

Understanding the Enabling Conditions for Emotional Intelligence Development in Adults: Insights from a Qualitative Expert Study

Lisa Bellinghausen¹, Anna Komkova¹, Tanja Martin²

¹Research and Development Department, Qualia Emotion Institute, Lyon, France

²Research and Development Department, Allert + Martin Personalmanagement, Freiburg, Germany

Email: lisabellinghausen@qualia-ei.com

How to cite this paper: Bellinghausen, L., Komkova, A., & Martin, T. (2026). Understanding the Enabling Conditions for Emotional Intelligence Development in Adults: Insights from a Qualitative Expert Study. *Psychology*, 17, 1072-1112.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2026.1710054>

Received: September 9, 2026

Accepted: October 26, 2026

Published: October 29, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) and its benefits for personal and professional life are now well established. Consequently, the development of EI competencies has attracted growing interest. However, knowledge regarding the underlying developmental mechanism and its enabling conditions in adulthood remains underexplored and fragmented. The aim of this qualitative expert study is to fill this gap. Findings from interviews with nine experts, actively involved in EI research and practice, suggest that EI development mechanism is both iterative and stepwise. Furthermore, EI development is not merely supported by isolated factors but is best understood as an adaptive developmental system emerging from continuous interactions and feedback loops between the individual and the environmental enabling conditions. Finally, experts highlight that the benefits of EI development extend far beyond the individual, generating cascading positive effects on relationships, teams, and organizational culture.

Keywords

Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence Development in Adulthood, Emotional Learning, Individual and Environmental Conditions of EI Development, Emotionally Supportive Others, Workplace Emotional Intelligence

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has emerged as a central construct in psychology, leadership research, and organizational behavior. The

various positive outcomes of EI in different life domains and organizations are now well established (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011; Lopes et al., 2003, 2004, 2005; Petrides et al., 2016). Especially, organizations are increasingly interested in the promotion of EI as it strengthens interpersonal relationships, employee well-being and overall individual and collective performance. In the work context, well-regulated emotions are identified as fostering individuals' and teams' abilities to communicate, to collaborate, to be creative, to take more daring decisions, to manage stress and to sustain mental and physical health (Haag, Bellinghausen, & Jilinskaya-Pandey, 2023). EI is furthermore seen as a core factor for engagement and flourishing at work. Thus, in current organizational research, EI starts to be seen not only as a set of individual competencies but as a set of strategic and highly competitive competencies for efficient collective functioning and outstanding organizational performance (Farh et al., 2012; Harper & White, 2013; O'Boyle et al., 2011; Haag, Poirier, & Bellinghausen, 2024; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). Consequently, EI received growing interest among HR professionals, organizational leaders, trainers and coaches. EI competencies are increasingly integrated into job requirements, recruitment, assessment and talent selection, leadership development, team and employee development. EI training programs have progressively been integrated into organizations as well as academic programs, including MBA programs. Prestigious institutions such as Yale University and Emlyon Business School have incorporated EI training into their educational programs for several years now.

EI, originally defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990), refers to the ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and use emotions in oneself and others to facilitate adaptive functioning. Since then, a growing body of research has demonstrated that EI is associated with a wide range of important outcomes, including better health, increased psychological well-being, enhanced interpersonal relationships, higher academic achievement, and superior professional performance (Haag, Bellinghausen, & Poirier, 2024, 2025; Lopes et al., 2004; Martins et al., 2010; O'Boyle et al., 2011).

Alongside the growing recognition of the benefits of EI, research has increasingly focused on the question of how EI develops. Evidence from systematic reviews and meta-analyses, largely based on quantitative pre-post intervention studies, indicates that EI is not a fixed personality trait but a malleable set of competencies that can be strengthened through structured learning experiences and intentional developmental processes (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019; Kotsou et al., 2019; Mehler et al., 2024). Existing research has identified numerous individual and environmental factors that foster EI development in adults. However, these findings remain fragmented and would benefit from a more integrative framework that apprehends how these factors interact to support EI development across human systems. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, no previous study has explored the perspectives of experts in the field. Key figures such as coaches, psychologists, psychotherapists and researchers who work with EI development in everyday

practice can provide valuable insights into how EI develops and the enabling conditions under which it can be fostered in individuals, interpersonal relationships and organizations.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: How do experts in emotional intelligence perceive the enabling conditions and developmental mechanisms involved in the development of emotional intelligence?

To address this research question, the present qualitative expert study draws on the perspectives of nine experts in EI development. By integrating existing evidence with experts' insights, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of EI development and the conditions that enable it. In doing so, it aims to advance both theoretical knowledge and evidence-based practice in coaching, training, and organizational settings.

2. Theoretical Foundations of EI

Two competing models of EI currently co-exist. The first approach conceptualizes EI as a set of abilities. EI is defined as a specific form of intelligence allowing to process emotional information efficiently (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Caruso & Salovey, 2004; Farh et al., 2012; Haag, Bellinghausen, & Jilinskaya-Pandey, 2023; Tse et al., 2018). The second approach—'mixed or trait models of EI'—conceptualizes EI as a trait, positioning EI as a constellation of emotional dispositions and competencies embedded within broader personality and motivational structures (Bar-On, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Petrides & Furnham, 2000, 2003). Trait models conceptualize EI as a set of emotional dispositions that include elements of personality, motivation, affective tendencies, and self-perceived emotional competencies (Matthews et al., 2004; Roberts et al., 2008; Zeidner et al., 2004). Because of this conceptualization, trait EI measures are often strongly correlated with personality dimensions (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001; Roberts et al., 2008). However, some researchers argue that trait EI captures meaningful variance beyond traditional personality constructs such as the Big Five or alexithymia and can therefore predict outcomes such as work performance more effectively (Mikolajczak, 2010). Nevertheless, critics have questioned whether trait EI represents a distinct psychological construct, suggesting that it may largely reflect established personality dimensions rather than a new form of intelligence (Matthews et al., 2004; Zeidner et al., 2004; Davis & Humphrey, 2014).

In contrast, the ability model of EI defines EI as a set of cognitive abilities involved in the processing of emotional information. According to this perspective, emotions provide information that can be perceived, interpreted, and used by individuals to guide thinking and behavior efficiently (Mayer et al., 2004). The ability approach therefore positions EI as a form of intelligence that is conceptually distinct from both personality traits and traditional cognitive intelligence (Mayer et al., 2000; Lopes et al., 2003). Many researchers consider the ability model to be the most theoretically promising framework for studying EI (Matthews et al., 2004; Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019; Zeidner et al., 2004; Haag, Bellinghausen, &

Jilinskaya-Pandey, 2023).

Despite their theoretical differences, the ability and trait approach of EI share some important assumptions. First, a substantial body of research demonstrates that EI is positively associated with a variety of important life outcomes, including psychological health, workplace performance, and overall well-being (Haag, Bellinghausen, & Poirier, 2025; Mikolajczak, 2010; Zeidner et al., 2012a, 2012b). Second, these benefits have attracted growing interest from organizations seeking to improve leadership effectiveness, employee engagement, and organizational performance (Côté, 2014; Caruso & Salovey, 2004; Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Miao, Humphrey & Qian, 2018; Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2026).

3. Current State of Research on Emotional Intelligence Development and Its Enabling Conditions

After defining the concept of development and reviewing the current literature on EI development, we examine the enabling factors identified in the literature as supporting its development.

3.1. Defining the Concept of Development

Development is widely conceptualized as a dynamic, lifelong process through which individuals progressively strengthen and expand their competencies and adaptive capacities in response to ever changing personal, social, and environmental demands (Boyatzis, 2008; Škrinjarić, 2022).

In general, development is a fundamentally non-linear process (Baltes, 1987; Siegler et al., 2011; Illeris, 2017) who appears to be iterative, context-dependent and emerging from the continuous and complex interaction between individual characteristics, interpersonal experiences, and environmental conditions. Noteworthy, rather than reflecting the simple acquisition of knowledge or skills, development involves sustainable changes in cognition, emotion, motivation, and behavior that enable individuals to function more effectively across diverse contexts (Boyatzis, 2008). Finally, development is shaped by the individual's age and developmental stage, reflecting the dynamic interplay between maturational processes and socially mediated learning opportunities (Vygotsky, 1978; Hoemann, Xu, & Barrett, 2019).

In conclusion, development is essential for the continuous acquisition, refinement, and adaptation of competencies, enabling individuals to respond effectively to ever-changing environmental demands. Within this adaptive perspective, the development of EI is of particular interest, as it equips individuals with the emotional skills required to navigate in increasingly complex personal, social, and organizational contexts.

3.2. Development of Emotional Intelligence

Across developmental psychology, neuroscience, positive psychology, and organizational research, broad evidence now indicates that EI is not a fixed trait but a

developable set of competencies. Research consistently shows that EI can be strengthened through learning, deliberate practice, social experiences, and targeted interventions across the lifespan (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019; Esnaola et al., 2017; Cipriano et al., 2023).

The development of EI is supported by the brain's capacity for neuroplasticity. Throughout the lifespan, neural networks continuously reorganize in response to learning, experience, repeated practice, and environmental stimulation, providing the neurobiological foundation for the acquisition and refinement of emotional competencies (Milbocker et al., 2024; Cabrera et al., 2024).

Recent meta-analytical research on EI training for adults has consistently demonstrated that emotional skills such as emotion identification or emotion regulation can be improved and that the development of EI competencies has a positive impact on real life variables such as stress management, well-being, and performance (Hodzic et al., 2018; Kotsou et al., 2019; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019).

The meta-analytic investigations of Kotsou, et al. (2019) reviewed 46 face-to-face EI intervention studies and Mattingly and Kraiger (2019) reviewed 50 studies. Both analyses conclude that EI can be trained and developed through structured training. The positive overall effect of training was observed despite different training modalities: training duration, properties of the training and learning approaches (e.g. lecture, case studies, feedback, group discussion, homework assignments, emotional knowledge instruction, fostering emotional reasoning or even engagement with liberal and creative arts). For the pre-post study designs, no effect was observed for the different models of EI used in training (ability vs mixed model of EI) nor the variable gender (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019). Interestingly, the analyses reveal that EI training produced larger effect sizes when discussion and exchange were included (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019) whereas interventions relying predominantly on didactic lectures produced smaller improvements in EI (Hodzic et al., 2018). These results suggest that EI training benefits more from interactive and personally meaningful engagement than formal passive lectures. When participants actively discuss the construct of EI and reflect on its relevance to their own life and experiences the training effect appears to be greater. Furthermore, effect size is also larger when training incorporates regular practice and feedback. Opportunities for practice appear as development enhancers. Overall, these findings suggest that active participation, regular experiential practice, and personalized feedback may represent key ingredients of EI development.

In conclusion, the evidence accumulated over the past decade across multiple studies converges on the idea that EI can be developed through structured training programs. Establishing that EI can be developed is the first step. The next step is to gain deeper understanding on how this development occurs and which factors facilitate it.

3.3. Key Enabling Factors in Emotional Intelligence Development

Research specifically examining the key factors of development in EI has identi-

fied a range of biological, individual, environmental, and educational factors that support its development (Martínez-Rodríguez & Ferreira, 2025; Zeidner et al., 2003). Collectively, these determinants can be grouped into two broad categories: internal factors of EI development and external or environmental factors that influence it.

On the one hand, the findings highlight a set of internal conditions that enable EI development. The capacity for EI is rooted, to some extent, in our biology (Meerum Terwogt & Stegge, 2001). All humans are born with automatic emotional responses, such as fear triggering an instinctive urge to flee or anger prompting approach behavior and confrontation (Damasio, 1994). These rapid, unconscious responses originate in deep brain regions like the limbic system and serve an important survival function. Developing EI thus requires the ability to recognize and, if required, regulate these innate responses. This ability largely relies on cognitive abilities namely emotional awareness and emotional reflection. In addition, specific brain structures and neurochemical processes support this kind of emotional processing and regulation, including the body's stress response system involving the hormone cortisol (Kotsou et al., 2011). While some people may be genetically predisposed to greater emotional sensitivity or reactivity, twin studies estimate the heritability of trait EI at approximately 40% (Vernon et al., 2008). Research thus suggests that EI is not fixed by genetics alone.

An individual key factor of development appears to be emotional awareness. Smith et al. (2020) highlight that human species is unique in this capacity. Humans have this unique ability to attend to and reflect upon their automatic emotional responses and to decide how to manage their emotional responses or express them before taking actions observable to others. According to Lane and Schwartz's (1987) cognitive-developmental theory, emotional awareness develops through five hierarchical levels, from the recognition of diffuse bodily sensations to the differentiation of complex blends of feelings, paralleling Piagetian stages of cognitive development. Individuals must be able to recognize first their own emotional states and then understand how these states influence their behavior. Afterwards, individuals should become able to reflect on how their emotions affect others (Boyatzis, 2001; Greenberg, 2015). While emotional awareness is largely considered a learned and developmentally acquired skill, individual differences in traits such as openness may facilitate or hinder this process (Lane & Smith, 2021).

Motivation and the genuine willingness to grow, accept feedback, and confront emotional challenges, are also key enabling factors as they create the necessary internal drive for personal EI development (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006; Petrides, 2011). Indeed, EI development often requires individuals to confront discomfort, revisit personal patterns, and engage in emotionally demanding work. Intrinsic motivation, growth mindset and willingness to change can thus be understood as enabling mechanisms for EI development, supporting deeper engagement in the process, openness to experience even if they appear to be unpleasant, and thus favoring long-term integration of emotional competencies into real-life behavior.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be understood within the Self-Determination Theory framework. [Ryan and Deci \(2020\)](#) emphasize that intrinsic motivation and well-internalized forms of motivation support deep engagement and profound learning.

More recently, [McAnally and Hagger \(2024\)](#) applied Self-Determination Theory to workplace outcomes. Beyond its role as an initial driver of engagement in EI development, intrinsic motivation may also contribute to a self-reinforcing developmental process. This dynamic can be conceptualized as an ‘upward spiral’, in which initial engagement in emotionally meaningful work leads to improved emotional competencies, increased effectiveness in interpersonal situations, and greater subjective satisfaction. These outcomes provide individuals with tangible evidence of their progress, reinforcing both their perceived competence and their motivation to continue developing. This perspective is supported by research on positive psychological dynamics, which shows that positive affect and successful experiences broaden cognitive and behavioral repertoires, thereby facilitating further learning and growth engagement ([Fredrickson, 2001](#); [Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018](#)). More recent work in organizational psychology highlights that intrinsically motivated engagement contributes to cumulative gains in performance and well-being over time, creating reinforcing feedback loops between motivation, competence development, and adaptive functioning ([Slemp et al., 2021](#)). Applied to EI development, this suggests that individuals who begin to experience the benefits of EI, such as improved quality of relationships, increased well-being, and enhanced emotional regulation capabilities, are more likely to sustain and deepen their developmental efforts. Thus, successful EI development appears to be a self-reinforcing developmental trajectory, in which intrinsic motivation, development, and positive outcomes continuously interact.

Moreover, the EI development process is identified as relying on the capacity for strategic self-reflection and metacognitive processes ([Kotsou et al., 2011](#); [Meerum Terwogt & Stegge, 2001](#)). From a theoretical perspective, these findings are in line with contemporary models of emotion regulation and metacognition. For instance, Gross’s process model of emotion regulation ([Gross, 2015](#); [Ford & Gross, 2019](#); [Gross & Ford, 2023](#)) highlights that effective emotional functioning relies on the ability to flexibly interpret emotional signals and select context-appropriate regulatory strategies. In parallel, recent research on metacognition emphasizes that reflective awareness of internal states supports adaptive decision-making and behavioral adjustment, particularly in complex or emotionally demanding situations ([Normann & Morina, 2018](#)). Importantly, reflection appears to play a key role in revealing the adaptive and functional value of experienced emotions. By analyzing emotional experiences retrospectively, individuals can learn what emotions signal and what is at stake, which needs are activated, and which actions and responses may be most appropriate in different contexts. This process thus seems to support the development of fine-tuned and context-sensitive regulatory mechanisms, allowing individuals to move beyond automatic or habitual patterns of

responding. Additionally, reflective processing facilitates the transfer of emotional learning across situations. When individuals are able to extract generalizable insights from specific emotional experiences, they can apply these learnings in new contexts, thereby strengthening their emotional development over time. This perspective is supported by research in experiential learning and reflective practice, which shows that structured reflection enhances learning generalization and promotes adaptive expertise (Boud et al., 2013; Gegenfurtner et al., 2020). Furthermore, strategic reflection and meta-cognitive processes strengthen the individual's ability to set emotional goals, allowing them to consciously recognize and utilize emotions as valuable resources in various contexts (Haag, Bellinghausen & Poirier, 2025; Gross, 1998, 2002, 2014). Taken together, these findings suggest that reflective capacity and meta cognitive functions are core integrative mechanism in EI development, linking emotional experience to sense-making, behavioral adjustment, and the transfer of learning across contexts.

Another condition of the development of emotional skills is mental health and psychological stability (Kotsou et al., 2011; Meerum Terwogt & Stegge, 2001). EI development itself appears to be a demanding and sometimes destabilizing process. Engaging in emotional work often involves confronting previously avoided emotions, revisiting difficult experiences, and questioning established patterns of thinking and behavior. As such, development can temporarily increase emotional activation, generate stress, or create a sense of vulnerability. Recent research suggests that engaging in emotionally demanding reflective processes can increase cognitive load and emotional strain, particularly when individuals lack sufficient regulatory resources (Troy et al., 2023; Kalisch et al., 2019). Therefore, EI development appears to rely on emotional and cognitive readiness.

Emotional self-regulation is another crucial factor in EI development as it involves learning to act on one's own emotions with regard to their intensity and their expression, and the ability to implement effective emotion regulation strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal or attentional deployment, rather than relying on impulsive and reactive responses (Meerum Terwogt & Stegge, 2001; Gross, 2014). This finding is linked to contemporary models of emotion regulation. Gross highlights that effective emotional functioning requires the ability to modulate emotional intensity in order to maintain adaptive responding (Gross, 2015; Petrova & Gross, 2023). Similarly, emotion-focused approaches emphasize that individuals must first be able to regulate overwhelming emotional activation before engaging in deeper emotional processing and transformation (Greenberg, 2021). Furthermore, Greenberg (2021) highlights that the ability to regulate emotional intensity within the development process appears to be particularly important, as excessive emotional arousal can interfere with the capacity to process and make sense of emotional information.

Taken together, psychological stability and emotional self-regulation play a dual role: it is both a precondition for development and a protective factor during the developmental process itself. Individuals who possess sufficient emotional

regulation capacity are better able to ensure a certain degree of stability required to navigate the discomfort associated with emotional exploration, without becoming overwhelmed or disengaging from the development process. More broadly, research indicates that high levels of stress or emotional overload impair executive functioning, attention, and reflective capacity, thereby limiting the ability to learn from emotional experiences (Arnsten, 2015; Shields et al., 2017). This further supports the idea that EI development requires a certain level of emotional safety and regulation capacity.

Finally, for EI development, it is crucial to have a basically positive relationship to one's emotions. Having a positive relationship to one's emotions enables an individual to be open to emotions, to welcome them and to assess them as information's and as potential resources to produce effective behavior in a specific context (Haag, Bellinghausen, & Poirier, 2025).

Taken together, literature highlights that EI development is primarily supported by the following individual factors: psychological stability and mental health, emotional awareness, individual motivation and willingness to grow, strategic reflection and meta-cognition, positive relationship to one's emotions and emotional self-regulation, particularly the regulation of emotional intensity.

On the other hand, environmental contexts play a fundamental role by shaping individuals' ability to develop EI (Meerum Terwogt & Stegge, 2001). Special life events and experiences such as traumas or significant social transitions are often associated with emotional growth. Rather than uniformly positive or negative, these effects seem to depend on individuals' prior EI level: research suggests that EI tends to increase following a traumatic event primarily among individuals who had comparatively low EI beforehand (Tuck & Patlamazoglou, 2019). Furthermore, EI seems to play a particular positive role in the engagement in post-traumatic growth and resilience process (He et al., 2026).

Furthermore, the development of EI deeply relies on the social environment of the individual, namely the presence of emotionally responsive others. Research most widely demonstrated the positive impact of responsive others within the emotion socialization framework. Consistently emotionally supportive caregivers are shown to foster emotional skills in children through supportive responses to emotions, openness to emotion-related discussions, emotional modeling, and emotional coaching (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Denham, 1998; Gottman et al., 1996; Morris et al., 2007). Lane and Smith (2021) furthermore define emotionally responsive caregivers as validating emotional experiences and emotion expression, guiding attention shift from external factors to internal states and the underlying meaning of these states. They foster perception and understanding of the emotions of others and finally encourage language-based emotional reasoning. More recently, meta-analytic evidence has confirmed that emotion-focused parenting practices significantly improve children's emotional competence (England-Mason et al., 2023). On the other hand, unpredictable or emotionally invalidating others or environments can hinder and disrupt the acquisition of emotional de-

velopment and the abilities to understand and regulate emotions (Lane & Smith, 2021). While these findings originate from developmental psychology, they suggest that emotionally sensitive relationships across the lifespan constitute a fundamental mechanism underlying the acquisition and development of emotional competencies. In adulthood, particularly in organizational settings, leaders, coaches, mentors, peers and co-workers may provide emotionally responsive interactions that support the continued development of emotional competencies.

Psychological safety is also identified as a core environmental factor allowing learning and development. Edmondson (1999) introduce this concept defining it as a shared belief that the interpersonal environment is safe for taking risks such as asking questions, acknowledging mistakes, or expressing uncertainty (see Newman, Donohue, & Eva (2017) for a systematic review on psychological safety). Consequently, psychological safety is a key environmental condition enabling the development of learning behaviors, especially when it concerns emotional learning. Building on this foundation, Carmeli, Brueller, and Dutton (2009) show that psychological safety in the workplace relies on the quality of interpersonal relationships: the higher the quality of the relation the more psychological safety is perceived. Psychological safety then creates a context that encourages behaviors as feedback seeking, strategic reflection, experimentation, and finally continuous learning. Psychological safety is thus providing fertile ground for personal development in general and the development of emotional competencies especially. In this line, Chernis and Adler's research (Chernis & Adler, 2023) regarding work environments highlights the important role of constructive feedback on the development of EI competencies. The authors identified constructive feedback as a key organizational lever for supporting learning and EI development within organizations. In sum, organizational culture, and especially the promotion of psychological safety and positive social interactions sustain emotion expression, emotional learning and emotional growth (Boyatzis, 2001).

The broader social and cultural environment also shapes EI development by defining which emotions are considered acceptable, how they should be expressed, and how individuals are expected to regulate them. Through processes of socialization, individuals gradually internalize emotional norms that guide emotion perception, expression, and regulation across different contexts (Matsumoto et al., 2008). Within organizational settings, these norms are reflected in emotional display rules, defined as shared expectations regarding the appropriate expression of emotions at work (Diefendorff et al., 2011). Emotional labor theory conceptualizes adherence to these display rules as a form of emotion regulation, requiring employees to adjust their emotional responses to meet organizational expectations (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Although display rules have primarily been studied as antecedents of emotional labor and employee well-being, they also constitute an important learning environment through which individuals repeatedly practice emotion perception, regulation, and interpersonal adaptation. Self-conscious emotions such as pride and guilt, for example, are learned through so-

cial interactions and cultural expectations and, as a function of culture and norms, contribute to the development of adaptive self-regulation and prosocial behavior (Tracy & Robins, 2004).

In summary, research on external conditions of EI development for adults highlights the important role of emotionally responsive others, supportive environmental norms and organizational culture characterized by psychological safety and constructive feedback. Finally, significant life events are identified as an crucial factor of EI development with EI playing an important role in the process of emotional growth following such experiences.

Taken together, the literature suggests that EI development is facilitated by both internal and external conditions. These conditions seem to form an interconnected ecosystem in which individuals' capacities and environmental influences continuously interact and shape EI development.

3.4. Key Figures of EI Development

While individuals are responsible for their own growth and supportive environmental conditions are essential, key figures such as coaches, therapists, and researchers play a crucial role in the developmental process of EI (Haag, Bellinghausen, & Poirier, 2025).

Coaches act as central facilitators of emotional learning by providing structured feedback, emotional mirroring, and opportunities for self-reflection (Haag, Bellinghausen, & Poirier, 2025). They create emotionally realistic settings through tools like role-plays or group discussions that promote experiential learning and allow clients to test new emotions and new regulation strategies (Kotsou et al., 2011). Coaches tailor interventions to the client's emotional readiness and serve as continuous guides throughout the development process.

Psychologists and therapists, by contrast, support emotional growth through deeper introspective work helping clients attend to differentiate and make sense of their emotional experience within the therapeutic relationship (Greenberg, 2015). Using methods such as introspection about emotional functioning, restructuring emotional experiencing, and resolving primary dysfunctional emotions (Greenberg, 2015), therapists engage clients in cognitive reappraisal (Gross, 1998, 2002, 2014) as well as mindfulness- and acceptance-based regulation strategies (Hayes & Hofmann, 2017). Therapists help individuals reframe their emotional responses and build stronger regulatory skills. Their focus is often more integrative and rooted in clinical insight. Therapeutic approaches may be particularly suited for individuals requiring foundational emotional reconnection or healing before growth can occur (Pascual-Leone & Greenberg, 2007; Greenberg, 2023).

Scientists, in comparison, contribute to EI development less through direct interpersonal facilitation than through the development and validation of theoretical models and assessment instruments (O'Connor et al., 2019). By establishing which constructs and measures reliably capture emotional abilities, traits, and competencies, researchers provide the empirical foundation upon which both

coaching interventions and therapeutic approaches can be systematically designed, evaluated, and refined. Without this ongoing theoretical and psychometric groundwork, neither coaches nor therapists would have access to validated methods and tools for assessing emotional functioning or evidence-based frameworks for guiding their interventions (O'Connor et al., 2019).

Together, these key figures shape a holistic ecosystem for emotional development. While personal initiative remains indispensable, it is the thoughtful interaction between self-directed efforts and expert guidance that creates the most conducive environment for cultivating EI.

4. Method

To address the research question and develop a more integrative understanding of the mechanisms underlying EI development and the conditions that enable it, we adopted a qualitative research design. Given the complexity and multidimensional nature of EI development—encompassing subjective experiences, interpersonal dynamics, and contextual influences—a qualitative approach was considered particularly appropriate.

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals who play a central role in fostering EI development (Kotsou et al., 2011) including psychologists, psychotherapists, coaches, and researchers. By drawing on the perspectives of experts with complementary areas of expertise, this methodological approach enables an in-depth exploration of the mechanism underlying EI development as well as the conditions that facilitate this development while maintaining sufficient flexibility to capture emerging themes and uncover interactions that may not be reflected in the existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.1. Participants

In contrast to quantitative studies, where representativeness is a central concern in sampling, qualitative research focuses on selecting individuals who are particularly well-suited to provide valuable insights into the research question (Palinkas et al., 2015). Accordingly, the present study targeted key figures involved in fostering EI development, including researchers, psychologists, psychotherapists, and professional coaches (Haag, Bellinghausen, & Poirier, 2025; Kotsou et al., 2011). Additionally, to guarantee the quality of the data collected, all selected key figures could be considered as experts in the field of EI development. Following Chi (2006), expertise was defined through a combination of formal qualifications, extensive domain-specific experience, and peer recognition. To further ensure the quality of the expert sample, participants also met the characteristics of expert performers described by Ericsson et al. (1993), having accumulated substantial professional experience and being recognized for their advanced knowledge and practice in the field of EI development.

The recruitment was facilitated through the professional networks of the authors, with initial contact established via email or phone. Interviews were con-

ducted online using Microsoft Teams.

Sixteen experts were approached. All responded to the invitation, but two declined to participate and five were unavailable during the study period, resulting in a final sample of nine experts. The interviews were conducted by a bachelor's student in work and organizational psychology who was completing her dissertation on the topic, ensuring that none of the participants had a prior professional relationship with the interviewer.

The resulting sample consisted of nine participants: two scientists, three psychologists with additional qualifications as psychotherapists, and four professional coaches with a gender distribution of six women and three men. This diversity ensures a wide range of experiences, further enriched by the participants' diverse cultural backgrounds, with four identifying as German, four as French, and one as Luxembourgish. Additionally, they are working with individuals and groups across multiple countries in Europe, the United States, and Asia. Academically, four participants held a master's degree, five had accomplished a PhD degree. The age of the participants ranged from 45 to 67 years, with an average age of 52 years, which is consistent with this level of expertise.

Prior to the interviews, participants received an official invitation along with information outlining the aims and procedures of the study. All participants provided informed consent for the audio recording and transcription of the interviews, the use of interview quotations, and data storage. Participants were informed that their data would be used for the publication of a scientific article on the topic. Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes ([Table 1](#)).

Table 1. Participant demographics by professional background.

Category	Scientists	Psychologists, Therapists	Coaches
Total (N)	2	3	4
Gender (F/M)	0/2	2/1	4/0

4.2. Research Design

To investigate the mechanism underlying EI development and its enabling conditions, the interviews we explored seven overarching topics, defined as deductive categories based on the existing literature on EI development.

The following topics were explored: 1) understanding of EI, which provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how they describe its development; 2) EI developmental mechanisms through which changes in emotional functioning occur; 3) the internal conditions that enable these processes; 4) external enabling conditions; 5) the role of key figures enabling EI development (e.g. coaches, psychologists and scientists); 6) barriers that may hinder EI development; and 7) benefits and perceived outcomes of EI development.

All interviews were conducted in English and recorded and transcribed for analysis. Transcription was realized in accordance with the transcription guidelines by [Kuckartz \(2016\)](#). These guidelines served exclusively as a framework to

ensure that the interviews were transcribed systematically, consistently, and transparently. The automatic transcription function of the online platform Turboscribe was used to transcribe the interviews, with audio files converted into text and reviewed and corrected manually to ensure accuracy. This post-processing primarily addressed grammatical errors and incomplete or missing sections resulting from the automated transcription.

The qualitative content analysis method, as described by Kuckartz (2016), was employed to analyze the data. This method combines both deductive and inductive category development, making it particularly suitable for systematically addressing extensive qualitative datasets (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2024). A category system was developed to serve as an analytical tool, filtering out the key aspects of the interviews essential for answering the research question (Kuckartz, 2016). The text material was coded using computer-assisted methods with the aid of the software MAXQDA (Version 2024).

5. Results

This section presents the findings in relation to the two overarching dimensions of the research question: the developmental mechanisms involved in EI development and the conditions that enable or constrain this development.

The qualitative analysis followed a combined deductive-inductive approach. Prior to coding, 7 initial deductive categories were identified based on the research questions and the existing literature on EI development. These initial categories were subsequently organized into five overarching deductive categories: 1) participants' shared understanding of emotional intelligence, which provides the conceptual foundation for understanding how they describe its development; 2) experts' perception of EI development, focusing on the developmental mechanisms through which changes in emotional functioning occur; 3) the conditions that enable these processes, including internal and external conditions and the role of key figures fostering and sustaining EI development; 4) the barriers that may hinder or limit this development; 5) the perceived implications of EI development for individuals and their relationships.

These overarching categories provided an initial structure for the analysis without constituting a fixed coding framework. During the coding process, additional codes and subcategories were developed inductively from the interview data when relevant aspects of the experts' accounts were not adequately captured by the initial framework. Emerging codes were progressively compared, refined, and organized into subcategories within the overarching deductive categories. Three researchers were involved in the coding process. Coding discrepancies were directly discussed among the three researchers and resolved through consensus, with particular attention to the interpretation and boundaries of emerging codes and subcategories.

Throughout the analysis, the coding framework was iteratively reviewed and revised to incorporate inductively emerging dimensions and to refine the defini-

tion and organization of codes and subcategories. The final category system thus integrated theoretically informed deductive categories with inductively derived patterns from the experts' accounts.

Based on this analytical framework, the following section presents the results for each of the five overarching deductive categories. Within each category, we also describe the additional codes and subcategories that emerged inductively from the interview data. To ensure anonymity, participants are identified by codes (Int#1, Int#2, Int#3, etc.) throughout the result section.

Although coaches, therapists, and scientists approached EI development from different professional perspectives, the interviews revealed substantial convergence in the definition of EI, the core developmental mechanisms and enabling conditions identified across professional groups. Furthermore, given the small and uneven composition of the subgroups (four coaches, two scientists, and two therapists), the study does not allow for meaningful comparisons between professional groups.

5.1. Shared Understanding of Emotional Intelligence

Within the overarching category of the definition of EI, experts' accounts reveal four inductive categories: EI is a set of abilities, self-awareness is central to EI, emotions are social signals, and prosocial use of EI.

Experts define EI primarily as an ability to perceive, understand, regulate, and effectively use emotions in oneself and in others (Int#1, Int#2, Int#3, Int#4, Int#5, Int#6, Int#7, Int#8). Within this definition, self-awareness emerged as a core characteristic of EI, with several experts emphasizing the importance of being aware of one's own emotional states, functioning and processes (Int#1, Int#2, Int#4, Int#5, Int#6, Int#7). In addition, experts consistently described emotions as essential social signals and valuable sources of information that can guide adaptive behavior across different contexts (Int#1, Int#8, Int#9).

This definition and the emphasis on self-awareness as a core component of EI is consistent with the literature conceptualizing awareness and understanding of one's own emotional states as central components of emotional intelligence and emotional competence (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Experts' perception of emotion echoes theoretical perspectives emphasizing the informational and adaptive functions of emotions, both within the individual and in interpersonal interactions (Frijda, 1986; Damasio, 1994; Van Kleef, 2009, 2016). Taken together, experts' accounts were broadly consistent with the ability approach to EI, while placing particular emphasis on self-awareness and on the capacity to use emotional information adaptively.

Despite this consensus, one expert highlighted the importance of establishing ethical and prosocial boundaries for the effective use of EI skills, arguing that current definitions of EI may, to some extent, also encompass manipulative forms of emotional influence, as illustrated by examples such as phone scammers and some public figures (Int#5).

“Phone scammers also use emotions effectively. [...] They call 80-year-old grandmothers and say their granddaughter is in the hospital and will not receive care unless they pay. They use emotions, and in a sense EI, effectively. [...]” (Int#5).

Expert Int#5 thus emphasized the importance of distinguishing the authentic and positive relational use of EI from the strategic or manipulative use of emotional skills. This perspective echoes a growing stream of research in the EI literature (Kilduff, Chiaburu, & Menges, 2010; Haag, Poirier, & Bellinghausen, 2024; Carver & Woodley, 2026), suggesting that genuine EI should not only contribute to positive individual outcomes but also foster positive relational and collective outcomes.

Taken together, this shared understanding of EI provides the conceptual foundation for examining how experts describe its development and the mechanisms through which such development occurs.

5.2. Mechanisms of EI Development

Within the overarching category of EI developmental mechanisms, experts’ accounts revealed two distinct patterns of development, which emerged inductively from the data: an iterative developmental process and a stepwise developmental process.

Experts describe EI development as a continuous, nonlinear, and iterative learning process through which emotional competencies are progressively acquired, integrated, and refined throughout the lifespan (Int#1, Int#2, Int#5, Int#6). Several experts emphasize that this process involves acquiring knowledge about emotions, developing greater self-awareness, and progressively strengthening the ability to perceive, interpret, and regulate emotions. At the same time, experts describe a structured, stepwise progression within this iterative process (Int#2, Int#5, Int#8). EI development is portrayed as beginning with the acquisition of emotional knowledge, followed by the gradual integration of this knowledge into individuals’ thoughts, perceptions, and behaviors (Int#2). This progression involves increasingly complex abilities, from perceiving and identifying emotions to interpreting and regulating them (Int#5), together with the development of reflective capacities and emotional perspective-taking (Int#6, Int#9).

Int#2 illustrated this interplay between progression and iteration: “There are two, let’s say steps, but it’s an iterative process. First, you need to develop the knowledge. The knowledge regarding what is an emotion, what it means, what the process is at work, what is the message. [...] So the first step is the knowledge acquisition, but then you need to integrate. And then it changes your thoughts, it changes your perception, it changes your behaviors. And then again, you have more knowledge and you upgrade yourself like this.” (Int#2).

These accounts are consistent with broader developmental theories that conceptualize development as a continuous, nonlinear, and iterative process involving successive adaptations and reorganizations over time (Baltes, 1987; Siegler et

al., 2011; Illeris, 2017). They also align with EI and emotion regulation research emphasizing the progressive acquisition and integration of emotional knowledge, self-awareness, and emotion regulation abilities (Mayer et al., 2004, 2016; Brackett et al., 2011; Diamond & Aspinwall, 2003; Gross, 2015). More specifically, the step-wise progression described by the experts echoes research suggesting that emotional competencies develop through the progressive acquisition and integration of increasingly complex abilities (Harris, Anderson, & Visconti, 2022; Lim & Lau, 2021). Finally, the experts' emphasis on the integration of emotional knowledge into thoughts, behaviors, and relationships is consistent with research showing that EI development can extend beyond the cognitive acquisition of emotional knowledge and contribute to broader and lasting changes in emotional functioning (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2012b; Kotsou, Nelis, Grégoire, & Mikolajczak, 2011; Persich Durham et al., 2023; Mehler et al., 2024).

Taken together, the experts' accounts reveal two complementary developmental mechanisms. The first is iterative, whereby emotional competencies are continuously refined through experience, reflection, and the repeated integration of new emotional knowledge. The second is progressive, whereby development moves from more foundational abilities, such as emotional knowledge, perception, and identification, toward more complex abilities, including emotion regulation, perspective-taking, and the application of emotional competencies in interpersonal and organizational contexts. Rather than representing competing perspectives, these two mechanisms appear to operate together: EI development can be understood as a progressive process that unfolds iteratively, with each new level of emotional competence being consolidated and further refined through experience and reflection. Thus, genuine EI development extends beyond knowing about emotions to progressively integrating emotional knowledge into the way individuals perceive, think, behave, and relate to others.

5.3. Enabling Conditions for EI Development

Within the overarching deductive category of enabling conditions for EI development, the experts' accounts confirm the following three subcategories: internal, individual-level conditions; external, relational and environmental-level conditions; and key figures enabling EI development.

Internal enabling conditions: Within the deductively identified subcategory of internal enabling conditions, four interrelated dimensions emerged from the experts' accounts inductively: 1) developmental readiness, 2) developmental mindset, 3) emotional self-awareness and reflective capacity, and 4) emotional knowledge and vocabulary.

First, developmental readiness is described as a foundational condition for EI development. Experts emphasize that a sufficient level of mental health and psychological stability (Int#2, Int#4, Int#5, Int#8, Int#9) enables individuals to tolerate the emotional discomfort inherent in developmental processes, remain engaged with challenging emotional experiences, and transform these experiences

into opportunities for learning rather than responding defensively (Int#4, Int#7, Int#9). In this context, experts also highlight the importance of individuals' capacity to be open to experience (Int#1, Int#3, Int#6, Int#7, Int#8, Int#9) and to access pleasant meta-emotions (Int#3, Int#7), particularly curiosity and hope toward their own emotional experiences. These pleasant meta-emotions are described as facilitating openness to emotional challenges and promoting an approach-oriented rather than avoidance-oriented response (Int#4, Int#7, Int#9).

Second, experts consistently emphasize the importance of a developmental mindset. Motivation for personal change (Int#1, Int#2, Int#6, Int#8) and a genuine willingness to grow and work on oneself are described as essential conditions for engaging in the developmental process (Int#1, Int#2, Int#3, Int#4, Int#7, Int#8, Int#9). Among these factors, curiosity occupies a particularly central place in experts' accounts (Int#1, Int#3, Int#6, Int#8). Experts' portrait curiosity as an emotional driver of EI development, encouraging individuals to explore their own and others' emotional experiences, question established patterns of emotional functioning, and remain receptive to new perspectives throughout the learning process.

Third, emotional self-awareness (Int#1, Int#2, Int#3, Int#4, Int#5, Int#6, Int#7, Int#9) and reflective capacity (Int#1, Int#2, Int#4, Int#5, Int#6, Int#7, Int#8) emerge as key enabling conditions supporting EI development. Experts described self-awareness as the capacity to notice and attend to one's emotions and to understand the information they convey (Int#1, Int#4, Int#5, Int#7, Int#9). Reflective capacity, in turn, is described as enabling individuals to make sense of emotional experiences, integrate new insights, and progressively translate these insights into more adaptive thoughts, behaviors, and interpersonal responses (Int#2, Int#3, Int#4, Int#7, Int#8).

Finally, emotional knowledge and vocabulary are identified as important cognitive resources for EI development (Int#2, Int#3, Int#4, Int#7, Int#9). Experts emphasize that understanding emotions and developing a rich emotional vocabulary provide individuals with the conceptual resources needed to identify, differentiate, interpret, and communicate emotional experiences more accurately (Int#2, Int#4, Int#6). Such knowledge is described as supporting both emotional self-awareness and the ability to regulate emotions more effectively in oneself and in interpersonal relationships.

These experts' accounts are broadly consistent with existing research. The importance attributed to developmental readiness aligns with previous work suggesting that mental health and psychological stability can support individuals' capacity to engage in EI development and tolerate emotionally challenging experiences (Kotsou et al., 2011; Meerum Terwogt & Stegge, 2001). The role attributed to pleasant meta-emotions has received less direct attention in the EI development literature but is consistent with research on positive affect, which highlights its role in broadening individuals' repertoires of thoughts and actions and facilitating learning and personal growth (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2018).

Similarly, the experts' emphasis on motivation, openness, and willingness to change resonates with the literature on growth mindset, which highlights individuals' beliefs about the possibility of development as important for sustained engagement in learning and change (Yeager & Dweck, 2020). The particularly prominent role attributed to curiosity is also consistent with research conceptualizing curiosity as a positive emotional-motivational system that promotes exploration and creates opportunities for personal growth (Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004). The importance attributed to emotional self-awareness and reflective capacity is consistent with theoretical and empirical work positioning awareness and understanding of emotional states as central to emotional development (Lane & Schwartz, 1987; Smith et al., 2020). Finally, experts' emphasis on emotional knowledge and vocabulary echoes research showing that richer emotional conceptualization and vocabulary support the identification, differentiation, and understanding of emotional experiences (Kashdan et al., 2015; Streubel et al., 2024).

Taken together, these findings suggest that internal enabling conditions play distinct but complementary roles in supporting EI development. Developmental readiness and the ability to access pleasant meta-emotions provides the psychological foundation that allows individuals to engage with potentially challenging emotional experiences inherent to the development process, while a developmental mindset and development orientated curiosity provide the motivational and emotional orientation needed to approach these experiences with openness. Self-awareness and reflective capacity enable individuals to attend to and make sense of their emotional experiences, while emotional knowledge and vocabulary provide the cognitive resources for identifying, differentiating, and interpreting them more precisely. Rather than operating independently, these conditions can be articulated into a coherent developmental framework: psychological readiness provides the foundation for engaging in emotional learning, a developmental mindset and the ability to access development orientated curiosity fuels the process, self-awareness and reflection constitute its central mechanisms through which emotional skills are continuously refined and adjusted, and finally emotional knowledge and vocabulary provide the cognitive resources that support and sustain EI development.

External enabling conditions: Within the deductively defined category of external enabling conditions for EI development, three interrelated subcategories emerged inductively from the experts' accounts: 1) a psychologically safe and emotionally supportive environment, 2) emotionally responsive others and role models, and 3) cultural and organizational norms.

First, experts consistently describe a psychologically safe and emotionally supportive socio-emotional environment as a foundational condition for EI development (Int#1, Int#3, Int#4, Int#6, Int#7, Int#8, Int#9). Individuals need contexts in which they can safely experience, explore, and express emotions without fear of judgment, rejection, or negative consequences (Int#1, Int#4, Int#6, Int#8). Importantly, experts went beyond the notion of psychological safety by emphasizing

what could be described as emotional freedom, namely, the possibility of experiencing and expressing emotions authentically without being criticized, invalidated, or pressured to suppress them (Int#5, Int#7, Int#8). Such environments were described as creating opportunities for emotional exploration, experimentation, reflection, and learning, thereby supporting the gradual development of emotional competencies.

Second, experts emphasize the importance of emotionally responsive others and emotionally intelligent role models throughout the lifespan (Int#4, Int#6, Int#7, Int#8, Int#9). Emotional validation is described as playing a central role in emotional learning (Int#5, Int#6, Int#7). When emotional experiences are perceived, acknowledged, and appropriately responded to by others, individuals are better able to recognize, understand, express, and progressively regulate their own emotions (Int#5). Experts emphasize that the importance of emotionally responsive others extends into adulthood. While parents and caregivers typically fulfill this role during childhood, managers, leaders, colleagues, coaches, therapists, and mentors can become important emotionally responsive figures in adulthood (Int#4, Int#6, Int#9). By modeling emotionally adaptive behaviors, validating emotional experiences, providing guidance and feedback, and creating opportunities for reflection, these individuals support the continuous refinement of emotional competencies (Int#6, Int#7, Int#8). Repeated feedback also enables individuals to progressively adjust their emotional responses and behaviors to become more adaptive, contextually appropriate, and prosocial.

Third, experts identify cultural and organizational norms as shaping the broader context in which EI develops. Experts generally considered emotional experiences and the adaptive functions of emotions to be universal, while emphasizing that the ways emotions are perceived, interpreted, expressed, and socially accepted are strongly influenced by cultural norms (Int#1, Int#2, Int#4, Int#5, Int#6, Int#8, Int#9).

As one expert explained: “I don’t think there are differences in how people feel. I think it’s totally universal... the message of the emotion is the same.” (Int#2).

Experts nevertheless describe considerable cultural differences in the value attributed to emotional expression and emotional learning (Int#2, Int#4, Int#7, Int#8). Cultures traditionally emphasizing rationality were perceived as providing fewer opportunities for emotional learning, whereas cultures encouraging emotional expression from childhood onward are viewed as more supportive of EI development (Int#6, Int#8). Similarly, changes in relational practices within human systems, from authoritarian approaches toward more emotionally responsive ones, are perceived as facilitating the development of emotion regulation abilities (Int#5, Int#9).

Beyond societal culture, experts also highlighted the role of organizational culture in shaping opportunities for EI development in adulthood (Int#6, Int#7, Int#8). Organizations establish explicit and implicit emotional norms through leadership behaviors, interpersonal interactions, organizational values, and emo-

tional display rules (Int#3, Int#8). Experts describe these norms as influencing which emotions can be expressed and discussed, how emotions are responded to, and how individuals learn to regulate emotions in the workplace. Organizational cultures characterized by emotional openness and supportive leadership are viewed as particularly conducive to EI development, whereas cultures discouraging or invalidating emotional expression were perceived as constraining emotional learning (Int#6, Int#7, Int#8).

These experts' accounts are broadly consistent with existing research on the external conditions that support emotional development. The importance attributed to psychologically safe environments aligns with research showing that psychological safety facilitates interpersonal risk-taking, learning, and developmental processes (Newman, Donohue, & Eva, 2017; Boyatzis et al., 2019). However, the experts' emphasis on emotional freedom extends this perspective by highlighting a more specifically emotional dimension of the developmental environment: individuals need not only to feel safe when taking interpersonal risks, but also to experience sufficient freedom to explore, express, and reflect on their emotional experiences.

The importance attributed to emotionally responsive others and role models is likewise consistent with research emphasizing the relational foundations of development and the role of significant others, mentoring relationships, feedback, and developmental interactions in adulthood (Boyatzis, 2001; Ragins et al., 2020). These perspectives support the experts' accounts of EI development as a relationally embedded process in which validation, modeling, guidance, and feedback provide opportunities for emotional learning and the refinement of emotional responses throughout the lifespan.

Finally, experts' accounts of cultural and organizational norms resonate with research demonstrating that emotional expression and regulation are embedded within broader social and organizational contexts (Diefendorff et al., 2011; Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Cultural and organizational norms contribute to defining which emotions can be expressed, how emotional expression is interpreted, and which forms of emotional regulation are considered appropriate. The experts' accounts therefore reinforce the view that opportunities for EI development are shaped not only by individuals and their immediate relationships but also by the broader emotional norms of the social systems in which they are embedded.

Overall, the findings from the experts' interviews suggest that these external conditions can be integrated into a coherent ecological framework of EI development. Psychologically safe and emotionally free environments create opportunities for authentic emotional expression, emotional exploration, and experiential learning. Emotionally responsive others and role models provide guidance, validation, feedback, and opportunities for reflection, enabling individuals to progressively refine emotionally adaptive and prosocial responses. At the broader level, cultural and organizational norms shape the emotional climate by defining which emotions are acknowledged, valued, and constructively expressed. Rather

than operating in isolation, these external conditions appear to interact as an integrated developmental ecosystem that continuously supports the acquisition, refinement, and maintenance of emotional competencies across the lifespan.

Enabling key figures: Within the category of enabling key figures, three inter-related subcategories emerged: 1) coaches, 2) psychologists and therapists, and 3) researchers.

First, scientists are described as advancing the foundations of EI development through knowledge generation and validation. The expert panel described the role of scientists as extending beyond conducting empirical research to refining theoretical frameworks, operationalizing the EI construct, synthesizing fragmented findings, and exploring emerging areas such as the neurobiological mechanisms underlying emotional processes (Int#2, Int#4).

Experts further emphasize that scientists should possess not only theoretical expertise but also embodied knowledge of emotions, enabling them to bridge scientific understanding with lived emotional experience. Furthermore, experts highlight the ethical responsibility as central to the scientific role: participants stressed that EI research should promote human flourishing, pro-social and positive influence rather than manipulation or hidden forms of social engineering (Int#2, Int#4).

Second, coaches were consistently portrayed as facilitators of emotional learning and competency development. Their primary perceived role is not to treat psychological disorders but to help individuals transform emotional knowledge into practical emotional competencies. Through questioning, feedback, experiential exercises, and structured methods, coaches are expected to guide clients to deepen self-awareness, acquire knowledge about emotions, explore emotional experiences beyond factual descriptions, and progressively develop more emotionally intelligent behaviors (Int#1, Int#3, Int#8). Participants also emphasized the importance of coaches acting as emotionally intelligent role models, demonstrating authentic emotional expression and creating relationships characterized by trust, curiosity, and psychological safety (Int#3, Int#5, Int#8). In doing so, coaches can facilitate the acquisition and refinement of emotional competencies through repeated cycles of practice, reflection, and feedback (Int#1, Int#5).

Third, psychologists and therapists were described as restoring individuals' capacity for emotional development when psychological difficulties interfere with emotional learning. Rather than focusing primarily on skill acquisition, therapists address the underlying psychological and emotional barriers—such as trauma, anxiety, depression, or emotional avoidance and disconnection—that restrict access to emotional experiences (Int#7, Int#8, Int#9). Through emotionally attuned therapeutic relationships, therapists gradually help clients reopen emotional channels, validate previously avoided emotions, and construct new emotional meanings. Experts described this process as a form of emotional attunement or a “dance of empathy,” in which the therapist's responsiveness enables clients to safely engage with emotions that had previously been experienced as overwhelm-

ing or threatening (Int#7, Int#8). In this sense, psychotherapy tends to restore the developmental conditions that allow emotional learning and EI development.

Furthermore, across all three professional roles, experts account consistently emphasized that the quality of the developmental relationship is as important as the techniques or knowledge employed. Ethical practice, emotional responsiveness, and psychological safety were described as universal conditions for fostering EI development (Int#4, Int#6, Int#7, Int#8). Conversely, judgment, emotional invalidation, insufficient professional competence, manipulation, or the misuse of influence undermine the developmental process by disrupting trust, reducing openness, and limiting opportunities for emotional exploration and learning (Int#3, Int#5, Int#7, Int#8, Int#9).

These complementary functions can be situated at the intersection of several strands of literature on EI, psychology, coaching, and developmental relationships. Research on EI has primarily emphasized the contribution of scientists to conceptualizing the construct and developing theoretically grounded and empirically validated assessment tools (Mayer et al., 2008; Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Coaching research, in turn, highlights the role of coaches in facilitating developmental processes through reciprocal helping relationships, reflection, feedback, goal setting, practice, and behavioral change (Boyatzis, 2001; Boyatzis et al., 2019; Passmore & Lai, 2019). Research on developmental and therapeutic relationships further suggests that growth may depend not only on the acquisition of knowledge or skills, but also on relational conditions that support emotional engagement, reflection, and change (Zahl-Olsen et al., 2023).

Rather than viewing enabling key figures as occupying distinct professional roles in EI development, experts portrayed their contributions as complementary functions within a broader developmental ecosystem, each supporting different aspects of the EI development process. While scientists are described as generating and validating knowledge about EI, coaches are viewed as translators. They are perceived as translating EI knowledge into emotional competencies through guided practice. Psychologists and therapists are seen as actors that restore the psychological conditions that make emotional learning possible. Together, these professions are perceived as contributing to different yet interdependent stages of the developmental process.

Taken together, these bodies of literature provide support for the different functions identified by the experts, while also suggesting a broader interpretation of EI development as a process that may involve complementary forms of support. The present findings extend these perspectives by bringing these functions together within a single developmental account of EI, rather than treating them as separate contributions.

5.4. Barriers to EI Development

Within the overarching deductive category of barriers to EI development, the inductive analysis of experts' accounts highlights two main subcategories: internal,

individual-level barriers and external, relational and environmental-level barriers.

Internal barriers: Overall, experts' accounts suggest that internal barriers to EI development can be understood through two interrelated developmental processes. The first concerns individuals' relationship with their own emotional experiences, whereas the second relates to their developmental orientation and openness to learning.

First, experts consistently describe a defensive relationship with emotions as one of the most fundamental barriers to EI development (Int#1, Int#2, Int#7, Int#8). Rather than emotions themselves, it is the tendency to disconnect from, suppress them, fear them, or judge one's own emotional experiences that limits emotional growth. Emotional disconnection (Int#5, Int#7, Int#9), emotional suppression, and secondary emotional reactions (Int#2, Int#6, Int#8, Int#9)—such as shame, fear, or disgust toward one's own emotions—significantly reduces individuals' capacity to recognize emotions as meaningful sources of information and opportunities for learning (Int#2, Int#3, Int#8, Int#9). Similarly, fragile self-esteem and difficulty accepting vulnerability often prevent individuals from engaging with their emotional experiences. Experts further noted that trauma and certain psychological disorders may reinforce these defensive and avoidance orientated emotional processes, making emotional awareness, emotional integration, and adaptive emotion regulation considerably more difficult (Int#4, Int#5, Int#6, Int#7, Int#8, Int#9).

Expert Int#1 state: "So, I would say, our motivation, and level of self-consciousness [...] it starts from ourselves, and we have the choice and the capacity to change ourselves. If we believe that everything that happens to us is linked to the external environment, it's going to be difficult."

Second, experts emphasize that EI development also depends on individuals' developmental orientation (Int#2, Int#3, Int#4, Int#8). Cognitive biases, automatic behavioral patterns, cognitive rigidity, egoism, and closed-mindedness reduce openness to feedback, alternative perspectives, and self-questioning, thereby limiting opportunities for emotional learning, development and personal change (Int#1, Int#2, Int#5, Int#6, Int#8, Int#9). These characteristics are perceived by experts as restricting individuals' capacity to integrate emotional experiences, refine their understanding over time, and adapt their responses to changing interpersonal situations. They are also described as impairing the ability to accurately perceive, understand, and respond to the emotions of others, ultimately limiting the development of interpersonal emotional competencies (Int#6, Int#9).

These findings are consistent with research on emotion regulation who has shown that habitual emotional avoidance and suppression can limit adaptive engagement with emotional experiences, whereas acceptance and willingness to experience emotions are associated with more flexible forms of regulation (Hayes et al., 1996; Gross, 1998, 2015). Furthermore, a substantial body of research has associated habitual emotional suppression with poorer psychological well-being and greater psychopathological symptoms, including depression and anxiety (Aldao

et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2014). Similarly, research on psychological flexibility emphasizes the importance of remaining open to internal experiences rather than attempting to control or avoid them (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). The experts' emphasis on openness to learning and self-questioning also resonates with research on growth-oriented approaches, which suggests that beliefs about one's capacity to learn and change can influence engagement with developmental experiences (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Overall, these findings suggest that internal barriers to EI development are not isolated traits but reflect two interrelated developmental mechanisms: a defensive relationship with one's own emotions and a limited openness to learning from emotional experiences. Together, these mechanisms constrain opportunities for emotional exploration, reflection, and adaptive change, suggesting that EI development depends not only on becoming aware of emotions but also on the quality of one's relationship with them. From the experts' perspective, emotional growth therefore appears to occur when individuals develop a positive relationship with their emotions, approaching them with curiosity, openness, and acceptance rather than avoidance, judgment, or defensiveness, thereby creating the conditions for progressive and adaptive EI development.

External barriers. Within the inductive category of external barriers, experts emphasize that EI development depends on the quality of the surrounding developmental environment. When the social environment fails to provide adequate conditions for emotional learning, reflection, and growth, EI development may be substantially hindered. Four interrelated subcategories emerged inductively from the experts' accounts: 1) the absence of psychologically safe and emotionally free environments, 2) the lack of emotionally responsive developmental figures, 3) limited opportunities for emotional learning through everyday social interactions, and 4) excessive digital media use.

First, experts consistently described psychologically unsafe environments as major obstacles to EI development. During childhood, emotionally invalidating family environments are described by the experts as limiting opportunities to recognize, express, and regulate emotions (Int#5, Int#6, Int#7, Int#9). Across adulthood, similar processes seem to occur namely in workplaces characterized by excessive pressure, hostility, psychological insecurity, fear of judgment or emotional suppression (Int#1, Int#2, Int#6, Int#8, Int#9). Participants' accounts suggest that emotionally restrictive environments discourage authentic emotional expression, emotional exploration, and learning from emotional experiences. Rather than fostering emotional freedom, these contexts promote defensive emotional strategies and emotional avoidance behaviors, limiting the gradual acquisition of emotional competencies.

As expert Int#1 highlight: "Having a safe environment is going to positively affect the development of EI. And at the opposite, a very difficult environment with a lot of pressure, toxicity, and things like that, it's probably going to affect the way we develop ourselves."

Second, experts emphasize that EI development is hindered when individuals lack emotionally responsive others who can guide, validate, and model emotionally adaptive behaviors (Int#3, Int#5, Int#6, Int#7, Int#9). While parents and caregivers primarily fulfil this role during childhood, managers, colleagues, mentors, coaches, therapists, and leaders increasingly become developmental figures in adulthood. In experts' perspective, the absence of such emotionally responsive relationships deprives individuals of the feedback, validation, modelling, and corrective interpersonal experiences that support the progressive refinement of emotional competencies (Int#4, Int#9).

Third, experts noted that broader cultural and societal influences may further constrain EI development. Organizational, family, and societal norms that prioritize emotional control, excessive rationality, competition, or emotional suppression discourage authentic emotional expression and reduce opportunities for emotional learning (Int#1, Int#6, Int#8, Int#9).

Finally, experts identified excessive digital media use as a contemporary obstacle to EI development. By replacing rich face-to-face interactions with mediated forms of communication, excessive engagement with smartphones, social media, and television reduces opportunities for authentic emotional exchanges and interpersonal feedback. Consequently, experts claim that individuals have fewer opportunities to observe emotional expressions, practice emotion perception and regulation in real time, and refine the interpersonal skills that underpin emotional intelligence (Int#7).

These findings are broadly consistent with literature emphasizing the relational and contextual nature of emotional development. Psychologically unsafe and emotionally restrictive environments may limit the learning opportunities required for EI development, consistent with research linking psychological safety to learning and interpersonal risk-taking (Newman, Donohue, & Eva, 2017; Boyatzis et al., 2019). The experts' emphasis on emotional freedom further suggests that, beyond the absence of interpersonal risk, EI development may benefit from environments in which emotions can be expressed and explored without fear of judgment or invalidation. The importance attributed to emotionally responsive others is also consistent with research highlighting the role of significant others, role models, mentoring, and feedback in development (Boyatzis, 2001; Ragins et al., 2020). Similarly, the influence of cultural and organizational norms is consistent with research showing that emotional expression and regulation are shaped by social norms and organizational display rules (Diefendorff et al., 2011; Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Such contexts may therefore restrict opportunities for emotional exploration and learning. Finally, experts' concerns regarding excessive digital media use point to a more emerging potential barrier. Reduced face-to-face interaction may limit opportunities for real-time emotional perception, interpersonal feedback, and social-emotional learning. Although this proposition requires further empirical investigation, it highlights the relevance of changing interactional environments for EI development.

Overall, the findings suggest that external barriers are not merely the inverse of the conditions that facilitate EI development, nor are they reducible to isolated adverse experiences. Instead, they reflect the absence of a supportive developmental socio-emotional ecosystem. When psychologically safe and emotionally free environments, emotionally responsive others, and emotionally supportive cultural norms are lacking, opportunities for emotional exploration, interpersonal feedback, and experiential learning become restricted, ultimately constraining the development of EI across the lifespan. Interestingly, experts highlight a contemporary obstacle: excessive digital media use as hindering emotional and social learning processes.

5.5. Benefits and Outcomes of EI Development

Within the overarching deductive category of benefits and outcomes of EI development, the inductive analysis of experts' accounts highlights benefits of EI as extending far beyond individual emotional competencies. Three inductive subcategories are identified: 1) individual benefits, 2) interpersonal benefits and 3) benefits for collective functioning.

First, EI strengthens adaptive functioning at the individual level. Participants consistently associated EI with a higher quality of life, greater psychological autonomy, and an enhanced capacity to cope with everyday challenges and adversity (Int#8). By promoting more effective emotion regulation, EI is described as enabling individuals to navigate stressful situations without becoming overwhelmed and supports psychological resilience during difficult life events (Int#4, Int#8). Experts further perceive EI as an important protective factor for mental health, contributing to the prevention and management of anxiety, depression, burnout, and chronic stress through more adaptive emotional processing (Int#4, Int#7). Beyond reducing distress, EI is also associated with greater life satisfaction, the ability to appreciate positive experiences, and more effective use of personal psychological resources, ultimately strengthening individuals' capacity to continuously adapt to changing life circumstances (Int#8).

Second, EI is described as enhancing interpersonal functioning by improving the quality of emotional interactions. Experts emphasize that emotionally intelligent individuals communicate more authentically, express emotions more constructively, and are better able to understand and respond to the emotional experiences of others (Int#8, Int#9). These abilities reduce the accumulation of unresolved emotions, facilitate conflict prevention and resolution, and foster trust, cooperation, care orientated behaviors and mutual understanding (Int#1, Int#2, Int#3, Int#6, Int#7). More broadly, participants suggest that EI creates the relational conditions that allow individuals and groups to continuously adjust to one another through emotional communication, feedback, and shared understanding, thereby strengthening the adaptive capacity of relationships themselves (Int#6, Int#7, Int#8).

Third, EI is perceived contributing to healthier collective functioning and or-

ganizational systems by shaping the social and emotional conditions that support collective adaptation. Participants consistently associated EI with stronger collaboration, greater employee motivation, improved decision-making, innovation, and overall organizational performance (Int#1, Int#2, Int#3). These benefits are largely attributed to the creation of psychologically safe and emotionally supportive work environments in which individuals feel able to express ideas, take interpersonal risks, and learn from one another (Int#1, Int#6, Int#8). Experts further emphasize that emotionally intelligent leadership plays a central role in cultivating these conditions, while arguing that EI should extend beyond leaders to the entire workforce (Int#3, Int#8). Developing a shared emotional language across organizations is viewed as fostering stronger interpersonal relationships, greater collective resilience, and organizational cultures grounded in respect, support, and care, enabling organizations to better navigate complexity and continuous change (Int#2, Int#6, Int#8, Int#9).

Int#1 shared: “EI [...] we can develop all along our life and it is [...] going to ease relationships, to facilitate teamwork, cooperation, [...] team performance and company performance, for motivation of people in the organization, for innovation, to feel safe, to propose ideas.”

These expert perceptions are broadly consistent with the existing literature documenting positive associations between EI and outcomes across individual, interpersonal, and professional domains (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011; Lopes et al., 2003, 2004, 2005; Petrides et al., 2016; Haag, Bellinghausen, & Jilinskaya-Pandey, 2023; Haag, Bellinghausen, & Poirier, 2024). Previous research has linked EI with psychological adjustment and well-being, higher-quality social relationships and interpersonal functioning, as well as adaptive outcomes in professional contexts.

Taken together, the experts’ accounts converge with this literature while offering a more integrated perspective on the benefits of EI development: rather than presenting these benefits as separate outcomes of EI, they portray them as interconnected across multiple interacting levels of human systems, from individual adaptation to relational functioning and, ultimately, collective and organizational outcomes. Overall, these findings suggest that EI should not be understood merely as a collection of emotional competencies but as a fundamental adaptive capacity that operates across multiple levels of human functioning. By strengthening individuals’ psychological resources, improving the quality of interpersonal relationships, and fostering emotionally supportive organizational cultures, EI enables people and organizations to continuously adapt, learn, and thrive in increasingly complex environments.

6. Discussion

The dual aim of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying EI development and the conditions that enable this development. To this end, we confronted existing scientific evidence with the per-

spectives of experts actively engaged in fostering EI development.

Findings extend current research by suggesting that EI development is best understood not as the product of isolated individual antecedents or contextual influences, but as an adaptive developmental system in which emotional competencies emerge through continuous interactions between individual developmental processes and a supportive environmental ecosystem. Building on this integrative perspective, the following discussion outlines six theoretical contributions that refine and extend current understanding of EI development.

First, although experts largely adopted the ability-based approach of EI—as the capacity to perceive, understand, regulate, and effectively use one’s own and others’ emotions—they unanimously described self-awareness as the pivotal mechanism underlying EI development. Awareness of one’s emotional experiences and their influence on cognition and behavior was portrayed as essential starting point from which emotional development can emerge. Importantly, experts emphasized the need for ethical boundaries to distinguish authentic EI from manipulative use (e.g., by scammers or authoritarian figures). They suggested that fostering EI development also requires cultivating ethical awareness, ensuring that emotional competencies are guided by prosocial intentions and used to promote mutual understanding and interpersonal well-being rather than manipulation or control.

Second, experts described EI development as an adaptive developmental process characterized by the interplay of two complementary mechanisms: a structured progression from foundational emotional competencies (e.g., emotion perception and identification) toward more complex abilities (e.g., emotion regulation and interpersonal application), and a continuous nonlinear iterative learning cycle in which these competencies are repeatedly refined through experience, reflection, and practice. Rather than representing competing perspectives, these mechanisms were perceived as mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, experts emphasized that sustainable EI development requires not only cognitive understanding of emotions but also their experiential integration, resulting in enduring changes in individuals’ thoughts, behaviors, and relationships.

Third, findings suggest that EI development should not be conceptualized as the result of isolated individual or environmental enabling conditions but as an adaptive developmental system in which emotional competencies emerge from the dynamic interplay between internal developmental processes and a supportive social environment. Rather than representing independent antecedents, internal and external enabling conditions appear to function as mutually reinforcing components of a dynamic process through which emotional competencies progressively emerge, consolidate, and transfer across contexts. At the individual level, EI development begins with psychological readiness. Emotional stability, pleasant meta-emotions (e.g., curiosity, hope, confidence, satisfaction), openness to experience and tolerance to discomfort constitute the foundation that enables individuals to engage in emotional learning. Once this foundation is established, a developmental mindset together with growth orientated curiosity, motivation for per-

sonal change and genuine willingness to grow provide the motivational energy required to sustain the learning process despite emotional challenges. Self-awareness and reflective processing then emerge as the central developmental mechanisms through which emotional experiences are repeatedly examined, understood, integrated, and transformed into increasingly adaptive emotional responses. Emotional knowledge and a rich emotional vocabulary further support this process by providing the cognitive resources necessary to accurately identify, differentiate, understand, describe, interpret, and regulate emotions. At the environmental level, EI development unfolds within a developmental ecosystem. Psychologically safe and emotionally free environments create the necessary conditions for authentic emotional expression and sharing, emotional exploration, and experiential learning. Emotionally responsive others—including parents, teachers, therapists, coaches, leaders, and colleagues—facilitate the development of EI by providing validation, emotional attunement, constructive feedback, role modelling, and opportunities for guided reflection. At the broader level, cultural and organizational norms shape the emotional climate by defining which emotions are legitimate, how they may be expressed, and whether emotional learning is encouraged or inhibited. Importantly, experts did not describe these internal and external conditions as sequential or isolated influences but as reciprocal processes that continuously interact throughout development. Supportive environments strengthen individuals' readiness, self-awareness, motivation, and reflective capacities, while growing emotional competencies enable individuals to engage more effectively with their social environment and actively shape emotionally freer and healthier relationships and cultures. EI development therefore appears to result from recursive feedback loops between the individual and the environment, allowing emotional competencies to be progressively acquired, refined, generalized across situations, and maintained throughout the lifespan.

Fourth, findings regarding barriers to EI development suggest that barriers should not be understood merely as isolated adverse circumstances but rather as disruptions of the developmental ecosystem required for emotional growth. In line with the proposed integrative framework, the absence of psychologically safe and emotionally free environments, emotionally responsive others, and supportive cultural or organizational norms limits opportunities for authentic emotional expression, interpersonal feedback, guided reflection, and experiential learning. As a result, the recursive processes through which emotional competencies are acquired, refined, and maintained become disrupted, constraining EI development across the lifespan. Beyond these well-established barriers, experts identified a contemporary challenge to EI development: excessive digital media use. They suggested that increased reliance on digital interactions may reduce the frequency and quality of emotionally rich face-to-face experiences, thereby limiting opportunities for emotional attunement, social feedback, and experiential learning that are essential for the progressive development of emotional competencies.

Fifth, while previous research has primarily examined the outcomes of EI at the

individual, interpersonal, team and organizational levels separately, experts described these outcomes as part of a cascading adaptive process. Enhanced emotional functioning was perceived to strengthen interpersonal relationships, which in turn foster psychologically safe and collaborative organizational climate that enables collective adaptation and sustainable performance. Rather than producing isolated outcomes, these findings suggest that EI functions as a multilevel adaptive capacity whose benefits progressively emerge across interconnected human systems.

Finally, rather than viewing scientists, coaches, psychologists, and therapists as performing distinct professional roles, experts described them as fulfilling complementary developmental functions within the broader ecosystem of EI development. Scientists generate, refine, and validate the knowledge that guides EI development; coaches facilitate the acquisition, practice, and transfer of emotional competencies; and psychologists and therapists restore the psychological conditions necessary for emotional learning when these have been disrupted. Together, these complementary functions support different yet interdependent stages of the developmental process, suggesting that effective EI development requires a multidisciplinary and developmentally tailored approach rather than a single professional intervention. Across all professional roles, however, experts consistently emphasized that developmental effectiveness depends less on specific techniques employed than on the quality of the developmental relationship itself. Ethical practice, emotional responsiveness, and psychologically safe relationships emerged as universal mechanisms through which emotional learning is facilitated, regardless of the professional context. Conversely, judgment, emotional invalidation, manipulation, insufficient professional competence, or the misuse of influence were perceived as disrupting trust, limiting emotional exploration, and ultimately hindering EI development. More broadly, these findings suggest that EI development is driven not primarily by professional techniques but by an emotionally responsive developmental relationship. Whether occurring in psychotherapy, coaching, education, leadership, or everyday social interactions, these relationships provide the relational conditions through which individuals can safely express and explore emotions, receive validation and constructive feedback, engage in reflection, and progressively acquire, refine, and sustain emotional competencies over time. This perspective extends existing research by shifting the focus from the specific profession, modalities or tools to the developmental function fulfilled by emotionally responsive others, highlighting relational responsiveness as a fundamental mechanism underlying EI development across the lifespan.

6.1. Limitations

A critical point of this research is the small sample size, which limits the possibility of analyzing responses through professional perspectives and limits the generalizability of our findings. However, the expert sample was composed of key figures in EI development. All experts had extensive experience in the field, allowing us

to assume that we obtained robust and valid insights into the research topic (Vassileiou et al., 2018). This expertise notwithstanding, each interviewee expressed a perspective grounded in their individual practical experience, introducing a degree of subjectivity into the data itself.

A further layer of subjectivity arises from the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis more generally. While this dual subjectivity requires us to interpret the results with caution, it simultaneously offers the opportunity to explore under-researched areas from multiple, experience-based angles.

Another limitation concerns the composition of the sample. Participants were selected from the authors' professional network rather than through random or systematic sampling, which may have introduced a degree of selection bias, for instance, toward experts sharing similar theoretical orientations or professional backgrounds.

In addition, all nine interviewees were based in Western/Central Europe (France, Germany, Austria, and Belgium). While this still reflects a degree of linguistic and institutional diversity, findings may not fully generalize to EI development in other cultural, institutional, or geographic contexts.

6.2. Future Research

Future research could be extended by examining the perspectives of individuals undergoing EI development programs. Integrating client perspectives would provide a larger understanding of the mechanisms and conditions that foster EI development, allowing for the identification of potential discrepancies between what experts consider important and what clients actually experience as beneficial.

Longitudinal research is also needed to explore how these conditions evolve and interact throughout the developmental process, as different factors may become more or less influential over time.

In addition, future studies should investigate more deeply whether the relative importance of these conditions varies across populations (e.g., managers, students, healthcare professionals, or clinical populations) and cultural contexts.

Finally, the integrative framework proposed in this study could be quantitatively tested to examine the relative contribution and interplay of individual and environmental factors in predicting EI development, thereby informing the design of more targeted and evidence-based interventions.

Author Contributions

Dr. Bellinghausen conceptualized the study, developed the methodology, supervised the research project, and supervised the writing of the manuscript. Data collection interviews were conducted by Sophia Carolin Werner, a bachelor's student in Work and Organizational Psychology. Anna Komkova and Tanja Martin contributed to the literature review, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings. They also critically reviewed and revised the manuscript. All authors contributed to the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Aldao, A., Nolen-Hoeksema, S., & Schweizer, S. (2010). Emotion-Regulation Strategies across Psychopathology: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 30*, 217-237. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.11.004>
- Arnsten, A. F. T. (2015). Stress Weakens Prefrontal Networks: Molecular Insults to Higher Cognition. *Nature Neuroscience, 18*, 1376-1385. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn.4087>
- Baltes, P. B. (1987). Theoretical Propositions of Life-Span Developmental Psychology: On the Dynamics between Growth and Decline. *Developmental Psychology, 23*, 611-626. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.23.5.611>
- Bar-On, R. (1997). *BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory: Technical Manual*. Multi-Health Systems.
- Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (2013). *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. Routledge.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (2001). How and Why Individuals Are Able to Develop Emotional Intelligence. In C. Cherniss, & D. Goleman (Eds.), *The Emotionally Intelligent Workplace: How to Select for, Measure, and Improve Emotional Intelligence in Individuals, Groups, and Organizations* (pp. 234-253). Jossey-Bass.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (2008). Competencies in the 21st Century. *Journal of Management Development, 27*, 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710810840730>
- Boyatzis, R. E., & Akrivou, K. (2006). The Ideal Self as the Driver of Intentional Change. *Journal of Management Development, 25*, 624-642. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02621710610678454>
- Boyatzis, R. E., Smith, M. L., & Van Oosten, E. (2019). *Helping People Change: Coaching with Compassion for Lifelong Learning and Growth*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., & Salovey, P. (2011). Emotional Intelligence: Implications for Personal, Social, Academic, and Workplace Success. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 5*, 88-103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00334.x>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Cabrera, Y., Koymans, K. J., Poe, G. R., Kessels, H. W., Van Someren, E. J. W., & Wassing, R. (2024). Overnight Neuronal Plasticity and Adaptation to Emotional Distress. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 25*, 253-271. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41583-024-00799-w>
- Carmeli, A., Brueller, D., & Dutton, J. E. (2009). Learning Behaviours in the Workplace: The Role of High-Quality Interpersonal Relationships and Psychological Safety. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science, 26*, 81-98. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.932>
- Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2004). *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager: How to Develop and Use the Four Key Emotional Skills of Leadership*. Wiley.
- Carver, S. J., & Woodley, H. J. R. (2026). Emotional Intelligence and Business Ethics: Feeling Confident in Doing the Right Thing. *Journal of Business Ethics, 203*, 769-786. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-025-06044-3>
- Chernis, C., & Adler, M. (2023). *Promoting Emotional Intelligence in Organizations*. Association for Talent Development.
- Chi, M. T. H. (2006). Two Approaches to the Study of Experts' Characteristics. In K. A.

- Ericsson, N. Charness, P. J. Feltovich, & R. R. Hoffman (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance* (pp. 21-30). Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511816796.002>
- Ciarrochi, J. V., Chan, A. Y. C., & Bajgar, J. (2001). Measuring Emotional Intelligence in Adolescents. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 31, 1105-1119.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/s0191-8869\(00\)00207-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0191-8869(00)00207-5)
- Cipriano, C., Strambler, M. J., Naples, L. H., Ha, C., Kirk, M., Wood, M. et al. (2023). The State of Evidence for Social and Emotional Learning: A Contemporary Meta-Analysis of Universal School-Based SEL Interventions. *Child Development*, 94, 1181-1204.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13968>
- Coronado-Maldonado, I., & Benítez-Márquez, M. D. (2023). Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, and Work Teams: A Hybrid Literature Review. *Heliyon*, 9, e20356.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e20356>
- Côté, S. (2014). Emotional Intelligence in Organizations. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, 459-488.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091233>
- Damasio, A. R. (1994). *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. Putnam.
- Davis, S. K., & Humphrey, N. (2014). Ability versus Trait Emotional Intelligence. *Journal of Individual Differences*, 35, 54-62. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000127>
- Denham, S. A. (1998). *Emotional Development in Young Children*. Guilford Press.
- Diamond, L. M., & Aspinwall, L. G. (2003). Emotion Regulation across the Life Span: An Integrative Perspective Emphasizing Self-Regulation, Positive Affect, and Dyadic Processes. *Motivation and Emotion*, 27, 125-156. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1024521920068>
- Diefendorff, J. M., Erickson, R. J., Grandey, A. A., & Dahling, J. J. (2011). Emotional Display Rules as Work Unit Norms: A Multilevel Analysis of Emotional Labor among Nurses. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 16, 170-186.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021725>
- Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (Vol. 276)*. Random House.
- Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44, 350-383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- Eisenberg, N., Cumberland, A., & Spinrad, T. L. (1998). Parental Socialization of Emotion. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9, 241-273. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0904_1
- England-Mason, G., Andrews, K., Atkinson, L., & Gonzalez, A. (2023). Emotion Socialization Parenting Interventions Targeting Emotional Competence in Young Children: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 100, Article 102252. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2023.102252>
- Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Römer, C. (1993). The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance. *Psychological Review*, 100, 363-406.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.100.3.363>
- Esnaola, I., Revuelta, L., Ros, I., & Sarasa, M. (2017). The Development of Emotional Intelligence in Adolescence. *Anales de Psicología*, 33, 327-333.
- Farh, C. I., Seo, M. G., & Tesluk, P. E. (2012). Emotional Intelligence, Teamwork Effectiveness, and Job Performance: The Moderating Role of Job Context. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97, 890-900. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027377>
- Ford, B. Q., & Gross, J. J. (2019). Why Beliefs about Emotion Matter: An Emotion-Regulation Perspective. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 28, 74-81.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721418806697>

- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56, 218-226. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.56.3.218>
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Joiner, T. (2018). Reflections on Positive Emotions and Upward Spirals. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13, 194-199. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617692106>
- Frijda, N. H. (1986). *The Emotions: Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gegenfurtner, A., Knogler, M., & Schwab, S. (2020). Transfer Interest: Measuring Interest in Training Content and Interest in Training Transfer. *Human Resource Development International*, 23, 146-167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2019.1644002>
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books.
- Gottman, J. M., Katz, L. F., & Hooven, C. (1996). Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy and the Emotional Life of Families: Theoretical Models and Preliminary Data. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 10, 243-268. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.10.3.243>
- Grandey, A. A., & Melloy, R. C. (2017). The State of the Heart: Emotional Labor as Emotion Regulation Reviewed and Revised. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22, 407-422. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000067>
- Greenberg, L. (2023). Changing Emotion with Emotion. *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies*, 22, 368-383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2023.2234966>
- Greenberg, L. S. (2015). *Emotion-Focused Therapy: Coaching Clients to Work through Their Feelings* (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association.
- Greenberg, L. S. (2021). *Changing Emotion with Emotion: A Practitioner's Guide*. American Psychological Association.
- Gross, J. J. (1998). The Emerging Field of Emotion Regulation: An Integrative Review. *Review of General Psychology*, 2, 271-299. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.3.271>
- Gross, J. J. (2002). Emotion Regulation: Affective, Cognitive, and Social Consequences. *Psychophysiology*, 39, 281-291. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0048577201393198>
- Gross, J. J. (2014). Emotion Regulation: Conceptual and Empirical Foundations. In J. J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of Emotion Regulation* (2nd ed., pp. 3-20). Guilford Press.
- Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 26, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840x.2014.940781>
- Gross, J. J., & Ford, B. Q. (2023). *Handbook of Emotion Regulation* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.
- Haag, C., Bellinghausen, L., & Jilinskaya-Pandey, M. (2023). QEPro: An Ability Measure of Emotional Intelligence for Managers in a French Cultural Environment. *Current Psychology*, 42, 4080-4102. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-01715-6>
- Haag, C., Bellinghausen, L., & Poirier, C. (2025). Ability Emotional Intelligence Profiles and Real-Life Outcomes: A Latent Profile Analysis of a Large Adult Sample. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, Article 1465774. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1465774>
- Haag, C., Poirier, C., & Bellinghausen, L. (2024). Emotional Intelligence and the Dark Triad: A Latent Profile Analysis to Investigate the Jekyll and Hyde of the Emotionally Intelligent Manager. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, Article 1459997. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1459997>
- Harper, S. R., & White, C. D. (2013). The Impact of Member Emotional Intelligence on Psychological Safety in Work Teams. *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management*, 15, 2-18. <https://doi.org/10.21818/001c.17933>

- Harris, V. W., Anderson, J., & Visconti, B. (2022). Social Emotional Ability Development (SEAD): An Integrated Model of Practical Emotion-Based Competencies. *Motivation and Emotion*, 46, 226-253. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-021-09922-1>
- Hayes, S. C., & Hofmann, S. G. (2017). The Third Wave of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and the Rise of Process-Based Care. *World Psychiatry*, 16, 245-246. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20442>
- Hayes, S. C., Wilson, K. G., Gifford, E. V., Follette, V. M., & Strosahl, K. (1996). Experiential Avoidance and Behavioral Disorders: A Functional Dimensional Approach to Diagnosis and Treatment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 64, 1152-1168. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006x.64.6.1152>
- He, Q., Ye, Y., Liang, J., & Zheng, B. (2026). The Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Resilience in Healthcare Practitioners and Students: A Multilevel Meta-Analysis. *BMC Medical Education*, 26, Article No. 404. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-026-08619-8>
- Hodzic, S., Scharfen, J., Ripoll, P., Holling, H., & Zenasni, F. (2018). How Efficient Are Emotional Intelligence Trainings: A Meta-Analysis. *Emotion Review*, 10, 138-148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073917708613>
- Hoemann, K., Xu, F., & Barrett, L. F. (2019). Emotion Words, Emotion Concepts, and Emotional Development in Children: A Constructionist Hypothesis. *Developmental Psychology*, 55, 1830-1849. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000686>
- Hu, T., Zhang, D., Wang, J., Mistry, R., Ran, G., & Wang, X. (2014). Relation between Emotion Regulation and Mental Health: A Meta-Analysis Review. *Psychological Reports*, 114, 341-362. <https://doi.org/10.2466/03.20.pr0.114k22w4>
- Illeris, K. (2017). *How We Learn: Learning and Non-Learning in School and beyond* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Kalisch, R., Cramer, A. O. J., Binder, H., Fritz, J., Leertouwer, I., Lunansky, G. et al. (2019). Deconstructing and Reconstructing Resilience: A Dynamic Network Approach. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14, 765-777. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619855637>
- Kashdan, T. B., & Rottenberg, J. (2010). Psychological Flexibility as a Fundamental Aspect of Health. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30, 865-878. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.03.001>
- Kashdan, T. B., Barrett, L. F., & McKnight, P. E. (2015). Unpacking Emotion Differentiation: Transforming Unpleasant Experience by Perceiving Distinctions in Negativity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24, 10-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414550708>
- Kashdan, T. B., Rose, P., & Fincham, F. D. (2004). Curiosity and Exploration: Facilitating Positive Subjective Experiences and Personal Growth Opportunities. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 82, 291-305. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa8203_05
- Kilduff, M., Chiaburu, D. S., & Menges, J. I. (2010). Strategic Use of Emotional Intelligence in Organizational Settings: Exploring the Dark Side. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30, 129-152. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2010.10.002>
- Kotsou, I., Mikolajczak, M., Heeren, A., Grégoire, J., & Leys, C. (2019). Improving Emotional Intelligence: A Systematic Review of Existing Work and Future Challenges. *Emotion Review*, 11, 151-165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073917735902>
- Kotsou, I., Nelis, D., Grégoire, J., & Mikolajczak, M. (2011). Emotional Plasticity: Conditions and Effects of Improving Emotional Competence in Adulthood. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96, 827-839. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023047>
- Kuckartz, U. (2016). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Methoden, Praxis, Computerunterstützung*

(3., überarbeitete Aufl). Beltz.

- Kuckartz, U., & Rädiker, S. (2024). Transkriptionsregeln, Hinweise zur automatischen Transkription. *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse*.
- Lane, R. D., & Schwartz, G. E. (1987). Levels of Emotional Awareness: A Cognitive-Developmental Theory and Its Application to Psychopathology. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 144, 133-143.
- Lane, R. D., & Smith, R. (2021). Levels of Emotional Awareness: Theory and Measurement of a Socio-Emotional Skill. *Journal of Intelligence*, 9, Article 42. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence9030042>
- Lim, M. D., & Lau, M. C. (2021). Can We “Brain-Train” Emotional Intelligence? A Narrative Review on the Features and Approaches Used in Ability EI Training Studies. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 569749. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.569749>
- Lopes, P. N., Brackett, M. A., Nezlek, J. B., Schütz, A., Sellin, I., & Salovey, P. (2004). Emotional Intelligence and Social Interaction. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 1018-1034. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167204264762>
- Lopes, P. N., Salovey, P., & Straus, R. (2003). Emotional Intelligence, Personality, and the Perceived Quality of Social Relationships. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 35, 641-658. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0191-8869\(02\)00242-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0191-8869(02)00242-8)
- Lopes, P. N., Salovey, P., Côté, S., & Beers, M. (2005). Emotion Regulation Abilities and the Quality of Social Interaction. *Emotion*, 5, 113-118. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.5.1.113>
- Martínez-Rodríguez, A., & Ferreira, C. (2025). Factors Influencing the Development of Emotional Intelligence in University Students. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 40, Article 60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-025-00956-4>
- Martins, A., Ramalho, N., & Morin, E. (2010). A Comprehensive Meta-Analysis of the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Health. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 49, 554-564. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2010.05.029>
- Matsumoto, D., Yoo, S. H., & Fontaine, J. (2008). Mapping Expressive Differences around the World: The Relationship between Emotional Display Rules and Individualism versus Collectivism. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 39, 55-74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022107311854>
- Matthews, G., Zeidner, M., & Roberts, R. D. (2004). *Emotional Intelligence: Science and Myth*. MIT Press.
- Mattingly, V., & Kraiger, K. (2019). Can Emotional Intelligence Be Trained? A Meta-Analytical Investigation. *Human Resource Management Review*, 29, 140-155. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.03.002>
- Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2016). The Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence: Principles and Updates. *Emotion Review*, 8, 290-300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073916639667>
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2000). Emotional Intelligence as Zeitgeist, as Personality, and as a Mental Ability. In R. Bar-On, & J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Development, Assessment, and Application at Home, School, and in the Workplace* (pp. 92-117). Jossey-Bass.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2004). Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings, and Implications. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15, 197-215. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1503_02
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2008). Emotional Intelligence: New Ability or

- Eclectic Traits? *American Psychologist*, 63, 503-517.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.63.6.503>
- McAnally, K., & Hagger, M. S. (2024). Self-Determination Theory and Workplace Outcomes: A Conceptual Review and Future Research Directions. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14, Article 428. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14060428>
- Meerum Terwogt, M., & Stegge, H. (2001). The Development of Emotional Intelligence. In I. M. Goodyer (Ed.), *The Depressed Child and Adolescent* (2nd ed., pp. 24-45). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511543821.003>
- Mehler, M., Balint, E., Gralla, M., Pöbnecker, T., Gast, M., Hölzer, M. et al. (2024). Training Emotional Competencies at the Workplace: A Systematic Review and Metaanalysis. *BMC Psychology*, 12, Article No. 718. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-02198-3>
- Miao, C., Humphrey, R. H., & Qian, S. (2018). Emotional Intelligence and Authentic Leadership: A Meta-Analysis. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 39, 679-690. <https://doi.org/10.1108/lodj-02-2018-0066>
- Mikolajczak, M. (2010). Integrating Ability and Trait Perspectives in the Prediction and Management of Stress. In *15th European Conference of Personality*. Brno, Czech Republic.
- Milbocker, K. A., Smith, I. F., & Klintsova, A. Y. (2024). Maintaining a Dynamic Brain: A Review of Empirical Findings Describing the Roles of Exercise, Learning, and Environmental Enrichment in Neuroplasticity from 2017-2023. *Brain Plasticity*, 9, 75-95. <https://doi.org/10.3233/bpl-230151>
- Morris, A. S., Silk, J. S., Steinberg, L., Myers, S. S., & Robinson, L. R. (2007). The Role of the Family Context in the Development of Emotion Regulation. *Social Development*, 16, 361-388. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2007.00389.x>
- Newman, A., Donohue, R., & Eva, N. (2017). Psychological Safety: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27, 521-535. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.01.001>
- Normann, N., & Morina, N. (2018). The Efficacy of Metacognitive Therapy: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, Article 2211. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02211>
- O'Boyle Jr, E. H., Humphrey, R. H., Pollack, J. M., Hawver, T. H., & Story, P. A. (2011). The Relation between Emotional Intelligence and Job Performance: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 32, 788-818. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.714>
- O'Connor, P. J., Hill, A., Kaya, M., & Martin, B. (2019). The Measurement of Emotional Intelligence: A Critical Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Researchers and Practitioners. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 1116. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01116>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42, 533-544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Paredes-Saavedra, M., Huanca-Cruz, J. M., Cruz, Z. R. M. L., Calsin-Pacompa, J., & Morales-García, W. C. (2026). Emotional Intelligence, Transformational Leadership, and Team Effectiveness: A Systematic Review and Correlational Meta-Analysis. *Administrative Sciences*, 16, Article 116. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci16030116>
- Pascual-Leone, A., & Greenberg, L. S. (2007). Emotional Processing in Experiential Therapy: Why "the Only Way Out Is through." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*

- ogy, 75, 875-887. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006x.75.6.875>
- Passmore, J., & Lai, Y. L. (2019). Coaching Psychology: Exploring Definitions and Research Contribution to Practice? *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 14, 69-83. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsicpr.2019.14.2.69>
- Persich Durham, M. R., Smith, R., Cloonan, S., Hildebrand, L. L., Woods-Lubert, R. et al. (2023). Development and Validation of an Online Emotional Intelligence Training Program. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1221817. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1221817>
- Petrides, K. V. (2011). Ability and Trait Emotional Intelligence. In T. Chamorro-Premuzic, S. von Stumm, & A. Furnham (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Individual Differences* (pp. 656-678). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Petrides, K. V., & Furnham, A. (2000). On the Dimensional Structure of Emotional Intelligence. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 29, 313-320. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0191-8869\(99\)00195-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0191-8869(99)00195-6)
- Petrides, K. V., & Furnham, A. (2003). Trait Emotional Intelligence: Behavioural Validation in Two Studies of Emotion Recognition and Reactivity to Mood Induction. *European Journal of Personality*, 17, 39-57. <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.466>
- Petrides, K. V., Mikolajczak, M., Mavroveli, S., Sanchez-Ruiz, M. J., Furnham, A., & Pérez-González, J. C. (2016). Developments in Trait Emotional Intelligence Research. *Emotion Review*, 8, 335-341. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073916650493>
- Petrova, K., & Gross, J. J. (2023). The Future of Emotion Regulation Research: Broadening Our Field of View. *Affective Science*, 4, 609-616. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-023-00222-0>
- Ragins, B. R., Ehrhardt, K., Lyness, K. S., Murphy, D. D., & Capman, J. F. (2020). Anchoring Relationships at Work: High-Quality Mentors and Other Supportive Relationships as Developmental Resources. *Human Resource Management Review*, 30, Article 100693.
- Roberts, R. D., Schulze, R., & MacCann, C. (2008). The Measurement of Emotional Intelligence: A Decade of Progress? In *The SAGE Handbook of Personality Theory and Assessment: Volume 2—Personality Measurement and Testing* (pp. 461-482). Sage Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849200479.n22>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation from a Self-Determination Theory Perspective: Definitions, Theory, Practices, and Future Directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, Article 101860. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional Intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9, 185-211. <https://doi.org/10.2190/dugg-p24e-52wk-6cdg>
- Schlegel, K., & Mortillaro, M. (2019). The Geneva Emotional Competence Test (GECe): An Ability Measure of Workplace Emotional Intelligence. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 104, 559-580. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000365>
- Shields, G. S., Sazma, M. A., McCullough, A. M., & Yonelinas, A. P. (2017). The Effects of Acute Stress on Episodic Memory: A Meta-Analysis and Integrative Review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 143, 636-675. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000100>
- Siegler, R. S., DeLoache, J. S., & Eisenberg, N. (2011). *How Children Develop* (3rd International ed.). Worth Publishers.
- Škrinjarčić, B. (2022). Competence-Based Approaches in Organizational and Individual Context. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01047-1>
- Slemp, G. R., Lee, M. A., & Mossman, L. H. (2021). Interventions to Support Autonomy,

- Competence, and Relatedness Needs in Organizations: A Systematic Review with Recommendations for Research and Practice. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 94, 427-457. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12338>
- Smith, R., Steklis, H. D., Steklis, N. G., Weihs, K. L., & Lane, R. D. (2020). The Evolution and Development of the Uniquely Human Capacity for Emotional Awareness: A Synthesis of Comparative Anatomical, Cognitive, Neurocomputational, and Evolutionary Psychological Perspectives. *Biological Psychology*, 154, Article 107925. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsycho.2020.107925>
- Streubel, B., Khammous, N., Gunzenhauser, C., & Saalbach, H. (2024). Emotion-Specific Vocabulary and Its Relation to Emotion Understanding in Children and Adolescents. *Cognition and Emotion*, 38, 789-804.
- Tracy, J. L., & Robins, R. W. (2004). Putting the Self into Self-Conscious Emotions: A Theoretical Model. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15, 103-125. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1502_01
- Troy, A. S., Willroth, E. C., Shallcross, A. J., Giuliani, N. R., Gross, J. J., & Mauss, I. B. (2023). Psychological Resilience: An Affect-Regulation Framework. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 74, 547-576. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-020122-041854>
- Tse, H. H. M., Troth, A. C., Ashkanasy, N. M., & Collins, A. L. (2018). Affect and Leader-Member Exchange in the New Millennium: A State-of-Art Review and Guiding Framework. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 29, 135-149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.10.002>
- Tuck, D., & Patlamazoglou, L. (2019). The Relationship between Traumatic Stress, Emotional Intelligence, and Posttraumatic Growth. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 24, 721-735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2019.1621543>
- Van Kleef, G. A. (2009). How Emotions Regulate Social Life: The Emotions as Social Information (EASI) Model. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18, 184-188. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01633.x>
- Van Kleef, G. A. (2016). *The Interpersonal Dynamics of Emotion: Toward an Integrative Theory of Emotions as Social Information*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107261396>
- Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., & Young, T. (2018). Characterising and Justifying Sample Size Sufficiency in Interview-Based Studies: Systematic Analysis of Qualitative Health Research over a 15-Year Period. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 18, Article No. 148. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7>
- Vernon, P. A., Villani, V. C., Schermer, J. A., & Petrides, K. V. (2008). A Behavioral Genetic Study of Trait Emotional Intelligence. *Emotion*, 8, 635-642. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013439>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets That Promote Resilience: When Students Believe That Personal Characteristics Can Be Developed. *Educational Psychologist*, 47, 302-314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2012.722805>
- Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2020). What Can Be Learned from Growth Mindset Controversies? *American Psychologist*, 75, 1269-1284. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000794>
- Zahl-Olsen, R., Severinsen, L., Stiegler, J. R., Fernee, C. R., Simhan, I., Rekdal, S. S. et al. (2023). Effects of Emotionally Oriented Parental Interventions: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1159892.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1159892>

Zeidner, M., Matthews, G., & Roberts, R. D. (2004). Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace: A Critical Review. *Applied Psychology*, 53, 371-399.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2004.00176.x>

Zeidner, M., Matthews, G., & Roberts, R. D. (2012a). The Emotional Intelligence, Health, and Well-Being Nexus: What Have We Learned and What Have We Missed? *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 4, 1-30.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-0854.2011.01062.x>

Zeidner, M., Matthews, G., & Roberts, R. D. (2012b). *What We Know about Emotional Intelligence: How It Affects Learning, Work, Relationships, and Our Mental Health*. MIT Press.

Zeidner, M., Matthews, G., Roberts, R. D., & MacCann, C. (2003). Development of Emotional Intelligence: Towards a Multi-Level Investment Model. *Human Development*, 46, 69-96. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000068580>