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Emotional intelligent leadership in the ministries

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis discusses the emotional intelligence of a leader, its meanings and occurrence in Finnish ministries. Emotionally intelligent leadership may function as a counterpart to a traditional, rational leadership methods and is included on human-centric leadership methods. This thesis considers what kind of leader is potentially emotionally intelligent. Thesis also discusses the impact that the ministries have in enabling an emotionally intelligent work environment. The study shows what effects emotionally intelligent behaviour has and, since acting from emotionally intelligent way is not completely problem-free, the study also discusses the challenges of a leader's emotional intelligence behaviour.

The study method is qualitative research, and the data was gathered through thematic semi-structured interviews. Director General in the department of State Administration Development from the Ministry of Finance gave an overview interview to the thesis about emotional intelligent leadership culture in the ministries. The research findings indicate that emotionally intelligent leadership has been observed within ministries. However, there are no precise metrics available for emotionally intelligent leadership, nor is it explicitly used as a term within the ministries. Emotionally intelligent behaviour of a leader takes many forms, and, in the ministry, emotional intelligence can be found in trust and dialogicity.

Since the ministry is a public sector operator, the provision of financial incentives is limited and it is recommended that the leader use other ways to encourage employees, which is where implementing emotional leadership fits in. Emotionally intelligent leadership can help alleviate ethical stress by providing subordinates with the opportunity to discuss difficult decisions and process the situation together with their leader. However, emotional intelligence should be used impartially in the workplace, and it is important for the leader to practice self-reflection to eliminate harmful effects.

Due to the small sample size of interviewees, the findings of the thesis cannot be generalized to the broader context of the entire ministry. Future research should examine how emotionally intelligent leadership in the ministry is seen from the perspective of the persons being led. Another future research topic is to study ethical stress and its prevalence in the Finnish ministries.

KEYWORDS: emotional intelligence, leadership, ministry, human-centric leadership

VAASAN YLIOPISTO

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TIIVISTELMÄ:

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee johtajan tunneälyä sekä sen merkitystä ja ilmenemistä Suomen ministeriöissä. Tunneälykäs johtaminen tarjoaa vastapainon perinteisille johtamismenetelmille ja sijoittuu osaksi ihmiskeskeisiä johtamisstrategioita. Tutkimuksessa analysoidaan, millaisia ominaisuuksia tunneälykkäällä johtajalla mahdollisesti on, sekä ministeriön roolia tunneälyä tukevan työympäristön edistämisessä. Lisäksi tutkimus tarkastelee tunneälykkään käyttäytymisen vaikutuksia ja tuo esiin tilanteita, joissa tunneälykäs johtaminen voi kohdata haasteita.

Tämä tutkimus hyödyntää kvalitatiivista tutkimusmenetelmää, ja aineisto on kerätty temaattisten puolistrukturoitujen haastattelujen avulla. Esihenkilötyötä tekevien johtajien haastattelujen lisäksi valtiovarainministeriön valtionhallinnon kehittämissosaston osastonjohtaja antoi haastattelun pro gradu -tutkielmaan. Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että tunneälykkästä johtajuudesta on havaintoja ministeriöissä. Tunneälykkäälle johtamiselle ei kuitenkaan ole tarjolla täsmällisiä mittareita, eikä se ole käytössä virallisena johtamisen periaatteena ministeriöissä. Johtajan tunneälykäs käyttäytyminen on monimuotoista, ja ministeriöissä tunneäly ilmenee luottamuksessa ja dialogisuudessa.

Koska ministeriö toimii osana julkista sektoria, taloudellisten kannustimien käyttö on rajoitettua, minkä vuoksi johtajille suositellaan vaihtoehtoisia tapoja motivoida työntekijöitä. Tässä yhteydessä tunneälykäs johtaminen tarjoaa keinon tukea sekä kannustaa henkilöstöä. Tunneälykäs johtaminen voi myös lievittää eettistä stressiä johtajan kyvyllä luoda tilaisuuksia avoimelle keskustelulle ja yhteiselle pohdinnalle haastavien päätösten äärellä. On kuitenkin keskeistä, että tunneälyä ilmennetään työyhteisössä puolueettomasti ja että johtajat harjoittavat itsereflektiota mahdollisten haitallisten vaikutusten vähentämiseksi.

Koska tutkimuksen otoskoko on suhteellisen pieni, tuloksia ei voida suoraan yleistää ministeriön laajempaan kontekstiin. Jatkotutkimusaiheiksi ehdotetaan tutkimusta siitä, miten tunneälykäs johtaminen nähdään johdettavien henkilöiden näkökulmasta. Lisäksi tutkimusaiheeksi nousi eettisen stressin esiintyvyyden ja sen vaikutusten ilmeneminen Suomen ministeriöissä.

AVAINSANAT: Tunneälykyys, johtaminen, ministeriö, ihmiskeskeinen johtaminen

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1 Introduction

This thesis is about emotionally intelligent leadership and its various manifestations. The purpose of the work is to reflect and find out what is emotional intelligent leadership and whether an emotionally intelligent way to lead has been recognized and manifested in the Finnish ministries, the interview data for this study were collected from four ministries. The thesis also considers what kind of criticism there is around emotionally intelligent leadership. The work follows the theory of emotional intelligence and existing research about emotional intelligent leadership.

While this thesis highlights the importance of a leader's emotionally intelligent actions, which are usually defined as positive, it's still impossible to prove exactly that it is positive leadership that leads to positive outcomes and negative leadership styles cause negative outcomes and the empirical findings around this subject might be the result of causal indeterminacy (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023, p.333). The leader plays a significant role in shaping how subordinates perceive the trustworthiness of leadership within their organization (Brotheridge & Lee, 2008, p.109). Human-centric leadership is talked about a lot in 21st century, and various trainings for leaders are built around it, for example in the state administration.

Public administration is still seen through power structures, and the pioneers of our time's organization theory looked at institutions through the glasses of a powerholder. Max Weber (1864-1920), a pioneer in theories of power and the study of capitalism, started from the idea that a bureaucratic organization is worth of pursuing. This also can mean that the leader's word is the law and there is no discussion with the subordinates. Today, the diversity of society in organizational research has brought into focus other, more humane starting points in addition to power, of which the theory of a servant leadership is a good example. The roots of being in a lead are in a status position, which was usually achieved as a reward for a job well done. Today, supervisors work in the same workspaces as their subordinates, and the work is increasingly a service and a coaching task. Broadly speaking, showing emotions has been seen as a weakness and an inability

to control oneself, and thus as a characteristic of a bad leader (Brotheridge and Lee, 2008, p.110). Emotional intelligence is not a new concept, but a rebranding of earlier theories on social intelligence. Although emotional intelligence has been widely praised, its limitations in leadership have not been sufficiently explored.

The theoretical reference framework is in theory of emotional intelligence and leadership models such as servant leadership. Director General Katju Holkeri in the department of State Administration Development from the Ministry of Finance gave an overview interview to the thesis about emotional intelligent leadership culture in the ministries. Based on that, the thematic interview to the 4 leaders were held. Leaders came from four different ministries Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Transport and Communications.

Subordinates and leaders operate in the field of a complex working life. For example, in public administration, complexity can be seen as the difficulty of leadership tasks, and for administration employees as rapidly changing administrative policies (Stenvall, 2023, p.109) and dealing with the frequently changing different political government coalitions. A complex operating environment means that the syntology of problems is not always known, and the related changes are not recognized (Stenvall, 2023, p.70). Working life has become more complicated in many aspects, but so is the individual life of employees. We live in a time of many crises, and this has inevitable effects on everyone and everything. Complexity requires a new kind of ability from public administration leaders, and in this sense too, the thesis examines whether emotional intelligence will inevitably become a more central part of a leader's everyday work because employees demand more than the leaders are interested in their well-being.

1.1 Research problem

This thesis examines emotionally intelligent leadership and whether an emotionally intelligent way to lead has been recognized and manifested in the Finnish ministry. Ministries are the highest decision-making, power controlling level in public administration in Finland. As the ministries are the highest decision-making public administrative authority, it's not indifferent how leadership is perceived and how it's implemented. We can assume the state's top administration as an example of emotionally intelligent leadership for its own administrative branches. The study will concern leader's emotional intelligent way to lead, and the policies of emotional intelligent leadership.

The Ministry of Finance guides management development for 10 other ministries which are Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and Ministry of the Environment. There are also recommendations from the OECD that influences ministries instructions and regulations. Also, the Finnish Civil Service Act gives the policies that every civil servant follows (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

Specific research questions are:

1. What is the conceptual framework of emotional intelligent leadership?
2. To what extent can emotionally intelligent leadership be identified and observed within Finnish ministries?

The thesis is based on existing research about emotionally intelligent leadership as well as researched knowledge about the different traits of emotional intelligent leadership. In recent years, the role of emotions in various scientific fields has been central. The Western culture is based on the idea of rationalism, where reality must be justified by reason. Emotions have been considered to confuse our thinking; emotions are like a misleading element that should be put aside in the way of reason. Rationalistic approach

to situations has its advantages, of course, but if we look at it humanly, what kind of leader is a leader without emotional reactions? Reason and emotions support each other, emphasizing the other leads to loss of balance (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p.13-14,17).

2 The concept of emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence has been defined as one form of social intelligence (Schutte & al, 1998, p. 168) and it's a part of human-centric leadership. Skills in human-centric (or people-oriented) leadership are for example learning skills, dialogicity, enabling thinking and the skill of implementing. Self-directedness (and encouraging to it) and motivating are typical for people-oriented activities. Self-directed teams are led by example, values and by investing in the prerequisites for internal motivation (Stenvall, 2023, p.147). Edward Thorndike defined social intelligence in 1920 (Riggio et al., 2002) (Chiseyeng'I & al, 2022, p.20). According to John Mayer and Peter Salovey, emotional intelligence involves evaluating and expressing emotions, regulating emotions and using emotions to solve problems (Schutte & al, 1998, p. 168). In Salovey and Mayer's model of emotional intelligence, clearly interactive emotional intelligence abilities related to another person are the ability to perceive another's facial expressions, the ability to feel empathy and the ability to direct another's emotions (Schutte & al, 1998, p. 168).

Psychologist Daniel Goleman has also continued Mayer and Salovey's research on emotional intelligence and stated that emotional intelligence includes several social and communication-related skills that affect understanding and expressing emotions (Schutte & al, 1998, p. 168). However, emotional intelligence has received a lot of criticism in the academic community, and there is also research in the scientific community with different conclusions. Spector and Johnson (Murphy, 2006) noted that emotional intelligence is one of the most controversial concepts in the social sciences. Cherniss (2010) presents three main points of criticism: conflicting models and definitions, the need for a better assessment method, and the importance of emotional intelligence in predicting key organizational outcomes. He suggests that emotional intelligence and emotional and social skills should be separated and studied as separate phenomena (McCleskey, 2014, p. 83)

Although emotional intelligence has gained increasing prominence and significance, there is disagreement whether emotional intelligence suits to the academic settings (McCleskey, 2014, p. 83). The reason why emotionally intelligent leadership is also viewed with critical eyes is that it is seen as an old idea that has been reinvented specifically as an interest in interpersonal skills. The criticism concerns the fact that emotional intelligence is seen rather through positive, optimistic glasses and that it doesn't give a specific understanding of a practical leadership. Furnham (2006) argues that the enthusiasm for emotional intelligence stems from the average person's scepticism about IQ. Emotional intelligence is commonly viewed as a counterpart to IQ. Murphy (2006) states that emotional intelligence is considered as a set of skills, that the average person thinks they have and can improve. The emergence of the concept of emotional intelligence among the average person, and its contrasting scepticism about IQ, may have helped make it a prominent and enduring target of academic criticism (Chiseyeng'I & al, 2022, p.21). It may be worth considering whether IQ, a long-established measure of intellectual development and ability, still affectively addresses the demands of today's professional working environment.

Emotions can be interpersonal or intrapersonal. On a general level, emotions develop, change and go in different directions in an organization, depending on how the organization changes and develops (Morten, 2007, p.152). Feelings and their presentation are central to communication and interaction between people. In positive and negative workplace situations, for example in conflicts, emotions are most often at the center. At workplaces, emotions can even be managed and cherished to achieve the desired goals. A commonly known form of this is a team spirit. Team spirit is a concept strongly built on emotions. Just noticing the positive feelings of others, can contribute to cooperative work behavior (De Neve & al, 2024. p. 25). Emotions can be both motivating and restraining forces (Morten, 2007, p.152). It has been studied that if a leader denies feelings at the workplace, leader may also do so in life in general (Morten, 2007, p.152). Alternatively, it has stated that emotions play important role in daily life, but people may vary their ability to perceive, understand, use and manage emotions

and these variances may affect individual adaptation in a variety of different contexts, including the workplace (2010, p. 110) (McCleskey, 2014, p. 77).

Fischer and Sitkin state, that leadership styles are evaluative patterns rather than objective behaviours, creating a conflation that research often overlooks. The critique underscores three main issues: positive valence, nonbehavioral influence and evaluation attributes. Ethical and authentic leadership includes itself a positive evaluating bias and it's difficult to look impartially. It's stated that considering positive or negative behaviour, it's evaluator specific trait, which creates inconsistencies and biases (Fischer et al, 2024, p.2). Therefore, it is challenging to assert that emotional intelligence alone has a positive impact on those being led, without considering the potential influence of other leadership traits the leader may be demonstrating.

An emotionally intelligent leadership appears strongly in the theory of servant leadership (Gartzia & van Engen, 2008, p.298). An empathetic approach and the effort to understand other people are at the centre of servant leadership (van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1232). A leader should be able to listen and appreciate what subordinates are indicating, so that they can help those they lead (servant leadership perspective) (Stenvall, 2023, p.162). According to Fischer & Sitkin servant leadership has seven dimensions: conceptual skills, empowerment, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, ability to emotional healing, and ability to create value for the community (2023, p. 345). The perspective of servant leadership was developed by Robert Greenleaf (1904 – 1990). Compared to other traditional leadership styles, where the goal is the well-being of the organization, a servant leader is genuinely interested in serving those they lead.

This person-oriented form of leadership enables safe and strong relationships in the organization (Van Dierendonck, 2011, p.1230). Servant leaders go beyond their own interest, they are motivated by something other than the need for power, they are motivated by the need to serve (Van Dierendonck, 2011, p.1231). In addition,

psychological studies have shown that the pursuit of individual achievements can often be self-defeating and harmful. Spence and Helmreich (1983) found that individuals who were competitive in relationships between people were less likely to achieve what they want than their peers who were less competitive (Mendonca & Kanungo, 2007, p.84).

2.1 The pitfalls of emotional intelligence and empathy

In projective empathy, it is important to separate assumptions and facts from reality. To be able to practice this kind of ability, the leader should be able to detach him or herself from the subject being discussed. In projective empathy, a person may project his or her own criteria or familiar traits onto another person and forget what the other person really is. The challenge here is that one can't ignore the other person's position because it's careless, but on the other hand, one can't assume to know completely how the other person feels (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p.33, 35). Practicing such a skill requires a genuine desire from the leader to understand the mental movements of the person he or she is leading.

Cognitive empathy means that we observe the feelings of others to become more aware of other people. Cognitive empathy has a dark side, where this skill combined with narcissism brings out manipulator and abuser traits in a person. In this case, it is not about striving for the flourishing of another person. When a leader possesses the cognitive ability to interpret the psychological states of subordinates, but lacks emotional attunement or empathy, there is a risk that such insight may be employed manipulatively, resulting in Machiavellian leadership behavior characterized by strategic exploitation. Machiavellian worldview (also a leadership style) is strongly associated with competition, pretense, manipulation and the rarity of genuine social ties (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p.53).

Both advocates and critics of empathy state that we often only empathize with people like us (Bloom, 2016, p.9). In other words, with this conclusion, the leader's emotionally intelligent positive treatment of his or her subordinates would not always be equal. It is

therefore important that equal treatment by the leader is conscious. Empathy-oriented treatment should be given to all subordinates in the team, not just the leader's favorite. In the book *Against Empathy*, Paul Bloom (1963-) states that a person can only show empathy towards one person. According to Bloom, when talking about a group of people, showing empathy is not possible (Bloom, 2016, p.89).

The philosopher and empiricist David Hume (1711-1776) has proposed that empathy is often biased. We feel the most empathy towards those who are like us. There are human, evolutionary reasons for this. In a competitive setting, experiencing empathic and positive feelings towards another is challenging (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p.117). The situation is of course questionable if the leader feels envy towards those she or he leads, and lets it show through inappropriate means. Competitive settings are quite common in the workplace. The basics of emotionally intelligent behavior can also be biological in a person, so empathic behavior appears naturally in some people. Leaders can also belong to the autism spectrum. People who belong to this spectrum often have difficulties understanding other people's mental movements, and in this case also manifesting an emotionally intelligent, people-oriented leadership style can be challenging (Bloom, 2016, p.201). But it's not said that people with autistic traits could never learn emotionally intelligent behavior in the workplace.

Those criticizing the empathy-based approach suggest using reason and cost-benefit analysis instead of empathy, and showing more distant compassion and kindness (Bloom, 2016, p.39). This point of view sidesteps the traditional rational approach to things presented in the introduction, which has been considered a sign of effective management. Leaders in ministries are inherently capable of making decisions, and emotional intelligence does not hinder this ability, even in complex situations affecting the workplace. However, a key challenge arises in ensuring that decisions are communicated clearly and justifiably. Over-reliance on emotional intelligence—particularly excessive empathy or attempts to deeply understand those affected—may obscure the message and create misunderstandings. In public administration, where

leaders must act within official responsibilities, an imbalance between emotional intelligence and decisiveness can lead to perceptions of inconsistency. Thus, effectively combining emotional intelligence with clear and authoritative communication remains a critical leadership challenge (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

3 Leader's emotional skills

Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, who studied the effects of emotions, has claimed that our morals and values are based on culturally learned models, for example stereotypes. The model is based on social intuition, which involves the perception of right and wrong (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p. 18). A leader, like everyone else, has personal assumptions about others, which influence their approach in the workplace. Civil servants have diverse human perceptions, and therefore emotional intelligence, the will to understand people, is a part of effortless leadership (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025). In their 2002 study, Salski and Cartwright examined the emotional leadership skills of 224 leaders. The study found that leaders whose emotional intelligence was considered higher also felt less stress, a better sense of physical and mental well-being, and they also performed better in their work as supervisors (Brotheridge & Lee, 2008, p. 112). Sensitivity in social situations, a combination of effective listening and the ability to understand social situations, appears to be crucial for a leader's success (Brotheridge & Lee, 2008, p. 178).

Leadership styles are patterns of informal and interactive behaviours, that are believed to foster certain desirable or undesirable follower-, team-, or organization-related objectives or consequences. However, it's not problematic to divide the leadership styles (behaviours) only including all-positive or all-negative attributes. This problem is exacerbated when person's behaviours include intentions, outcomes, and assessments of the quality (e.g., execution excellence or effectiveness) of the behaviours (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023, p.332). As emotional intelligence is referred of a form of positive leadership, it's not clear whether positive and negative leadership can be compared based on the leader's behaviour, or whether this could be measured in other style-outcome ways. It's not possible to prove exactly that it is positive leadership that leads to positive outcomes and negative leadership styles cause negative outcomes. Empirical findings supporting the do-good logic, and the don't-do-bad logic of leadership styles might be the result of causal indeterminacy (Fischer & Sitkin, 2023, p.333).

In 2002, Brotheridge and Lee did a study that investigated the display of emotions in the workplace. The study revealed that superficial behaviour (acting), as well as the presentation of pretended emotions caused a higher risk of burnout (Brotheridge & Lee, 2008, p.112). It has been studied that forcing also positive emotions at work causes negative effects, this has been studied in the business environment. Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* (1983) introduced a social theory of emotion, exploring concepts such as emotional labour, emotion work, and feeling rules within organizations. She defined emotional labour as the regulation of emotions to produce outward expressions, often as part of one's job responsibilities in exchange for financial compensation. Hochschild's work spurred research into professions with high emotional labour demands, such as retail, where positive emotional displays were associated with higher sales. Studies found that organizations enforced these feeling rules through training programs and incentives, with leaders playing a key role in their implementation. However, research also underscored the potential drawbacks for employees, as suppressing authentic emotions often led to stress and adverse health effects (Fambrough & Hart, 2008, p. 743)

For both employees and leaders, the regulation of emotions, and their display, has a clear correlation with general health. Emotional regulation and managing strong emotions are also a critical skill. Social expressiveness is related to the leader's presence and presentation skills, while social sensitivity gives the leader the opportunity to analyse social situations. Social control is closely related to the ability to act in a complex leadership role. In the end, however, the question is whether leaders themselves are easily able to develop emotional and social skills and whether they want to do so (Brotheridge & Lee, 2008, p.179).

Adam Smith (1723-1790), a leading figure in liberal thought, studied projective empathy. At the centre of projective empathy is a moral skill, according to which we are guided by some common thing that considers the well-being of others. Smith thought that by imagining we can put ourselves in the position of another person. A simulation exercise could be helpful in the development of leader's emotional skills. Although Smith's theory

is hundreds of years old, simulation theorists consider this way of understanding another person's experiences to be valid even in modern times (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p.30-31, 33). The ability of projective empathy can be practiced by imagining "how I felt to be in another person's place", or "how the other person feels as they are". Regular projection exercises could be a way for organizations to develop the leader's ability to practice empathy. Projection exercises and "getting into" the position of the other person would be an aid both in understanding the practical work and in finding a spiritual connection between the leader and the follower.

Empathy is a part of emotional intelligence and an asset of society. It supports the development of community spirit, reciprocity and cooperation. Empathy helps to understand another person's mental movements and social behavior (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p. 7, 20). The ability to perceive and understand the mental movements of others is important when working to fulfill common goals in a team and in a bilateral leader-follower relationship. The ability to empathize also helps the leader to perceive how satisfied the person being led is with the leader-follower relationship (Mahsud & al., 2010, p.565).

Leader's ability to empathize helps them to detect possible feelings of injustice experienced by the person being led, which can be caused, for example by the job itself, the salary and the lack of support from the leader. Empathy is strongly related to the characteristics of ethical leadership. The main features of ethical leadership are selflessness, honesty, the opportunity for the leader to experience empowerment, equality and justice (Mahsud & al., 2010, p.565). The behavior of an unethical leader and a leader who is incapable of empathy may cause cracks in human relations in the workplace. In the worst case, such a leader is destructive to the entire work community (Mahsud & al., 2010, p.109). A social learning perspective on ethical leadership means that leader's way to act ethically influences to subordinates. It's a psychological process, including observational learning, imitation, and identification. According to Bandura (1986) virtually anything that can be learned via direct experience can also be learned

by vicarious experience, via observing others' behavior and its consequences. (Brown & al, 2005, p. 119). This perspective on social learning aligns with Robert Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership, where Greenleaf posits that a leader can influence those it leads to adopt servant leadership principles by exemplifying these behaviors themselves (Van Dierendonck, 2011, p.1230).

The higher the level of empathy a person has, the more likely they are to help others. We can think that empathy is the core of morality. A higher level of empathy is associated with the desire to intervene in things perceived as wrong, as well as the courage to correct these wrongs. Morality is at the core of workplace ethics. Morality is that we know how to recognize subjectivity (one is not a faceless thing in the mass) in a person, it's needs and perspectives (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p. 20-21). A leader can easily forget to consider the subordinates wishes and thoughts during all the leader's own expectations. Leaders open attitude towards subordinates is closely related to how leader is valuing the diversity of the subordinates. In a safe work environment, people dare to reveal their ignorance. An empathic leader can be considered a person who is also ready to talk about their own worries and insecurities. However, in such a way that they do not carry all their worries on the shoulders of their subordinates (Morten, 2007, p.219). Mostly it's about leaders own example to show that you can reveal your own imperfection.

Empathy has its dark and bright sides. At it's best, empathy makes us remember that we are all different. The phenomenologist Edit Stein's (1891-1942) definition of empathy is perhaps the closest to the one that best fits working life. Stein saw that empathy makes us recognize that the other person is a different, whole and foreign individual having its own perspective (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p. 81). Individuals who consider themselves expressive (traits such as empathy, sensitivity or caring about the needs of others) are also more open to embodying the communal behavior patterns required for effective leadership (Gartzia & van Engen, 2008, p.300).

A leader who "believes in inequality" often practices patronage, favoritism, and discrimination. A leader who focuses on fatalism and lacks a futuristic direction makes itself incapable of envisioning and planning his or her work (Mendonca & Kanungo, 2007, p.124). Empathy skills are also strongly influenced by values, which the leader follows. If the leader is on the path of greed, self-interest and impulsive hedonism, his or her empathy skills are underutilized (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p. 97).

3.1 The importance of trustworthy leadership and dialogicity

To be able to behave with emotional intelligence, you must have trust. Trust is relational. It is a question of the relationship between individuals and collectives. Trust in an organization can focus on things, cooperation between organizations and/or individual people. If comparing, for example, trust between institutions to trust relationships between people, trust between people is functionally more relevant. For example, the relationship between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Finance may be difficult due to bilateral perspectives and because of the directive right of Ministry of Finance. But the bilateral relationship between the officials of the Ministry of Justice and the officials of the Ministry of Finance can be fruitful and build bridges. In a confidential atmosphere, we share our ideas and concerns (Stenvall, 2023, p.164-165).

The Finnish government's principal decision on state personnel policy emphasizes that "Leaders are expected to enhance the work community atmosphere more than before" (Government Decision-in-Principle on the State's Personnel Policy, Ministry of Finance, 2001). Although this directive was established over two decades ago, the role of leadership in fostering a positive work environment remains critical. Leadership responsibilities now extend beyond traditional administrative functions to include problem-solving and cultivating a psychologically safe and trustworthy work atmosphere. While workplace atmosphere has long been regarded as a shared responsibility among all employees, emotionally intelligent leadership plays a central role in ensuring both psychological safety and trust within the organization (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

A fundamental aspect of trust in leadership is its bidirectional nature. Within the Finnish government, emotional intelligence and people-oriented leadership are conceptualized as requiring not only subordinates' trust in their leaders but also leaders' trust in their subordinates. This aspect can be weaved in a way that there are long traditions to that, that leader has been seen as the only atmosphere builder in the work communities. However, the department of State Administration Development is actively promoting a paradigm shift, advocating for a more inclusive approach, in which responsibility for workplace atmosphere is distributed across all civil servants of the organization. Now, on a practical level, a risk assessment is being carried out, where the workload and thereby also the working atmosphere are reviewed from the point of view of safety, as well as from the point of view of mental safety (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

There are currently no precise metrics available to systematically assess the level of emotional intelligence within government ministries. However, emotionally intelligent leadership manifests in key organizational factors such as trust, fairness, and other management-related indicators. These dimensions are evaluated through the VMbaro survey, which allows employees to assess and rate leadership practices that reflect a people-oriented and emotionally intelligent approach. The VMbaro survey includes items such as "trust in immediate leadership" and "trust in management." The results of these assessments can be interpreted to suggest that the absence of emotionally intelligent leadership correlates with perceptions of unfairness and a lack of trust in both senior management and direct supervisors. Furthermore, employees in such environments often report feeling unheard and perceive that their concerns and needs are not being acknowledged or addressed. This highlights the critical role of emotional intelligence in fostering an inclusive, fair, and trust-based organizational culture (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

Emotionally intelligent leadership is recognized and supported within government ministries through leadership development initiatives. Rather than focusing solely on emotionally intelligent or people-centered leadership, ministries adopt a holistic management approach that integrates emotional intelligence as one component among various leadership domains. Leadership training programs incorporate emotional intelligence through supervisor training, occupational well-being initiatives, and early intervention strategies. A key focus is on fostering dialogue, as effective communication and active listening are essential for emotionally intelligent leadership. Ministries have increasingly emphasized dialogic skills in leadership development, ensuring that leaders can engage in meaningful conversations, understand diverse perspectives, and promote an inclusive work environment (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

3.2 The contradictory role of a female leader

This chapter explores the differing approaches to managing and expressing emotions in the workplace between men and women, and examines how these variations influence the perception of emotions and emotional intelligent leadership. However, it is essential to acknowledge that contemporary work environments increasingly recognize gender as a spectrum rather than a binary construct. Consequently, both past and future research are challenged by evolving perspectives on gender diversity, necessitating a more inclusive and nuanced approach to leadership studies. The Finnish Government does not explicitly emphasize female leadership as a distinct category in its policies. Instead, it conducts statistical analyses based on a male/female/non-binary classification (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

In the childhood education girls are encouraged to empathize and boys have been found to be guided to be more emotionally cold (Aaltola & Keto, 2017, p. 25). Gender should not matter in leadership. Over the years, the leadership role of a female employees has strongly included the fact that they should not show their emotions at work, especially negative ones. This is contrary to the view that a woman generally needs to be the empathic caregiver and emotional supporter compared to a man. However, the

researched data shows that people are more dissatisfied with emotionally unconcerned female leaders than with emotionally unconcerned male leaders (Mahsud et al., 2010, p.110, 112). When difference between male leader and female leader in terms of emotional competence and random reward behavior (support and encouragement) is researched, female leaders are more positively represented in it. Such leadership behavior is consistent with the culturally assumed norm that women are more caring, encouraging, and considerate compared to men (Gartzia & van Engen, 2008, p.297).

One of the modern thoughts about effective and successful leadership is based on socio-emotional characteristics. Leadership based on socio-emotional characteristics and traits are historically associated with women (Eagly and Carli, 2003, 2007; Gartzia et al., 2011; Kark, 2004). Traits associated with feminine leadership style and teamwork processes are prioritizing human relationships, expressing feelings, rewarding positive behavior, and paying attention to socio-emotional factors. These skills related to emotional intelligence differ from technical and abstract competence (Gartzia & van Engen, 2008, p.297).

There are various studies about the effects of gender stereotypes on the leadership of men and women. Stereotypically masculine characteristics such as ambition, independence, dominance or rationality are associated with more traditional, hierarchical leadership. Women, on the other hand, are stereotypically thought to be gentle, compassionate, sensitive, and good at caring for others (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Muhr, 2011) (Gartzia & van Engen, 2008, p.297, 307). This creates a gender stereotyped perception of leadership exercised by a female, which may in some situations be less favorable than that of male leaders, if the masculine stereotypical traits are considered more valuable and vice versa. Also, based on this, it could be argued that women tend to display more traits associated with emotionally intelligent leadership compared to men.

Many studies have shown that male leaders are more likely to have less emotional and interpersonal dimensions of leadership than female leaders. In the context of leadership, qualities that are generally appreciated are decisiveness, self-confidence, and strength, while less valued feminine traits are manifested as warmth, sensitivity and compassion (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Eagly and Karau, 2002) (Gartzia & van Engen, 2008, p.297). Of course, the perception of leadership style is changing, but it is common to think that such an assumption of gender stereotypes may have a disadvantageous effect. Prejudice has become an obstacle to advancing women's careers in organizations. The assumption is that men are seen as more efficient, potential, and real leaders than women. Although female leaders perform competently, they still face limitations due to gender stereotypes; however, studies have shown that there is no significant difference in the leadership effectiveness of assumed men and assumed women (Chen & Shao, 2023, p. 571, 580). In the ministries there are no conclusive evidence from everyday leadership practices or management development programs to suggest that leadership styles differ systematically based on gender. The government comprises a wide array of workplaces across various administrative sectors, some of which may follow more traditional leadership approaches. Leadership styles are shaped by individual characteristics rather than gender, making it difficult to categorize one approach as inherently more people-oriented than another. Nevertheless, gender disparities persist in certain administrative sectors, with some areas employing fewer women than others (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

The researched data moderately shows that a woman's ability to evaluate and understand the feelings of others is better than that of men (Nabih & al, 2023, p.11). In their 2008 study, Gartzia & van Engen stated that individuals who can transcend gender stereotypes and identify stereotypically with both feminine and stereotypically masculine traits (i.e. are androgynous) are potentially the most effective leaders (Gartzia & Van Engen, 2008, p.307). Thus, the traits of an androgynous leader include a balance of assumed feminine and assumed masculine traits. The role of a female leader reflects the times of our society. The role of a woman is contradictory and the debate about a

woman's "place" is heated in our society. In workplaces, the contradiction can be seen in the way that the role expected of women is both a leader who hides her emotions but is nevertheless able to provide emotional support.

International organizations such as the OECD, along with other nations, track the representation of women in leadership positions and their distribution across various roles. Within the Finnish government, gender-related monitoring primarily focuses on pay equality between men and women rather than on differences in leadership styles. Diversity is regarded as a fundamental value in state administration. However, the primary focus is not on gender but on the broader principle that having a diverse range of individuals in various roles is beneficial. Rather than gender, age is a more prominent consideration, with efforts directed toward increasing the representation of young leaders while also preventing age discrimination. A key issue currently being addressed in ministries is ensuring that employees feel valued and respected as they approach the end of their careers (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

3.3 Expectations of a public leader's emotional intelligence

The publication "Leadership for the common good - A development project for central government management" released in 2022 contains many mentions about the identity of a public leader. As a principal, the common identity and value base of public management arise from the common dialogue and building a sustainable public administration, which requires courageous leadership and planned support (Publication: Ministry of Finance, 2022, p. 9). According to the cooperation group's view, every leader, whether a political decision-maker or executive director, contributes to ensuring that the public administration works and safeguards the well-being of Finnish society. For this, the identity of public management and its value base for professional management must be further strengthened and build a new kind of partnership in the entire public sector (Publication: Ministry of Finance, 2022, p. 9). Emotional intelligence has been identified and been present a long time in ministries leadership culture as value leadership, HR-policies, and in practice (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025). It has been

included in the common value base of the State Administration: operational effectiveness, transparency, quality and strong expertise, trust, service principle, impartiality and independence, equality and responsibility (Ministry of Finance, 2025).

The identity of public leaders has evolved significantly over the years, with a shift towards human-centered leadership and emotional intelligence. This change began in the 1980s as human-centeredness became a desired result in government programs serving citizens. Over the past decade, the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership has become more noticeable, especially in ministries, where conflicts have arisen when leaders fail to meet these expectations. Emotional intelligence is now seen as an essential trait for success in public leadership; leaders who lack it are unlikely to be re-elected or succeed in government roles. Developing emotional intelligence is crucial for navigating the complexities of political decision-making and working collaboratively within ministries and across networks. As a result, psychological tests are increasingly used in recruitment processes to assess human-centeredness and emotional intelligence, emphasizing that technical skills alone are insufficient for leadership roles (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

In the fall of 2021, the Ministry of Finance conducted a survey as part of the state management development project. One of the project's main points was to increase management skills that better meet the needs of future working life, for example by developing both strategic management and exemplary personnel management, as well as the related people-oriented management approach. One of the key findings was that in the public sector, leaders evaluate personnel factors related to administration, such as supporting, giving feedback, and rewarding leaders' practices as deficient. Emotionally intelligent leadership is seen as a tool worth developing to meet these needs. Survey reveals that good leadership is not sufficiently rewarded in public organizations and the support for well-being at work has not been sufficient (Publication: Ministry of Finance, 2022, p.45). The survey also made visible the fact, that the public sector must purposefully increase professional management development and support of leaders in

such a way that bad leadership is addressed in time, good leadership is promoted, and the well-being of leaders is supported (Publication: Ministry of Finance, 2022, p.13).

A study commissioned by the Academy of Finland, conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, revealed that leaders, particularly general directors, felt isolated and unsupported during the crisis. Unlike middle management, who have department heads for support, general directors reported a significant lack of resources for delegation and assistance. In response to this issue, a dialogue-based initiative was organized for general directors, providing them with 1.5 hours of dedicated time to engage in discussions, share experiences, and foster mutual understanding among peers (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025). Ministry of Finance states that it's important that the basis and practice of management and its development are sufficiently uniform in the state administration. For this, joint development activities are needed, especially joint leadership training (Publications: Ministry of Finance 2022, p.44).

Different people use different terms for emotional intelligence in the ministries, for example, people-oriented leadership. Remote and hybrid work has increased the importance and appropriateness of emotional intelligence/people-oriented management. We are currently experiencing a period marked by multiple crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. This context demands mental crisis resilience from employees, both in their personal lives and within the workplace. An emotionally intelligent management culture is particularly relevant in addressing these challenges. Emphasis is placed on fostering dialogue to strengthen factors that enhance mental crisis resilience and promote a sense of community across the entire state administration (Katju Holkeri, personal interview, 14.1.2025).

4 Case study: Emotional Intelligence in the ministries

4.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research was chosen to the examining matter when studying emotional intelligence in the ministries. Qualitative research typically focuses on examining people's thoughts, feelings, perceptions and interpretations of various things (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p.77). This requires entering the world of people's experiences and interpreting the experience, as well as trying to understand the experiences in the same way that people understand them (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p. 67), which served the concept for this thesis.

Phenomenological research aims to get into the world of the persons who are the subject of the research and this case leaders of the ministry. The goal is to understand the emotional intelligence leadership as a phenomenon that is the subject of the research as it appears in the living world of the persons (leaders of the ministry) involved in the research. The guarantee of the reliability of qualitative research is therefore not a general requirement of objectivity, but the interpretation of the observation and making the interpretation comprehensible to others who are interested in the matter research. In qualitative research, the credibility of the research can only be weighed by those who want to understand the researcher's interpretations. Of course, this does not always mean accepting the results of the study (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p.286).

Qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalizations. It aims to describe a phenomenon, in this case emotional intelligent leadership in the ministries (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 98). The thesis was about studying how leaders describe emotional intelligence in the ministry and how the leaders themselves feel the matter. Leaders as human beings are at the center of the study and emotional intelligent leadership is researched as a phenomenon. In qualitative research, the human being is at the center, both as the object of research and as the author of the research (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, P.77).

4.2 The research process

The research material was collected using semi-structured Teams interviews. Leaders were approached through the e-mail and 14 invitations were sent and 4 answered the interview invitation affirmatively. The advantage of the interview is that people who have experience in the phenomenon can be selected for the interview (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 86.). The interview questions are attached at the end of this work at annex. The thematic interview, which was used in this research, is based on specific themes and clarified questions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 87.) Methodologically, the theme interview emphasizes people's own interpretations of the matter, meanings, and how meanings are created in interaction (Hirsijärvi and Hurme 2007 2007) (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 88.). The key is the effort to reach the point of view of the researched, which requires a close relationship with the researched (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p.77) and that's why the interview method was chosen. Interviews idea is to get as much as possible information about the research topic (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 85) .

The semi-structured interview was chosen the research method. It's method that can bring out something, that the researcher might not have been able to consider when preparing ready-made answer options (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p 105). The advantage of a semi-structured interview is that the researcher gets views from all the interviewees on the topics central to research, and on the topics, defined in advance, in each interviewee's own words (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p.105). As a method, interview focuses on the contents of consciousness and thinking, and its goal is to collect material that makes it possible to make credible conclusions about the phenomenon under investigation. At best, with the help of an interviewee, the researcher gets (indirectly) access to the thoughts, preferences, desires, expectations and experiences of the researched (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p. 98).

Theory-based content analysis has been used as the analysis method. With content analysis, the interview can be analyzed systematically and objectively. This analysis method aims to obtain a description of the phenomenon under study in a condensed and general form. However, it is important to draw meaningful conclusions from using this analysis method (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 117.). Content analysis aims to organize the material in a concise and clear format without losing the information it contains (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 122).

4.3 Research ethics

When studying the ministries and the public government it's important to keep the study as open as possible. The researched topic does not contain sensitive matters but nevertheless tells about the internal working methods of the ministries and contains mentions of people's behavior at work. Katju Holkeri has given an overview interview to the thesis about emotional intelligent leadership culture in the ministries and appears in the text under her own name with her consent. The responses of the four official research interviewees have been anonymized to ensure confidentiality and protect their identities. The research must not endanger the course of the lives of the people who are the subject of it (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p.175). It is also necessary to assess whether the researcher has any commitments of its own to the research or to the researched objects.

Finnish National Board on Research Integrity states in their guide, that it is important that the researcher carries out the research in such a way that the research does not harm the researched people, communities or other research subjects' significant risks, damages or disadvantages (2019). When participating in research with the subject the person has the right to participate voluntarily or not to participate in the study, cancel participation at any time without negative consequences and withdraw consent to participate in the study at any time (Finnish national board on research integrity, 2019). There were 4 interviewees in the study, the sample from all the ministerial leaders is small and it is impossible to make broader generalizations. The information obtained during the interviews must be evaluated by reflecting researchers own perceptions, and

they must be critically evaluated afterwards. It is important for the researcher to make visible the researcher-oriented and subjective justifications of their solutions (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p.183).

5 Findings

The research material was used to find answers to the research questions and to observe the main ideas of the interviewees about the themes of the interview. The answers of the interviewees were mostly deep and reflective and a suitable length to collect the information. The interviews progressed according to the interview framework, question by question, and the matter was not rambled on. In some places, there were already answers to questions that had not even been asked yet. Analysis content for certain topics were found other questions than under a specific set of questions. Clarifying questions were asked if necessary. Qualitative material is divided and grouped according to different topics (Tuomi& Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 105). There were three themes in the interview; 1. Ministry as a platform for emotionally intelligent leadership 2. The emergence and effects of emotionally intelligent leadership 3. Challenges of emotional intelligence and empathy.

Efforts were made in transcription to a depth appropriate for the research, so that the material supports its analysis process. The interviewees' comments have been highlighted in the research as particularly interesting views or if the view has been generally descriptive of the conclusions drawn from the interviewees' answers. Discussions and comments clearly unrelated to the topic of the study were left out as far as possible, already removed during the transcription phase.

There were 2 male and 2 female leaders to be interviewed between the age of 44-58. One male leader was in the upper management as a department head and one male and two females were head of the units. Leaders came from four different ministries: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Transport and Communications. Gender, position and age was asked in the interview. Interviews were held in Teams and they lasted approximately 45 minutes. The questions were sent to the interviewed leaders beforehand and some background information about the thesis was given as well as the Vaasa University privacy policy document. In the beginning of the interview, it was made clear to the interviewees that

they are being recorded. The Teams interview was saved on the password-protected cloud server of the University of Vaasa. Transcribing was done manually without utilities. Recordings and transcriptions were not shared with third parties and were destroyed during the study upon completion.

5.1 Assessing the interviews: Emotional intelligent leadership in the ministries

The leaders interviewed all felt that they were working in a human-centric management environment, others felt it stronger, and others saw that the ministry as an organization brings challenges to acting as a human-centric leader. It was felt that enabling enthusiasm, learning and enabling thinking is not meaningfully implemented and compared this with the possibility of the private sector to better support the employee. Peripheral conditions such as administration, job rigidities, and personnel policy create challenges to act comprehensively as a people-oriented leader. Also, dual leadership, in some cases even three-headed leadership, was perceived as a factor that hinders human-centric leadership.

"In my opinion, there are such boundary conditions or difficulties, which might bring additional spice to it. So I mean when the ministries are led by two or three heads. In general, the organization has clear management structures and responsibilities, how they work, in the ministry, the change of political leadership brings a new addition to it"

"If you think about the Ministry of Finance as a context, when the preparation and implementation of the matter is taken forward, then there can be quite a lot of different management group discussions and these type of things, so that you can take it to the political leader. And if, as it were, people-centric leadership had these themes such as solution and excitement, thinking that enables learning, then in a certain way they are such administrative intermediate steps, which do not, as it were, add to the excitement of doing the thing. But in order for the matter to proceed administratively correctly and then to reach a political decision, it is mandatory to implement it this way"

Regarding the interviewees, the importance of intangible incentives in the leadership work of the ministry accumulated, especially because the possibility of salary-related incentives was perceived as low. All respondents felt that issues related to the leader's interaction are especially important for creating a sense of encouragement and meaning, and felt that they are in an organization where they can act in this way.

"The government's official structure is quite rigid and we don't have the opportunity for the same kind of a spurs as in the private sector, and of course we have development discussions every couple of months in a different format and a couple of times a year on a bigger scale, and it is in the spring that possible salary increases are considered, but the government jobs doesn't have much room for maneuver. You can't quickly develop or reward people here. It's a bit like grinding in here"

" You should use the tools you have, for example build community spirit, working together and precisely strengthen encouragement, enthusiasm, thinking together about how to solve different challenges. You should have one kind of a training and coaching approach to work and tailoring the learning plan for your people. These methods do not cost anything, but this is based on the interaction of people and the creation of such motivation and enthusiasm, so we must try to cultivate more of these methods"

"Our organization is currently in a state of change with NATO membership, as well as with the change in the security environment, so many new things are coming that learning to learn is at the very center and creating a sense of security"

"I feel that here at the Ministry of Transport and Communications this human-centric leadership is strongly encouraged. We just had an organizational change and a search for a managers was carried out, as well as job interviews for them, this (human-centric leadership) was emphasized a lot"

In general, the leaders interviewed felt that the ministries where they work are those where leadership can be manifested as fairness, cooperation, and dialogue. Leaders can be present as their own person and encourage others to bring their "own selves" to the workplace. In ministries, you basically must get along with everyone, this requires

emotional intelligence. Ending employment relationships is difficult due to possible conflict situations, this causes pressure in terms of leadership.

"As myself, I could only work from a human-centric leadership approach instead of something that is called a "traditional" leadership, and the organization then is the kind that enables that"

"It is practically impossible in the government to fire people. When you hold an office, then you hold an office and that's it. From the point of view of leadership, it results in pressure if there is a conflict in the work community that cannot be resolved in any way. It emphasizes that you must get along with everyone. On the private sector, problems were solved by firing people, because the problems could not be solved in any other way"

Two of the interviewees mentioned that *we are here to work for the Finns* and that basically the reason why a person has ended up working in the ministry as civil servant is that you can act an example to the administrative branches of the ministry, as well as to Finns in general. It was felt that the values talk about how people and things are treated, and the ministry aims to influence that the administration works well and at a high level. Emotional intelligence manifests as the concretization of values.

"The values become visible in concrete leadership work and front-line work, and through the fact that they are not just principles as room signs."

"Strategy and value base are the reasons for working in the ministry. Civil servants in the ministry have in a way come to work through active choice. In the private sector, career development is faster and salaries are better, but here there is a strong feeling that people work here because they want something greater good for Finland or public health or to develop their own field of expertise in a better direction. In a way, it creates such a pretty strong value base for that work"

"It is important that the ministry's values are based on openness, appreciation, trust and these types of ideas. But when I think about it as a leader, value leadership is not about listing values, but about working through one's own personality, then acting according to one's own values in the work community,

which are then related to how one sees different people and actors and others in one's own working environment."

The orientation in the work was described in such a way that it has developed over the years and a future civil servant is expected to have an emotionally intelligent attitude towards people. The ministry's goal is to team people together and receive feedback on the success of the orientation. Orientation was also considered to be "extremely important" in the ministry's operations, and its success is reviewed through dialogue with the new employee. The leader is considered to have the main responsibility for how the orientation is successfully implemented and this responsibility cannot be passed on to anyone else

"Of course, we have forms, processes and persons who are responsible, and we go through the different areas of the work and aim for couple and teamwork, so that no one is ever alone. Especially in the beginning, there is always someone to ask and someone to guide you further. We evaluate the success of orientation a couple of times a year, when people gather and have a discussion without their immediate supervisors. In a way, we team up new people and talk about what it's like to come to work at the ministry and how it felt and what you've learned and how you could, in a way, when new people come, how you could have a better orientation"

"The current topic that I focused my attention on in the interview questions was orientation. I think it is extremely important in the ministry, but also in the unit, and when new people have arrived, the immediate supervisor has a special responsibility for it. Of course, I am not familiar with everything myself, but the main responsibility for ensuring that it is done lies with the immediate supervisor and leader and that it cannot be outsourced to anyone else"

5.1.1 Measuring emotionally intelligent leadership

Ministries do not have any official, concrete measure of how the manifestation of emotional intelligence could be monitored. However, concrete figures on the activities

of the immediate supervisor can be found in the VMbaro study, which is a personnel survey aimed at employees of the ministry. All but one of the respondents mentioned VMbaro at some point during the interview. The interviewers felt that VMbaro does not directly ask about issues related to emotional intelligence, but rather they appear in questions related to workplace bullying, the actions of a leaders and support. Acting as a manager is also evaluated in the so-called "360-degree" evaluations and "270-degree" evaluations given by colleagues

"We have concrete metrics, for example through VMbaro we monitor this development, when thinking about the flip side of good leadership, for example unprofessional treatments. After all, we have zero tolerance to it and when they come visible, then you must deal with them as a leader"

"The way emotional intelligence is measured is through personnel surveys, where things related to emotional intelligence come to light. Although there is no direct question of emotionally intelligent leadership. A question that is related in some way is the question of the supervisor's acts and the supervisor's work, support for the conditions for doing the work. Then, of course, if you yourself have been in supervisor trainings, there are 360-degree evaluations in them and a colleague given 270-degree evaluations, but there is no such single measure. Through such things, the issues of emotional intelligence will come visible."

VMbaro also saw flaws in the layout of the question and leaders felt that the survey needed a change.

"VMbaro has some structural issues. It shows trends and direction, but when the organization changes, the results drop. Like if there is a new political government that wants to do things that don't make any sense, the results drop. Then there is the question of how the management has succeeded as a role model and whether the values are realized in practice type questions. They are difficult when, at least for us, it has not been defined in more detail whether this question applies to immediate supervisors, or to senior management, or even to the chancellor or minister, who is a political leader. Open answers are more useful."

5.2 Emotional intelligent leader in the ministry

The interviewees were asked what they think an emotionally intelligent leader in the ministry is like and how emotionally intelligent traits are reflected in their own leadership. As a summary of the interviewees' characterization, it can be stated that, an emotionally intelligent leader in the ministry knows how to face the persons being led as an individual and leader is able to respond to the needs of his or her persons being led on an emotional level. This is also a way to get a person to act in the desired way for the benefit of the organization's needs.

"My own conclusion is that if you work as a leader, people are really different in general, and as a leader, then you think about the ways and means, how do you get the other person to work in the way that is hoped and expected, which usually means that as a direct supervisor or a leader, I like to adapt my own activities quite a lot"

"Faces everyone as an individual and as a person, and from the needs of the individual"

"You are genuine, present, you listen and interact, and you can respond to people's needs on an emotional level. When there are different personalities, you can always adapt yourself according to the situation and the other person so that the interaction takes place as well as possible"

"Able to see things from another person's point of view and can see if the other person is burdened or whatever else is going on in the background"

The interviewees feel that they have the freedom to lead as they wish, even if the rigidities of governmental administration sometimes prevent smooth operations. One interviewee mentioned having emotionally intelligent colleagues in the ministry and states that *"of course there are leaders with different emphases, some are more issue-oriented"*. According to the interviewees, an emotionally intelligent leader at the ministerial level is no different from what it would be like in other organizations, and one interviewee states that *"The private sector is not always a happy place either"* and that

an emotionally intelligent leader is not that different a leader in other sectors either. Managing subordinates in different positions requires special skills;

"In a situation where there are both assistant-level people to be managed, as well as people with PhDs and people who hope that things will be "done exactly this way" and "until now". Then there are those who hope that you will tell them roughly what should be done now, and they want to think about everything themselves. I have concluded that what works for us is that, as a leader, I recognize that what kind of way to lead would work with each person. Even though the ministries are very hierarchical organizations, I still try to create that things don't just go through me or are left hanging from me, but there is responsibility and power to do things quite independently"

One of the interviewees states that empathy is not the same as sympathy and that empathy does not always mean agreeing with everyone. To the same idea the interviewee adds that, it would be a false belief that an empathic leader would not be able to make decisions.

"In my opinion, it is extremely important not to misunderstand that if you are an empathic leader, you are not able to make decisions. On the contrary, when you can empathize, the result is that you are able to make those decisions and then also put those things into words, because the decisions are not always such that everyone would necessarily always be 100% satisfied with them. You are able to take the time to say those things and have a dialogue with people."

When the interviewees were asked how they themselves feel as leaders of their own emotionally intelligent activities, similar answers emerged in relation to meeting an individual. The interviews also revealed the importance of managing emotions. One of the interviewees spoke in greater depth about their personal motivation for taking on a leadership role. This source of motivation was described as contributing to emotionally intelligent leadership behaviour.

"I am motivated in leading by something other than the power, so the fact that I don't apply for a leading position in order to get more power. Of course, power is

strongly related to that in the way that you get to make decisions, and that you get to move things forward, but yes, for me, it is very strongly related to the fact that you get to work with people and in that way, I hope, promote people's good, meaningful working lives"

The leaders interviewed share a similar way of listening to their persons being led and being approachable as a leader.

"I consciously try to avoid saying things myself first. The first thing I do is listen to what other people's thoughts are. Sometimes there are situations where you must take a stand and tell them that this is what is done. Then, what I tried to teach or spar with my own people is that you can only influence your own actions...it is good to remember as a leader that if you have two ears and one mouth, use them in the same proportion, that is, preferably, you listen and ask and then tell what you think yourself"

"I can sense emotions and you don't always need even a sense, because they can come so suddenly, like a flood, from some persons. I notice emotions and on the other hand I receive them, and try to manage them"

"I have twenty years of experience as a leader of some sort and I would like to think that I would be emotionally intelligent and empathetic, supportive. As far as I know, I'm a person with a very low threshold. I don't like any hierarchy and if anything, I try to be with people in everyday life, time is limited of course, but I don't promote myself to some leader's bubble terribly. I am informal."

The leaders interviewed state that negative emotions and their display are allowed in their work community and among their subordinates. However, the interviewees all think the same that leaders should be more neutral than the others regarding the emotional scales shown, especially negative emotions; *"However, the boss must be more restrained in emotional scale than others, that boss can be happy but not sad."* Leaders admit that they feel negative emotions at work but do not express them when they occur. One leader says that they can tell subordinates when there is a bad moment; *"I've told my own unit persons, if I'm on the work desk intensely and focused and not so happy, I'll say that I'm in the middle of a stressful situation, that it's not your fault, so don't worry."*

The consensus among the interviewees was also that the leader should rather promote the manifestation of positive emotions at work. One interviewee states that the leader should take care of the feeling of security within the team or unit, which manifests itself as the leader's calmness and tranquillity.

"However, the leader must have some kind of a filter, especially for negative feelings. You shouldn't show frustration towards your subordinates"

"...but we don't have any prep talk, so that if you're grieving, you're grieving, so we (leaders) would comfort you, we don't go to that kind of thing. Yeah, and nobody can lead the sunshine all day long. Of course, my disappointment and upsetness does affect my speech, facial expressions, performance, and yes, people, when they are emotionally intelligent, can sense it. I would like to think that in these situations I can censor how I'm really feeling"

"Emotions are visible and I think they should be allowed to be seen, but maybe not on such an intensive level as in some private life, but emotions are visible, they are allowed to be seen, different people show them differently"

One leader interviewed once felt that they reacted too intensively to something and learned from the situation; *"I have set a 2-minute answering timer on my e-mail because, when a e-mail has find me, there is always some "backup", which is always useful if something emotional comes up. Usually you react too strongly, and if you write it down, it comes out even more strongly, which is intended"*

The leaders felt it was important that, as the ministry is a workplace that is very formal at times, it is important to be able to be more relaxed and be yourself in a close working community. Leaders also set an example themselves; *"I show emotions myself; I'm not always the loudest person myself, but the laughter is fresh and the irritation is also visible"*. An atmosphere of trust also became important in the close work community, as well as the fact that feelings can be shown more freely among familiar people in the work community.

"...of course, when you are involved in government negotiations or in press presentations and dealing with the leaders of other ministries, or the leaders of the private side in a certain way, yes, there you often wear a suit and a tie and have a certain official role. But then when you come back, as it were, among your own group and when you don't have to be formal, then you don't have to."

"When we are a formal work community, that we also have a lot of formal processes, of course we can't go to that parliament house to get angry or necessarily show even positive emotions. We are quite object oriented in many places, but then in the same place, when we are here in a close work community, I feel that it is important to be allowed to show those feelings and I show them myself. It's also important to me that I strive to feed that positive feeling and humour with my own being and doing."

"In orientations, I always have a couple of things that I want to be memorable, and the first thing is that there is a confidential atmosphere in the unit meetings, and everyone can say what they want, and there you can speak openly and you can trust that things won't spread anywhere. Then the second thing is that I encourage to do yourself and try. That it is not defined what can be done, but that those people are usually smart about it and then recognize what the organization's rules or similar invisible operating methods are."

The leaders interviewed all stated that they allow all kinds of emotions to their subordinates; *"In general, the fact that the person being led can defuse the situation is important."* There are two approaches to showing aggressive emotions. One of the leaders interviewed has in some situations allowed an "angry and loud" person to take up space, but then received feedback that the interviewee had allowed such a person to behave in the following manner. The leader in question says that what kind of behaviour *"I can tolerate and what I consider ok is quite broad, I don't get startled easily"*. Another of the interviewees thinks that showing aggression in the work community is not desirable *"...certainly not showing aggression in such a way that someone feels insecure or that the aggression is directed at someone"*.

In the beginning of the interview the leaders interviewed stated, that in their opinion, an emotionally intelligent leader meets people as individuals, and understands that each

person to be led uses and shows emotions in different ways. As the interviews progress, it became clear that leaders embody their skill in meeting individuals in such a way, that they have the ability and skill to receive all kinds of emotions from their subordinates.

"They (emotions) are not forbidden in any way, but I don't know if we as a work community encourage (showing emotions) an awful lot, that of course positive emotions are promoted, we are laughed a lot and so on. We have so-called "let loose" events. In the events, for example, we go bow-tie skating, we've practiced making soap bubbles, we've gone to stand-up and on various trips, photo exhibitions and movies. Such events encourage to positive community spirit. It can also encourage you can also share the most difficult things and feelings...it depends on the person, how much the person being led shows emotions. It's easier to show those positive emotions. Negative (emotions) in the work community are something that you can then discuss with close people"

"Yes, managers also show their emotions at work. An atmosphere of trust has been created either between two people, but also in a group. There is joy and there is fun and then there are also sad things. The whole scale is in use."

"Persons being led show emotions at work; the other has tears easily and sadness immediately, as well as giggles of joy. Others are more reserved and neither (style) is right or wrong but are different ways of showing emotions"

5.3 The effects of emotional intelligent leadership

The leaders interviewed all stated that the emotionally intelligent leadership style influences the performance, motivation, ethical functioning and behavior of those being led. Also, a few other clear and concrete things came to light, which the emotionally intelligent leadership style affects, and they were the feeling of freedom and control, coping at work and the ability to tolerate uncertainty. One leader states; *"No one produces the best possible result in an anxious state"*. Ethics and acting ethically emerged as their own theme throughout the interviews, on which there were many different views. The leaders interviewed tied the four themes in question into interdependent entities, so that the performance, motivation, ethical functioning and behavior of the

leaders were connected to each other. Considering the person being led as an individual was a key factor in the answers, as it had already become clear from the answers to the previous interview questions.

"...when you see those colleagues also as human, it also makes it easier to perform at work and cope and get along with each other. (Person being led) Also dares to make mistakes and tolerates the fact that there are a lot of uncertainties at work, we don't have ready answers at all times."

"...if the staff is not taken care of, then the work is not efficient either. Performance at work is affected when there are different personalities, so you have to take into account the fact that the same approaches do not suit everyone and that has a direct connection to motivation... one likes to write more, to be in contact by email and the other always runs into the office desk to tell everything right away"

In the interviews, the importance of inspirationality and motivation for the person being led, came up. Inspirationality was difficult to manifest concretely in the ministry, and two leaders stated that they should pay more attention to being a more inspirational as a leader; *"I don't know if we civil servants are always so inspirational, but at least we are motivated"*. Motivation was perceived to be manifested through emotionally intelligent ways; *"If it's fun at work, then the work feels easier, and you can do it better and (the person being led) is more motivated.... An open, conversational, motivated, friendly atmosphere usually fosters such (motivated) behavior in people"*

The special feature of the ministries was that there are many uncertainties in the work. The interviewed leader from the Ministry of Defence emphasized that their ministry stands out due to its focus on serious security matters, making it particularly important that each employee is recognized and treated as a valued individual.

"It is important if (the leader) can create such a feeling of freedom and joy. Even in this field of administration, we talk about really serious and safety-related issues, that the person is taken into account, and when there is a relaxed atmosphere even in difficult matters, that things are resolved and that the person does not feel too burdened, that's when things progress."

5.3.1 Emotional intelligence, ethical functioning and ethical stress

Acting ethically was examined as one of the effects of an emotionally intelligent leadership style. At the highest level of the state administration, in the ministries, ethically sustainable operation is the starting point, and the interviewees mentioned that they expect ethical operation from their leaders as a matter of principle. Ethically sustainable activity as such was not opened to the interviewees in more detail, but the purpose was that the interviewees themselves mention what the concept means to them. Also because ethical behavior is already considered standard in the ministry, it was initially difficult for the leaders interviewed to integrate the idea of ethical behavior into the context of emotionally intelligent leadership.

"Yes, we have a pretty strong code in terms of what is acceptable, and fortunately we have people who have learned. That is, if there is any uncertainty about something, whether this is now wrong, they will ask what I think about things. The unit is not on its own, although I encourage it to reach its own solutions. Then if there is a sensitive topic, then they will my thoughts on it. So it could be that the leader's emotional intelligence affects that ethical action."

"...but if you think about, for example, ethically sustainable operations, then that is the starting point and you expect from your own unit that, we are at the forefront of doing things, so if it is expected that others (for example, administrative branches) act in a certain way, then we ourselves should act in that way"

"...if a person is treated well or if she or he feels that she or he has been seen, and heard, then I believe that the person also acts ethically"

A leader working at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health says that they have identified ethical stress as a phenomenon. As a specific leadership tool, emotionally intelligent leadership becomes particularly relevant when a civil servant is required to make decisions that conflict with their personal values. Ethical stress refers to situations

in which an individual is uncertain about what is morally right or experiences a level of responsibility that exceeds their capacity to act accordingly (The Center of Occupational Healthy, 2025). The leader interviewed states that the officials do their work with high morals and ethics, and around the creation of the common good. As the ministries operate under the executive authority of the ministers, the decisions of the political decision-makers (the government/minister) are civil servants to prepare and execute. But which are, for example, scientifically proven to be harmful to society. The leader interviewed feels that an emotionally intelligent way of leading can ease the ethical stress experienced by a subordinate civil servant, when civil servant can discuss the matter with the leader and unpack the situation.

“So the problem comes from the fact that person thinks that “my world of values does not necessarily always correspond to the government's world of values”. That is, if you have the idea that alcohol causes significant harm in the society and its availability should be limited, drug harms should be reduced and help those people who have suffered those harms, and if you have a political government that announces that wine goes to the milk shop and let’s bring everything to everyone's home, which is a harm from a public health point of view. Since it is a ministry, here we do as the minister orders, this is where this ethical stress comes in. It is very important that you can say about it and that you can talk about it. The stress doesn't go away, but handling it is like a central part of empathic leadership... when you must act against your values, emotionally intelligent leadership can reduce those disadvantages”

5.3.2 The challenges of emotional intelligence and empathy

Those speaking in favor of empathy, and those who are more critical of it, state that we empathize more with people who are similar to ourselves. The interviewees show different views in front of the statement in question and the majority believed the statement in question could very well be true; *“It's terribly human to deal with people who are somehow like you or whom you like more”*. Two leaders state that it is also difficult for the leader self to evaluate the equal manifestation of empathy. The interviewees emphasized the importance of a leader’s capacity for self-reflection,

particularly in situations where there is a risk of treating individuals unequally due to personal affinities or interpersonal tensions. One interviewee stated that it is *"an old challenge for a leader, that one should be able to get along with everyone on some level, be equal and offer opportunities to everyone and not just to people close to you in some way"*.

"In the role of leader, you also have to be able to reflect your own feelings and thoughts, and that is a skill that needs to be learned. And in general, to admit that such a thing is possible (that one only empathizes with one's own kind)."

"No one can completely avoid this, the first step is to be able to examine one's own actions critically... you will probably never understand your person being led like you understand someone person being led who is like yourself, and then you have to try to approach the matter from that person's starting point... Then, knowing someone better does not necessarily mean that you treat them better than someone else"

"In a way, this is related to the kind of people you hire" The interviewee stated having made efforts to recruit individuals with diverse backgrounds to their team, while also acknowledging the inherent tendency or opportunity to select candidates with similar characteristics to their own. One of the interviewees says that it is a professional skill of a leader to be able to express empathy equally, and for that a leader needs self-knowledge. The leader in question states that the leader's empathy skills can also help to resolve problems with a person being led whose thinking habits are fundamentally different. The two leaders say that persons being led also seek empathy from the leader in different ways. For some, it is important that the leader is empathetic, and others are, for example, more withdrawn and do not seek or need attention in the same way as others.

"...some people maybe look for it more easily, like sharing or showing empathy or something else, and then others are like that, at least they don't directly show or look for it. "

"After all, not everyone has the same needs, others need a different type of encounter. Some people need more interaction than others...some people also need more empathic attitude towards them."

"But then what would be the empathetic leader's alternative? A cold, unempathetic leader who is equally mean to everyone is probably not good either"

Emotionally intelligent leadership has its downsides, but none of the leaders feel that the disadvantages outweigh the benefits. One interviewee mentions that there are no disadvantages of emotional intelligence, although mild phenomena may occur; *"it would be odd if you had to talk about something that is difficult, that it wouldn't be hard to broach, then it wouldn't matter to you"*. Two leaders mention that it can happen so, that the leader may carry too much of the emotional burden from the subordinate or get an "emotional shift" as an emotionally intelligent person.

"You might think about the actions of your unit members, even in the evening, but you shouldn't think about them, and it's not an obligation"

"I have recognized this in myself before I was a leader, that is, that you can become the bearer of such emotional burdens in that work community and the bearer of things that do not belong to you...Justifying decisions is not too much for me that emotional intelligence would be a problem, I like to make decisions and I know how to justify them and at the same time I also like to communicate difficult things. Emotional intelligence can be a disadvantage if you don't know how to self-reflect and if you don't know how to take care of your own coping"

Two leaders mention conflict situations in the work community and their resolution as a challenge for emotionally intelligent leadership. In this situation, you have to understand everyone and be empathetic in many ways, and you may still have to spend sleepless nights because of the prejudices of the persons being led. One leader interviewed states that *"On the other hand, you also get quite a lot from it, when you can create a good atmosphere or you can help people do their work better or cope better at work, so it motivates. You can get it, but you also have to give it."*

"Conflict situations in the work community, that you have to resolve them and be as empathic and understand everyone, of course it is so mentally taxing, you can't deny it...excessive understanding I recognize well, that I consider myself to be reasonably kind, so there is the danger in terms of leadership, that you don't demand enough, but understand everyone, whether they worked or not"

The interviewed leaders stated that the leader's professional skills include being able to stay out "emotionally" about the ongoing situation. Leaders should know when they are understanding the person being led too much and intervene early enough if leader notices a problem, so that it does not have time to swell too big and cause more damage.

"I Previously tried to avoid the solution of difficult issues, if it is a question of people. Now I have taken such a line that if I feel even a little bit that this thing is not working now, we will talk about the issue and then even change people if have to. I can't take it any longer, that the matter will languish for a month or a year and that nothing will come of doing the work. I don't know if that's a rude line. Such a thing comes to mind to haunt easily"

"Maybe even for that you must have enough ability to reflect on yourself and your own behavior. That, what is a positive understanding from the point of view of the working community, and what then somehow goes into understanding either one's own coping or from the point of view of the working community too much... you have to make difficult decisions, and you have to be consistent. If you can't or it's difficult, then you shouldn't start leading."

The leaders interviewed state that carrying out change negotiations and communicating difficult decisions is a challenge for an emotionally intelligent leadership style. Even in these situations, the leaders interviewed consider consistency and the importance of justifying things as a way to cope in challenging situations. In some situations, you must understand that some decisions come as given, and that you cannot tell your persons being led everything that happens in the process

"I myself have had to be and plan change negotiations procedures as well, and where I have even had to fire people, and in a way, it's a little bit that you have to distance yourself from the procedure, when there are no alternatives in a certain"

way. It's good to bring out and tell your persons being led what those realities are and what we are now acting according to"

"Having managed five or six change negotiations during my career, it is never easy to fire people and often in these situations there are quite strict rules that you cannot tell everything you know. You just have to act according a plan. You must be consistent in that, and even though it's such a unpleasant process for everyone, it's also a unpleasant process for the leader"

"Of course, there are situations where there is not always time for discussions and arguments, and at some points it may be more of a notification nature that not all points need to be discussed. And bear in mind that even if you justify a decision, even a salary raise decision, if someone still doesn't accept that matter, it doesn't mean that we will go along with what the other person demands. That's often enough to bother justify that decision. It would be good to justify the policies regarding work, it can increase motivation, that a person better understands why this and that is done."

5.3.3 Hybrid work summons the atmosphere at work

All four leaders interviewed are of the opinion that everyone is responsible for a safe atmosphere in the work community. All the leaders state that the leader has a special responsibility for the atmosphere and that he or she has to do more for the atmosphere than others. The leader's emotional intelligence, especially the ability to dialogue, is also key in here.

"We have "a good employee and good leader" -cards, and the idea in all communications is, that everyone is somehow responsible for the work atmosphere...yes, supervisors have to do more for that work. Leaders consider various options for improving people's well-being at work, the employee may not have an obligation to do so per se, but the persons being led has obligation to their own behavior and relationships with coworkers"

"As a leader you are responsible for certain matters, but then in the work community everyone has their own responsibility to act in accordance with common rules or operating methods"

One leader state that *"An emotionally safe work community is a resource for coping."* As mentioned at the beginning of the interview section, a special feature of the ministry is that when possible conflict situations arise, dismissal is not a primary or even a possible solution in government service. However, according to one leader, this can cause human tragedies if the leaders do not have the ability to intervene in time; *"There are people in the ministries who have become embittered, left out, for whom a sensible work assignment has not really been found (as the conflict escalates), and if one job has been found, they don't really want to do it. You are a bit detached from everything and that is a tragedy for everyone. This should be prevented"*

One of the leaders says that they strongly believes in *the expert leading itself*, while the other leader mentions that *"the "self-management course" cannot replace the supervisor's special responsibility as a maintainer of a good working atmosphere"*. According to this leader, self-management should be within certain frameworks. The third leader mentions, with sarcasm, that the ideal would be that the leader would not have to lead and that; *"people lead themselves in exactly the right direction and take care of the working atmosphere and invite the boss to have a beer every week, and then everything is very well, but it doesn't seem to be going exactly like that."*

The leaders state that the era of hybrid work and the change of people in the work community cause challenges to the work atmosphere. According to leaders, the challenges of hybrid work can be minimized by understanding that the old way of dealing with people no longer works, and that new ways must be found to merge the work atmosphere and hybrid work together. When employees change, it is important to have a dialogue among the team about the operating methods that may be needed when people change. One of the leaders states that it is also necessary to accept, that not everyone will put the same amount of effort into the atmosphere of the working community.

"Hybrid work creates certain kinds of challenges, the transition phase is going on. When you are not interacting with people all the time, the old way to

communicate doesn't work anymore and it has to be taken into account. Remote work, on the other hand, also brings flexibility to cope at work, even if it reduces the sense of community and challenges communications when we just send e-mails to each other. Although remote work can challenge the working atmosphere, it is not an inevitable consequence. Now this new normal is happening, which is not yet established, so attention should be paid to the atmosphere in the coming years"

"In a way, our group also changes all the time, because every year someone leaves and comes. The relationships between people and the group's mutual relationships are changing all the time... We always have the unit's own operating methods agreed upon in the spring and at the beginning of the autumn season, and we conduct a self-evaluation of how these work, and whether we want to change something. They are written in Teams as a list, and we discuss them and then change them if necessary"

"Remote and hybrid work is tricky. We are quite much live at workplace. In our work, we deal with issues that cannot be talked about so much in Teams, and we have such a work culture that people are primarily present...But you can't forcefully draw people into that community, if they work remotely due to various reasons. There is probably a similar limit in that too, that this person works for us and does these things, but does not actively interact with others all the time."

5.4 The interview assessment

The interviewees were enthusiastic about the themes of emotional intelligence and were also very aware of their own skills as emotionally intelligent leaders. This could be because some of the interviewees had a background in the social sciences, medical sciences and educational sciences. The results of the interview show, that leaders acknowledge that emotions are present in the workplace, but leaders must regulate their emotional expressions more than the ones they're leading. Leaders must regulate especially negative emotions. Leaders encourage employees to express emotions but aim to foster a positive atmosphere. The interviews finds that trusting environment allows for both positive and negative emotions to be shared appropriately.

The thesis finds that there is no official or concrete method for measuring emotional intelligence in ministries. However, some indirect approaches emerged from the interviews: *VMbaro Personnel Survey*, which is a ministry-wide survey that includes questions related to workplace bullying, leadership actions, and support. While it does not directly measure emotional intelligence, its results can indicate leadership effectiveness. Another tool for measuring emotional intelligent leadership was the *360-Degree and 270-Degree Evaluations* to the leaders. That is an assessment where supervisors receive feedback from colleagues and subordinates, providing insights into leadership behaviors and emotional intelligence. There were some challenges in the measurements and the one is VMbaro's structural issues. Leaders feel the survey needs improvement, as results are influenced by political changes and unclear question wording. Also, the VMBaro survey lacks of direct emotional intelligence metrics and current evaluation methods do not explicitly measure emotional intelligence but rather infer it through leadership performance indicators. Some survey questions assess whether leadership reflects ministry values, but respondents find them vague and difficult to apply to different leadership levels. Despite these limitations, personnel feedback and survey trends help highlight emotional intelligence in leadership.

There are different kinds of ministries in terms of substance, and they also need different kinds of emotional intelligent leaders. Ministries cannot be categorized into a single group, even though they operate under the same direction from the Ministry of Finance. For example, in two very different ministries, Ministry for Social Affairs and Health and Ministry of Defence, emotional intelligence is equally needed to strengthen the mental resources of civil servants, but for different situations. The leaders interviewed all stated that the emotionally intelligent leadership style influences the *performance, motivation, ethical functioning and behavior of those being led*. Also, a few other clear and concrete things came to light, which the emotionally intelligent leadership affects, and they were the *feeling of freedom and control, coping at work and the ability to tolerate uncertainty*.

The interviews reveal that emotionally intelligent leader in the ministry is someone who *recognizes individual needs*, treats employees as individuals and adapts their leadership style accordingly. *Practices active listening* as listens before speaking and encourages open communication. *Shows empathy and emotional awareness*, understands employees' emotions, even if not explicitly expressed. *Manages their own emotions*, maintains a balanced emotional presence, avoiding excessive negativity. *Creates a trusting environment*, promotes psychological safety where employees feel comfortable expressing emotions. *Encourages a positive atmosphere*, uses humor, team activities, and supportive leadership to foster well-being. *Balances empathy and decision-making*, understands that being empathetic does not mean avoiding difficult decisions. *Adapts to different personalities*, understands that different employees require different approaches to leadership.

Unlike the private sector, ministries lack flexibility in employee incentives and decision-making, limiting leadership options. However, leaders emphasize the importance of intangible motivators such as *community building, encouragement, and coaching*. Ministries require leaders to navigate complex structures and political changes. Decision-making often involves lengthy administrative steps, which can diminish enthusiasm. Despite structural rigidity, leaders aim to create fairness, cooperation, and dialogue in their work environment.

In the thesis discussed the effects of emotional intelligence and ethics from two different perspectives, one was the leaders own ethical behavior, which is standard in the activities of civil servants in public administration, and another perspective was whether emotional intelligence of a leader affects the ethical behavior of the person being led. Leaders highlighted that ethical behavior is guided by clear codes of conduct. If employees face ethical uncertainties, they are encouraged to seek guidance from their leaders. Emotional intelligence plays a role in fostering ethical behavior by creating an environment where employees feel the encouragement to raise issues that concern them with their leader. *Ethical stress* is recognized as a phenomenon in the Ministry of

Social Affairs and Health, particularly in situations where a civil servant must make decisions that conflict with their personal values. This can arise, for example, when political decisions must be prepared and implemented by civil servants, even if civil servants perceive them as harmful to society. Emotionally intelligent leadership can help alleviate ethical stress by providing subordinates with the opportunity to discuss difficult decisions and process the situation together with their leader. While such discussions and emotional intelligent leadership may not eliminate stress entirely, they can mitigate its negative effects and ensure that employees feel heard and understood. However, because ethical behavior is already ingrained in the ministry's culture, interviewees found it initially challenging to link it specifically to emotionally intelligent leadership. Some interviewed leaders felt that emotionally intelligent leadership promotes ethical decision-making and behavior in a way that when they are treating employees as individuals, they are at the same time reinforcing ethical responsibility.

Although the thesis didn't find such a dramatic consequence of the bad effects of empathy in the ministry, some challenges of empathy emerged; *empathy bias*: As stated in the thesis, both proponents and critics of empathy agree that people tend to empathize more with those like themselves. Leaders acknowledge this challenge and stress the need for self-awareness to ensure fair treatment of all subordinates. *Self-reflection*: Leaders must recognize and regulate their own feelings to avoid favoritism. Some interviewees emphasize that leaders should strive to be equitable and provide opportunities to all employees, not just those they naturally relate to. *Different needs for empathy*: Not all employees seek or require the same level of empathy. Some actively look for emotional support, while others prefer a more distant professional relationship.

The thesis reflects servant leadership principles; Servant leadership prioritizes understanding and meeting the needs of employees. The interviewees emphasize that emotionally intelligent leadership *requires recognizing individuals as unique people* and adapting leadership approaches accordingly. Servant leaders empower employees by

providing autonomy and responsibility. The interviewees highlight the importance of not centralizing decision-making but instead allowing employees to *work independently and take ownership of their tasks*. Servant leadership is deeply connected to emotional intelligence, which involves recognizing and managing both one's own emotions and those of others. The interviewees emphasize *listening, being approachable, and responding to emotions* in a thoughtful way.

Servant leaders prioritize ethical decision-making. The interview acknowledges that leaders should be empathetic, but that does not mean avoiding difficult decisions. This reflects the moral responsibility of servant leaders—being kind and fair but also making necessary decisions for the organization's benefit. Servant leadership is about creating an environment of trust, positivity, and well-being. The interviews reveal how leaders promote trust, humor, and open communication to build a strong team culture. Servant leaders' model emotional regulation while creating a safe space for employees to express emotions. The interview finds that leaders acknowledge their own emotions but also act as stabilizers for their teams.

The interviewees emphasize that a safe and positive work atmosphere is a shared responsibility, but leaders have a greater role in maintaining it. Leaders must foster emotional safety, engage in dialogue, and ensure well-being, especially in government settings where it is especially important to get along with each other. Although a positive way of leading, which is also emotionally intelligent leadership, may be criticized as too narrow, it gives the ability to approach the person being led holistically, and the leader also can see that the subordinate wants tougher and more direct leadership and not so much a soft, empathic, approach.

6 Conclusions

The purpose of the work was to reflect and find out what is emotional intelligent leadership and whether an emotionally intelligent way to lead has been recognized and manifested in the Finnish ministries.

Specific research questions were:

1. What is the conceptual framework of emotional intelligent leadership?
2. To what extent can emotionally intelligent leadership be identified and observed within Finnish ministries?

As stated at the beginning, the work life has changed rapidly, and for example the HR policy of the public administration does not keep up with the changes as nimbly. Remote and hybrid work and the time we live with various crises, has increased the importance and appropriateness of emotional intelligence and human-centric management. Mental crisis resilience is required from employees, both in people's own lives but also at workplaces. Thesis states that, human-centredness has been identified in the Finnish government and in the highest level of it, in the ministries. The leaders in the ministries also felt that they can embody a people-oriented way of working.

Emotional intelligence is recognized as a form of social intelligence. Emotional intelligence is ability to evaluate, express, regulate, and utilize emotions in problem-solving. It includes interpersonal aspects, such as recognizing facial expressions, demonstrating empathy, and influencing others' emotions. Daniel Goleman further developed the concept, emphasizing its role in social and communication skills. The conceptual framework of emotionally intelligent leadership has many forms, and the most important things are expressing trust, fairness, creating meaning for the person being led, and having an empathic attitude towards the person being led. However, emotional intelligence remains a highly debated topic in academic circles. Critics argue that emotional intelligence is one of the most controversial constructs in social sciences because of its inconsistent definitions and models. There is a need for improved assessment methods, and questions regarding its predictive value for organizational

outcomes. Nevertheless, in the thesis, interviewed leaders felt that they were using their emotional intelligence when acting as a leader.

Especially the manifestation of empathy in leadership is very dualized. Projective empathy involves distinguishing assumptions from reality, requiring leaders to detach themselves from their own biases while seeking to understand others. Cognitive empathy, while valuable in enhancing awareness of others' emotions, can also be misused in manipulative or Machiavellian leadership styles that exploit subordinates for personal gain. Research suggests that empathy is often biased, as people tend to empathize more with those like them, raising concerns about fairness in emotionally intelligent leadership. Critics argue for a more rational, cost-benefit-driven approach, advocating for detached compassion over emotional involvement.

Another challenge of empathy in leading is that leaders can struggle with carrying emotional burdens or over-identifying with employees, which can be mentally taxing. Conflict resolution requires balancing understanding with maintaining firm leadership. Emotional intelligence can sometimes lead to excessive leniency, where leaders understand employees' struggles too much and fail to enforce necessary standards. While empathy is valuable, leaders also need to remain decisive and consistent. Difficult decisions, such as layoffs or organizational changes, require emotional distance to ensure fairness and efficiency. Challenges in emotional intelligent leadership lies in the balancing professionalism with emotional expression, trying to manage between diverse personalities and emotional responses and creating a culture where emotions can be expressed without disrupting work dynamics.

As an emotion, empathy has different manifestations and areas. The manifestation of some areas is better and some worse for the workplace. Empathy is rooted in our moral understanding and at its core is our understanding of what is right and wrong. Empathy in the workplace should be used judiciously and impartially. Leaders in the ministry states that empathy does not mean always agreeing with others but rather being able

to make decisions while considering employees' emotions. Another statement was that empathy is also linked to fostering a supportive work environment, allowing emotional expression, and building trust within the team. Researched information about empathy tells that empathy also has its dark side, and this quality can be misused in many situations, especially if the leader lacks emotional resonance. Excessive empathy towards the one being led may also cause emotional exhaustion for the leader.

Emotional intelligent leadership is not mentioned as a term in the ministry. In ministry's own words, it's included in the values and in a people-oriented leadership approach. Four interviewed leaders experienced that they could act with emotional intelligence in their own work. The identified emotional intelligent leadership principals in the context of Finnish ministries are openness, trust, and respect, and leaders integrate these into their leadership approach. Emotional intelligent leadership in the ministries lies in the dialogicity. The study reveals that employees perform better when they feel emotionally supported. Leaders state that anxiety and stress negatively impact productivity, so creating a psychologically safe workplace enhances efficiency. The leaders interviewed felt that those they led felt more comfortable expressing themselves and making mistakes without fear of judgment. A relaxed atmosphere, even in high-pressure environments where ministries are, helps employees feel in control of their work. Leaders took important that they can create an environment where challenges are addressed with a problem-solving mindset rather than fear. In the theory of emotional intelligence, the main social characteristics involves perception, regulation, expression, and use on emotions in problem-solving and interpersonal elements, such as empathic approach towards the persons they led. These elements were identified as recurring themes within the empirical data obtained from the leader's interviews.

The thesis asserts that a leader cannot achieve success within the ministry unless they are both people-oriented and emotionally intelligent. However, this conclusion is derived from a limited sample number of interviewees and reflects an objective that the ministry aspires to achieve. There is no concrete metric in place to assess whether

emotional intelligent leadership is embedded in the ministry's leadership principles. While leaders may personally perceive themselves as emotionally intelligent, and the ministry's principles and statements align with this ideal, there is no systematic method to evaluate its actual implementation. Emotional intelligence is essential, as ministries require strong interpersonal skills due to cope with challenging personnel situations. Leaders believe working in ministries is driven by strong values and a sense of purpose, emphasizing service to Finland.

Emotional intelligent leadership emphasizes human-centric values. The interviewed leaders largely perceive their work environment as human-centric, though some find the ministry structure challenging for implementing such leadership. Bureaucratic constraints, rigid personnel policies, and multi-headed leadership create obstacles to fostering enthusiasm and to prevent things from progressing. As the survey conducted in 2021 by Ministry of Finance says, these are related to the same findings that the survey revealed, that leaders evaluate personnel factors related to administration, such as supporting, giving feedback, and rewarding leaders' practices as deficient. Emotionally intelligent leadership could be seen as support for efficient state administration operating strategy. The public sector operates with ever-decreasing resources, and we live in an era of efficiency and effectiveness. Motivating employees by means other than salary-related incentives increase the importance of emotional leadership.

As stated in the thesis, servant leadership aligns closely with emotional intelligent leadership. In it, the leader is there for subordinates and helps them to flourish while also getting pleasure from the good performance of others. One of the servant leaderships dimensions is behaving ethically. Above all, emotionally intelligent leadership brings a sense of reward to those it leads; the leader can convey to subordinates that they are important to the organization with gestures, expressions and words. Servant leadership is characterized in the ministry by a leader's focus on serving,

supporting, and empowering their employees, as well as fostering an ethical and emotionally intelligent workplace.

As stated before, in the thesis discussed the effects of emotional intelligence and ethics from two different perspectives, one was the leaders own ethical behaviour which is standard in the activities of civil servants in public administration, and another perspective was whether emotional intelligence of a leader affects the ethical behaviour of the person being led. The interviewees emphasize that ethical conduct is a fundamental principle at the highest level of state administration, and they expect it from their subordinates. Ethical conduct is considered a fundamental principle in state administration, particularly in ministries, where ethically sustainable operations are the standard. Leaders expect ethical behaviour from their subordinates.

If we look at emotionally intelligent leadership from the perspective of the stereotypes of a assumed female and assumed male leader, both masculine and feminine traits are needed for a successful leadership work. Differences in leadership between women and men have not been observed and have not been studied in the ministries. However, the OECD keeps statistics on the number of female leaders and gives recommendations from instructions and regulations to the ministries. The interviews did not reveal any specific differences between men and women regarding emotionally intelligent leadership, and neither women nor men were asked separately about emotionally intelligent ways of leading, the interview was of a consistent quality. Feminine and masculine leadership traits emerged in every interviewee, so assumptions can be made, that the ministry's leaders therefore have androgynous leadership traits.

In the context of remote and hybrid work, leaders recognize the challenges associated with maintaining workplace connections. Emotionally intelligent leadership can play a crucial role in addressing these challenges effectively. New communication strategies and flexible approaches to sustain a sense of community is needed. Efforts like regular team discussions and shared agreements on work practices help maintain cohesion

despite staff changes. We are still living in this time after COVID-19 of change and complexity and ministries, like other organizations, are seeking balance in the new normal.

As stated, there were four leaders from four different ministries to be interviewed and the sample for the leaders was small. Same kind of a study could be meaningful to do with a larger scale and with a larger group of a research subjects. Suitable topic for further research would be to examine how emotionally intelligent leadership is seen from the perspective of the persons being led. In addition, the researcher herself became interested in a broader study of ethical stress and its prevalence in ministries.

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7.1 Annex

Questions to the leaders.

1. Background questions
 - a. What leadership position do you hold in the ministry? (middle management, top management)
 - b. What is your age?
 - c. What is your gender?

2. Human-centric leadership has been identified in the ministry and even in some government programs. Do you feel that you are in a work community/organizational culture where you can act as a people-oriented leader? (The themes of human-centric management include: encouragement, enthusiasm, motivation, learning to learn, dialogicity, enabling thinking, implementation ability).

3. If you think emotionally intelligent leadership is evident in your work community/organization, how is it visible? (Themes such as: Values, attitudes, orientation, concrete metrics).

4. What do you think an emotionally intelligent leader in the ministry is like?

5. What emotional intelligence traits are evident in your own leadership?

6. How emotions (such as joy, happiness, sadness, aggression, empathy) are reflected in your work community?
 - a. Do you show emotions at work? Are you able to show all kinds of emotions?
 - b. Do the persons you are leading seem to show their emotions at work?

7. Do you feel that an emotionally intelligent leadership style affects the following subordinates
 - a. Work performance
 - b. Motivation
 - c. Acting ethically
 - d. Behavior

How are these effects to be seen?

8. Those who advocate empathy, or those who are more critical of it, state that we tend to empathize more with people who are similar to ourselves. If you find yourself empathizing with those you lead, how can you equally demonstrate empathy in your work?
9. Do you feel that in some situations, emotional intelligence can have disadvantages to work? (For example: a leader's own coping with emotional burdens, justifying decisions, over-understanding, getting a difficult message across).
10. Who is responsible for the work atmosphere in your local work community? (problem-solving ability, safe mental work atmosphere, confidential atmosphere). Especially when considering challenges/opportunities such as self-leadership themes, remote and hybrid work.