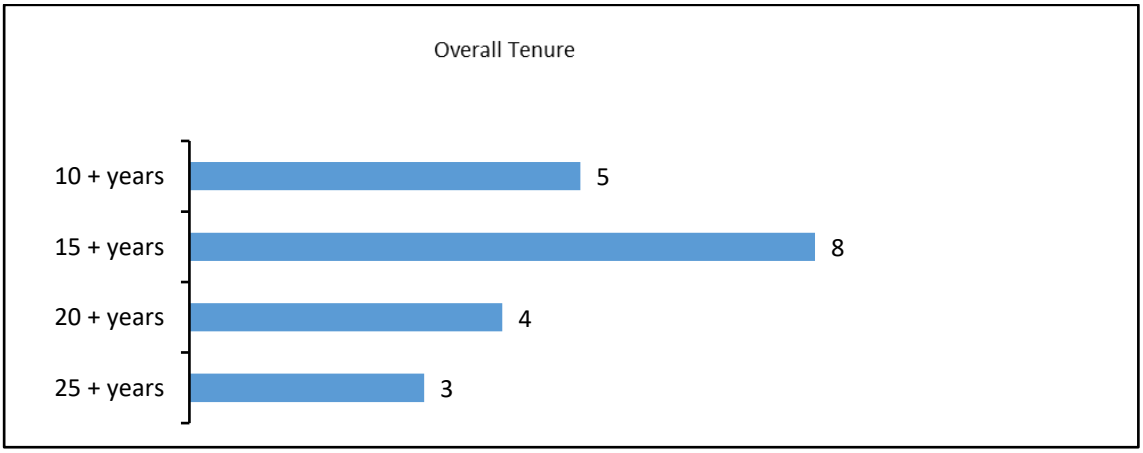


Figure 6: Tenure of participants internal and external to organisation

The overall tenure which is the total career experience of the participants, ranged from over ten years to over 25 years. Five participants had 10 to 14 years of overall tenure, eight participants had 15 to 19 years of overall tenure, four of the participants had 20 to 24 years of overall tenure and three participants noted tenure greater than 25 years of work experience.

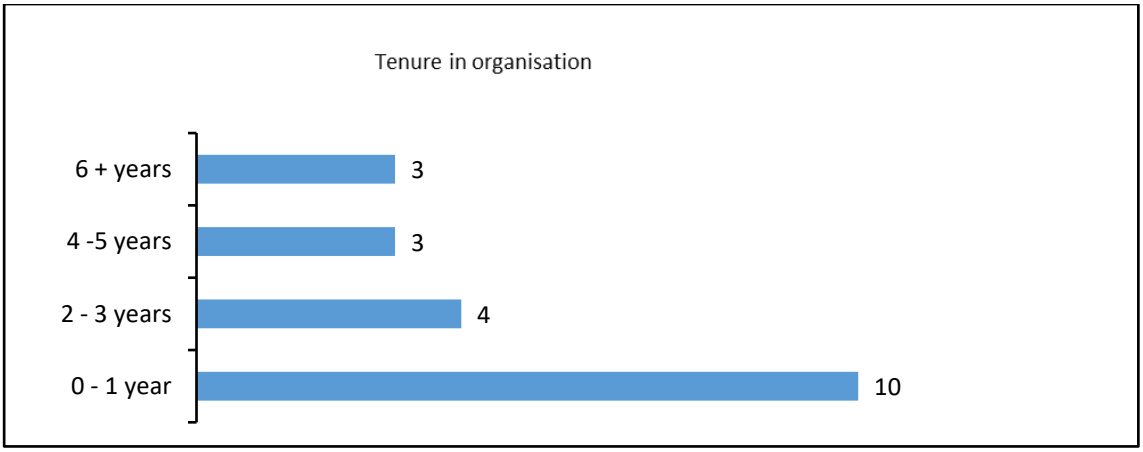


Figure 7: Tenure in organisation of participants

Participant tenure within the organisation was systematically categorised into four groups which were below a year, two to three years, four to five years and six plus years. Ten participants indicated that they had been with the organisation for a year or less, four participants indicated that they had two to three years' work experience within the organisation, three participants' organisational tenure ranged from four to five years and three participants had greater that six years work experience within the organisation.

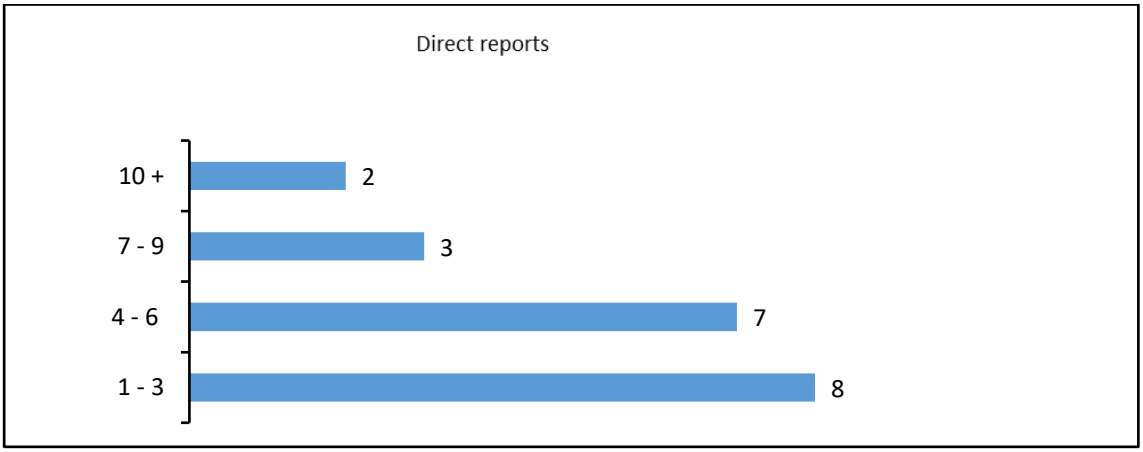


Figure 8: Number of direct reports of participants

The researcher grouped the direct reports data into four groups. The group with one to three direct reports had eight participants, the group with four to six direct

reports had seven participants, the group with seven to nine direct reports had three participants and the group with over ten direct reports, had two participants.

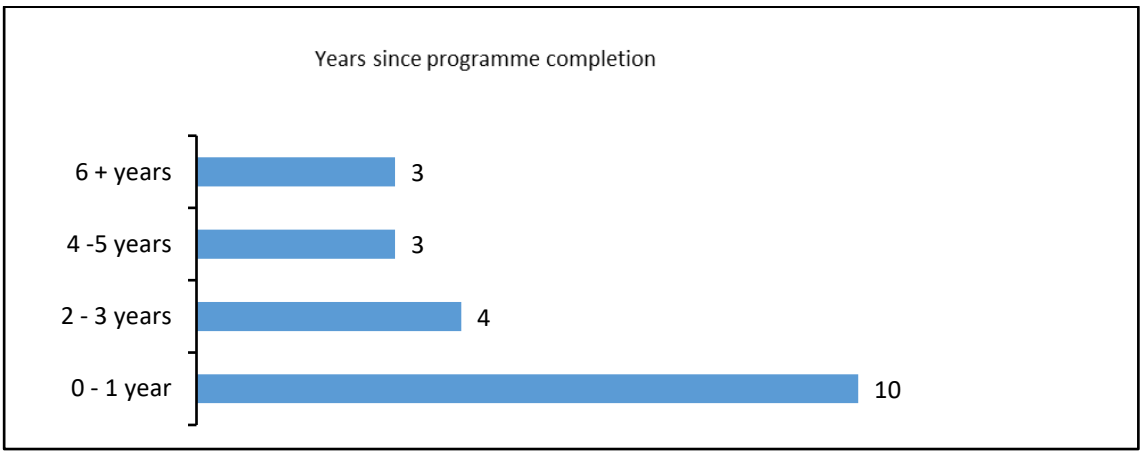


Figure 9: Years since programme completion of participants

The researcher noted the number of years which had passed since the participants had completed the programme. In this category, the participants were subdivided into four levels, which were less than a year, between two to three years, between four to five years and greater than six years. Ten of the participants had had less than a year since they completed the emotional intelligence programme, four participants had between two to three passed since their programme completion, three participants had had between four to five years pass since programme completion and three participants had had greater than six years pass since the completed the programme.

4.5 Research Themes

4.5.1 Introduction

To address the research question *what is the impact on the emotional intelligence of corporate leaders after participating in the executive emotional intelligence programme?*, a set of structured interviews was conducted with twenty

participants affiliated with a major retail organization. The forthcoming chapter will illuminate the primary themes and subthemes elucidated by the respondents.

4.5.2 Self-Awareness

4.5.2.1 *Theme 1: Understanding and mitigating bias in decision-making processes.*

All the research participants indicated that they perceived that completing the psychometric assessment as a prerequisite of the programme helped them significantly understand themselves, and their colleagues, and thus their biases were highlighted, the programme helped the participants formulate strategies to counter their biases. Participant R17 was reflected that "*I think the other one that was a huge AHA was that whole diminishes and multipliers… until it was boxed into those specific examples, it heightened awareness of that kind of stuff."* R17 p.1. Interestingly, participant R1 expressed that *"There was a big change from myself in terms of how I deal with other people… I ended up understanding that people are different, and they've got different emotions and I have to understand how I deal with them."* R1p.3

This theme of highlighting and bias countering consistently flowed through the interviews; however, it should be noted that none of the participants perceived that they were not self-aware prior to the programme's attendance, rather the programme has reinforced what they already know. Particularly, participant R5 reflected that "*I didn't have a lot of room to still grow from a self-awareness perspective, but just reinforce some of my own sort of learning that I had."* R5 p.2 Participant R3 indicated that *"So going into this program, I had already had a lot of foundation basics in place, so I did not go into the program blank or not understanding exactly what emotional intelligence also means"* R3 p.3

4.5.2.2 *Theme 2: Assessing the application proficiency of tools acquired through the emotional intelligence programme*

Research participants indicated that they had learned at least four new emotional intelligence tools in the programme, which being the *enneagram assessment, crucial conversations, multipliers, neuroscience leadership and braving leadership*. These tools have been detailed in the literature in chapter two. Most notably, all the participants mentioned that the application of these tools, and referral to them as necessary, has significantly improved their self-awareness.

Participant R11 mentions that "*I'm mindful of the styles that are kind of present within in enneagram, very mindful of accidental diminishing…but it's accidental, so sometimes you still do it …and either apologize or course correct"* R11 p.3 When referring to how the neuroscience leadership model has helped as a tool, participant R16, made an interesting example of how the application of the tools had helped with the recognition of negative behavioural patterns and remedying thereof. R16 mentioned that " *You might receive an e-mail that's a little bit heavy-handed and, immediately you want to jump in … and then you just take a step back, go make a cup of coffee, come back and … think what's the best way to tackle this problem and respond diplomatic"*R16 p.3

4.5.2.3 *Self- Awareness minor theme*

Whilst the dominant themes have been highlighted above, less dominant views which are of interest were raised by the participants. In terms of *self – confidence*, which is a subfield of self-awareness in Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence, an interesting comment was made by participant R15, who had over 10 years of tenure within and external to the organisation, *"I still need work on and for me … I don't know whether the program gave me that."* This participant

seemed to be in the earlier stages of building self-confidence, in spite to many years of work and leadership experience. R 15.p3.

4.5.3 Self-Management

4.5.3.1 *Theme 1: Innate ability to self-manage*

In terms of self- management, an innate ability to self -manage in relation to sense of transparency was expressed. Transparency as concept of Goleman's subfield of self- management, refers to exhibiting behaviours that align with the individuals' values, the participants indicated that they had a powerful sense of alignment of their values to the company values, thus participants have had the freedom to be transparent in this sense. Participant R18 stated that "*I'll say it reaffirmed. I'm not saying I'm there's no room for growth with me, but I'm just saying. It reaffirmed the correctness of that"* R18 p.6 Participant R14 had a similar response when she explained that the overall programme reinforced the company values which aligned very strongly with hers, specifically, *"I found that it aligned with my moral campus. It was more so about just eye-opening in terms of the business itself is this core is it aligns with my own, moral compass."* R14 p.9

4.5.3.2 *Theme 2: Predisposition and affinity for change*

Concerning change management, participants shared the sentiments that since covid19 the world, including the retail trade of South Africa, is in a state of continual change. This has forced a rapid change agility in leaders, which is now perceived as an innate and necessary trait for leadership. Participant R6 remarked that "*That's like a natural reflex to myself. ... it's the awareness when you know that you're not as agile or adaptable. It just makes you a little bit more conscious."* R6 p.8 According to R8, teaching the change process to teams has allowed a collective understanding of the emotional responses to change and helped with

responding from a place of collective understanding of why individuals would experience change in a particular way. Participant R8 noted that "*in fact, I would go on to say the whole change growth mindset versus fixed mindset, were the big takeouts for me… especially now like with all this instability change, just became the norm, yeah.*" R8 p.6

4.5.3.3 *Self-management minor theme*

A minor theme that emerged in terms of self-management is in terms *of reframing thinking patterns*. This subtheme is intricately linked to the subfield of self-management referred to as *emotional self-control* . Specifically, participant R19 mentioned that *"every time I apply that principle (reframing obstacles to opportunities), I have found truth that for every object obstacle, there's an opportunity"* R19 p. 18. A similar sentiment was shared by participant R16 who outlined that " *it really just gives you a little bit of perspective and that's why I really like that that word reframing"* R16 p.12. These participants indicated that the programme helped them to reframe their thinking patterns by teaching them how to look for cues and be sensitised to why they would consider information from a perspective and gave them a method of applying a different lense to the circumstances which surround them.

4.5.4 Social-Awareness

4.5.4.1 *Theme 1: Augmented empathy skills*

Participants indicated that the programme assisted with demonstrating empathy towards their team members. The perceptions of being empathetic prior to the programme was indicated by a third of the participants, whilst the remaining majority perceived to have improved. Of interest, participant R20 reflected that ***"****taught me to as a leader to differentiate of when you're being empathetic is how*

do you not be a rescuer… how to understand what people are going through, but how to also bring it back." R 20 p.42. Participant R7 indicated that being empathetic has improved with age, and experience. This participant however clarified that has helped in being more conscious of that there is more to consider regarding people's behaviour related to what they experience outside of the workplace. Participant R7 stated, "*the human side for me is so important because I know that everyone has is here for 8 hours a day but, there's the rest of the hours where they've got something else."*R7 p.9.

4.5.4.2 *Theme 2: Amplified networking skills*

It must be noted that the programme was introduced in 2017 and the highest number of years since programme completion is six years, whilst the highest tenure within the organisation in the sample group was 20 years. Of the sample group, 10 participants had an average of less than a year since programme completion and an averaged at three and a half years of tenure within the organisation. This indicates that in this sample, fairly new leaders were many of the beneficiaries of the programme, meaning that networking through the programme was pivotal. R15 who has ten years of tenure and six years since completing the programme expressed that *"Going through that journey, you got to see different aspects of the business…understand the different pressure points that people are experiencing and also understanding that you're not alone in this"* R15 p.10 For this participant created a support network that fostered a deep relationship with the group of programme alumni, embedding a sense of connection between them.

A similar sentiment was expressed by participant R2 who completed the programme this year and has a year of tenure within the organisation. The participant indicated that that the cross-divisional nature of the programme has significantly enhanced their networking ability. The participant remarked *" it has*

helped me understand that I now have the ability to engage with anybody at any level and get insight from a plethora of people around me who have mostly all the answers to the questions that I have" R2 p.11 The enhanced networking has contributed to the participants ability to fulfil their role, by creating a network of experts that can be referred to as necessary.

4.5.4.3 *Social- Awareness minor theme*

Participant R4 indicated that they have not yet bedded down how to *accurately meet their customers' needs*, which is a concept of the subfield of *service orientation* of Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence, as a the nature of the work required. It was shared by the participant that *" people don't always know how to articulate what they need…if I can break through to understand what it is truly that somebody' needing…that's probably my weakness still, that sometimes I have quite a hard hand and I need to do it in a way that it doesn't make them feel like they were bullied into it."* R4.p14

4.5.5 Relationship Management

4.5.5.1 *Theme 1: Fortified teamwork and team development*

In the relationship management theme, a common sentiment is that there has been an enhancement of teamwork and team development for corporate leaders. This is prevalent for all participants. A pertinent example is expressed by participant R13 who outlined that *" I think the positive feedback has created an opportunity for people to be open in terms of what are the weaknesses and learning opportunities"* R13 p.12 The programme has helped the leaders to be responsive to their team's developmental needs, thus improving overall teamwork and development. A key element required to efficiently develop team members is the

leader's ability to ensure that the developmental gaps are closed. A failure to act once needs have been identified may result in dissatisfaction.

Participant R 9 shared an insight of interest concerning teamwork by highlighting that the programme has shifted the perspective to aspire to servant leadership where *"It's about serving your team and not feeling a sense of entitlement from your team. So, it's about humility, uplifting them, it's about imparting to them, getting them to do the job that you are doing. You know, to make yourself redundant, and that's what I'm aspiring to with my team"* R9 p.16 The participant reflects that the programmes teachings have created exposure to a new type of leadership that has a strong focus on developing teams, which is culminating in a better sense of how to develop team members.

Other participants reflected on how the programme has influenced their teamwork within their peer groups across functions and divisions. Participant R 12 mentioned that *"the piece I spoke about just now where that vulnerability within the team that we attended with has allowed me to step in and be more supportive and a more of a team player within my community*. R12.p.19 Overall this participant also shared that they have made deliberate attempts to share their knowledge with team members towards team development.

4.5.5.2 *Theme 2: Improved conflict resolution proficiency*

Conflict resolution seemed to be more pertinent for the team members who had a more that 3 direct reports. Participants R4, R10 and R4 indicated a high improvement of conflict resolution as an outcome of the programme. It must be highlighted that all the participants indicated the programme has equipped them with tangible approaches to conflict resolution. Participant R4 noted that *"I think*

it's trying to not resolve the conflict for my team members but teach them how to do it themselves. Because I think it's also important that they can conflict resolution with me when they feel they need to, you know, and vice versa." R4.p.17. The participant's perspective is that all team members must be equipped with the capacity to resolve conflicts in a healthily, and the participants has the expectation to also be held accountable should conflict arise on their end. There is a mutual expectation of healthy conflict resolution within the team.

Participant R 10 held a similar view and expressed that *"not so much with me myself, but in coaching others or like helping people through things"* R10 p.17. The participant then shared an example of a team member which they had coached on conflict resolution, who went on to successfully resolve a conflict within the team. Similar to R4, there seemed to be a sense of mutual expectation for healthy conflict resolution within the teams.

For participant R19, a personal experience was shared where they witnessed inappropriate behaviour and used conflict resolution skills to confront and resolve an issue. " *I used to watch that happening …I think that is when I just, took a step and called people on the side and said, you know what you were doing was out of order and I made sure that I was listening so that I can quote examples to them."* R19.p17. For this participant, the conflict wasn't necessarily their own, however they used their skills to resolve a conflict in the team.

4.5.5.3 *Relationship Management minor theme*

In terms of *relationship management* participant R19 who had a team of four direct reports was the only participant to remark that they were not doing enough to energise their team. The ability to energise a team is a concept of *inspirational*

leadership which is a subfield of relationship management. The participant reflected that *"I will put my hand up and say I haven't been doing any fun activities"* R19.p14. Lastly , participant R 12 who had between 6 – 10 years tenure within the organisation was the only participant who their perception of being able to give upward feedback since the programme's completion. The participant noted that " *it's made me brave enough to be able to give that feedback upwards where I may not have been as brave enough to do that before."* R12.p12.

4.5.6 Summary of the results/findings

From the findings, one can conclude that the emotional intelligence programme has improved the emotional intelligence of the corporate leaders within the retail industry. In the instances where the programme has built on foundations of other learnings prior the programme, the programme itself has triggered a remembrance of emotional intelligence skills, and thus catalysed improvement to emotional intelligence. All participants indicated varying degrees of improvement, even in instances where participants responded that the programme marginally improved an emotional intelligence skill, the participants could share examples in their current roles within the organisation where they have recently applied the skill learned on the programme.

Theme two of self-awareness *Assessing the application proficiency of tools acquired through the emotional intelligence programme,* was prevalent in the sample across tenure, age, and function. All research participants referred directly to the tools taught in the programme, further, each participant could clearly articulate which tool they used when, these extends to events as recent as a week before the interviews, and as far back as when they had just completed the programme.

Participants indicated that in terms of self – management, it seems to be a prerequisite for operating as a corporate leader, to have a strong affinity for change and adaptability. Interestingly during the interviews, sixteen of the respondents were almost amused to be asked the question. The participants have an overall perception that change is a constant given the current state of trade locally and globally. The programme itself has changed the way leaders view change, from it being a threat response, they now understand it better and have clarity on how to approach change in a positive way for themselves and their teams.

The most significant finding about social awareness is the enhanced networking and an outcome of the EQ programme. Of interest, there did not seem to be a differentiation of improved networking for participants who had higher tenure within the organisation in comparison to participants who had lower tenure. A common utterance was that the participants formed an alumni group with the attendees of their group. Those relationships were underpinned by a common experience of the programme and have become (over the years) a support network.

Interestingly, the participants referred to the impact of the neuroscience principles in relation to daily interactions, specifically the research findings indicated the ability of the participants to understand the emotional impact of situations which trigger their primitive brain which has a fight or flight response, has resulted in a considered approach , should they need to respond. This is a noteworthy element in establishing emotional intelligence as well as maintaining it in various circumstances.

The researcher found that , key to relationship management, is the notion of enhanced conflict resolution. Specially, the researcher found that corporate leaders after participation in the emotional intelligence programme, were better equipped to manage conflict as it arose in their This was mostly prevalent with participants who had more than three direct reports, which was twelve participants in total. The corporate leaders indicated that not only have they learned how to resolve conflict, but the corporate leaders also recognised a need to teach this skill to their team members, so that they could resolve their own conflicts. A common statement used to describe the learned response to conflict, is that of "pausing" to assess the situation before responding.

From the results, the programme has had a lower effect on the internal concepts of emotional intelligence, which being *self-awareness and self-management.* There is a greater perception of development for the external concepts of emotional intelligence, which being *social awareness and relationship management.*

5 CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter discusses the research findings in response to the research topic of the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail sector. This chapter explores the research findings from Goleman's perspective of emotional intelligence and unpacks the data in terms of his concepts of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

The preceding chapters have outlined the foundation through presenting a review of the relevant literature, methodology and empirical framework. The transition to the discussion of results will use an examination of research finding nuances to decipher, draw connections and offer insightful interpretations. Through a thematic analysis, the discussion will attempt to highlight the significance and implications of this study and outline potential avenues for future research and practical implications.

5.2 Interpretation of results

In the dynamic and complex landscape of corporate leadership, the significance of emotional intelligence (EQ) cannot be overstated. Recognizing the importance of emotional intelligence, many organizations have implemented EQ programmes that endeavour to embed and augment leader emotional intelligence. This chapter explores various theoretical frameworks that highlight the results according to the participants experiences, the notion that emotional intelligence programmes result in improved emotional intelligence in corporate leaders. An exploration of the interpretation of the findings will be expanded in this section, by applying various theoretical frameworks embedded within emotional intelligence programmes

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the retail industry to meet the research objective *to determine if corporate leaders exhibit increased emotional intelligence following their participation in the executive emotional intelligence programme.* A total of twenty participants have shared their perceptions and experiences and key discussions that have arisen using Goleman's (2005) framework of emotional intelligence.

5.3 Self – Awareness

In chapter four we discussed that the emotional intelligence programme showed a marginal improvement of self-awareness for the participants after programme attendance, and the research has shown that the most significant area of improvement is the learning of how to effectively apply new tools learned in the programme.

To reiterate, *self-awareness* refers to understanding of one's own emotions and formulating appropriate responses in varying situations (Goleman, 2009). As per researchers' findings in chapter four of this paper, the participants already had a basic appreciation for various tools related self -awareness but lacked the information on how to effectively implement the EQ tools accordingly, prior to the programme. This is supported by Salovey and Mayer, who support that emotional intelligence programmes that are effective are designed to a structured approach to skill development. Through targeted exercises and activities, an enhancing of a leaders ability to recognize and manage emotions, resulting in improved emotional intelligence (John D Mayer et al., 2002).

For instance, the participants have experience in a corporate environment and as a foundation, are aware of the company policies and procedures in relation to learning and development. Specifically, the participants as corporate leaders in this organisation, there is an expectation that they would plan and permit their team members to attend training. Now in instances where team member performance is not at the correct level, team members may be asked to halt the training and focus on their performance first. This then necessitates a difficult conversation, which participants are aware of in a lose form, not as a tool. The programme taught the participants how to navigate these conversations using the programmes lessons on crucial conversations, by creating and enacting role play scenarios from different perspectives, and thus allowed for practical application of the tool with likeminded individuals, thus embedding its applicability in real life scenarios.

This research finding is supported by the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model, developed by Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, which outlines a comprehensive framework for emotional intelligence, emphasizing the importance of perceiving, understanding, managing, and using emotions effectively (John D Mayer et al., 2002). It can therefore be concluded that corporate leader EQ can be enhanced through EQ programmes when targeted activities are used within the programme.

5.4 Self-Management

According to the research findings of this paper outlined in chapter four, the emotional intelligence programme seems to have had a marginal improvement on self-management, however participants showed a great affinity for change due to the nature of their work industry. This is supported by the writings of Sala, who concluded in his research study, that a marginal improvement in the area of

empathy and change catalyst was observed in leaders after attending EQ programmes (Sala, 2001).

As expanded in the literature review, self-management according to Goleman refers to the internal processes of regulation of impulses and resources. Within this concept self-management is the sub concept of change management. Change management was offered as a module in the programmes and was perceived as core to corporate business processes by the participants. Change managements as highlighted in the programme, is aligned to Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2009). The researcher was not surprised by this finding as change management and the language thereof is commonly understood, especially in the senior and top management teams.

Dearborn supports this finding by emphasizing that organizations should invest in developing emotional intelligence competencies through training programmes, customising them to a specific management competency such as change management skills (Dearborn, 2002). This researcher suggests that targeted training can enhance emotional intelligence, equipping the beneficiaries of the learning, with the tools for emotional management and the navigation of change more effectively (Dearborn, 2002). Goleman affirms that leaders should model emotionally intelligent behaviour, demonstrating adaptability and resilience in the face of change. By embodying emotional intelligence, leaders set a positive example for employees, fostering a climate where change is embraced rather than resisted (Goleman et al., 2002).

Within the concept of self-management, there is also reference to the sub concept of initiative which focuses on an individual's capacity to leverage opportunities (Goleman et al., 2002). In this regard, of the twenty participants, only six

indicated career progress post the programme. Research by Urquijo et al. indicated that emotional intelligence is a foundation to career success and satisfaction, however personality traits also impact career success (Urquijo et al., 2019). Whilst this research paper did not delve into the personality traits of participant, it is of interest that in the research sample, of the six participants who indicated career progression post the programme, only two had greater than 10 years tenure whilst the balance was between three and seven years of tenure within the organisation. This is of interest as the organisational ethos is to appoint from within first. It must be noted that five of the twenty participants were directors, yet only one had greater than 10 years of tenure within the organisation. It would then seem from the findings, that albeit the programme is designed to advance a leader's career through using the programme for succession, perhaps personality traits or systemically, there are barriers to career progress.

5.5 Social Awareness

Outlined in chapter four, the research findings of this paper indicated a significant improvement of social awareness as an outcome of the programme. In terms of this, the participants improved their organisational awareness through forming alumni groups with previous participants.

In accordance with Goleman's framework, social awareness refers to the approach to navigating relationships and understanding others feelings. A sub concept of organisational awareness was a key highlight in the research (Goleman, 2009). All participants attested to the creation on networks as an outcome of the programme. Indeed, this is of greater importance to newer employees, but is as equally important to participants with longer tenure. The nature and design of corporate organisations is such that a fair amount of decision making requires cross divisional inputs, especially in relation to the strategic endeavours of

organisations. For instance, an opening of a new store will require input and approval from the merchandise, supply chain, human resources, property, and IT functions, yet the operations head holds the final accountability for that store opening. This sometimes means that rapport could outweigh the justification for the store opening. Accordingly, the gravitation of the leaders who have completed the programme, to create networks of affiliation or alumni, influences how much support a project may have. This finding is aligned with the study by Khattab et al. regarding the use of social networks in the advancement of minority careers. This research supports that organisations could implement networking programmes in the form of training and creating role models to aid in the career advancement of minority employees (Khattab et al., 2020).

It was not surprising that the participants would form alliances based on a shared experience as forming bonds through shared experiences is highlighted as a crucial aspect of social awareness. Goleman suggests that shared experiences create a sense of connection and understanding between individuals. Whether it is through collaborative work, shared challenges, or mutual interests, these experiences foster a deeper connection and empathy among people. This, in turn, contributes to the development of positive relationships and effective communication (Goleman, 1999).

Writings by Singh et al, aligns with relaying that emotional intelligence is not solely concerned with an individual's inclinations to manage their own emotions but also about their capacity to navigate and relate to the emotions of others. By emphasizing social awareness and the importance of shared experiences, and underscores the role of empathy, understanding, and interpersonal connection in building strong and meaningful relationships (Singh et al., 2022).

A crucial factor to note in relation to social awareness and career networking is the symbolism created through the programme. To elaborate, the after completion of the emotional intelligence programme, each graduate is gifted with personalised memorabilia, and an award. The research found that these awards are most often displaced in the participants office as a type of badge of honour, which symbolises that that corporate leader has earned their space within the leadership team. This award becomes a conversation piece and proof to other leaders, that this corporate leader is now part of the inner circle. This particular symbol is also the organisational emblem, and thus can be thought of as an additional support when networking, in instances where the corporate leader has completed the programme. The opposite could also be true, in that corporate leaders who have not obtained this rite of passage could feel left out. The programme not only improve social awareness as part of its learning outcomes, it also has created a social stratification which could be aspirational or demotivating, depending on the leaders' position within that stratification.

5.6 Relationship Management

In terms of relationship management within Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence, this research paper found that there was a significant improvement in conflict resolution in the participants teams. This was of greater significance for corporate leaders who had greater than three direct reports. By Goleman's definition, relationship management is concerned with the ability to influence and gaining a positive outcome from others (Rechberg, 2020).

The researcher found that the nature of the organisation requires a high conflict resolution capability. The organisation is within the retail space where high competition and high change is constant. Additionally, within the South African

context, there have been challenges with politico – social unrest, power outages, a declining economy and uncommon weather patterns (Teuteberg, 2022). These factors have immediate and visible impact on the organisations ability to be profitable, which in turn adds pressure. Coupled with this, the case site organisation distributes profit figures which reflect trade performance three to four times a day. These figures are communicated and tracked by division, function, and team. This results in the real need to continuously perform within teams, which causes conflict, particularly when results are negative.

High conflict occurs the most frequently in larger teams, by virtue of having multiple personality types within these large teams. Accordingly, the research found that corporate leaders learned high conflict resolution as an outcome of the programme. Leaders who had more than three direct reports, extended their conflict resolution ability, by teaching and facilitation conflict management for their teams.

Hopkins and Yonkers research on the conflict resolution and emotional intelligence, emphasises the use of cognitive understanding and conflict resolution. These writers recognised that, for an individual to precisely resolve conflict, that individual could analyse themselves and their responses , prior to attempting a solution to conflict (Hopkins & Yonker, 2015). This is particularly useful to corporate leaders in high paced environments, where conflict is inevitable. This is ability to resolve conflict, is a foundation for building strong relationships with peers and teams, as it can create psychological safety where sensitive matters can be resolved without estranging one another.

5.7 Summary and conclusion of interpretation

The research findings discussed and interpreted by the researcher allude to the success of emotional intelligence programmes in building the emotional intelligence capability of corporate leaders within the retail trade of South Africa. The discussion has highlighted how self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, as indicated by Goleman, collectively contribute to the general development of emotional intelligence of the corporate leaders. Importantly, the research findings indicate that an integrated approach to emotional intelligence programme is best suited in facilitating the development of corporate leader emotional intelligence.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Research Summary

The research objective of this study is *to determine if corporate leaders exhibit increased emotional intelligence following their participation in the executive emotional intelligence programme.* The research framework was that of Goleman's perspective of emotional intelligence. Highlighted themes of the research findings as indicated by the participants were, in relation to self- awareness, self – management, social awareness and relationship management, which are the subfields of Goleman's framework (Sala, 2001).

In the research the key themes outlined in terms of self -awareness were the participants improved capacity to comprehend and mitigate bias in decision making and improved ability to assess and apply the tools learned in the programme proficiently. In terms of self - management the research participants indicated an improved an innate ability to self-manage and a strong affinity for change. In the subfield of social awareness, the key themes highlighted include augmented empathy skills and amplified networking skills. The relationship management subfield indicates the key themes of fortified teamwork and team development, and improved conflict resolution proficiency.

From the research findings, it can be confirmed that indeed, EQ programmes positively impact corporate leader EQ development. The emotional intelligence programme teaches corporate leaders how to have better EQ. This research study findings have indicated that leaders have benefited from the emotional intelligence programme at varying degrees. In alignment with Goleman's framework of emotional intelligence, research findings indicated that self-awareness, self-management social awareness and self-regulation indicated an refinement for all the leaders who

participated in the emotional intelligence programme. Wholistically the improvement of these attributes in a leader allude to an improved emotional intelligence capability.

6.2 Study Limitations

This study is limited to the sample of twenty participants at the case site, based on their roles and availability. It must be noted that this study took place during the peak trade season in November 2023, where most leaders were unavailable. This study was only conducted at one case site, and thus the findings are limited to that case site.

This study did not take into consideration company culture, size structure or ways of working which may have had an impact on research findings. This study reviewed the perceptions of corporate leaders regarding their own EQ. Whilst the study has asked participants to share examples of their experiences, the researcher has accepted this as a correct recollection of the events. The study was limited to corporate leaders within a specific organization in the year of 2023, and thus cannot account for previous leader behaviour. This study was limited to senior leaders within a specific organization who have at least 3 years of experience. This study was conducted within the private sector of the retail industry and thus may be different in the public sector, or outside of the retail industry.

6.3 Future Studies

Future studies can be expanded to review if the leadership emotional intelligence programmes of other large retailers locally and internationally. This could include a study of multiple retailers where a comparative study could be conducted. This study could also be expanded to a larger sample of all leaders at the case site. ,. These studies could expand across other provinces as well, as the current study was limited to the Kwa-Zulu- Natal area. Further, the population sample was limited, and thus future

studies could incorporate a much larger sample for the study, to include leaders at lower levels of the organisation

6.4 Recommendations

The research study has concluded , in using Goleman's framework as a measure of emotional intelligence, that emotional intelligence programmes improve the emotional intelligence of corporate leaders in organisations within the retail trade of South Africa. The following section will suggest recommendations to enhance emotional intelligence programmes within the retail trade of South Africa as well as the case site.

6.4.1 *Recommendations for the Retail Trade of South Africa and corporate leaders*

The study research results indicated that the emotional intelligence programme has improved the emotional intelligence of corporate leaders at varying degrees,. The study has also surfaced that strong sponsorship of the programme and the characteristics of the corporate leader have an effect on the level of the embeddedness of behavioural change. Lastly, the study has found that the learned EQ tools have relevance to not only the participants' work life, and that it is applicable in the social setting. This section of this chapter will examine the research implications on the retail industry as well as corporate leadership.

6.4.1.1 *Continued and increased investment in emotional intelligence programmes offered in the retail trade of South Africa*

In the introduction of this study, it was highlighted that the South African retail industry both the government and private sector offer programmes that are aimed at improving leadership EQ. These programmes are designed in a similar fashion

to that of the programme in this study, where workshops, coaching classroom and on the job, learning takes place.

From this study, and concerning the effectiveness of the programmes, the South African retail sector would benefit from increased investments in this type of programme, specifically as postulated in the rationale of this study, improved leader emotional intelligence affects the strategic decisions making quality. The effectiveness of emotional intelligence programmes has been highlighted in the study, particularly in improving leader emotional intelligence, which relates to the development of robust strategy. The continued investment in these programmes can be postulated as a means to address some of the constraints within the South African retail industry such as rapid change response.

6.4.1.2 *Improve emotional intelligence programme design by cross-industry partnering*

During the research , the findings indicated that the participants benefited from the improved networking ability as an outcome of the emotion intelligence programme. Accordingly, it is a recommendation for the South African retail industry that the future emotional intelligence programmes should be designed for implementation across industries.

This is to say that programmes which transcend industries create a greater opportunity for networking whilst exposing leaders to different working environments. A benefit of such a setup is rich knowledge sharing, leveraging networks and creating greater reach for leadership understanding and development of EQ. Whilst the current design of programmes by the wholesale and retails sectorial education and training authority (W&R Seta) such as the

International Leadership Development programme, are effective in creating a global leadership training programme, perhaps partnering with other SETA's could create a programme which teaches leader EQ from varying perspectives. This aligns with leader career progression as industry leaders often climb the corporate ladder through navigating various industries. It certainly seems unlikely that future leaders would only be proficient in one industry, thus cross-sectorial leadership training for EQ could benefit multiple industries, simultaneously.

6.4.2 *Recommendations for enhanced EQ programme at Case site*

Key recommendations to enhance the emotional intelligence programme at the case will be expanded on in this section. This study's research findings indicate that the success of the emotional intelligence programme could be attributable to three factors which include, organisational support of the programme, refresher training and learning content updates and leader exposure to different organisational settings.

6.4.2.1 *Organisational support*

Ensuring organizational support for an emotional intelligence (EQ) programme is paramount in cultivating a workplace culture that values and prioritizes emotional intelligence among its members. Organizational backing not only legitimizes the significance of EQ but also communicates a commitment to fostering a psychologically healthy and emotionally intelligent workforce. When leadership actively endorses and supports EQ initiatives, it sends a powerful message within the organisation that emotional intelligence is integral to personal and professional development. This support is reflected in resource allocation, dedicated training time, and integration of EQ principles into various facets of the organisational structure. Furthermore, organisational endorsement helps overcome potential

scepticism or resistance from employees, facilitating a more receptive environment for the programme. Wholehearted engagement of employees are y in EQ training can be expected, should participants perceive it as an integral part of the organisational fabric rather than a mere peripheral initiative. Ultimately, organisational support for an EQ programme not only enhances individual emotional competencies but also contributes to a positive and collaborative workplace culture, leading to improved team dynamics, communication, and overall organisational effectiveness. The organisational support of the programme is by the researcher's assessment, the most key factor for resulting in real embeddedness of EQ behaviours.

6.4.2.2 *Refresher training and content updates*

The significance of refresher training and content updates in emotional intelligence (EQ) corporate programs cannot be overstated. EQ, being a dynamic and evolving skill set, requires continuous reinforcement and adaptation to stay relevant in the ever-changing corporate landscape. Refresher training serves as a mechanism to reinforce previously acquired skills, preventing the erosion of emotional intelligence competencies over time. Regular updates to programme content ensure that participants are exposed to the latest research, methodologies, and real-world applications, keeping the training materials aligned with contemporary workplace challenges. As organisational dynamics evolve, so too should the content of EQ programs to address emerging issues and trends. Additionally, frequent updates demonstrate a commitment to staying at the forefront of EQ research and best practices. This not only enhances the credibility of the programme but also instils confidence in participants, assuring them that the organization is invested in their ongoing development. In a rapidly changing business environment, where adaptability and resilience are crucial, refresher training and content updates contribute to the sustained effectiveness of EQ

initiatives, fostering an ethos of continuous learning and growth within the organisation.

6.4.2.3 *Leader exposure and experience*

Facilitating leadership exposure for future participants in an emotional intelligence (EQ) programme is instrumental in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Exposure to effective leadership models serves as a powerful catalyst for participants, allowing them to witness firsthand how emotional intelligence can be successfully integrated into leadership practices. By providing opportunities for interaction with seasoned leaders who exemplify high emotional intelligence, participants gain valuable insights, observe effective communication, and witness how emotional intelligence contributes to successful decision-making and team dynamics. This exposure creates a tangible link between the abstract concepts taught in the EQ programme and their real-world applications, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership roles.

Moreover, leadership exposure instils inspiration and motivation among participants, as they witness the tangible benefits of honing emotional intelligence skills in their future roles. By highlighting diverse leadership styles that prioritize emotional intelligence, organizations create a more enriched learning experience, demonstrating that emotional intelligence is not just a theoretical concept but a practical and indispensable tool for effective leadership. In essence, leadership exposure enhances the overall impact of EQ programmes by providing a tangible and relatable context for participants, empowering them to translate their acquired emotional intelligence competencies into meaningful leadership practices within their professional spheres.

6.5 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to assess the effectiveness of emotional intelligence programs in enhancing the emotional intelligence of corporate leaders in the South African retail industry. Although global research on this topic existed, there was a notable absence of a specific focus on the retail trade of South Africa. Chapter two of the study highlighted the indistinctness of the literature regarding the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders in this industry, revealing a significant research gap.

Research methodology , quality assurance, and analysis for this qualitative study were examined in chapter three. It was determined that a case study approach and thematic analysis were the most suitable methods. A presentation of the research findings was elaborated on in chapter four and in chapter five there were discussions and interpretations of the research results, supported by notable literature. In chapter six a summary of the study was presented , and the recommendations for future the studies, the South African retail trade and corporate leaders were offered.

Research findings of this study concluded that the emotional intelligence programme has effectively enhanced the emotional intelligence of corporate leaders in the South African retail industry. Instances where the programme built upon existing knowledge and skills resulted in a recall of emotional intelligence abilities, leading to overall improvement. Participants consistently reported various levels of enhancement, and even when improvements were deemed marginal, they provided specific examples of applying newly acquired skills in their current organisational roles.

The analysis reveals that the programme had a more modest impact on internal facets of emotional intelligence, specifically self-awareness and self-management. In

contrast, there is a stronger perceived development in the external dimensions of emotional intelligence, such as social awareness and relationship management.

The recommendations for future studies of emotional intelligence and corporate leaders are to include larger samples, multiple organisations, and multiple industries. In terms of improvement of emotional intelligence programmes in the South African retail industry, continued investment and improved design have been postulated for programme enhancement. The recommendations at the case site for enhanced emotional intelligence programmes include , organisational support, refresher training and leader exposure.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form for Participation in a Case Study

Study Title :the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry

Researcher : Raquelle Bhengu

Contact details : 2617239@students.wits.ac.za / 0769799406

I, …….., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following: (Please circle the relevant options below)

1. The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about. YES NO
2. I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study YES NO
3. I agree that the interview may be audio recorded YES NO
4. I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report YES NO
5. I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report) YES NO
6. I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on YES NO

…… (signature)

…… (name of participant)

…… (date)

…… (signature)

…… (name of researcher)

…… (date)

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Participants,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our research study. Your contributions are invaluable in helping us to gain a better understanding of the topic at hand. The purpose of this research is to study the impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry.

This invitation to participation, requests your permission to interview you at a time that suites you, either in person or via Microsoft teams. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be recorded.

Kindly note that as a participant your rights include that your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with the organization or any individuals involved.

All your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. We will not share your information with anyone outside of the research team, and we will take all necessary precautions to ensure that your identity is not revealed. In any reports or publications that result from this study, your responses will be presented in aggregate form and will not be linked to your name or other identifying information.

On completion of this study, a written research report will be in the Wits University library and website. For your comfort, I can share a summary of this report.

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study or your rights as a participant, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are happy to discuss any issues with you and address any concerns you may have. You may address all concerns to me at the following email address **2617239@students.wits.ac.za**, or alternatively, you may contact the Human Research Ethics Committee: Non-Medical, **hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za, or call 011 717 1408.**

Thank you again for your valuable contributions to this study.

Kind Regards

Raquelle Bhengu

Appendix C: Structured Interview Guide

Research Topic : The impact of emotional intelligence programmes on corporate leaders within the South African retail industry

Introduction: " Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your views and insights will significantly contribute to our understanding of the Impact of Executive Emotional Intelligence Programs on Enhancing the Emotional Intelligence of Corporate Leaders within the South African Retail Sector. The primary goal of this interview is to explore the question: In what ways does attending the EQ Programme contribute to the development of emotional intelligence among executives? Your responses will be kept confidential."

Please answer the following demographical data

Name	
Alias (Assumed Name)	
Gender	
Age	
Marital Status	
Current job title	
Tenure	
No. of direct report	

Date of completion of program	
Highest Qualification (Matric, Certificate, Diploma, Degree, Postgraduate, Masters, Ph.D.)	

Research Question one: ***What is the impact on the emotional intelligence of Corporate Leaders after participating in the Executive Emotional Intelligence Programme?***

1. **Self-Awareness:**
   1.1. How has the Emotional Intelligence Programme impacted your ability to accurately assess your own emotions?
   1.2. What specific new tools have you obtained from completing the programme?
   1.3. How has the programme contributed to your increased self-awareness of emotions?
   1.4. How have you demonstrated your self-awareness post the programme?
   1.5. How has the programme has influenced your sense of self-efficacy in pursuing your goals?
   1.6. In what ways do you perceive the programme has enhanced your capability for self-reflection?
   1.7. In what ways has the programme positively influenced your self-confidence?

2. **Self-Management:**
   2.1. What specific improvements have you observed in your emotional self-control as a result of participating in the programme?
   2.2. How has the programme contributed to your capacity to exhibit transparency and consistently align your behaviour with your core values?
   2.3. In what ways has the programme enhanced your capacity to proactively take new initiative in your professional growth?
   2.4. How has the programme positively influenced your adaptability to change and your overall flexibility in your professional life?

2.5. In what ways has the programme contributed to your personal achievement and your ability to advance towards self-improvement?

2.6. In what ways has the programme enhanced your optimism and determination to persist in pursuit of your objectives, even in the face of challenges and setbacks?

3. **Social Awareness**:

3.1. How has the programme affected your capacity to be more empathetic and considerate of others' perspectives when assessing various situations?

3.2. In what ways has the programme improved your overall organizational awareness?

3.3. How has the programme enhanced your service orientation, particularly in terms of your ability to anticipate and accurately meet your customers' expectations?

3.4. Do you believe that the programme has improved your overall social awareness?

4. Relationship Management:

4.1. Can you share an example of how the programme has improved your ability to develop your team?

4.2. Could you describe how the programme has improved your teamwork and provide specific examples of how this development has manifested in your experiences?

4.3. What activities do you do to energize your team post the programme?

4.4. What collaborative projects have you started post programme attendance ?

4.5. Describe any experiences where the programme's teachings on conflict resolution have facilitated the successful management of disagreements or tensions within your professional relationships.

End of Interview