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UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Pauliina Lehto

# **Perceived Manager's Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement**

School of Management  
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Human Resource Management

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| <b>Tekijä:</b>           | Pauliina Lehto   |                      |
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| <b>Oppiaine:</b>         | Henkilöstöjohtaminen   |                      |
| <b>Työn ohjaaja:</b>     | Maria Järnlström   |                      |
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**TIIVISTELMÄ:**

Tämän pro gradu-tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, miten esimiehen tunneäly koetaan olevan yhteydessä työntekijän sitoutumiseen. Tämän päivän työelämä voi olla vaativa, mutta samalla se tarjoaa myös monia mahdollisuuksia työntekijöille. Houkutellakseen ja säilyttääkseen huipputaajia, organisaatioiden on otettava huomioon sekä rationaaliset että emotionaaliset tekijät, jotka tukevat työntekijöiden sitoutumista organisaatioon.

Teoreettinen viitekehys koostuu kahdesta osa-alueesta, tunneälystä ja työntekijöiden sitoutumisesta. Kummallakaan osa-alueella ei ole yhtä ainoaa yleisesti hyväksyttyä teoriaa tai määritelmää, vaan nykyinen akateeminen tutkimus sisältää useita erilaisia näkökulmia ja lähestymistapoja. Tutkielman viitekehys käsittelee yksityiskohtaisemmin olemassa olevia lähestymistapoja ja erilaisia malleja molempien ilmiöiden osalta. Tunneälyä ja työntekijöiden sitoutumista tarkastellaan yksilön tasolla, sekä miten nämä ilmenevät työympäristössä.

Tutkimuksen empiirinen osa on toteutettu kvalitatiivisena haastattelututkimuksena tutkittavan aiheen monitahoisuudesta johtuen. Tutkimus perustuu työntekijöiden näkemyksiin ja kokemukseen esimiehen tunneälyn ja työntekijän sitoutumisen välisestä suhteesta. Tutkimuksen empiiriset tulokset koostuvat kahdeksan työntekijän teemahaastatteluista. Analyysimenetelmänä on käytetty teorialähtöistä sisällönanalyysiä.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että esimiehen tunneäly vaikuttaa epäsuorasti työntekijöiden sitoutumiseen. Esimiehen tunneälyllä itsessään ei siis ole huomattavaa yhteyttä työntekijöiden sitoutumiseen, mutta se edesauttaa esimiehiä havainnoimaan, fasilitoimaan ja ymmärtämään asioita työympäristössä. Esimiehen tunneälyn taso kuitenkin heijastuu muihin asioihin, esimerkiksi johtamistyyliin, jolla puolestaan koetaan olevan keskeinen yhteys työntekijän sitoutumiseen. Tutkimus osoittaa, että esimiehen alhaisella tunneälykyvydellä saattaa olla huomattavampi ja kielteisempi yhteys työntekijän sitoutumiseen. Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella on muita tärkeimpiä asioita, jotka ohjaavat työntekijöiden sitoutumista kuin esimiehen tunneäly, kuten esimerkiksi organisaation oppimis- ja kehittymismahdollisuudet tai palkitseminen. Empiiristen tulosten valossa on kuitenkin tärkeää kehittää esimiesten sosiaalisia taitoja, jotka lopulta vaikuttavat välillisesti työntekijöiden sitoutumiseen, yrityksen hyvinvointiin ja suorituskyykyyn.

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**AVAINSANAT:** Tunneäly, sitoutuminen, johtajuus

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**VAASAN YLIOPISTO****School of Management**

**Author:** Pauliina Lehto  
**Thesis title:** Perceived Manager's Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement  
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**Supervisor:** Maria Järnlström  
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**ABSTRACT:**

This master thesis aims to discover how does a manager's perceived emotional intelligence relates to employee engagement. Today's working life can be demanding but it also enables many opportunities for employees. Organizations need to consider both rational and emotional drivers that support employee engagement to attract and retain top talents.

The literature review is divided into two theoretical constructs: emotional intelligence and employee engagement. There is not a universally agreed theory or definition for both constructs. Therefore, the study presents different kinds of approaches and models for both constructs in more detail. Emotional intelligence and employee engagement theories are examined at the individual level and how these appear in the organizational environment.

The empirical part of the study was carried out using a qualitative research method due to the complexity of both research constructs. The study is based on the experiences of eight employees, and it examines a relationship between perceived manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement from the employee's point of view. The empirical data was collected through eight semi-structured interviews within one organization. The data was analyzed by using theory-oriented content analysis.

The study reveals that a manager's perceived emotional intelligence is indirectly related to employee engagement. The manager's emotional intelligence itself does not have a notable relation to employee engagement, but it does help managers to identify, facilitate, and understand things in the work environment. However, the level of a manager's emotional intelligence reflects on other factors, for instance, leadership style which is perceived to have a more important relation to employee engagement. The very low emotional intelligence of the manager might have a more notable and negative relation to engagement. According to the results, there are more important factors that drive employee engagement than the manager's emotional intelligence, such as a company's learning and development opportunities, or rewards. In light of the empirical results, it is relevant to develop managers' soft skills that eventually can be reflected in employee engagement, the company's wellbeing, and performance.

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**KEYWORDS:** Emotional Intelligence, Engagement, leadership

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## 1 Introduction

*“Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. -- Great leadership works through the emotions.” (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee 2013: 3)*

Competition and constant change in today’s versatile business environment increase the challenge for management. Not everyone can cope with the pressures of change in the working life, it requires managers and employees to be adaptable and mentally resourced. While challenges today are not solely due to leadership issues, successful managers have the potential to help employees by strengthening motivation, creating opportunities, and supporting development and learning. (Kolari 2010: 14.) Leadership success is not about doing everything perfectly correct, but it is all about *how* to conduct a leadership role. That is why being emotionally intelligent and understanding the role of emotions in business life can be a huge advantage for retention and engagement of the best talents. (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee 2004: 3-4.)

Cognitive intelligence, theoretical leadership knowledge, and educational background alone are no longer enough to succeed in a role of an effective manager. The importance of emotional abilities has also risen equally – perhaps nowadays, emotional abilities are even more significant when considering successful leadership. (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey 2000.) Recognition and regulation of feelings and managing relationships have become important aspects of leadership. High-level emotional abilities have indirect effects in a working environment, such as a safe and positive psychological climate with trust towards others (Mahon, Taylor & Boyatzis 2014).

Social skills will play a greater role in the future as the business environment faces the Fourth Industrial Revolution and new technology innovations will entirely take over. The World Economic Forum conducted the Future of Jobs Report, which evaluated new employment trends. According to the report, there is a huge demand for versatile social skills, such as emotional intelligence, service orientation, and teaching skills. They are

expected to be more crucial in the future than narrow technical skills of a certain type. (World Economic Forum 2016: 20-21).

Today's working life can be demanding and needs adaptation from employees, but it also enables different opportunities in the job markets. Best talents are sought after and it needs the effort to retain them, and it also makes leadership more challenging. Employees do not have to accept poor leadership style or inappropriate behavior at the workplace. (Pastor, 2014). It is usually stated that people join organizations, but they leave managers. It is no wonder that employee engagement is currently one of the trendiest topics in the management field. The topic has aroused interest among practitioners and researchers, and especially it has gained popularity in the business world due to associated organizational and individual outcomes. (Saks & Gruman 2014; Macey & Schneider 2008.) According to Human Capital Trends 2019, employee engagement is a key element in achieving employee experience, which is one of the most challenging goals in today's business life. Employee engagement includes emotional and social needs that must be met to achieve the best employee performance. (Deloitte 2019.)

Employee engagement has gained a lot of attention, but further improvements are still needed in order to avoid an employee engagement gap in organizations. This gap means a lack of understanding of how employee engagement is defined and how to enhance it in the business context. Organizations need to understand how to create a work environment where people want to commit, personally develop, and give their best. (Bridger 2018: 1-2.)

Emotions and emotional intelligence also naturally come into play when considering engagement. Organizations need to consider both rational and emotional drivers that support employee engagement and lead to a desire to stay in the organization in order to attract and retain top talents. The role of emotions, as well as a sense of engagement, encompasses common psychological factors. Employee engagement can be seen as an expression of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral commitment. (Saks et al. 2014; Kahn

1990). It is not surprising that organizations have recognized employee engagement as well. According to the CIPD report, 80 percent of large organizations measure engagement by using different tools and surveys (Bridger 2018).

Emotional intelligence and employee engagement are both broad constructs, and it can be hard to define those if the recipient is not familiar with the background. There is not a single or universally agreed theory or definition for both constructs. However, both topics have become remarkable in the business and leadership context. (Bridger 2018; Sadri 2012.) This vagueness is an interesting opportunity to examine what emotional intelligence and employee engagement truly mean, what kind of implications do constructs have, and is there any relationship between those constructs.

### **1.1. Scope of the Research and Research Problem**

This study aims to discover how is a manager's perceived emotional intelligence related to employee engagement. This qualitative study will precisely focus on respondents' experiences, feelings, and impressions of manager's emotional intelligence and its relation to their employee engagement. Thus, the aim is to examine the topic from the employee's point of view.

The research was conducted empirically but still based on a theoretical framework. The answer to the research problem is sought with the help of the empirical data from the interviews. The empirical part of the study only addresses employees' views and experiences. Therefore, the subordinate's emotional intelligence skills or manager's experiences are not included. The aim of the thesis is to reflect on the areas of emotional intelligence that managers should pay special attention to.

In order to answer the main research question, a research objective is to understand how employees perceive a relationship between their manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement.

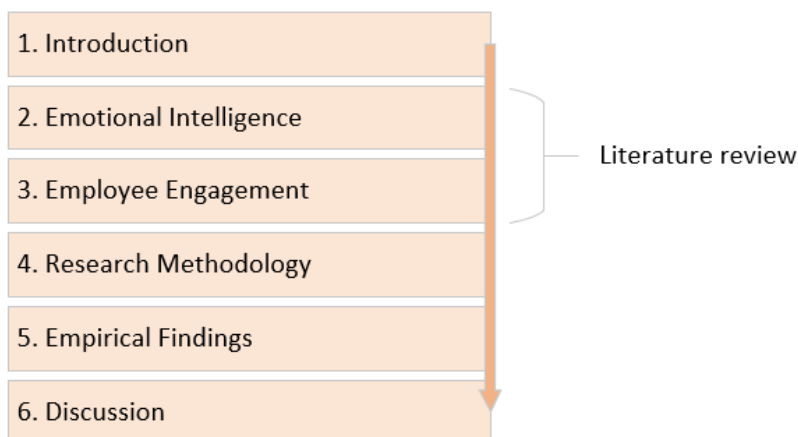
The main research question is:

*How is a manager's perceived emotional intelligence related to employee engagement?*

While previous academic research has focused more on emotional intelligence and leadership performance, this study discovers the relation of perceived manager's emotional intelligence to employee engagement. Previous studies investigating the relationship between emotional intelligence and engagement have often used quantitative research methods. Qualitative studies that combine emotional intelligence and employee engagement have not received much attention in the academic literature. This study is carried out as a qualitative study to understand the chosen research subject and phenomenon. This thesis is based on employees' experiences, insights and perceptions, and the significance of the subject. Thus, this study significantly fills the research gap in emotional intelligence and engagement. It is valuable to find out how employees disclose their point of view as employee engagement is mainly subjective experience. This approach provides knowledge on how these employee perspectives can be utilized in today's demanding and changing working life.

## 1.2. Structure of the Study

The structure of the study consists of six main chapters as illustrated in the figure below.



**Figure 1.** The structure of the study

The first chapter of the study gives an introduction to the study. It justifies the relevance and importance of the topic and the study. The introduction also defines the purpose of the study and the research problem. The literature review is divided into two theoretical chapters; emotional intelligence in the second chapter and employee engagement in the third chapter. Both concepts are widely reviewed based on the previous research and the existing literature. The purpose of the literature review is to provide an in-depth understanding of emotional intelligence and employee engagement. Therefore, both research topics have been considered from several theoretical approaches.

The fourth chapter focuses on the research methodology. It presents procedures and research methods of the study and provides a detailed description of the qualitative study as a research approach. Moreover, it provides an insight into empirical data collection and analyzing methods of the data.

The fifth chapter presents the main empirical findings of the research. The sixth chapter provides the discussion and conclusion of the study. It provides an answer to the research problem and points out how results are linked to the existing theory. The focus is to reflect on areas of emotional intelligence that managers should pay attention to in day-to-day leadership activities. This last chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and provides ideas for further research. The validity and reliability of the study are discussed in this chapter as well.

## 2 Emotional Intelligence

Today's work environment includes an exceptional amount of change and complexity. Regardless of the position, employees need to interact and influence others in order to achieve success. Emotions rule a human's overall presence and mood, which affect thinking and behavior. The Human intellect works best with emotional intelligence, whereupon it rises human being's overall intellectual ability. However, the paradigm is to how to harmonize the balance between reasoning and feeling or sense and heart. (Goleman 2006: 28-29.)

Emotions include signals and data about people, interaction, and the world around us. Actions that lead to emotions are usually interpersonal or social. They may also represent factors that are meaningful for people and they give feedback on those signals in real-time. Therefore, this emotional data is significant for managers in workplaces. (Caruso & Salovey 2004: 9-11.) This chapter contains a definition of emotional intelligence and the background of previous research in the field. Different kinds of emotional intelligence approaches and models will be presented in the chapter as well.

### 2.1. Defining Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been defined in many ways amongst various researchers, which also makes it quite a broad concept in scientific discussion (Caruso, Fleming & Spector 2014). However, the initial definition of emotional intelligence begins from the idea that the human mind includes a different kind of intelligence (Gardner 1983: 10-13.) According to Daniel Goleman (2006), people have a different kind of intelligence and those are mainly divided into two parts in general discussion: rational and emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence, in all its simplicity, is defined by *the capability to perceive and regulate emotions in ourselves and others*. It is the common basis for all different theoretical models and approaches of emotional intelligence among researchers. (Goleman 2006: 28-29; Goleman 2001: 14.)

It has been argued that IQ (intelligence quotient), which represents rational intelligence, is not able to change much by education or experience. In turn, Goleman has shown that essential emotional competencies can be improved and learned. (Goleman 2006: 28-34.) Mayer, Roberts, and Bartsade have also defined that emotional abilities are constantly developing throughout life (Mayer, Roberts & Bartsade 2008: 513.) The only obstacle is that those topics are not often taught in childhood, like self-awareness, recognizing feelings and reactions, understanding of feelings in the decision making, and noticing the result in other choices. (Goleman 2006: 268.)

## **2.2. Previous Research on Emotional Intelligence**

Psychologists have already studied emotional intelligence-related matters and their impact on organizations for dozens of years, but without using the exact term. Even though the concept of emotional intelligence has been widely known for almost 30 years, there is still not clear common understanding in some areas, for instance how emotional intelligence should be measured. This has led to controversy amongst scientists in some cases. (Cherniss 2001: 7.)

Most frequently, emotional intelligence can be separated into three different approaches in the academic literature and research: *ability model*, *mixed model*, or *trait model* approach. The ability approach focuses on individual mental capabilities. The trait approach to emotional intelligence encompasses emotional intelligence to be based on personality traits. The mixed model approach is the combination of the other two approaches, and it includes noncognitive ability elements and socially or emotionally intelligent behavior and personality traits. (Mayer et al. 2008; Petrides, Pita & Kokkinaki 2007.)

Howard Gardner and other psychologists presented the idea of *multiple intelligences* (MI) first time in the 1980s including several different intelligence types and the perception of individual backgrounds in each human being's intelligence (Gardner 1983: 10-13.)

Reuven Bar-On already used the term of *Emotional Quotient* (EQ) in his dissertation of doctoral studies in 1988, which was before the most well-known emotional intelligence studies (Bar-On 2005: 4.)

The actual research of emotions and the interaction between emotion and cognition started later in the 1990s. Emotional intelligence as an academic term appeared first in the early 1990s when psychologists John Mayer and Peter Salovey brought it out in a professional debate (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso 2016: 290.) David Caruso joined later Salovey and Mayer and they created a model for an emotional intelligence assessment, the MSCEIT, in 2002. Nevertheless, the journalist Daniel Goleman managed to bring the concept of emotional intelligence to public awareness in the mid-1990s with his mixed model of emotional intelligence. (Mayer, Roberts & Bartsade 2008: 509-513.) Goleman also indicated the significance of emotional intelligence in leadership effectiveness in the early 2000s. Goleman defined that emotional intelligence mainly focuses on individuals and one's capability to manage interaction and feelings, and especially how to be intelligent *about* relationships. (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee 2004; Goleman 2006b: 5, 329-333.)

Researchers started to question the validity of the early emotional intelligence approaches as of the 2000s, especially weaknesses of the ability model that has been stressed later. Due to this discussion, the trait model of emotional intelligence has also given a new approach to newer studies. (Petrides & Furnham 2000.)

### **2.2.1. Ability Approach**

Psychologists, John Mayer and Peter Salovey have defined the abilities which can contribute intelligence to our emotions. These abilities are *knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognition of emotions in others, and handling relationships*. (Goleman 2006: 42-43). The very initial emotional intelligence definition from Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990 is:

*"The ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action" (Salovey & Mayer 1990: 10; Brackett & Salovey 2006: 34).*

This definition includes only perceiving emotions and managing emotions, thus Mayer and Salovey defined emotional intelligence again in 1997. They added the capacity to reason emotions and understanding of emotional knowledge. Also, they stated that it is a facilitation of thoughts and the ability to regulate emotions in order to promote emotional and intellectual growth. This led to the creation of the four-branch ability model in 1997. (Mayer & Salovey 1997: 10; Sadri 2012: 536.)

Salovey and Mayer defined a four-branch model of emotional intelligence, which divides emotion-related abilities into four branches (Brackett & Salovey 2006: 35.) This revised model has been generally agreed upon by the academic literature and it is considered as an ability model of emotional intelligence (Sadri 2012: 536.)

**Table 1.** The four-branch ability model of John Mayer and Peter Salovey in 1997 (Adapted from Mayer & Salovey 1997: 10-14; Brackett & Salovey 2006: 35.)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1. Perceiving emotion</b>                     | The ability to detect or recognize emotions in oneself and others, as well in other objects.                                     |
| <b>2. Use of emotions to facilitate thinking</b> | The ability to use emotions to communicate and operate more logically and apply emotions in cognitive or intellectual processes. |
| <b>3. Understanding of emotion</b>               | The ability to understand and appreciate emotional information, how emotions merge and evolve in relationship alterations.       |
| <b>4. Managing emotion</b>                       | The ability to regulate feelings and adapt those to the personal growth.   |

The first, third, and fourth branches are based on reasoning emotions and the second branch includes using emotions to improve thinking (Brackett & Salovey 2006: 35.)

The first branch includes recognition of emotions in oneself, others, and objects, such as different levels of people's voices, music, and art. This branch is often associated with better emotional awareness and expression, for instance, the ability to nonverbal sensitivity. (Brackett et al. 2006: 35.) This aspect may be the most fundamental of four different abilities because it includes basic elements of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, it enables the processing of all other emotional information. Thus, it is also the base for the following ability-branches. (Salovey & Grewal 2005: 281.)

The second branch is an ability to use emotions to improve thinking and reasoning cognitive tasks, for instance in problem-solving and decision-making situations (Brackett et al. 2006: 35.) People with this ability can take full advantage of one's own changing feelings to achieving the best solution (Salovey et al. 2005: 281.)

The third branch is about analyzing emotions, for instance how emotions can change from one to another and understanding emotion combinations. People with strong skills in understanding emotions usually have a versatile vocabulary of feelings and they can describe various emotional conditions and meanings behind emotional experiences. (Brackett et al. 2006: 35.)

The last branch is the ability to manage emotions and utilize different methods, which will change one's own feelings and emotional states. For instance, emotionally intelligent people are capable to know how to express themselves in difficult emotional situations, such as cheering up or motivating others. These kinds of people can easily control and manage feelings to reach desired goals. Also reflecting and assessing these methods is an important part of managing emotions in order to achieve personal growth. (Brackett et al. 2006: 35; Salovey et al. 2005: 281.)

### 2.2.2. Competence Approach (Mixed Model)

A competence or mixed model approach is the combination of the ability and trait approaches of emotional intelligence. The mixed model includes noncognitive ability elements, and socially or emotionally intelligent behavior, and personality traits. (Mayer et al. 2008; Petrides, Pita & Kokkinaki 2007.)

Daniel Goleman has listed the five domains of emotional intelligence which is known as a mixed model of emotional intelligence: *self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills* (Goleman 1999). He has also modified it into four domains and related competencies. The modified model presents distinctly personal and social competencies but also includes one whole dimension, empathy, under social awareness. (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee 2004: 38-39.)

**Table 2.** The simplified model of emotional intelligence domains and related emotional competencies by Daniel Goleman in 1998 (Adapted from Goleman 2001: 28.)

|   | SELF  | OTHER   |
|---|---|---|
|   | <i>How to manage ourselves</i><br><b>PERSONAL COMPETENCIES</b>                      | <i>How to manage relationships</i><br><b>SOCIAL COMPETENCIES</b>  |
| R<br>e<br>c<br>o<br>g<br>n<br>i<br>t<br>i<br>o<br>n | <b>Self-awareness</b>   | <b>Social Awareness</b>   |
|   | Emotional self-awareness<br>Self-assessment<br>Self-confidence                      | Empathy<br>Organizational awareness<br>Service orientation  |
|   | <b>Self-management</b>  | <b>Relationship Management</b>  |
| R<br>e<br>g<br>u<br>l<br>a<br>t<br>i<br>o<br>n      | Emotional self-control<br>Transparency<br>Adaptability<br>Achievement<br>Initiative | Inspirational leadership<br>Influence<br>Developing others<br>Communication<br>Catalyzing change<br>Conflict management<br>Building bonds<br>Teamwork and collaboration |

In the mixed model of Goleman et. al (2004), self-awareness is determined as an understanding of one's and other's emotions, strengths, limitations, values, and motives. This often appears as a realistic and honest attitude, just between unnecessary self-criticism and excess optimism. People with strong *self-awareness* are capable of

- *Emotional self-awareness*, such as self-reflection and thoughtfulness, ability to think over rather than react too impulsively.
- *Self-confidence*
- *Self-assessment* can accurately evaluate one's own strengths and weaknesses in order to perform at the best. (Goleman et al. 2004: 39-45)

Emotionally self-awareness people often have a great sense of gut feeling and intuition, because they have understood to train their brain in the tacit mode whenever they are facing decision points. This registration of challenging decisions helps to deal with it next time when they are facing a similar challenge. This kind of training of the brain leads to accumulated life wisdom on the subject. (Goleman et al. 2004: 39-45; Shamian-Ellen & Leatt 2002: 38.)

Self-awareness is all about the understanding of emotions, thus the second category of personal competencies is self-management. According to the model of Goleman et al. (2004), *self-management* includes an ability to:

- *Emotional self-control*, how to control negative feelings like anxiety, panic, or stress and not letting them lead you.
- *Transparency*, one's conscientiousness, trustworthiness, and integrity, which also means openness to others about feelings.
- *Adaptability*, one's capability to be flexible in changing or challenging situations and receive new information.
- *Initiative*, readiness to see different opportunities, and act accordingly. (Goleman et al. 2004: 45-47.)

In conclusion, the first and second domains of personal competencies are tight together as follows; without recognizing what we are feeling, it is impossible to manage those feelings. Hence, both domains are needed as a determination of how one manages oneself with emotional intelligence. (Goleman et al. 2004: 39, 45-47; Shamian-Ellen et al. 2002: 38.)

In the mixed model of Goleman et. al (2004), the second area is social competencies. Social competencies are divided into social awareness and relationship management. *Social awareness* consists of competencies like:

- *Empathy*, be attuned to other's emotions, understanding their perspective and concerns at a certain moment. Thus, social awareness is perhaps the easiest to recognize due to empathy towards others.
- *Organizational awareness*, culture, politics, and orientation at the organizational level.
- *Service*, to recognize and meet the needs of other people, for instance, customer needs in the business context. (Goleman et al. 2004: 39, 48-50; Shamian-Ellen et al. 2002: 39.)

The last competence after self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness is *relationship management*. According to the model of Goleman et al. (2004), it contains competencies like:

- *Inspirational leadership and influence*, to guide, motivate and inspire others towards the common vision and goals.
- *Developing others*, to give feedback and guidance, and boost and encourage other's abilities.
- *Communication*, ability to interaction, for instance how to listen to others, but also how to give a clear response or message back to others.
- *Change catalyst*, recognition of the changing situations, and how to lead to a new direction.
- *Conflict management*, the ability to solve disagreements.

- *Building bonds*, creating and maintaining the relationship network.
- *Teamwork and collaboration*, the capability to establish a synergy of the group, as well as working and cooperation together towards common goals. (Goleman et al. 2004: 39; Shamian-Ellen et al. 2002: 39.)

Another model of competence approach of emotional intelligence is created by Reuven Bar-On. He used the term of Emotional Quotient in 1988 (see chapter 2.1.). He also created the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-I) for self-judgment testing of emotional intelligence in 1997 (Bar-On 2006: 3-4.) The emotional-social intelligence (ESI) model gives the theoretical basis for the emotional quotient inventory (Mayer, Roberts & Bartsade 2008: 520.) According to his emotional-social intelligence model (Bar-On 2006: 3):

*“Emotional-social intelligence is a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands.”*

Bar-On’s model of emotional-social intelligence includes five emotional and social components; *intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, adaptability, and general mood*. Each component includes several amounts of competencies, skills, and behaviors, which are presented in the following table 3. (Bar-On 2006: 3-4.)

**Table 3.** Emotional intelligence quotient inventory by Reuven Bar-On (Adapted from Bar-On 2006).

| EQ-i SCALES              | SUBSCALES  | Measured Emotional Intelligence Competencies by Subscales   |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Intrapersonal</b>     | Self-Regard<br>Emotional Self-Awareness<br>Assertiveness<br>Independence<br>Self-Actualization | - <i>Self-awareness and self-expression</i><br>- <i>Recognition and understanding one's own feelings</i><br>- <i>Free of emotional dependency on others</i> |
| <b>Interpersonal</b>     | Empathy<br>Social Responsibility<br>Interpersonal Relationship                                 | - <i>Social awareness and interpersonal relationships</i><br>- <i>Recognition and understanding other's feelings</i>  |
| <b>Stress Management</b> | Stress Tolerance<br>Impulse Control  | - <i>Managing and regulating emotions</i>   |
| <b>Adaptability</b>      | Reality-Testing<br>Flexibility<br>Problem-Solving  | - <i>Change management</i><br>- <i>Adapting and adjusting feelings and thinking to new situations</i>   |
| <b>General Mood</b>      | Optimism<br>Happiness  | - <i>Self-motivation</i><br>- <i>Being positive and finding the brighter side of life</i>   |

### 2.2.3. Trait Approach

According to Petrides, Pita, and Kokkinaki (2007: 287):

*“Trait emotional intelligence is a distinct, compound trait located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies. -- The trait emotional intelligence framework provides an operationalization of emotion-related self-perceptions that can be integrated into the mainstream taxonomies of personality.”*

A trait approach of emotional intelligence gives an alternative concept for emotional intelligence against the ability and mixed approaches. Emotional intelligence as a trait is suggested to be an inborn personality trait, which elevates and develops well-being. (Harms and Credé 2010.) According to Petrides, Pita, and Kokkinaki (2007), emotional intelligence as a personality trait is understood as self-efficacy, which is based on emotion-related tendencies or dispositions. This approach is also about self-perceptions and it is measured by self-assessments.

Previously mentioned Bar-On’s model is considered as a mixed model, but he used emotional quotient inventory scales as a measurement for emotional intelligence (see chapter 2.2.4), which however includes personality traits elements, such as empathy, happiness, and optimism. Afterward, other researchers, including Konstantin Petrides, have used the same components in the trait-based measures as has been identified in mixed models of emotional intelligence. (Petrides et al. 2007.)

### 2.2.4. Comparison of Approaches

Due to different definitions, approaches, and research of emotional intelligence, researchers are today convinced to define emotional intelligence as an ability or a trait. In conclusion, emotional intelligence as an ability is considered to be understanding and managing emotions as well as merging them into awareness and cognitions. Conversely, emotional intelligence as a trait is an inborn personality trait, which elevates and develops well-being. (Harms and Credé 2010). As a result of the different theories, there are also several ways to measure emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence as ability can

be measured by performance-based tests, which assess an individual's emotion-related cognitive abilities. Conversely, the trait emotional intelligence is measured by self-reports, which are based on assessments of self-perception and emotional-related dispositions. (Petrides, Pita & Kokkinaki 2007.)

Emotional intelligence abilities in the ability and mixed model approaches are developing during human life, from childhood to adulthood. When some skill is developing in one of emotional intelligence areas, the other skills can regulate them. (Mayer, Roberts & Bartsade 2008: 513.) According to Salovey and Grewal, emotional intelligence is associated with long-term development because it is seen as a set of competencies or skills rather than inherent personality traits. Also, Goleman has referred to this phenomenon in his mixed model of emotional intelligence that emotional competencies and skills can be developed by experience and education (see chapter 2.2.2). (Salovey & Grewal 2005: 282; Goleman 2006: 34.)

This research will focus on the ability and mixed models of emotional intelligence because those approaches are still the most popular in a leadership context.

### **2.3. Emotional intelligence in Organizations**

The previous chapter consisted of an individual's emotional intelligence; how does it appear in previous research and practice (see chapter 2.2.) This chapter will be focused on how an individual's emotional intelligence appears in the organizational environment. Also, the chapter includes emotional intelligence in management work.

Emotional intelligence has typically seen as an individual's competency. However, organizations usually work in teams, thus it is also important to focus on how to implement emotional intelligence in organizations and especially in team working. Managers have a crucial role in carrying this out. (Urch Druskat & Wolff 2001.) According to the study of Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall, and Salovey (2006), emotional intelligence is associated with

many performance indicators, such as an increase of employee's percent merits, company's rank, and interpersonal attitudes and impact at organizations (Lopes, Grewal, Kadis, Gall & Salovey 2006). Therefore, it is also relevant to consider the meaning of emotional intelligence in leadership when discussing emotional intelligence at the organizational environment.

### **2.3.1. Individual's Emotional intelligence**

Regardless of multiple different definitions of emotional intelligence, there is one integrative element in each point of view: introspection. According to Edwin Locke, it is a skill that enables understanding of the contents and processing one's thoughts and mind. That is important for individuals in every aspect of human life. (Locke 2005.)

Overall, emotional intelligence has been shown to have a positive impact on individuals. Emotionally perception has a positive impact on decision-making and problem-solving. Besides, emotional intelligence has proved to be useful in a negotiation because the outcome of the highly emotionally intelligent individual seems to appear more positively to the opponent side. (Mayer, Roberts & Bartsade 2008: 523-524.) The positive appearance of people might also spread emotional contagion in the group, which is truly beneficial for group dynamics and organizations as well (Barsade 2002.)

Emotional contagion is seen as a positive advantage also regarding an individual's performance. Côté and Miners (2006) found in their study that emotional intelligence is a relevant predictor of task performance. They state that people with high emotional intelligence, but low cognitive intelligence, can use emotional intelligence and contagion to impact other people's feelings and conduct in the way of improving their own performance at the same time. They also argue that highly emotionally intelligent people may also perform well at work as they are able to smoothly manage conflicts. (Côté & Miners 2006.)

Emotional intelligence predicts significant outcomes of workplace performance, mental well-being, and social relations (Mayer et al. 2008). An emotionally intelligent person is capable to regulate feelings and thus achieve better performance, for instance by controlling stress under the pressure (Lopes et al. 2006).

According to the study of Brunetto, Teo, Shacklock, and Farr-Wharton (2012), emotional intelligence has an impact on well-being and job satisfaction among police officers in Australia. They also showed that increased well-being and job satisfaction is contributed to employee engagement and affective commitment. Also, Lindebaum (2013) has shown evidence that there is a positive correlation between mental health and job dedication in the case of a high level of emotional intelligence. However, if the emotional intelligence level is low, there is not any evidence of a positive relationship.

### **2.3.2. Emotional Intelligence in Management**

Leadership is not only what managers think about themselves. It also is how their followers understand them. Traditionally, managers have been seen as controlling, planning, and running the overall performance of organizations. However, this way of thinking has changed a lot within the past decades. Leadership is now seen as a service orientation by motivating and inspiring employees, creating a sense of belongingness and the capability to still achieve goals by enhancing positive cooperation among the organization. (Dabke 2016: 30.)

Also, according to Caruso and Mayer, the characteristics of managers can roughly be defined into the following areas: *building effective teams, planning and deciding effectively, motivating people, communicating a vision, promoting change, and creating effective interpersonal relationships* (Caruso & Salovey 2004: 196.)

The psychologist, Edwin Locke also states that traits and motives do not generate an effective manager by themselves, but cognitive ability is an essential factor in leadership

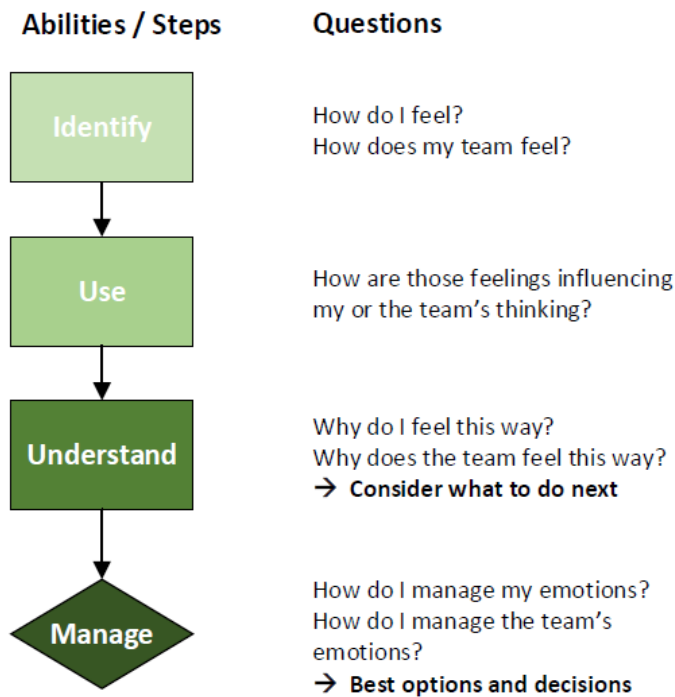
(Locke 1999: 35.) This also supports the idea of the ability approach of emotional intelligence, and it supports the fact that there is a possibility to improve those abilities in the long term (see chapter 2.2.)

Daniel Goleman's simplified model of emotional intelligence and related competencies; *self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills* can be strongly linked to managers' capability to be successful leaders (see Table 2). Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee state that emotional intelligence competencies are not inherent talents, but those are learned abilities. Therefore, each competence (see Table 2) evolves managers to grow as a leader and to adapt to different leadership situations. (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee 2004: 38, 109.)

One of the key things in emotional intelligence in leadership is that emotions as data can be used in decision making in order to support managers to make the right decisions and to act with an adaptive approach. Effective leadership is based on the intelligent use of emotions in overall thinking, decision making and leadership actions. (Caruso et al. 2004: 196.)

According to Caruso and Salovey, managers with strong emotional intelligence integrates emotions with intelligence and passion with logic. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee also state the importance of passion in leadership and especially when motivating employees. They specify that it is more difficult to maintain employees' commitment if managers are only committed on an intellectual level. Thus, they need to find the passion and be emotionally committed to their work as a manager, for instance, to be emotionally engaged in strategy implementation. When employees are emotionally engaged, the whole organization is able to change in the desired direction due to the employees. However, this does not mean that all emotionally intelligent people would not be successful managers and on the other hand, all great leaders are not necessarily emotionally intelligent. (Goleman et al. 2004: 238-239; Caruso et al. 2004: 3-11.)

According to the four-branch ability model of Mayer and Salovey (see chapter 2.2.1), emotional intelligence is based on the following four abilities; recognize, use, understand and manage emotions. An emotional blueprint is a method to develop behavior and action as a manager by utilizing emotional intelligence in practice, for instance, in emotion-based problem-solving. It is a structured way to carry out difficult interpersonal situations, and it can be used for a follow-up or preventative action. The emotional blueprint is based on those four abilities of emotional intelligence (see chapter 2.2.1), as well it is seen from the following picture below. The blueprint can help people, especially managers in this context, to apply emotional intelligence to everyday business. (Caruso, Fleming & Spector 2014.)



**Figure 2.** Emotional intelligence blueprint (Adapted from Caruso & Salovey 2004: 25; Caruso, Fleming & Spector 2014)

### **3 Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement as a concept has recently become popular amongst practitioners and in the business context. However, the construct is relatively new amongst academic researchers and the definition is not fully established. (Macey & Schneider 2008). Therefore, it is relevant to examine the concept and the perceived relationship between a manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement.

This chapter contains a definition of employee engagement and the background of previous research in the field. A different kind of employee engagement approaches, models, and outcome will be presented as well. The chapter reflects the previously studied relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement.

#### **3.1. Defining Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement is a broad concept that describes an employee's relationship between the professional role and organization (Schaufeli & Salanova 2011). There is not a commonly accepted theory for employee engagement, but a few approaches are established when considering the construct and matters that influence employee engagement. Despite the explosion of the term in the business world, there is still a lot of confusion in scientific research due to multiple definitions and overlapping constructs of employee engagement (Saks & Gruman 2014). Overlapping constructs are understood as organizational commitment, job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Saks 2006; Little & Little 2006).

Regardless of different definitions, there is still a consensus of each definition; employee engagement is the desired condition within organizations. It implies involvement and commitment, enthusiasm and passion, and effortfully attitude towards work and an organization. Therefore, employee engagement has behavioral and attitudinal elements. (Macey & Schneider 2008.)

Brad Shuck (2011) classified employee engagement into four approaches; *need-satisfaction*, *burnout-antithesis*, *satisfaction-engagement*, and *multidimensional* approaches based on existing research of employee engagement. Each approach has a different perspective on employee engagement, and these are presented in the following sub-chapters. (Shuck 2011.)

### **3.1.1. Need-Satisfaction Approach**

William Kahn is the first researcher who defined personal engagement and disengagement in 1990. This theory is also commonly used today as a basis for employee engagement. (Saks et al. 2014). Kahn (1990) defines employee engagement as follows:

*“The harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.”* (Kahn 1990: 694).

Shuck (2011) classified Kahn’s definition as a need-satisfaction approach to employee engagement. Kahn defined three psychological conditions based on his research in 1990 that influences engagement:

- *psychological meaningfulness,*
- *psychological safety,* and
- *psychological availability.*

These factors determine how people vary their engagement level and their roles in organizations. (Shuck 2011: 307-308; Kahn 1990: 703.)

According to Kahn (1990), people are capable to control the degrees of their roles when they perform. These varying degrees can appear a different kind of physical, cognitive, and emotional stages in their presence. It can also be called a *self-in-role* in people’s behavior, and these self-in roles can present a combination of engagement and disengagement. Personally engaged people keep themselves in the role, but at the same time, they do not sacrifice other role behaviors. This happens when people feel that their val-

ues, beliefs, creativity, and personal relations are fulfilled as they need. Conversely, personally disengaged people can be determined as passive people with a lack of physical, cognitive, and emotional presence. They have also not completed their role behavior performance. (Kahn 1990: 699-700)

### **3.1.2. Burnout-antithesis Approach**

When defining employment engagement, the other common approach is job burnout and employee well-being (Saks & Gruman 2014). Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter stated in their study that job burnout is a result of six work environmental antecedents:

- *workload*
- *control*
- *recognition and reward*
- *community*
- *perceived fairness*
- *values* (Maslach & Leiter 2008: 500; Saks 2006: 602-603)

They also discussed that the greater misfit between an employee and these six domains, the greater chance of burnout (Maslach et al. 2008). In contrast, the better fit between these six organizational domains and the employee, the greater is employee engagement (Saks et al. 2014).

Burnout literature is often based on Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, and this model can be used for defining employee engagement, but also work engagement (Saks et al. 2014). According to the model, work environment characteristics can be categorized into job demands and job resources. *Job demands* consist of physical, social, and organizational elements of the job that require psychological or physical effort. Therefore, job demands also identify psychological costs, for instance, burnout. *Job resources* imply psychological, physical, social, and organizational elements that contribute to achieve goals, to reduce job demands, and to stimulate personal development.

(Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner & Schaufeli 2001: 501.) Job resources and personal resources can accordingly predict work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti 2017). Work engagement is briefly presented in chapter 3.1.4.

Burnout and work engagement are considered as opposite psychological states and concepts; however, it does not mean that they are completely dependent on each other. For instance, if an employee has a low work engagement level, it does not necessarily indicate that the employee is burned-out. Thus, it is important to independently examine these concepts. (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004: 294.)

### **3.1.3. Satisfaction-engagement Approach**

This approach developed from the positive psychology movement in the early 21st century (Shuck 2011: 311). James Harter, Frank Schmidt, and Theodore Hayes (2002) did a meta-analysis study about outcomes of employee engagement and satisfaction based on data from the Gallup Work Audit (GWA), which was conducted in 36 different companies and 7 939 business units. This large study showed that employee engagement has a positive correlation to business outcomes, such as employee turnover, productivity, profitability, safety, and customer satisfaction-loyalty. (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes 2002.)

Due to the findings of the study and its profit linkage, it made the satisfaction-engagement approach the most widely read and much used, especially in the business context (Shuck 2011). Harter et al. (2002) defined employee engagement as follows:

*“Employee engagement refers the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work.” (Harter et al. 2002: 269.)*

### 3.1.4. Multidimensional Approach

Engagement studies and academic discussion have more focused on the job rather than the whole organization. Thus, it is also relevant to pay attention to the term; *work engagement*. Work engagement describes an employee's relationship with one's work, but not with the whole organization as employee engagement does. Thus, work engagement is a narrower construct than employee engagement. (Saks & Grumer 2014; Schaufeli & Salanova 2011: 40).

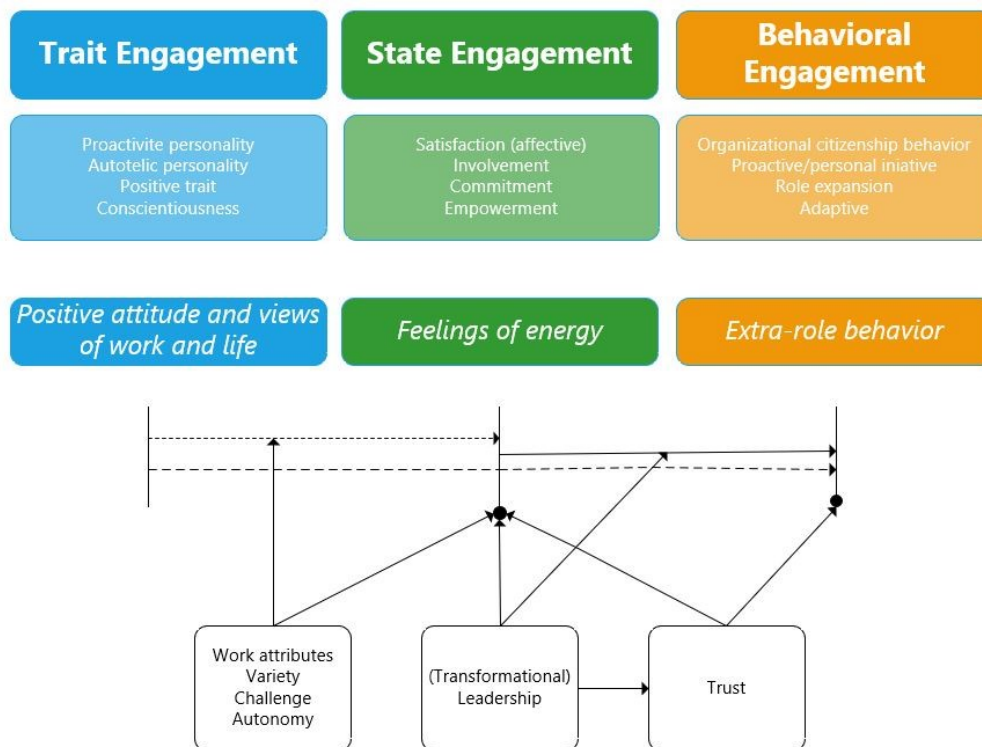
Alan Saks was the first researcher who focused on the multidimensional approach of employee engagement in the academic literature by examining antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (Shuck 2011). Saks (2006) explained employee engagement through the social exchange theory by focusing on why employees have different levels of engagement in organizations. He pointed out that other approaches to employee engagement provide psychological conditions for engagement, but they do not fully answer to question; why employees choose to become engaged? Therefore, Saks determined that employees exchange their engagement levels for provided organizational elements, such as resources and benefits. (Saks 2006: 603.)

Saks (2006) addressed through his study that engagement has two separate stages; *job engagement* and *organizational engagement*, which are related, but still entirely distinct concepts. His findings explain individually different variance for outcomes of both constructs in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention not to quit the employment, and organizational citizenship behavior. In the study, organizational engagement was a stronger predictor for the earlier mentioned outcomes than job engagement. Therefore, employment engagement studies cannot only focus on work engagement, and this demonstrates that employee engagement is a valid construct in the academic literature. (Saks 2006: 613-615.)



**Figure 3.** Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (Saks 2006: 604)

Macey and Schneider (2008) also focused on the multidimensional approach of engagement by defining three different engagement stages: *trait*, *state*, and *behavioral engagement*. They proposed that job characteristics, leadership and personality have a relationship with the development of engagement.



**Figure 4.** A Framework of employee engagement (Adapted from Macey and Schneider 2008: 6)

According to Macey's and Schneider's conceptualization of employee engagement, *state engagement* is considered as feelings of energy, enthusiasm, passion, and activation. It has elements of affective organizational commitment and satisfaction, job involvement, and empowerment. *Behavioral engagement* is a continuation of state engagement that is considered as adaptive behavior at the workplace. It often appears as organizational citizenship behavior or proactivity. *Trait engagement* consists of various interrelated personality attributes, which may have a tendency to employee engagement, such as proactive, autotelic, or effortful personality. These attributes have a direct relationship with state engagement, and thus an indirect relationship with behavioral engagement. (Macey & Schneider 2008.)

### **3.2. Drivers of Employee Engagement**

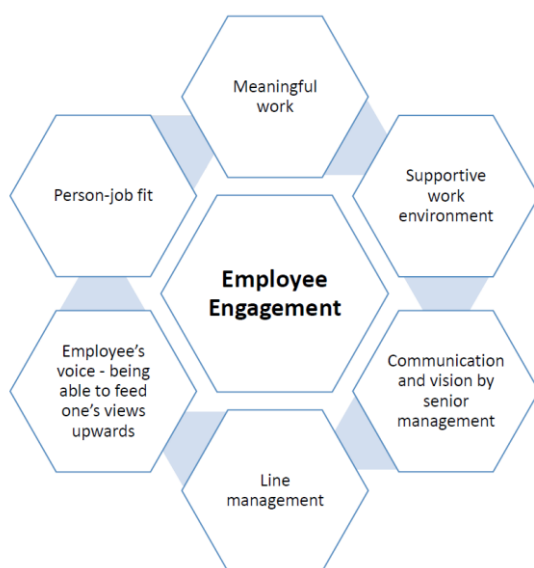
Some antecedents of employee engagement were briefly presented together with different approaches in the previous chapter. Although, there are multiple factors, which have been examined to influence employee engagement. This subchapter presents antecedents that usually drive employee engagement.

According to Crawford, Rich, Buckham, and Bergeron (2013), drivers of employee engagement are based on Kahn's (1990) definition of psychological conditions (see chapter 3.1.1.) Like it was presented earlier, these psychological conditions are divided into three categories: psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Crawford et al. utilized these conditions in defining factors that influence employee engagement. (Crawford, Rich, Buckham & Bergeron 2013: 58-62.)



**Figure 5.** Drivers of employee engagement (Adapted from Crawford, Rich, Buckham & Bergeron 2013: 58-62)

Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, and Gatenby (2010) also determined a slightly different model for drivers of employee engagement based on their study of 5200 employees in 8 different organizations in the United Kingdom. This model includes meaningful work, employee's voice, and manager's behavior (figure 6). (Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees & Gatenby 2010: 55.) Furthermore, Macey and Schneider also identified leadership, especially transformational leadership, as an important matter in employee engagement (Macey and Schneider 2008).



**Figure 6.** Drivers of employee engagement (Adapted from Alfes et al. 2010: 56)

Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees and Gatenby (2013) showed in their study that perceived line manager's behavior and HRM practices have a positive correlation with employee engagement. According to their study, employee engagement also led to higher self-reported task performance and self-reported innovativeness in work. Their study presents the importance of manager's and human resource professional's roles in building a work culture and environment which support employee's willingness to engage and to achieve better performance. It shows that leadership has at least an indirect linkage to employee engagement. (Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees & Gatenby 2013.) According to the determined drivers of Crawford et al. (2013), managers play a role at least in giving feedback, rewards, and recognition. These matters can be also connected to perceived line manager behavior, which has a direct impact on employee engagement in the model of Alfes et al. (2013).

### **3.3. Outcomes of Employee Engagement**

Employee engagement is presumed to be associated with various individual and organizational outcomes. It is perhaps one of the reasons for its enormous popularity in business life. (Saks et al. 2014.) Bailey, Madden, Alfes, and Fletcher (2017) explored 214 different research studies to find outcomes and evidence of employee engagement. They also discovered that employee engagement has a positive impact on individual and higher-level outcomes, which means outcomes for instance, for an organization or team.

In terms of individual level, Bailey et al. (2017) found that employee engagement has a positive impact on task-performance, and extra-role performance or organizational citizenship behavior. They also found that several studies had evidence that employee engagement decreases stress. (Bailey et al. 2017: 40-43.) Similarly, Shuck, Alagaraja, Rose, Owen, Osam and Bergman (2017) found a positive impact on overall health matters, life satisfaction towards and less frequent stress or burnout in their research. These individual outcomes indirectly benefit the organization as well. (Shuck, Alagaraja, Rose, Owen, Osam & Bergman 2017.)

Engaged employees express themselves in an authentic way which can be seen as emotional connections, physical involvement, and cognitive awareness at the individual level (Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes & Delbridge 2013: 2659). Also, employee voice is a result of authentic expression of engagement. When employees feel that they are important, they are also secured to express their real opinions and feelings. If the voice of employees has a real impact on prevailing conditions, they will be engaged. (Shuck 2017: 68.) This could happen for instance in organizations.

At the organizational level, the most uniform finding amongst the explored studies by Bailey et al. (2017) was that employee engagement is strongly correlated with organizational commitment and job satisfaction. There were also results for a moderate relation between employee engagement and both performance and turnover intentions. (Bailey et al. 2017: 40-43.) It was also stated earlier that Harter et al. (2002) presented that employee engagement correlates with various business outcomes, such as productivity, employee turnover, profitability, and customer satisfaction and loyalty (see chapter 3.1.3). They showed that short-term outcomes, such as customer satisfaction and lower employee turnover can lead to long-term business outcomes, such as customer loyalty and profitability. (Harter et al. 2002.)

It is recognizable that employee engagement has notable and positive outcomes for individuals and organizations. Shuck determines that employee engagement is still more about individuals because it is like an individual state of motivation. (Shuck 2020: 71.)

### **3.4. Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement**

Previous studies and theories have not managed to clearly show a direct relationship between emotional intelligence and employee engagement. However, studies have shown an indirect connection between both constructs. Employees and managers with high emotional intelligence are capable to clarify by themselves how the vision and goals

of the company are related to them. Moreover, emotional intelligence can enhance the psychological climate at the organization, and thus it may amplify the effect on the linkage between climate and engagement. These factors may increase the individual's sense of connection to the organization, and thus it may increase a level of engagement. (Mahon, Taylor & Boyatzis 2014.)

As it was referred earlier that the intelligent use of emotions will improve effective leadership by enhancing overall thinking, decision making and leadership actions (Caruso et al. 2004: 196). Thus, it is possible to assume that emotional intelligence may positively affect leadership behavior. In turn, perceived leadership behavior may have a relationship with employee engagement, because the leadership or management behavior is understood as one of the drivers for employee engagement (see chapter 3.2).

Miao, Humphrey, and Qian (2016) found a positive relationship between a manager's emotional intelligence and a subordinate's job satisfaction. This does not automatically show evidence between the manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement, but job satisfaction and employee engagement are partly considered as overlapping constructs (see chapter 3.1.)

Both constructs in this study are broad concepts, there is no solid evidence in one direction or another. Therefore, it is interesting to examine what kind of associations and implications employees feel between a manager's perceived emotional intelligence and their employee engagement.

## 4 Research Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology and design of the research. It also explains the research process, the empirical data collection of the study, and how the empirical findings were analyzed.

### 4.1. Research Method

This research is carried out by using a qualitative method, which aims to comprehensively understand the interpretation, meanings, and characteristics of the subject. The aim of qualitative research is a holistic understanding of the topic and detailed knowledge of reality. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016: 5). Hirsjärvi, Remes, and Sajavaara (2007) define that the purpose of qualitative research is to describe a specific phenomenon, rather than examine statistical data. Qualitative research is often carried out through interview methods or observation. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2004: 157.)

According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2007: 157), qualitative research is based on describing real-life situations, including the idea that reality is very diverse. This study examines research topics in a real-life context thus it was assumed that the subject of the study genuinely exists, but it may constantly change. Because of the nature of this study, the qualitative method was the most suitable method to answer research questions due to the complexity of both research constructs: emotional intelligence and employee engagement. This study focused on respondents' real experiences of the topic without questioning how they experience and perceive it. In other words, it was assumed that the respondents truthfully expressed themselves in the interviews.

The purpose of the study is also classified as a descriptive and explanatory study as it aims to recognize cause-and-effect relationships, but also to present descriptions of the phenomena (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007: 134-135). The purpose of this study is to understand and analyze emotional intelligence and employee engagement in the work environment context. It does not aim to produce information for generalization of the topic but to

understand and analyze how employees perceive emotional intelligence and employee engagement in the work environment. Especially, the main focus is to understand how employees perceive that a manager's emotional intelligence is related to their employee engagement.

## **4.2. Empirical Data Collection Techniques**

Both primary and secondary data were collected to answer the research questions of the study. The secondary data covers previous academic literature, and the primary data consists of empirical data of this study. The thematic interview was selected as a main empirical data collection technique for this qualitative study.

The thematic interview is a commonly used qualitative data collection technique in both the social and business sciences. Thematic interviews allow the researcher to structure the interviews without having too much control in the interview situation. It is possible to clarify and deepen the available answers of the respondents as the interview is a flexible situation based on the individual experiences of each interviewee. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007: 202–204; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2012: 75.)

The interviews are conducted as individual thematic interviews, guided by a semi-structured interview framework. A pre-designed outline of the topics or themes is typical for a semi-structured interview, but it also provides a possibility to change the exact order and structure of the questions in each interview situation. This kind of interview uses “what” and “how” questions and requires preparation to the themes beforehand. (Eriksson et al. 2016: 94-95.) The themes of this study were raised from the theoretical framework, thus the interviews also provided space for discussions outside the themes and focused on respondents' experiences.

According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2007), it is typical for qualitative research to use data collection techniques in which a tone of voice and perspectives of the research subjects come

to the fore, such as thematic interviews or observation. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were selected as a primary data source of the thesis to present the point of view and experiences of the respondents as comprehensively as possible.

### **4.3. Research Process**

This subchapter explains the whole research process in detail. Planning of the research process began in October 2019. Due to the complexity of research topics, emotional intelligence and employee engagement, the whole research process and data collection began by exploring the secondary data. Exploration of topic and theories took place through the previous research literature, such as related academic articles and publications. The previous literature was searched from several databases, for instance, Sage Journals Online, Science Direct, and PsycArticles. Familiarity with the topics and the previous academic literature helped to narrow the subject and find the focus for the thesis.

As previously stated, the semi-structured interviews were chosen for the primary data to find out the perspectives and experiences of the respondents. On the contrary to a structured interview, additional questions were asked during the semi-structured interview, for instance, “what” and “how” questions to have in-depth discussions on the subject. (Eriksson et al. 2016.) The interviews aimed at understanding the perceptions and experiences of employees about the manager’s emotional intelligence and explaining its influence on their engagement at the organization.

The primary or empirical data was collected by interviewing employees of one Finnish fast-growing technology company that operates in the international environment and has business entities in a couple of other countries as well. The company has gained a rapid growth in the past couple of years from the start-up to the scale-up company, and the aim is still to grow the business. The whole empirical data was collected from the employees in this same organization. Respondents are only from the company’s Finnish entity, but with diverse demographic factors.

The interview invitations were sent to nine employees in April 2020. Nine people were invited to the interview and eight of them accepted the invitation and were able to participate in the interview. The interviews were conducted as individual online interviews via Zoom between the 6<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> of April in 2020. Employees were selected for interviews from different departments and teams, and from various demographic factors to make the data as representative and multilateral as possible. Half of the selected respondents were engineers, and half of the respondents worked in business functions. Three selected respondents were female, and five of them were male employees. The interviews were conducted mainly in English due to the lack of a common mother tongue. Only one interview was in Finnish, as it was the common mother tongue of the interviewee and the respondent. These factors demonstrate the actual gender, job field, and work language distribution in the organization context. The respondents were volunteers in the study, which certainly affected the availability of rich data and the reliability of the results.

At the beginning of the interviews, there were a few background questions for respondents to get a better insight into their relationship with the company. There also were a couple of warm-up questions at the beginning of each theme to make them feel comfortable. The sample of the study was versatile. Half of the respondents were working in the company for 1-2 years, one-quarter less than 1 year, and one-quarter were working there for 3-5 years. The respondents had also the different lengths of their employee-manager relationships. Due to the young age of the company, the lengths of employee-manager relationships were relatively short, none of the respondents had the same manager for more than two years.

The study was conducted as a semi-structured interview method, whereby the interviews are conducted by focusing on pre-selected themes, and further questions can be asked and discussed during the interview. The interview approached the topic through three different themes: emotional intelligence, employee engagement, and the relationship between a manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement. The inter-

view template included 20 open questions related to the pre-selected themes (see appendix 1). Moreover, the interview situation was designed to be as identical as possible in each interview and the questions were asked always in the same order.

In addition to semi-structured interviews, the respondents were asked to answer a brief survey at the end of the interview situation (see appendix 2). The main idea of the survey questions was to support the qualitative main findings of the semi-structured interviews. The intention was not to focus on analyzing the survey results.

The online interviews were recorded on Zoom, which allowed the interview material to be recorded as accurately as possible, and the possibility to return to recordings when analyzing the material. The recordings were audible afterward and there were no technical problems. Before the start of the interview, each interviewee was asked for permission to recording and was told that the interview material would be presented anonymously and that the interviews would be confidential. In total, the interviews produced digital material for 5 hours 52 minutes. Interviews ranged from a minimum of 28,75 minutes to a maximum of 64 minutes. Thus, the average length of the interviews was approximately 44 minutes.

The transcribing of the interviews was conducted immediately after each interview, thus the fresh interview situation was still on the mind and it was possible to avoid misinterpretations when transcribing the material. All interviews were transcribed word for word without leaving out what the people said in the interviews. There was a total of 73 pages of interview material.

#### **4.4. Data Analysis**

The approach of the empirical data analysis is deductive. Deductive reasoning logic is a linear process, and theory is the primary source of knowledge. This means that the logic

of proceeding is from theoretical framework to empirical results. Therefore, the empirical data is analyzed based on research questions and objectives. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016: 23.)

The data analysis of this study is carried out as a content analysis, which describes the phenomenon in a compressed form. The content analysis is a systematic and objective analysis of the empirical data, which aims to specify the content in a relevant context. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2012: 105-107.)

The empirical data was compiled using interview questions by coding the material into different categories. Coding classifies and provides specific labels for themes in empirical data. It is an essential part of the qualitative content analysis when there is a need for categorizing data to find out a valid description for the phenomenon. Systematic coding is a suitable way to analyze research that focuses on existing theory. (Eriksson et al. 2016: 120.) With the coding of the material, it was also possible to identify more strongly the emerging themes and to connect these to the phenomena under study. According to Eriksson et al. (2016), coding enables the logical structure of the empirical data with careful content and thematic analysis. It facilitates the progress of the study, reaching the goals and presenting the conclusions.

The data analysis began by listening and reading the transcribed interview material. After transcribing, the material was compiled using interview questions by coding the material into different categories and themes. This allowed a clear comparison of the material and the finding of similarities and differences in the interview material. The expressions and the number of recurred similarities were calculated. The study reports themes that recurred, but some less frequent factors were also highlighted if they were significant for understanding the whole context.

## 5 Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the main findings and analysis of the study. It also aims to answer the essential research question and preliminary research objectives. The essential research question of the study is: *How is a manager's perceived emotional intelligence related to employee engagement?* The chapter is divided by the main themes of the interviews. The findings and analysis of the study are supported by citations from the interviewees, which are marked with the letter R and a number referring to each interviewee.

### 5.1. Emotional Intelligence at Organizations

The first theme is emotional intelligence, and especially, how it appears in the business context and the organization. To identify these, respondents were asked to explain how emotions appear in their everyday life and especially in the workplace. The purpose was to find out how emotions appear at the workplace and how managers use their emotions.

#### 5.1.1. Occurrence of Emotions

The respondents have faced different kinds of emotions in the work environment according to the findings. When they explained the occurrence of emotions in the workplace, they referred to happiness and excitement as positive emotions that they have perceived. In turn, frustration and uncertainty were perceived as negative emotions that they have occasionally experienced in the workplace.

*R1: "-- It's like the happy emotions are most of the time there because you're doing your thing you don't even really pay attention to the happy parts. But it is like every now and then when you have something that doesn't really work out as best for your schedule, or as you're planning."*

*R2: "-- At work, they're more career-oriented emotions, like excitement about some project, or maybe competition with your colleagues."*

The respondents addressed that emotions and feelings appear most often in interactive situations, both in a positive and negative sense. Some of the respondents pointed out that emotions might particularly appear in conflict situations, which is also one kind of interaction situation.

*R1: "They do appear when situations get critical in the work. Might be frustrating when you have to deal with other people and things don't really work out as smoothly as you would want them to be. -- I mean basically at any point when you're interacting with people, I think there's some sort of emotional use. It could be good or bad."*

*R2: "-- So, you get emotions from any interaction with people, even in a coffee break. So, some positive emotions in the morning, when you're having a small talk. And yeah, work-related emotions, when you're working on some project. --"*

*R5: "I guess one thing can just be like how people treat you. Like, if you have ideas, how those are reacted to, whether those are taken into consideration."*

*R7: "Let's say somebody didn't do some task and try to hide it, or you talk about work and somebody tries to stick to talk about something else. -- I would say this, but the opposite as well. Like some people are in a good mood and they just have coffee with you, you're upset or you're too stressed, and then just a small coffee break with some people and you feel energetic."*

Based on previous statements, it is quite clear that emotions often arise in interactive situations. According to the respondents, the background of the situation and personal matters usually cause different kinds of emotions and it makes interactive situations singular. Stress, personal life situation, organizational situation, or personal factors such as competitiveness and uncertainty about oneself are perceived to have relation to the occurrence of emotions.

*R4: "Mostly it's [the occurrence of emotions] in situations that already have an element of stress. There's a common denominator. I feel like most of the time, it*

*comes into play where people are somehow in doubt of themselves, somehow unsure, and unnecessarily in doubt of themselves but unsure about the assignment. Unsure about the goal."*

*R3: "Sometimes, of course, there will be situations that some employee or team is used to doing things in a particular way. And then, someone from another team will advise or say how the matter should be done. No matter how it's justified, some people may take it personally if their approach has been "wrong kind of", or their own way of doing is questioned or challenged more than they would be used to."*  
[Translated]

*R6: "So, because a lot of things are changing, a lot of restructuring, we have changed who reports to who, and who is team lead and who's not the lead, what's the team. -- I don't care who reports to what. I think it's like waste of time, most of the time. And also, it impedes to do the work, it prevents you from actually getting things done, because you're worried about third party to whom writing this paper or whatever. Which is a byproduct of the work, not the work itself and its goals. So that's frustrating for people like me."*

It was interesting to observe that half of the respondents (R1, R4, R6 and R7) first explained negative-based emotions or situations that they have experienced. After those, they referred to positive emotions or situations. Two of the respondents (R5 and R8) began with neutral emotions or situations, and only two of the respondents (R2 and R3) firstly started with positive-based experiences. Therefore, it indicates that negative emotional states and experiences can be easily be etched on one's memory.

### **5.1.2. Manager's Perceived Emotional Intelligence**

The managers' emotions were perceived in relatively similar situations as other emotions at the workplace. The main findings can be classified into positive and negative interactive situations, such as success in something or conflict situations. Based on findings, the manager's positive emotions and the ability to use emotional intelligence may appear, for instance, due to successful occasions, or while motivating and encouraging employees.

*R3: "I haven't been with my current supervisor for so long that I could do a lot of analysis that still feels more superficial. However, my manager has that kind of certain cultural background and my manager is very outgoing and so on, that obviously affects how my manager tries to build a team and motivate people. Of course, it's very brilliant, but sometimes, I actually wonder how much analytical side of some issues is covered with that outgoing presence or behavior." [Translated]*

*R4: "Again, I think those two things. Firstly, my manager is very open up about being happy about the team achieving things. Especially you know, has a something that I also definitely want to learn from my manager, like, my manager has the ability to make you feel happy about your input versus just being happy for you. --"*

*R8: "I will say sometimes my manager is in a really good mood and can share it with you as well. Like, I meet with my manager to talk about work, but one is in such a good mood, so my manager starts to talk about something else."*

According to the respondents, the lack of emotional intelligence may often be caused by stress, the manager's personal life situation, or the manager's self-uncertainty. However, it is good to keep in the mind this is only the perceived experience of the respondents. In other words, it is only one part of the solid truth, but this is how respondents feel about it.

*R4: "-- And likewise, the stress thing, which is also something my manager is very aware of, if a stressful situation my manager can be intimidating. -- Like I said, sad about screwing up or just overly sensitive emotionally when you have somebody who's a bit intimidating towards them."*

*R5: "It's less about, like necessarily, the specific situation, but what's maybe going on in my manager's life - personal or professional, like that affects the situation. -- So, it seems like with my manager, it's all dependent on the background of what's going on in one self's head, not necessarily the exact situation."*

*R6: "I guess, in any of them, when they are like insecure about what they should be doing or they're devoting a little bit to find their own place. Then that brings out of like overwork and frustration."*

It is interesting to pay attention that positive situations when the manager is using emotional intelligence are also essential matters on employee engagement, for instance using emotional intelligence while motivating and encouraging employees.

### 5.1.3. Ideal Emotionally Intelligent Manager

Several points addressed what makes managers highly emotionally intelligent. Four aspects were the most common amongst this study: communications skills, understanding of other's emotions, inspiration, and being objective. A highly intelligent manager understands other's emotions and can take actions based on them. This person is likely to have good communication skills to keep the team working together.

*R1: "And then, not really caring about other people's you need to care about everyone equally and then make them work together as a highly functional unit. And do so in a way, by, you know, having really good communication skills with everyone. Like having really good communication and, you know, a link with everyone."*

*R4: "The first one is definitely you should be able to notice you should be able to gauge other people's emotional states. And then the second step is act on those. And then there are I mean, there's a dozen other things where to have, you know, especially in bigger teams, I think but to have a good working team, like emotions, obviously very important, but at some points, work and emotions is not necessarily don't necessarily go hand in hand. So, it's good for yourself, if you can also just contain those and not let your own private life stress fall into work."*

Inspiration is something that employees want to find from their manager, it brings energy to the work environment. There was also reference to the management in general, the inspiration is not always coming directly from the own manager.

*R7: "I think that this leader can catch the moods of the society where he's working in, and improve them, and influence them. And also not influence, obviously, by taking some actions, but influencing on other people and also on their moods and their deeds. Is also leading by example. Yeah, for example, in my company also if we take CEO. He is this kind of person with whom you can talk about something for 10 minutes, then you get out of the room, and you want to work 24 hours in a row, because there's so much inspired. And when you think about what exactly he said or what was there. It's not really something special and you can't even say what he said. But you just feel this energy. This is an ideal situation about emotional intelligence leader."*

Being objective as a manager also ensures equality and trust amongst employees as anybody is not favored.

*R1: "-- Yeah, I think, I think any any highly emotional intelligent leader should be able to make the whole team work together. Instead of, you know, somehow managed to actually keep everyone important and make them work together as a single unit, rather than favoring one or two people."*

## **5.2. Employee Engagement**

The second theme is employee engagement. To find out what matters affect employee engagement and how do respondents consider the own level of engagement in their current organization, they were asked to describe what matters would make them hold on to the organization. Likewise, they were asked to identify matters that would make them leave their current organization. The purpose was to find out which factors may affect the feeling of being engaged, and whether there is any indication of managers or their emotional intelligence that affects employee engagement in this context.

### **5.2.1. Issues that Increase Employee Engagement**

The respondents were asked what matters make them hold on to their current organization. The answers can be divided into five different factors, which were repeated in the responses: meaningful job, learning and development opportunities, company's mission, company culture or work environment, and company's success.

*R1: "Well, to be honest, I believe in what the company is doing, and you know, you work towards what you personally believe and know is going to be a great thing. But also, in my current organization, I know that the company is very young. So, there's a lot of learning opportunities."*

*R2: " Well, I say company culture. The company's success. Main characters."*

Meaningfulness was considered to be an important factor that drives employee engagement. Both meaningful job tasks and being part of the company for a long time creates a feeling of meaningfulness.

*R4: "I would have just said, the meaningfulness. I feel like the feeling of contributing to something larger than myself. That's what keeps me going. But like you said, job security and the psychological safety that was the building block on which that is rested. So, the fact that we have such a secure job at my company, it allows me to enjoy the meaningfulness."*

*R7: "Like the time and the effort invested in organization, then that like, we started from scratch and that was part of it, and I was building this culture as well. This means much."*

According to these results, it is interesting to pay attention that there was not any sign of manager, neither leadership nor management which affects employee engagement. This data strongly indicates that the managers' emotional intelligence is not perceived to have an important relation to employee engagement. Instead, other factors are perceived to be more relevant to employee engagement.

### **5.2.2. Issues that Decrease Employee Engagement**

There was significantly more variation in the factors that reduce employee engagement among the interviewees compared to factors that keep up the engagement. Some of the factors are opposites to the engagement factors that were discussed in the previous chapter (5.2.1.) Opposites are a lack of development opportunities or career growth, a lack of rewards and recognition, cultural misfit, and a mismatch with the company's mission or vision. Possible barriers to development, rewards and the cultural misfit were most often perceived as factors that reduce engagement. Moreover, other individual factors also emerged from the interviews, such as possible issues with management and external non-work-related matters.

*R7: "Of course, if I wouldn't be recognized, my efforts won't be recognized, or if I won't have any more power of influence, and then I won't be engaged in."*

*R4: "If I ever noticed I'm hitting some kind of ceiling where, practically that could be a ceiling in position or a ceiling in salary. Those things would eventually, you know, eventually as the time progresses, I would start looking for something else."*

*R6: "One reason is like lack of interest or lack of belief in what we do makes sense. Another reason would be that even though what needs to be done will be interesting, and so on, if let's say the ambient becomes toxic."*

The results reveal some management-related issues that decrease employee engagement, for example, relationship with a manager. Also, being ignored at the workplace was considered a factor that decreases engagement. A manager plays a main role in how to react to employee's ideas and opinions.

*R1: "If there's not rewards or recognition for an extended period of time. If there are no opportunities for development, or if there's like, you know, the relationship with the team leader, or with the management or, you know, with the managers basically isn't good anymore. Those are the situations in which I would think about leaving the organization."*

*R2: "Oh, when your opinion is not considered anymore and like people are just not taking you into consideration and employment, and when they feel you're not the right person to work with them."*

Once again, it is interesting to pay attention that there was not a direct response of a manager's emotional intelligence as a factor that decreases engagement. Management-related issues were mentioned, for instance, that an employee's opinions are not taken into consideration. Although, there is not a direct indication that a manager's lack of emotional intelligence would significantly decrease employee engagement. However, the manager usually contributes to those matters with emotional intelligence, for instance, by creating a sense of belongingness, recognition of employees' achievements, or whether employees' opinions are considered.

### **5.3. Manager's Perceived Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement**

The third theme was a sort of combination of two previous themes, so perceived manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement. To find out how is perceived manager emotional intelligence related to employee engagement, respondents were asked to describe their relationship with own manager, for instance, how do the manager's emotional intelligence influence respondents, and how do the managers act in certain situations.

### 5.3.1. Outcome of Manager's Perceived Emotional Intelligence

The respondents stated that a manager's emotional intelligence affect the following matters: motivation, engagement, willingness to learn and develop, transparency, and the feeling of support.

Increased employee engagement was also evident in the responses, although mainly because of motivation – not exactly due to a manger's emotional intelligence. This clearly shows that a manager's emotional intelligence has a relation to employee's motivation. Increased motivation is related to employee engagement. When employees are motivated, they can also feel to be engaged in the work and the organization.

*R1: "Yeah, well, I guess, it has a big influence to me, and I suppose to me personally, yes. Because if the manager is emotionally unavailable and is not intelligent enough, then, then it basically puts me in a difficult situation because then I would be in a place where I'm not that motivated to work. Because if there's anything, if I want the other person to be intelligent towards what I'm feeling in the workplace. And if those things are not recognized, then at some point it will basically, you know, take away my motivation from working, which in turn will basically take away my enthusiasm or my level of engagement away from the organization."*

*R8: "Yeah, I would say that again in a positive way. I mean, from the positive perspective, so if there is something that it's good, for example, he can show it, and this influence me to be more motivated, this kind of chain I would say. And of course, this has an immediate impact of my engagement level. So, if I am getting motivated from my work and I have like some supportiveness from my manager, then I'm getting also more engaged to work."*

Employee's motivation can also decrease due to manager behavior. The lack of motivation has an impact to employee engagement.

*R5: "I would say that like my engagement goes down in my own job and in my own team. Because I have to just kind of tiptoe around and be careful. So, I'm not trying to make big effects and things like that, because when I've done that in the past it's gone wrong. It's not appreciated."*

Managers can also be seen as an example for subordinates, and managers can encourage people to learn and develop their work by leading with an example. The manager can be a kind of role model for other people by using emotional intelligence abilities.

*R7: "Some things I want to learn from my manager. I mean I see how my manager behaves with other people and solves some also emotional-related problems between some employees and with some team leads and... I'm wondering how my manager is doing that, trying to look at it and maybe learn from it."*

The results indicate that the manager's emotional intelligence is related to several things. The majority of respondents pointed out the importance of emotional intelligence in a manager's ability to motivate employees. Employee engagement was also evident in the responses, but only in a couple of responses, thus it was not the most significant finding. Employee engagement was also one of those subjects, but certainly not the major finding. The manager's emotional intelligence was perceived to have a relationship with, for example, the manager's ability to motivate subordinates. In turn, this ability to motivate employees was perceived to be an essential antecedent of employee engagement.

### **5.3.2. Relation between Manager's Perceived Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement**

Despite the findings that increase or reduce employee engagement in the previous chapter (5.2.), the results suggest that a manager's emotional intelligence influences employee engagement. Six respondents of eight answered that manager's emotional intelligence has a relation to their employee engagement. One respondent (R3) expressed

that a manager's emotional intelligence can at most support one's engagement but does not believe it will have a significant relation to employee engagement. Only one respondent (R7) answered that the line manager's emotional intelligence does not affect one's own engagement, but instead, the CEO's emotional intelligence has a more significant relation to the engagement level.

Respondents were also asked whether they would be more engaged if their managers were highly emotionally intelligent. This caused some uncertainty among respondents and many found it difficult to think of a relatively hypothetical situation. However, one-third of the respondents clearly answered in the affirmative and believed they would be more engaged if the manager were even more emotionally intelligent.

*R5: "Absolutely yeah. Like, I've just examining with thinking over the situation with myself, I see managers in the company and think that I really wish I had that. Like, I think I could be a lot more engaged in the company and in my job as well."*

A quarter of respondents were not absolutely sure about it, but they consider it could be possible to be more engaged. However, one-third of respondents believed that the manager's high emotional intelligence would not make them be more engaged.

*R4: "I think yeah, I think I would. Yeah, I don't think there's a maximum on that. Yeah, like I said, it's maybe more important when you're new in the company, but there's no limit on that. Like, no matter how long you work here, no matter how emotionally intelligent your manager is, it can always be more."*

*R8: "I would say that the current level of my manager's emotional intelligence... I would say, it's okay for me. I mean, my manager gives me that motivation and support that I need for the engagement. So of course, if it goes a little bit better, it will not be bad. But still at this level, I'm very, very happy."*

Some of the respondents were sure that the manager's very low emotional intelligence, which usually occurs in a negative emotional state or unconscious behavior, is experienced as a factor that most likely decreases engagement. Thus, the manager's very high

emotional intelligence does not necessarily increase employee engagement, but the manager's low emotional intelligence does clearly decrease employee engagement.

*R8: "I have seen the opposite side. And I see also the other side. So, if you if you somehow experienced this bad situation [low emotionally intelligent manager], you can appreciate the very good one. I would say, because if you've got like good experiences everywhere, you cannot see the very good part of that. But now I can see it very well."*

Based on all findings, a manager's emotional intelligence seems to be associated with engagement level. However, the interview data do not indicate a strong relation. The manager's emotional intelligence is not the most essential factor which affects employee engagement. There are plenty of other things that seem to have a stronger relation to employee engagement, such as rewards and career development.

The outcome of a manager's very low emotional intelligence is more substantial than the outcome of high emotional intelligence. A straightforward finding is that the manager's high emotional intelligence does not necessarily increase employee engagement, or make the huge difference compared to the sufficient level of emotional intelligence – but the manager's very low emotional intelligence can lead to disengagement. This can be interpreted from the engagement survey as well. Those respondents who had the lowest average engagement rate (R5 and R6) pointed out most dissatisfaction towards the manager. However, also other factors were involved in the outcome of the lower engagement, not only the manager's emotional intelligence.

## **6 Discussion**

This chapter provides theoretical and managerial implications of the study. The findings are discussed in light of the theoretical framework and empirical studies presented in the literature review. The managerial implications present development ideas for business context. Also, assessment of the study is discussed by considering validity and reliability. The chapter is concluded with the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

### **6.1. Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical implications answer the research question and compile the main results of the study. The aim of this study was to discover how does a manager's perceived emotional intelligence relate to employee engagement. The study focused to understand how employees perceive a relationship between their manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement.

Theoretical implications are divided into three subchapters that combine results of the study regarding perceived manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement. The last subchapter compiles the perceived relation between manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement.

#### **6.1.1. Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence is associated with a capability to perceive and regulate emotions in oneself and others (Goleman 2006; Salovey & Mayer 1990; Brackett & Salovey 2006.) In this study, emotional intelligence was also perceived to be related to the understanding of other's emotions and how to approach, react and especially communicate in different situations at the workplace. The interpretation and perspectives of respondents were practical and individual-centric regarding emotional intelligence.

The study shows that a manager's emotional intelligence was perceived in positive and negative interactive situations at the workplace, for instance how the manager is celebrating achievements or behaves in conflict situations under pressure and stress. It was clear that emotional intelligence capabilities can be used for monitoring and regulating emotions in those situations. According to the academic literature, self-awareness and self-management are important factors in how individuals manage themselves by using emotional intelligence. Without recognizing what we are feeling, it is impossible to manage those feelings. (Goleman et al., 2004: 39, 45-47.)

### **6.1.2. Employee Engagement**

The concept of employee engagement was not as clear as emotional intelligence to the respondents. This study reveals that employee engagement was mainly perceived as enthusiasm and commitment to the work. In the academic literature, employee engagement is also studied to appear as involvement and commitment, enthusiasm and passion, and effortfully attitude towards one's work and the organization (Macey & Schneider 2008; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes 2002; Saks 2006.)

Even though employee engagement was not familiar terminology for the respondents, the study reveals factors that were perceived to increase employee engagement. Meaningful job, development opportunities, and rewards and recognition were perceived to have an evident relation to employee engagement at the workplace. The study also indicates that a company itself has a big role in engagement, for instance, perceived company culture and environment are related to employee engagement. In the academic research, these factors fall into psychological conditions that drive employee engagement at the workplace (see chapter 3.2.). Psychological conditions determine how employees vary their engagement level and their roles in organizations. (Kahn 1990; Crawford, Rich, Buckham & Bergeron 2013).

The study also shows that several factors decrease employee engagement, for instance, cultural misfit and a lack of development opportunities or rewards or recognition. This is aligned with academic literature as these decreasing factors are opposites for factors that increase employee engagement. (Crawford et al. 2013).

### **6.1.3. Perceived Manager's Emotional Intelligence and Employee Engagement**

This study shows that a manager's emotional intelligence is perceived to have a relation to employee engagement, although it is not very significant. There are more meaningful factors that drive employee engagement in this study, such as meaningful job, career development opportunities, and company culture. The manager's emotional intelligence can be an enabler and a basis for the robust company culture and leadership skills. Therefore, a suggested relation is an indirect and amplifying relationship between the manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement. The manager's emotional intelligence has a relation to factors that directly increase engagement, such as company culture, mood, transparency, or communication at work. This is aligned with previous academic research that has not found a significant direct correlation between a manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement. According to Mahon, Taylor and Boyatzis (2014), emotional intelligence is more like a moderator and has an amplifying impact on employee engagement (Mahon, Taylor & Boyatzis 2014).

Based on the results of this study, a highly emotionally intelligent manager has the following capabilities: good communication skills, understanding of other's emotions, and being objective and inspirational. This is aligned with previous academic research that has found similar components for an emotionally intelligent manager, such as self-confidence, trustworthiness, effective communication, emotional and social awareness, and vision (Shamian-Ellen & Leatt 2002.)

It might be difficult to differentiate in reality what is leadership behavior and what is a manager's emotional intelligence. According to Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee (2004: 38),

emotional intelligence certainly reflects leadership behavior and capabilities, for instance, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. This study also provides evidence for it because the results of this study indicate that a manager's emotional intelligence itself does not have a significant relation to employee engagement, but it has an impact on leadership style which is perceived to have a direct relationship with employee engagement.

Managers can use emotional intelligence in leadership behavior and practices, for instance, to motivate, encourage and inspire employees, or give feedback. According to Crawford, Rich, Buckham and Bergeron (2013), ensuring job challenges, giving feedback, or providing career development opportunities are points that ensure psychological meaningfulness at work. Especially, leadership and managers play a major role in enabling these in everyday working life.

Even though the results do not reveal that a manager's perceived emotional intelligence significantly increases employee engagement, the results show that a manager's low emotional intelligence has a stronger relation to employee engagement. The results of the study can be interpreted in such a way that if an employee perceives that the manager's level of emotional intelligence is sufficient for the employee - it does not necessarily increase employee engagement. However, if the employee feels that the manager's emotional intelligence is low, it has a stronger and negative relation to engagement. The reason is not only the manager's emotional intelligence itself, but the leadership style in general. The results of the study revealed associations between employee disengagement and a manager's questionable leadership style or low emotional intelligence. This partly supports the previous academic research that has not found a direct significant correlation between a manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement (Mahon et al. 2014).

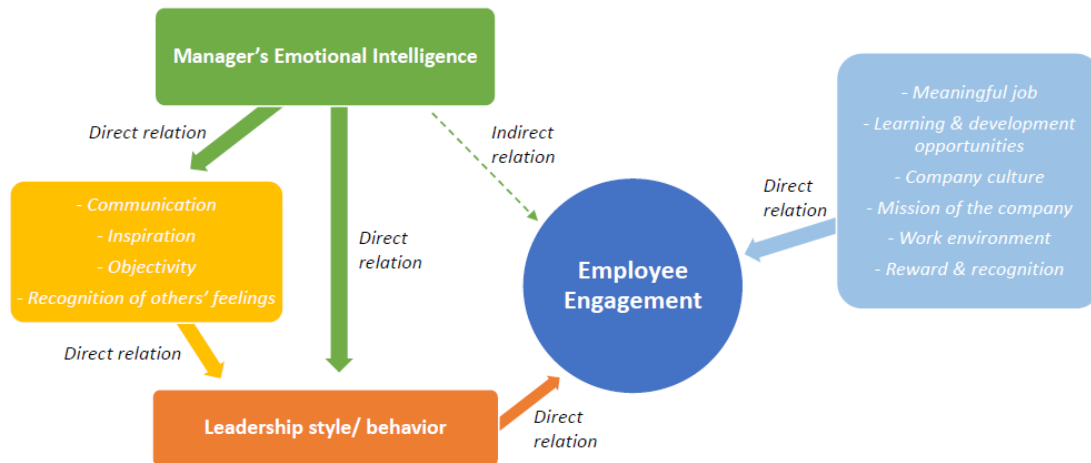
Emotional intelligence abilities enable managers to be socially aware and manage relationships at the workplace (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee 2004). Also, according to

Truss, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz and Soane (2014), managers can build an open and positive working environment in which employees can naturally engage. Even though, the study does not provide significant evidence that a manager's emotional intelligence directly increases employee engagement – it demonstrates an indirect and amplifying relation. For instance, emotional intelligence capabilities affect leadership style or behavior, and leadership behavior has an impact on employee engagement. Therefore, a manager's emotional intelligence itself does not directly increase or decrease engagement, but emotional intelligence can be used to identify, facilitate, and understand things. Based on this knowledge, the manager can take actual actions in the workplace that have an impact on employee engagement. Correspondingly, low emotional intelligence can lead to inaction, which can have a degrading impact on engagement, for instance, a lack of feedback because the manager is not socially aware in relationships.

Lack of emotional intelligence does not automatically mean that the person cannot be a good manager (Goleman et al. 2004). It does not mean either that the employee cannot be engaged if the manager has low emotional intelligence. The manager can take actions that increase employee engagement, for instance, at the prompting of another person, which suggests that the manager oneself does not utilize emotional intelligence in leadership skills on their initiative.

To clarify the result of this study, the results are summarized in the following figure (see Figure 7). The figure concludes the main findings and answers to the research problem: how does a manager's perceived emotional intelligence relate to employee engagement. It also identifies what other factors have a relation to employee engagement in this sample. The manager's perceived emotional intelligence is indirectly related to employee engagement. The manager's perceived emotional intelligence itself does not have a significant relation to employee engagement, but managers can use emotional intelligence to identify, facilitate, and understand things. This has an impact on other factors, for instance, leadership style which is perceived to have a significant relation to employee engagement. Therefore, the manager's emotional has an indirect and amplifying relation

to employee engagement. In this sample, other significant factors drive more employee engagement than the manager's emotional intelligence, such as learning and development opportunities, or rewards and recognition.



**Figure 7.** The results of the study – a perceived relation between a manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement

## 6.2. Managerial Implications

In today's challenging business, it is important to nurture human capital to gain engaged employees and to create a competitive advantage in the labor markets. Managers play a big role to engage employees, and therefore, leadership development is beneficial to organizations. The organization can support managers to develop their soft skills that eventually can be reflected in employee engagement and the company's wellbeing and performance.

According to the results of this study, emotional intelligence capabilities support employee engagement, and it is valuable to consider a strategy for ensuring emotional skills in leadership. This study demonstrates that negative emotional experiences are easily

etched on an individual's mind and can be remembered for a long time. Negative emotional experiences might have a more significant and long-lasting impact on individuals than positive emotional experiences.

Therefore, it is convenient to put proactive effort into the manager's emotional intelligence than try to repair an already lost connection or relationships within the work community. As much as managers have a responsibility to develop the work environment, each member has their influence. Every member has an impact on creating the working environment and how it is formed in everyday work life. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to emotional intelligence at the whole company level.

The study revealed that a highly emotionally intelligent manager has several soft skills, such as good communication skills, understanding of other's emotions, and being objective and inspirational. Based on the literature review, recognition and presenting a clear business vision and objectives are also matters that a highly emotionally intelligent manager contributes to (Goleman etc. 2004: 39; Shamian-Ellen et al. 2002: 39.) Therefore, training in emotional intelligence can be combined with other topics as well, for instance, communication training.

Even though emotional intelligence is not necessarily the most significant matter on employee engagement, organizations still need to understand the importance of managers and their emotional intelligence level. Organizations need continued interaction to find out and measure employee engagement levels. Recurring employee engagement surveys or other measurements provide valuable data for the organizations about what is important exactly for their employees. This is something that should be considered in a company or cultural strategy.

### 6.3. Reliability and Validity

The quality of any research is assessed by measuring validity and reliability. The concepts of validity and reliability are not completely univocal, but these provide a typical evaluation basis for qualitative business and social research. In general, validity refers to the ability to measure exactly what was intended to measure. Reliability refers to the reproducibility and consistency of the research. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016: 305.)

As it was discussed earlier, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe a specific phenomenon, rather than examine statistical data (chapter 4.1.) Therefore, validity signifies the compatibility of interpretations and explanations in a qualitative study. Validity simply indicates whether the explanation and analysis are reliable. The reliability of qualitative research is enhanced by an accurate description of different research stages and conditions. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007: 226-228.) The aim was to clearly describe the different stages included in the study and the conditions for conducting the study. Each reference is marked according to the writing instructions of the School of Business, which supports both the logic and traceability of the research.

To ensure the validity of the study in the interview situation, the purpose of the questions was clearly described to make ensure that those were understood correctly by the respondents. The questions were opened or redefined to achieve full comprehension if necessary. The interview framework was designed well to match the purpose of the study as closely as possible. Before assembling the body of the interview, the topics were studied very carefully so that the interview questions would answer the research problem in the best possible way. However, it is difficult to assess the reliability of a study in terms of its reliability, for instance, reproducibility. Likely, the results of the interviews would not be identical if the interviews were repeated. The design of the research and the respondents' views on the phenomena may change even in the short term, and then the reproducibility of the research suffers.

The aim was to compile and analyze the research material as thoroughly as possible based on the research question and the themes that emerged from the interviews. To ensure the reliability of the empirical data, the discussion of the main findings was supported with direct quotations. It ensured that the opinions and perspectives of the respondents emerge in their accurate sense. The most crucial was to find uniform and recurring phenomena when analyzing the interview results. The main findings are described to present the opinions and views of the respondents on the research topic.

The respondents were volunteers in the study, which certainly affected the availability of rich data and the reliability of the results. Even though the study was conducted in the same organizational context, background details and demographic factors of the respondents were different. The consistency was observed in the empirical results, but the results obtained from this study cannot still be generalized. In the role of the researcher, I believe that the results of this study could also represent other employees in another context - especially experiences of emotional intelligence and the factors influencing employee engagement.

A broader treatment of research data with quantitative methods might have increased the generalizability of this study, for instance analyzing the results by using SPSS. Now the quantitative processing of the research material was intentionally quite limited because the primary emphasis was on the qualitative methods. A brief quantitative survey for respondents was mainly supporting the qualitative main findings.

#### **6.4. Limitations of the Research**

The study has both theoretical and methodological limitations. From the theoretical perspective, both emotional intelligence and employee engagement are very difficult constructs to assess. There are not fully established or universally agreed definitions in the existing literature. Multiple different ways to approach emotional intelligence and employee engagement make the literature review complex in this study.

In terms of methodological limitations, the main findings cannot be generalized due to the qualitative nature and the research method of the study. An evaluation of the manager's emotional intelligence is partial because it is only based on the experiences of the subordinate [respondents]. The main findings and outcomes do not take into consideration the manager's perspective or self-assessment of their emotional intelligence. Also, an evaluation of employee engagement is also based on the self-assessment of the respondents. Any external tool was not used in measuring engagement.

There was a risk of misunderstanding in the interview situation due to interview language and a previously unknown research topic for the respondents. Only two respondents participated in the interview in their mother language. These risks were minimized by explaining unclear constructs and questions for respondents to achieve a common understanding in the interviews. Only two of the respondents were not familiar with emotional intelligence, and one respondent was not sure what is employee engagement.

The comprehensiveness and scope of research can be seen as its weakness. The scope and abstraction of emotional intelligence and employee engagement posed challenges, especially in the interpretation of the data, and made it difficult to clarify the main results. Thus, there is also a risk that the results will remain too general, which may make it challenging to understand the main results. A more precise delineation of the research topic would have made it possible to delve deeper into the phenomenon of the study.

## **6.5. Suggestions for Future Research**

This study aimed to explain the relationship between a manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement from the employee's point of view. Several new ideas and perspectives emerged that could not be addressed in this study, but it would make sense to explore them in future research.

The study focused on the current situation in a particular context. It would be appealing to examine the impact of possible leadership training and interventions. Is it possible to improve a manager's perceived emotional intelligence in such a way that it would be beneficial for employee engagement? In future research, it would be valuable to compare the current main findings to the results after emotional intelligence or another leadership training.

This study was addressed from the employee perspective to understand the employee experience. In future research, it would be interesting to approach the topic also from the company point of view and try to statistically assess and examine what kind of economic result or consequences the manager's emotional intelligence generates.

The focus was purely on employee perspective which means that evaluation of manager's emotional intelligence is based on experiences of an employee. It would be appealing to study how an employee's own level of emotional intelligence affects their assessment of a manager's emotional intelligence, or how an employee's level of emotional intelligence affects a manager's use of emotional intelligence. This could be investigated, for instance by using the leader-member-exchange (LMX) theory.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview Questions

#### Background questions:

- Total years of working experience:
  - Less than 1 year
  - 1-2 years
  - 3-5 years
  - 6-10 years
  - More than 10 years
  
- Length of employment:
  - Less than 1 year
  - 1-2 years
  - 3-5 years
  - 6-10 years
  
- Length of the employee-manager relationship:
  - 0-0,5 year
  - 0,5-1 year
  - 1-2 years
  - 3-5 year
  - 6-10 years
  
- Field of your job position:
  - Engineer
  - Business / support function
  
- Gender:
  - Female
  - Male
  - Other
  - Prefer not to say

#### Emotional intelligence

1. Are you familiar with the concept of emotional intelligence? What does emotional intelligence mean to you?

→ *[Explain what emotional intelligence means.]*

2. How do emotions appear in your everyday life? Give examples.
3. How do emotions appear in your organization? Give examples.
4. In what situations do your manager's emotions and feelings appear in the workplace?
5. How do you describe your level of emotional intelligence?
6. How would you describe a highly emotionally intelligent manager or leader?

### **Employee engagement**

7. Are you familiar with the concept of employee engagement? What does employee engagement mean to you?

→ *[Explain what employee engagement means.]*

8. What matters make you hold on to your current organization?
9. What matters would make you leave your current organization?
10. How do you contribute to the engagement at your organization?
11. Do you consider yourself as an engaged employee?
  - a. Why? How does it appear in your daily work?
12. How likely would you recommend your employer to other people?  
*[Scale 0-10; 0 = very unlikely, 10 = very likely].*

### **Manager's emotional intelligence and employee engagement**

13. How would you describe your relationship with your manager?
14. How does your manager and his/her emotional intelligence influence you?
  - a. Does it have an impact on your engagement level?
15. How does your manager regulate his/her feelings and emotions?
16. How does your manager recognize and understand other's feelings and emotions?
17. How does your manager manage relationships?
18. How does your manager act in conflict situations?
19. How does your manager use emotions in problem-solving and decision-making situations?
20. Do you think would you be more engaged with your organization if your manager was highly emotionally intelligent?

## Appendix 2. Engagement Survey

(Scale 1-5; 1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) (Modified from Harter et al. 2002)

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the needed materials, equipment and access to do my work right.
3. I know what I need to do to be successful in my role.
4. I have received recognition or praise for doing good work within the last seven days.
5. My manager, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. My opinions seem to count at work.
8. The mission of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My co-workers/colleagues are committed to doing quality work.
10. Someone at work has talked to me about my progress during the last six months.
11. I have had opportunities to learn and grow at work during the last year.
12. I rarely think about looking for a job at another company.
13. I see myself still working at the company in a couple of years.

### Appendix 3. Results of Engagement Survey

(Scale 1-5: 1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree)

R = Respondent

|     |   | R1         | R2         | R3         | R4         | R5         | R6         | R7         | R8         |
|-----|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1.  | I know what is expected of me at work.  | 5          | 4          | 4          | 5          | 2          | 4          | 4          | 5          |
| 2.  | I have the needed materials, <u>equipment</u> and access to do my work right.         | 4          | 5          | 4          | 5          | 4          | 2,5        | 5          | 4          |
| 3.  | I know what I need to do to be successful in my role.                                 | 5          | 5          | 4          | 4          | 2          | 4          | 5          | 4          |
| 4.  | I have received recognition or praise for doing good work within the last seven days. | 1          | 5          | 5          | 5          | 4          | 5          | 1          | 5          |
| 5.  | My manager, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.                   | 5          | 5          | 4          | 5          | 3          | 4,5        | 3          | 5          |
| 6.  | There is someone at work who encourages my development.                               | 5          | 5          | 3          | 5          | 5          | 2          | 4          | 4          |
| 7.  | My opinions seem to count at work.  | 4          | 4          | 5          | 5          | 3          | 4          | 4          | 5          |
| 8.  | The mission of my company makes me feel my job is important.                          | 5          | 5          | 5          | 4          | 4          | 3          | 3          | 5          |
| 9.  | My co-workers/colleagues are committed to doing quality work.                         | 3          | 4          | 4          | 3          | 4,5        | 4          | 5          | 5          |
| 10. | Someone at work has talked to me about my progress during the last six months.        | 5          | 5          | 5          | 5          | 4,5        | 4          | 3          | 5          |
| 11. | I have had opportunities to learn and grow at work during the last year.              | 5          | 5          | 4          | 5          | 3          | 3          | 5          | 5          |
| 12. | I rarely think about looking for a job at another company.                            | 5          | 5          | 2          | 5          | 2          | 3          | 3          | 5          |
| 13. | I see myself still working at the company in a couple of years.                       | 5          | 4          | 3          | 5          | 3          | 3          | 3          | 5          |
|     | <b>average</b>  | <b>4,4</b> | <b>4,7</b> | <b>4,0</b> | <b>4,7</b> | <b>3,4</b> | <b>3,5</b> | <b>3,7</b> | <b>4,8</b> |