Emotional Intelligence: a Competitive Advantage for Tourism and Hospitality Managers

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a better understanding of tourism and hospitality management through exploring the perceptions of and the application of emotional intelligence (EI) in the practices of managers. The effect of EI on improving business performance is widely acknowledged in business and management studies. However, there is limited research in the context of tourism and hospitality industries. The paper contributes to the literature through a qualitative study of the perceptions and experiences of middle-level managers. Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in tourism and hospitality organisations in the UK. The findings of the study reveal that EI can have a positive contribution to improving staff satisfaction, motivation and overall business productivity. They highlight the importance of building quality relationships among staff and the critical role middle management has in an organisation. Based on the finding from the qualitative inquiry, the authors propose a model conceptualising the role of managers' EI in creating a competitive advantage for the organisation. Practical implications are discussed and recommendations for further research are provided.

Key words: emotional intelligence, staff satisfaction, self-regulation, staff motivation, tourism and hospitality industries, qualitative methodology

Introduction

In the context of an increasingly competitive and fast-changing business environment, emotional intelligence (EI) has been recognized for its potential to contribute to job satisfaction, better work performance and commitment to achieving the organisation's goals (Ashkanasy, 2003; Carmeli, 2003; Goleman et al., 2002; O'Boyle et al., 2011; Prati et al., 2003; Shooshtarian et al., 2013; Wong & Law, 2002). Studies show that employee satisfaction has positive correlation with productivity, customer loyalty and profitability, and a negative link with staff turnover (Krekel et al., 2019). EI has long been the focus of research in business management studies, leadership and organisational development. However, the concept is relatively new among tourism and hospitality (T&H) scholars (Darvishmotevali at al., 2018). The T&H industry is falling behind other sectors in developing and sustaining 21st-century leadership talent (Baum, 2015) and people resourcing continues to be a pressing issue (Enz, 2009). Researchers are raising the issue that workforce research is a relatively under-represented theme in the T&H literature and the key industry discourse (Baum et al., 2016), which suggests a significant disconnect between academia and the industry's needs.

This paper provides a better understanding of T&H management through exploring the perceptions of and the application of EI in the practices of middle-level managers. The research sets out to achieve three key objectives. Firstly, to provide an overview of existing research on EI and its key elements and dimensions in the T&H context. Secondly, to investigate the awareness of managers in T&H businesses of the concept of EI and its key elements. Lastly, to critically evaluate the perceptions of managers of the role of EI in relation to employees' job satisfaction and productivity, and the related management practices. The paper makes a significant contribution to the growing body of literature through the development of a model conceptualising the role of managers' EI in creating a

competitive advantage for the organisation. Practical and theoretical implications are also offered in the last section.

EI is of particular relevance to T&H, where service quality and business success is heavily dependent on staff performance and the effective interaction between managers and their direct reports (Mullins & Dossor, 2013; Nickson, 2013). The emotional nature of the industry brings unique challenges for staff and requires well developed EI at all organisational levels to successfully compete in this high-pressure working environment. Work tasks involve frequent personal interactions between employees and customers resulting in their exposure to the negative effects of burnout and job dissatisfaction (Pizam, 2004). Therefore, EI is a key factor for service staff, who need to be able to manage their own and customers' emotions in order to achieve high standard of service delivery and effective service recovery (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018). T&H organisations are increasingly using EI to drive business success through promoting self-efficacy at work (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016) and developing leadership capacities (Antonakis et al., 2009; Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; George, 2000). All these areas have the potential to create a competitive advantage for the T&H organisations, thus helping them achieve long term sustainability.

A balanced EI skill set enables managers to recognise and manage their own emotions and those of others, thus making more confident decisions and effectively leading staff. Self-awareness of emotions and the ability to use it to effectively interact with subordinates is among the crucial capabilities of managers (Butler et al., 2014; Kriegl, 2000), especially when working with a multicultural and diverse workforce. Past research focuses on frontline employees' EI and its importance for enhancing the customer experience. However, the context of middle-level managerial performance has remained under-studied. This leaves a significant gap in the current management research.

The middle-level management has been largely overlooked in the literature even though previous research found that job requirements at the top levels of the organisation are different from those at lower levels (Mumford at.al., 2007). EI is directly related to middle-level manager performance, since middle-level managers are responsible for linking the decisions of senior management to the often conflicting realities of their direct reports. They are also 'stuck in the middle' and in order to perform their job, they need strong social skills to successfully build and manage quality relationships with various stakeholders.

Theoretical Review

Emotional Intelligence – Definitions, Advocates and Critics

EI is a complex concept and variations in both its definition and its key elements are common among academics and practitioners. It is defined as "*the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others*" (Mayer et al., 2007, p. 82). The concept of EI was introduced to the business and management field by Salovey and Mayer (1990) who linked the ability to regulate emotions with improved problem solving and overall performance. Over the last decades, the concept has evolved into a set of abilities that enable the individual to understand and manage one's own emotions and act upon them in relation to established ethical standards and in response to the social and environmental requirements (Abraham, 2006; Bharwaney-Orme & Bar-On., 2002; Brackett et al., 2006; Côté, 2014; Dulewicz & Higgs, 1999; Mayer et al., 2004; Wong & Law, 2002; among others).

EI can enable professionals to create positive mindsets and emotional experiences. In turn, this helps to improve their communication and ability to effectively cope with stressful situations (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Lopes et al., 2005). By relating emotionally with their employees, managers are able to create an environment for successful teamwork (Gardner &

Stough, 2002; Kernbach & Schutte, 2005). Despite the complexities surrounding the concept, there is an overall consensus that EI could be enhanced and cultivated over time with greater experience and suitable training (Ashkanasy et al., 2002; Goleman, 1999; Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019).

The concept has attracted a lot of scepticism because of its elusive and somewhat controversial construct. Some scholars have labelled EI the 'curse of emotion' phenomenon and queried its potential to improve performance (Antonakis et.al, 2009). They have argued that the weak foundations of EI as a theoretical construct and the use of wrong methodologies raise questions about the validity of the concept. In addition, EI and emotional labour are often used interchangeably, which contributes further to the confusion and misunderstanding (Wong and Law, 2002). Both concepts are inter-related and important as studies show that the emotional labour of the job determines the EI - job outcome relationship, therefore EI is more important for jobs that require higher emotional labour, such as those in T&H.

Key Domains of Emotional Intelligence and Specific Skills

EI has been developed through a large number of competing models for measuring EI (Mayer at al., 2007; Goleman and Boyatzis, 2017). Some of them (for example Mayer and Salovey's model, 1997) focus on mental abilities whilst other models mix mental abilities with personal attributes (for instance, Bar-On, 1997 and Goleman, 1996). All models identify major areas of skill (domains) and specific skills that make up the specific domain. Selected models are presented in Table 1. While these competencies have been adopted in a number of studies (Côté & Miners, 2006; Darvishmotevali et al., 2018; Wong & Law, 2002), their main limitation is that they originate from different contexts and are supported by limited empirical evidence.

Table 1 HERE

In order to address the shortcomings of the various models, for the purpose of this study, an initial conceptual framework was developed (Figure 1) based on past research. It comprises five domains: self- awareness, self-management, self-motivation, empathy and social competence. Each domain is supported by a set of specific skills and brief overview of the domains is offered in the sections below.

Figure 1 HERE

Self-awareness is the foundation of EI and is considered a critical competency of managers and leaders. This is the skill of recognising one's own emotions and understanding the way they are perceived by others through accurately assessing own emotional state. Professionals who possess high self-awareness are able to accurately identify the emotions they experience as individuals, recognize the impact of their behaviour on others and adjust their approach when making decisions (Atwater et al., 2005; George, 2000). By using self-awareness, managers are able to encourage cooperation and create collective goals among their subordinates/direct reports. This, in turn, contributes not only to their own growth but also to their employees' success and satisfaction and ultimately, translates into improved performance (Bratton et al., 2011; Carmeli, 2003; Klenke, 2007).

The second domain of EI is concerned with the ability to self-manage. Being conscious of one's own and of others' emotional state relates to one's ability to control and facilitate these inner feelings in order to cope with challenging situations (Goleman, 1996). Studies reveal that individuals who possess this ability are better equipped to govern their actions and adjust to different situations, thus encouraging positive emotional responses (Boyatzis et al., 2000; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Managers who have mastered the art of self-management have a strong influence on their subordinates' actions (Bagshaw, 2000; Sivanathan & Fekken, 2002). Caruso and Wolfe (2001) argue that the ability to self-regulate promotes better channels of communication and encourages the exchange of ideas.

Managing one's own emotions and aligning them to achieve the desired goals is at the heart of self-motivation. Past research shows that EI contributes to the individual's attitude towards their work, creating higher levels of motivation and greater organisational commitment (Carmeli, 2003). Coetzee and Harry (2014) claim that well-developed EI supports the willingness to master the challenges and tasks related to one's career, along with seeking new opportunities and planning career goals. There is a general consensus that self-motivated employees are more engaged and productive. The labour-intensive nature of service work presents staff with emotional challenges on a daily basis. This places even greater emphasis on the ability to self-motivate in order to effectively cope with challenges and achieve organisational targets (Cavelzani et al., 2003). Managers are not only expected to sustain their own motivation. They also have to lead by example and promote energy and drive as a way to support their staff to achieve the collective goals and deliver higher service quality (Bagshaw, 2000; George, 2000; Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Mullins & Dossor, 2013; Wong & Law, 2002; Wilton, 2013).

Previous studies on EI of business executives reveal that the most successful managers are those who are most able to associate with the feelings and behaviours of their employees and provide the support needed (Kellett et al., 2006; Humphrey, 2013). Therefore, empathy is considered a fundamental 'people skill' (Goleman, 1996). It is based on emotional self-awareness, more specifically, on the ability to stay attuned to the feelings, emotions and experiences of others and, accordingly, make the effort to meet their emotional needs. The ability to put themselves in someone else's shoes can give managers an important insight into the reasons for underperformance and actions that need to be taken. Genuine interest in others and active listening can assist with developing empathy for the team and identifying appropriate ways to motivate them.

Empathy is one of the competencies in the CMI Professional Standards Framework. Leadership theories postulate that, when used appropriately by managers, empathy can make staff feel valued and understood, which in turn leads to higher engagement and productivity. Empathetic leadership styles are more likely to yield positive results than the self-focused and aggressive style of the command-and-control approach to management (CMI, 2019).

Social competence is the interpersonal dimension of EI. It refers to the skill of managing emotions in others effectively (Goleman, 1996). Social competence includes a number of abilities: the ability to communicate effectively with different audiences, in different contexts and degrees of complexity; to influence others throughout the line of management; to develop and nurture others; to encourage collaboration and teamwork; prevent disputes from arising and resolve disagreements (Boyatzis et al., 2000). Cherniss and Goleman (2001) point out that individuals excelling in these people skills encourage positive emotional experiences in their interactions with others. They are able to create shared vision and goals among subordinates, encouraging them to achieve and exceed the set business targets (Ployhart et al., 2001).

Why T&H Leaders Need EI?

EI has been gaining popularity in the recruitment of employees (Kusluvan et al., 2010). Industry reports highlight the high rates of staff turnover and issues of staff retention, which ultimately have a negative impact on business productivity, staff attitudes and staff morale (People 1st, 2015). The existing gap in essential skills has also been a critical point put forward by T&H businesses in the UK context, with insufficient managerial skills identified as a primary issue (Institute of Hospitality, 2016; People 1st, 2017). Staff engagement is recognised as a crucial driver for organisational success in the context of a growing number (and range) of managerial objectives (Lee & Ok, 2012, 2015). Past research shows that EI is

associated with effective performance in leadership and customer service (Mattingly and Kraiger (2019), and staff development through training (Day, 2000).

T&H studies show a shift in research interest from burnout and emotional labour to more positive perspectives such as job engagement and EI (Kim et al., 2009). Contemporary research places the focus on frontline employees and is concerned with the relationship between EI and creative performance (Darvishmotevali et al., 2018), coping styles (Kim & Agrusa, 2011), emotional labour acting strategies (Kim et al., 2012), employee creativity in travel agencies (Tsai & Lee, 2014); service performance of casino hosts (Prentice & King, 2013; Prentice, 2016) and developing emotion recognition abilities (Koc and Boz, 2019). While the influence of the manager's EI on employee performance has been acknowledged (Langhorn, 2004; Cichy et.al., 2007; Scott-Halsell et al., 2008; Weber & Ladkin, 2010), the managerial context has attracted little attention. Haver et al. (2014) make a notable contribution by examining how experienced hospitality leaders (GMs) in the Scandinavian countries use Emotional Regulation to address demanding duties. Overlooking the role of EI in the context of T&H has the potential to help resolve serious performance issues in the face of increasing globalisation, structural changes induced by pandemics and the cultural diversity of the workforce and customer base in leading destinations.

Methodology

This research adopts a social constructivist approach, which is effective in developing knowledge based on the subjective views of participants and the multiple meaning shaped by social interaction and the personal experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2014). Specifically, it is based on an exploratory qualitative study in which middle-level managers were interviewed face-to-face. Purposive sampling strategy was used to identify potential participants who are of relevance to the study and can provide in-depth information on the

research topic (Patton, 2002). The semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 – 90 minutes each. The interviews were deemed sufficient when a theoretical saturation was achieved and no new themes emerged from the participants' accounts (Bryman, 2012). Data saturation was achieved through 14 interviews (see Table 2), which were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The sample size included middle-level managers working in micro and small T&H businesses. Micro-businesses are defined as businesses that employ fewer than 10 persons, whilst small businesses are defined as businesses that employ fewer than 50 persons (European Commission, 2020). The study participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1/to have been working in a T&H organisation in the last 5 years or longer, 2/to be holding a middle management position and have line management responsibility for at least 5 direct reports; and 3/to be working in a micro or a small organisation (employing between 5-50 employees) at the moment of the interview.

The research included the views of a representative range of professionals. As evident from Table 2, a balanced representation was achieved in terms of size of the organisation, functional areas, seniority, genders and number of direct reports.

Table 2 HERE

An initial conceptual framework derived from the literature review was used to develop the interview protocol which guided the line of investigation during the interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The interview questions were based on the initial conceptual framework (Fig. 1). These addressed the ability of the manager to recognise own emotions and those of direct reports (self-awareness); to adapt quickly to dynamic changes in the workplace (self-regulation); to identify opportunities and challenges and take appropriate actions to achieve targets (self-motivation); listening skills, awareness of the needs of direct reports and related actions (empathy); and strategies to support direct reports (social

competence). While the order of the questions was the same for all interviews, a flexible approach allowed participants to lead the discussion and encouraged them to freely express their views.

Thematic analysis, and more specifically framework analysis was employed to analyse the data and identify themes and patterns (Altinay & Paraskevas 2008; Grey, 2018). Initial codes were generated deductively based on priori research and conceptual framework (Figure 1). Codes were mapped into a pre-existing codebook to assist with the analysis of aspects of the data stemming from the research objectives. Although some of these themes were later modified and new ones emerged from the participants' accounts, the use of predetermined themes proved helpful where the theoretical explanations appeared to fit the data collected from the interviews (Miles & Huberman 1994). The analysis involved manual coding and followed six phases: (i) familiarisation with the data, (ii) generation of initial codes, (iii) search for themes, (iv) review of the themes identified, (v) defining and labelling the themes, and (vi) development of an analytic narrative and thematic map, where the themes cohere around the central concept. The final thematic framework is conceptualised in Figure 2.

Issues regarding the trustworthiness and credibility were addressed through the adoption of a consistent process of collecting, coding, analysing and interpreting the data. The use of a code book provided a clear trail of evidence for the credibility of the study which was further enhanced by ensuring that the data are analysed by more than one researcher (Saunders et al., 2016). The researchers observed Grey's (2018) principles for designing credible qualitative interviews: (i) validity in designing the interview guide, based on prior research and guided by the research objectives, (ii) validity in interviewing (introducing sampling criteria, use of interview protocol and achieving theoretical saturation), and finally (iii) consistency through standardisation of the interview process. The findings

from the interviews were triangulated with secondary sources and informal conversations

with industry professionals. The validity of the research findings was further enhanced by

comparing and contrasting them with those of previous studies and providing 'thick

descriptions' that give insight into the experiences of the study participants as well as into the

context in which they occur.

Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis revealed that EI plays a crucial role in improving business performance

and is a competitive advantage for managers. In the words of a study participant, "*Yes, EI is*

fundamental. When someone feels happy at work, they are more relaxed, more productive;

they are doing things with a better attitude" (Kate). The data confirmed that the EI skill set

has the potential to enhance staff experience and increase the competitiveness of the

organisation in the context of a changing nature of the T&H job (specifically the growth of

the gig economy), emerging new business models and leadership, a changing society

(including the need for more diversity and inclusion), and the impact of technological

developments (such as automation and Artificial Intelligence). The key themes are outlined in

Figure 2, followed by a discussion of the main findings.

<p align="center">**Figure 2 HERE (Thematic framework)**</p>

Self-awareness

There was a shared view among the managers that the need to master self-awareness was

directly linked to the nature of the T&H industry:

> *Because of the nature of my work, every day is different. I'm in the hotel industry, so I*
> *am thrown into certain situations and I need to understand my own emotions.* (Louise)

[E]veryone really puts a lot of feelings and emotion into their work, and I think everyone treats it more as a lifestyle than a job. (Roger)

The majority of the participants felt that EI is especially needed in dealing with the demands of the fast-paced nature of the job:

It's not easy when you are here every day of the week and you have so many responsibilities and things to do. I may forget that an employee is particularly sensitive and I need to be careful in the way I talk to them, so I do not upset them. Sometimes, you simply forget to do that! (Sam)

Sometimes there is no time to actually understand an emotion or to deal with it. (Louise)

Self-awareness was considered especially crucial when working with diverse and multicultural teams:

Quite a lot of people working [in T&H] are foreign. Sometimes it can be difficult, because it's not our first language and we may not phrase something in the most appropriate way. For me, it could be a normal conversation, but someone may find it rude, or not professional. So, I think, awareness of how others feel is important and you just learn with experience. (Sam)

The participants' accounts revealed that the value of self-awareness and self-reflexivity was well-recognised. As other studies (Wilton, 2013) show, the dynamics in the workplace requires well-developed ability to work effectively with staff, be able to delegate and problem-solve. Possessing the ability to accurately evaluate own behaviour and recognise the effectiveness of own leadership style was seen by the participants as fundamental for managers in such a culturally diverse industry as T&H, which directly supports past research (Butler et al., 2014). The data also suggested that self-awareness was often narrowly identified with emotional labour. This finding also appears in previous studies and shows that little progress has been made in the understanding of EI in the last three decades (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 2012, among others).

An interesting aspect emerging from the interviews was that in their business practices managers associated self-awareness with the external customers rather than with staff. When feeling overloaded with work tasks, they focused on understanding and responding to the emotional needs of the customers. In doing so, they would consciously place the emotional needs of their staff in second place.

Self-regulation

Although all participants acknowledged the power of self-regulation, their narratives indicated it was not always used effectively in their work practices. This could be linked to staff dissatisfaction, low engagement and productivity, which most of the managers observed in their teams.

The study participants directly linked the ability to control their emotions with managing the excessive stress in the workplace. Knowing one's emotions and using this knowledge to govern reactions appropriately under stress is at the heart of self-regulation (Boyatzis et al., 2000). As Lopes et al. (2005) point out, individuals who can control own emotions can successfully modulate them and make adequate decisions in stressful situations. In many cases, the focus was once again on the interactions with the external customers, rather than staff. As one participant stated:

> *Sometimes I know how [my team] feels, but we have to be there for the guests. We don't have time to be feeling emotional. We just have to get on with the job.* (Louise)

A new aspect that emerged from the interviews was that some managers interpreted self-regulation as an act of suppressing stress, rather than actively addressing the issues. This could be linked to emotional labour and burnout as defined by Pizam (2004). Staff was expected to accept challenging situations and find a way to show positive emotions in order to perform work duties. Such views could hardly fit the notion of an emotionally intelligent

manager. While some of the study participants were familiar with ways to handle emotions in the workplace, they struggled to describe their own approaches, while others showed little consideration of the needs of staff:

> *You don't adjust [your style] to staff. Staff should adjust to your style.* (Kate)

There was a shared implicit resistance to using flexibility and adjusting management behaviour to the individual needs of staff which conforms with the findings of Boyatzis et al. (2000).

Motivation and Self-motivation to Improve Performance

The importance of staff satisfaction to improve productivity and overall business performance emerged strongly from the participants' accounts. Roger's words summarized everyone's view that *"motivated staff are happy and happy staff are more productive".*

> *[P]roductivity comes with staff satisfaction. People coming to work and feeling happy, having a good time together will make sure that everything is perfect.* (Jim)

The participating managers also suggested that the ability to motivate staff and keep them satisfied was one of the key performance measures. They also felt that they were doing the best they could within their power and remit.

The data revealed that some of the managers struggled to self-motivate. Furthermore, those who found it difficult to sustain their own motivation, experienced issues of low staff motivation and morale among their staff. However, there seemed to be limited understanding of the actions they could undertake to achieve a positive change and approaches employed to motivate staff varied. Wong and Law (2002), too, found that self-motivated leaders are better at managing their teams; they lead by example and can foster the same emotions in their subordinates. Dashborough and Ashkanasy (2002) also argue that leaders' inner motivation

conveys their ability to better stimulate their subordinates, leading to greater employee satisfaction and business success.

The participants' accounts showed different practices to motivate self and staff, and ways to deal with the challenges of the job. Some participants adopted a rather narrow view and somewhat dismissed the need to take any action: "*Motivation? You just do what needs to be done. You simply go and do the job.*" (Anne)

Overall, responses suggested limited awareness of how to use motivation as a performance tool. When asked how they keep themselves motivated, Anne responded, *"it just comes naturally. You learn to do it"*. The majority of the managers shared this view. Such a stance was linked to the perception of limited progression opportunities.

> *There are no opportunities. When I came to this place I was first a waiter, then was promoted to a manager. That's it! So, where else can you promoted? Nowhere. Just enjoy life and do the best you can do.* (Andrew)

Individual practices to motivate staff included "*staying positive myself*" (Louise) and "*just trying to keep that bubble that surrounds you with the positive energy*" (Andrew*).* According to Kate, the best way to enhance staff satisfaction and productivity was to "*keep everyone happy by just being friendly and talking to them. […] make them feel comfortable"*. There was a common view that 'feeling comfortable' and 'satisfied with the job' improves with time, experience and familiarity with the job and the workplace.

While appraisals were regarded as an established tool for improving performance, some questioned its effectiveness. Findings indicated that managers have a rather sceptical, even dismissive view on the importance of setting targets and personal objectives as a means of motivation. While some of the participants used monthly targets in staff appraisals, others argued that these are not an effective way to achieve organisational targets. In some cases, expectations seemed to be based on ambiguous criteria: *"The most important thing is that the*

work is done to meet the highest standards. I want to see that the customer expectations are

met. That's it." (Andrew).

There was a shared belief that employees' motivation to perform better can be enhanced through positive feedback and verbal appreciation.

> *[T]hey know, that I'm going to come to them and say, "Good job. It was really busy, well done!". I think those are the most important things ... I'm trying to make my staff feel appreciated for their hard work.* (Roger)

A recurrent theme was that the participants did not perceive their work as one that provides them with opportunities to develop and exploit their skills and abilities, which is part of the intrinsic motivational factors. They felt that their own performance targets were difficult to achieve and there was no system in place to reward them for their effort and hard work. This fits with Armstrong's findings (2012) and the call for creating more promotion and career progression opportunities (People 1st, 2015) within the industry to encourage engagement and stronger work performance. Such behaviour matches the expectancy theory of motivation and its postulate that an employee's behaviour is based on conscious decisions, with the expectation that efforts would lead to a certain outcome or required performance level.

The Importance of Empathy: "I don't care, shut up"

All managers participating in the study believed that they show empathy towards their staff. However, only a couple of the managers related empathy with understanding the emotions of staff. The majority equated empathy with listening to staff and accommodating requests for shifts, days off and holidays when putting together the rota. This is consistent with other studies which reveal that empathy is the competitive edge leaders are missing. Statistics show that 72% of CEOs feel that empathy needs to evolve and 91% of them believe that empathy is

linked to the financial performance of a company; 92% of employees see empathy as an undervalued trait and 93% state that they are more likely to stay with an empathetic employer (Businessolver, 2018).

There was a shared understanding that empathy has the potential to motivate staff and therefore is an important tool in a manager's toolkit. However, in challenging situations, their own emotions would be priorities over those of the employees.

> *You need to see things from several points of views when you are a manager. And especially when you lead people. Something which for you is a problem, for other people is not. … I try my best and I think I am good at it most of the time, but sometimes my own feelings get involved, I am tired and I'm going to be like "I don't care, shut up".* (Ellie)

Most of the managers seemed to show empathy in their daily practices making subjective judgement about the validity of the issues raised by their staff. Their judgement would reflect their personal beliefs and values.

> *I listen to the problem, the issues that they might have and I act on it if I feel they are justified.* (Andrew)

Participants who demonstrated high degree of empathy also reported that their teams were better motivated and more productive. This supports past research which has found that managers are able to create an environment for successful teamwork by implementing effective adaptive strategies and relating emotionally with their employees (Gardner & Stough, 2002; Langhorn, 2004; Kernbach & Schutte, 2005). Recent studies argue that whist formal strategic plans have a vital role to play in supporting a productive workplace environment, these may achieve their goals only if managers address the individual professional and personal needs of their employees (Fotiadis et al., 2019). In a similar vein, Haver et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of creating a work environment, which

supports team members to grow, thrive, and develop. However, their study showed that not all hospitality leaders are always supportive, empathetic, or good managers in terms of emotional awareness and relationship skills. This is of particular significance in T&H where service quality and business success are heavily dependent on staff and the effective interaction between managers and their direct reports (Nickson, 2013).

Social Competence in Supporting Staff

The ability to handle relationships was seen by the study participants as an effective way to improve performance. Some of the approaches included leading by example (working alongside staff and helping them with the tasks), providing moral support ('being there for them'), building teams, encouraging collaborations, mentoring and providing positive feedback.

> *I think, when you get behind things yourself, this motivates the team. Sometimes you don't have to necessarily say something.* (Louise)

> *When [staff] see that I am there any time for them, they feel motivated, because they see that if they need anything, I can give them a hand.* (Anne)

The value of working as a team in order to achieve goals and tasks was another recurrent theme present in all participants' accounts. Managerial practices included pairing staff and allocation of tasks depending on skill sets.

> *It's really important for me that my team works well together, that they like each other. We had to let a few people go, because they didn't fit into the team.* (Roger)

Achieving the best fit for the team was considered a way to keep staff satisfied and boost productivity. Nevertheless, there seemed to be little evidence of targeted attempts to develop team spirit and improve teamwork. On the contrary, a noticeable pattern among

participants was their propensity to work with a few trusted members of their teams who, they felt, had the knowledge and skills to perform their work. When their 'trusted' staff were not on duty, most of the managers would prefer to perform the tasks themselves: *"well, if I do not have someone that I can trust around me, I just take care of the task myself" (Sam).* There was little, if any, recognition of the need of a fair and equal approach to all staff and staff development.

Creating a common vision and setting goals to achieve are considered to be part of the skill set of leaders with well-developed social competence (Ployhart et al., 2001). As Horvath (2019) points out security, identity, value and sense of control are embedded in the workplace, they lead to enhanced well-being and behavioural adjustment. The findings of this research revealed that despite their desire to develop well-functioning teams, managers either did not set goals and objectives or these were not clearly communicated to employees. This indicates that the managers needed management training into the effective ways to foster teamwork among staff, which ultimately is in the heart of EI. Due to the nature of the work in T&H, tasks (as well as rewards) depend on the contribution of co-workers (Wilton, 2013; Fotiadis et. al, 2019). To achieve organisational effectiveness and productivity, managers should provide greater support to subordinates and aim to create a healthy working environment through an attitude of respect, value and trust (Mullins and Dossor, 2013). The findings of this research show that the issue is much broader and deeper. The role of agency should be strengthened, enforcing accountability and responsibility for people-management practices at all levels within T&H organisations (Baum, 2019).

Synthesis and a Conceptual Model

The findings of the qualitative enquiry confirmed that EI plays a crucial role in the toolkit of the T&H managers. It has the potential to contribute to a greater staff satisfaction, enhance

engagement and productivity, resulting in improved business performance. It can, therefore, create a much-needed competitive advantage for the organisations. Although the importance of EI has been acknowledged, managerial practices varied and actions were often guided by intuition and prior experience rather than personal development training. This, in turn, affected the ability of managers to operationalise it and use it consistently and effectively.

The interview data suggested that organisations encouraged and practiced EI in relation to the external customers rather than their own employees. Companies often adopted (somewhat) short-sighted policies, focusing on short-term operational priorities often using the nature of the T&H industry as an excuse. Managers who participated in the study felt that they had limited resources to motivate staff. To add to this, the industry offered limited opportunities for career progression and fair approach to all employees. Staff were treated as a replaceable resource, rather than a valuable asset, resulting in unhappy employees, dissatisfaction and burnout, high staff turnover, and ultimately poor customer service and loss of competitive edge. The participants' accounts revealed higher staff turnover rates in the hotels where managers had lower levels of awareness and evidence of the application of EI, thus supporting the argument that there is a relationship between EI and staff satisfaction and performance.

Based on the finding from the qualitative inquiry, the authors propose a model conceptualising the role of managers' EI in creating a competitive advantage for the organisation. Figure 3 outlines the added value that EI brings through nurturing the managers' emotional awareness of self and others, self-management, empathy, ability to motivate self and others, and manage complex emotions in others. In any given organisation, the manager's EI interacts with that of the individual employee and the organisational culture. It is then adjusted through training and personal development. This leads to the development of the new, 'transformed' manager, with enhanced EI capabilities, attitude and behaviour.

These, in turn, contribute to quality changes in the organisation's human capital (staff) and internal processes and procedures. The benefits of these transformations are improved staff satisfaction, productivity, commitment, which create a competitive advantage for the organisation, resulting in happy and loyal customers.

<div align="center">**Figure 3 HERE**</div>

Such a model offers a better fits with the new business models and the shifts in social trends which require businesses to move away from the top-down, command-and- control managerial styles operating in many T&H organisations.

Conclusion and Future Research

This research adds a valuable perspective to the current literature in T&H management by exploring a new range of EI aspects within the business practices in the UK context. The specific implications and recommendations are highlighted below.

Theoretical and conceptual implications

From a theoretical perspective, the paper provides a valuable insight into middle-level managers' perceptions and practices of EI and offers a conceptual model that helps with understanding the role of the managers in creating a competitive advantage through EI. The study contributes to the recognition of EI as an important tool in the toolkit of managers operating in an environment of increasing cultural diversity of the workforce, high staff turnover and dynamic changes in the global landscape. Furthermore, it explores EI from the point of view of middle management (agency), which few studies have done and looks at the UK (context) which has not been done before. The study has its limitations. Although rich information was collected from managers through interviews, these were conducted in T&H organisations in the UK. We recommend that future research explore other contexts and

sectors. The study of EI from an HR perspective can be extended to the ranks of top-managers.

Practical implications for the industry

The findings of the study, fundamentally, call for a greater focus on EI in management training as well as more effective appraisal of managerial performance by including EI as a personal objective. There is sufficient evidence that EI can create positive mindsets and emotional experiences. It has the potential to enhance self- and staff satisfaction, motivation and productivity, leading to business success. In particular, the study highlights the importance of building quality relationships and the critical role middle management has in an organisation. A recommendation for the T&H organisations is to commit to providing in-house development opportunities or team up with public and professional bodies to benefit from mentoring schemes and CPD courses. Such an approach will help address the lack of sufficient and appropriate leadership skills in the T&H industry. Placing more emphasis on EI into academic curricula is also essential to better prepare future managers for a successful career.

The T&H industry is undergoing a fundamental shift in managerial mindsets to address the requirements of the new economic, social and environmental developments globally. As in all economic sectors, small and medium-sized businesses are affected most by the changes. Through implementing EI in their practices they can effectively address the challenges of the stressful working environment and better support T&H managers in growing and sustaining successful businesses.

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Table 1 Selected models of EI with main areas of skills

(Source: adapted from Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Goleman, 1996, 2017; and Bar-On, 1997)

Goleman (1996)	Mayer & Salovey (1997)	Bar-On (1997)	Goleman (2017)
Knowing One's Emotions	Perception and Expression of Emotion	Intrapersonal Skills	Self-Awareness
Managing Emotions	Assimilating Emotion in Thought	Interpersonal Skills	Self-Management
Motivating Oneself	Understanding and Analysing Emotion	Adaptability Scales	Social Awareness
Recognising Emotions in Others	Reflective Regulation of Emotion	Stress-Management Scales	Relationship Management
Handing Relationships		General Mood	

Figure 1. Initial conceptual framework of the study

(Source: Based on Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000; Goleman, 1996, 1998, 2017; Higgs & Aitken, 2003; Langhom, 2004; Scott-Halsell, 2008; CMI, 2019)
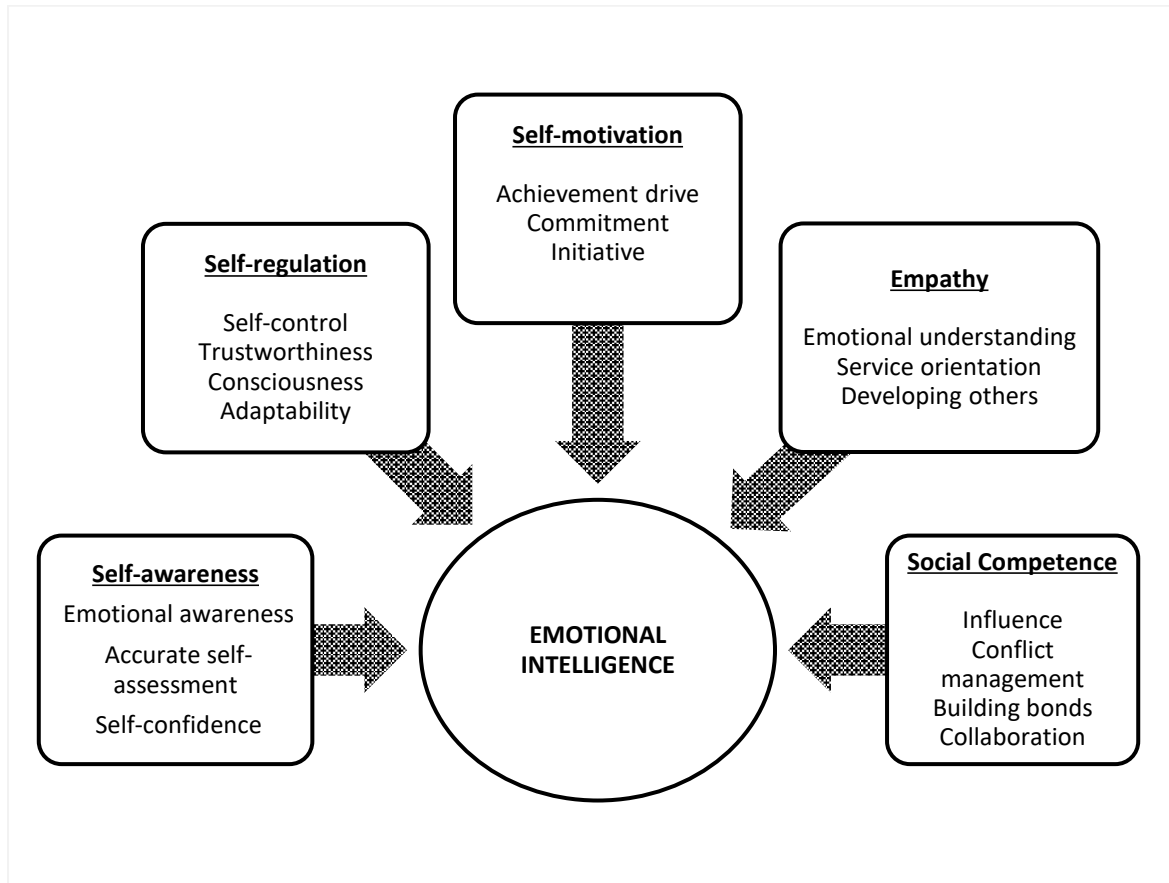
Table 2: Interviewees' profiles

Interviewee	Company Size	Interviewees' Work Position	Direct Reports
Jim	Small	Food and Beverage Manager on duty	11
Tom	Micro	Direct line-manager FOH	6
Anne	Micro	Restaurant manager	8
Louise	Micro	Assistant Manager FOH	10
Matt	Micro	Duty Manager/ Bar Manager	10
Andrew	Micro	Duty Manager FOH, Restaurant and Housekeeping	9
Kate	Small	Managing director	12
Sam	Micro	Duty Manager FOH and Restaurant	8
Roger	Small	Operations Manager	20
Ellie	Small	Assistant Manager	15
Bill	Small	Managing Director	22
Paul	Small	Hotel Manager	27
Pam	Small	Restaurant and Events Division Manager	16
Ivo	Small	Managing Director	25

Figure 2 – The role of EI in improving staff satisfaction and productivity – Thematic analysis
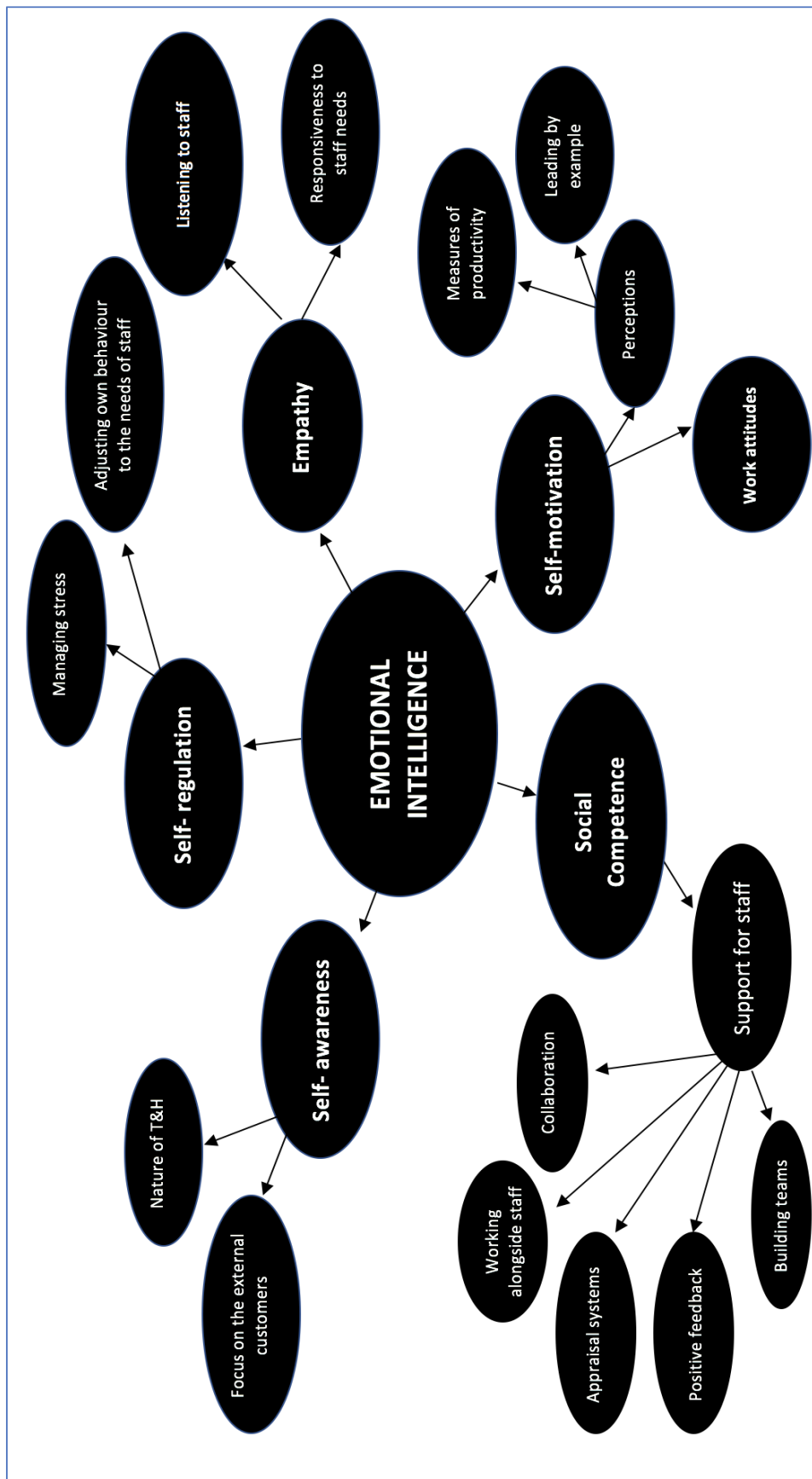
Figure 3 Conceptual model - The role of managers' EI in creating a conceptual advantage for the organisation