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Understanding and Applying Emotional Intelligence: A Qualitative Study of Tampa Veterans Administration Hospital Employees

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Understanding and Applying Emotional Intelligence:  
A Qualitative Study of Tampa Veterans Administration Hospital Employees

by

Brenda Webb Johnson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career and Higher Education  
Curriculum and Instruction with an Emphasis in Adult Education  
College of Education  
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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) has not been studied extensively within the Veterans’ Health Administration (VHA). The VHA is the largest healthcare organization in America with over 360,000 employees and the organization invests heavily in competency development. The Tampa VA is a level 1 facility with over 5,000 employees in the Tampa Bay area. The facilities Education office offers competency development through soft skills training, leadership development, and contracted courses that include emotional intelligence for leaders.

The purpose of this study was to better discern ten Tampa VA medical center employees understanding and application of EI competence within their personal and professional lives. A series of qualitative interviews, focus groups, and an emotional intelligence curriculum were conducted over a six-month span in order to help participants improve their individual emotional intelligence competence.

Findings confirm significant benefits for participants including increased EI competencies of self-awareness and self-management of emotions. Improvement also led to benefits including improved relationships, teamwork, and the ability to manage stress and change. Findings in this study were consistent with existing literature on EI specifically in regard to the possibility of improving EI competencies through training. An unanticipated finding was that only African American employees felt spirituality and upbringing contributed to initial development of emotional intelligence. Implications
for theory include the need for an exploration of the potential influence of diversity and inclusion on the development of EI, and the need to explore the possibility of racial bias in the 360-assessment. Of the numerous implications for practice the most salient is that the provision of facility-wide opportunities for EI training for teams, leaders, aspiring leaders, and entry-level staff would be beneficial. Training could also be tailored to address specific challenges faced within the healthcare setting such as burnout, compassion fatigue, stress management, customer service, conflict management, and employee satisfaction. As this type of employee development is expanded to larger numbers of employees, it has the potential to significantly improve the organizational culture at the Tampa VA, which in turn will produce greater outcomes for our nations’ Veterans.
CHAPTER ONE

Emotional intelligence (EI) theory has evolved over several decades in response to concerns that the construct intelligence was not adequate to describe all aspects of human ability to perform well across contexts. From Alfred Binet to Edward Thorndike in the early 1900’s the concept of socialization as a part of intelligence was introduced yet rejected (Gardner, 2006). Over a half century later, Thorndike’s theory would be researched and expanded to go beyond the traditional cognitive description of intelligence to include components of what would eventually become emotional intelligence theory. Howard Gardner and Robert Sternberg would study multiple types of intelligence in the 80’s.

A challenge facing organizations is how to effectively develop and maintain among its employees social and emotional skills such as empathy, self-management, and the ability to build and maintain relationships and social networks which are believed to be associated with high performers. One approach to preparing employees to be high performers is to develop their emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional Intelligence (EI) theory seeks to formalize how people get along with others, including how they manage their emotions to promote themselves and others around them (Goleman, 1998). Although there is a wealth of literature on emotional intelligence promoting its benefits to the organization, and even how it can be developed in employees, there is minimal
literature regarding employee understanding and application of EI within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).

**Background of the Study**

In 2012, after a two-year project with employees from various levels of the organization, VHA released its “ICARE” core values initiative. ICARE is based on the expected core characteristics of VHA employees and serves as guiding principles for how each employee provides service to our nation’s Veterans. The ICARE acronym stands for integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence. ICARE development was intended to clarify the desired culture and commitment that every VHA employee should abide by. Each employee in VHA, regardless of position, salary, or role is expected to demonstrate ICARE principles on a daily basis to everyone they encounter while serving customers.

EI becomes important to an organization like the VHA where the mission and its core values are emotion and relationship-based and the employees reflect a range of social differences as do those they serve. High emotional intelligence can aid VA employees in providing day-to-day service to the vulnerable Veteran population that it serves.

A recent study (IRB PRO#00022936) conducted at a Veteran’s health administration (VHA) facility in Tampa, FL looked at the possibility of using the Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA), an emotional intelligence screening tool, for selecting candidates who apply for one of two leadership development programs. Throughout this paper that study will be referred to as the EI screening study. After conducting a series of three interviews and three
focus groups, the EI screening study discovered that there is a gap in understanding about emotional intelligence and that through training, dialogue, and reflection, new understanding of how EI manifests itself within the lives of these federal employees was desired. Understanding how employees perceive EI can contribute to both EI and human resource development (HRD) literature.

VHA National Structure

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the largest health care organization in America serving nearly nine million Veterans annually. The mission of the Veterans Administration (VA) has not changed since its inception. Abraham Lincoln determined that the VA would exist "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" ([https://www.va.gov/](https://www.va.gov/)). Having this strong core mission, grounded in compassion for current and prior military service members makes the VA’s purpose clear. The VA is structured with three organizational units including the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and the National Cemetery Administration.

A small portion of the VHA organizational chart can be found in Appendix A. That portion of the organizational chart highlights how education and training is organized within VHA beginning at the topic and trickling down to the Tampa VA hospital’s education office where the EI screening study took place. The VA Learning University (VALU) was a separate office within VHA that represented VHA’s corporate university. They provided education, leadership development, career guidance, and they offer training support to program offices and facilities. They also manage and provide technical assistance and oversight to the Talent
Management System (TMS). TMS is an on-line system of training and development within VHA. TMS is where VHA houses all training records and assures that employees complete any mandatory training requirements. VALU was also responsible for the development and management of the VA Competency Model, which has been created as a guide for how all employees and leaders within VHA can demonstrate competence to aid in fulfilling the VHA mission. Portions of VALU were recently absorbed into the Employee Education System (EES) and combined they are responsible for education and training support throughout the VA.

**VHA All Employee and Leadership Competencies**

The VA Learning University (VALU) defines competencies as the “knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to build a highly competent organization capable of meeting current and future challenges” (http://www.valu.va.gov). VALU has made the VHA competency model the foundation of their education and training model. The leadership development programs across the agency have modules based on developing these competencies. These competencies are also often attached to performance-based interviewing, individual development plans, and the performance review process. VALU developed its comprehensive competency model so that it applies to all of its employees nationwide, regardless of position within the organization. Healthcare leadership competencies are common throughout the industry. Like the VALU model, healthcare competencies typically address relationship building, organizational development, business acumen and various technical skills. Many business
industries also include emotional intelligence as a key need for leaders (Weiszbrod, 2015).

There are three types of competencies within VHA: all employee, technical, and leadership. The all employee and leadership competency models have guides prepared by VALU to help employees independently work on self-development. Each guide identifies the core competencies along with a detailed list of behavioral indicators that describe what demonstrates competence in each area. Behaviors are based on proficiency levels within the organization including novice, foundational, intermediate, advanced, and expert. For example, a novice, or entry-level employee is expected to build partnerships by identifying opportunities to network internally and externally where as an expert would be expected to develop organizational partnerships that are strategic that supports the mission of the office or facility that they lead.

Technical competencies are based on the position within the organization and the details are part of position descriptions and performance plans that are provided to the employee by their department. This is typically done through the orientation process and in the development of performance plans which are included in the performance appraisal process.

The VHA all employee competency model is considered to be foundational and all employees can use this model during their VA careers. The seven all employee competencies include communication, organizational stewardship, interpersonal effectiveness, Veteran and customer focus, critical thinking, and personal mastery. VHA leadership competencies are designed to help leaders and aspiring leaders understand the skills that are needed to be successful
leaders within VHA. Leadership competencies include leading people, leading change, results driven, global perspective, and business acumen.

The all employee and the leadership competencies are used for both leadership development programs at the Tampa VA. The competencies can also be used during the personal development planning process. The majority of the behavioral indicators are emotional-based behaviors.

Although emotional intelligence is not specifically listed as a VHA competency, many of the behavioral indicators are associated with emotional intelligence. The models in Appendix D-E are designed to be roadmaps for advancing to various levels of leadership within VHA and they identify expected behaviors for each proficiency level from entry level to senior management. In chapter 2, Table 2.5 demonstrates the connections between the VHA and EI competencies. All VHA facilities, including the Tampa VA, are expected to use these competency guides in their individual efforts to help employees grow within the organization.

**The Tampa VA**

The Tampa VA is a federal facility within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and is one of three arms that make up the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). The Education Office within the Tampa VA manages the leadership development efforts for employees ranging from entry-level employees to mid-level managers. PRIDE and CDL are two of the primary leadership development programs operated within the Tampa VA. Both programs have curriculums that are directly tied to the VHA all employee and leadership competency models. The primary conduit for training Tampa VA employees on these nationally driven
workplace competencies is generally limited to leadership development program participation, which limits access to the majority of our employees. The leadership development programs at the Tampa VA are called PRIDE and Competency Development for Leaders in the 21st Century (CDL). These programs are competitive and only have space for about 20 employees per year. Absent of participating in a six-month leadership development program, utilizing and learning from the competency models is self-directed.

The challenge faced for the employees at the Tampa VA is that in the absence of participating in a LEAD program, you may never learn about the VHA competency model. The education office does a great job with offering courses that indirectly develop personal competencies, and they post resources for self-directed employees to create their own personal development plans using the competency model but only a small percentage of the population of the facility take advantage of these opportunities. To this end, it was no surprise when the majority of study participants were totally unaware of what emotional intelligence is and the majority of LEAD participants have never heard of the VHA Competency model prior to participating in one of the programs.

**Education Structure and Offerings at the Tampa VA**

The Education Office at the Tampa VA reports to the Chief of Staff through the Associate Chief of Staff for Education. This office is responsible for the medical residency program, employee and leadership development, patient health education, tuition assistance, scholarships, continuing medical education (CME) courses, hospital affiliations, as well as advanced cardiac life support (ACLS) and basic life Support (BLS) certification. There are three competitive
leadership development programs coordinated through the education office and applications are available for staff to apply annually. The education office also receives support from the VA Learning University (VALU), which provides contracted facilitators for face-to-face and on-line training opportunities. The office purchases training licenses through Franklin Covey and Vital Smarts so that it can offer in-house courses that support personal development and many of these courses support the improvement of the VHA Competencies for all employees.

**Problem Statement**

Researchers, over time, have conducted various studies within a broad array of industries to develop a large number of EI screening assessments with varying descriptions for the key components measured. Although the research has produced a wealth of literature on emotional intelligence promoting its benefits to organizations and how it can be developed in employees, little is known regarding federal employee understanding, application, and possible VA contextual challenges and opportunities for emotional intelligence development within the Tampa VA. Key VA culture contextual issues to be explored include race, gender, age, and the environment in general.

Only eleven peer-reviewed articles have been located that feature the employee perspectives of emotional intelligence in the workplace. Only two of these studies were qualitative. And of the nine EI quantitative studies, one acknowledges that it is difficult to measure emotional intelligence and recommends qualitative studies for future research (Alson, Dastoor, & Sosa-Fey, 2010). None of the studies are affiliated with the VHA nor did they use the
Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA) with the curriculum developed by Stein, Mann, and Papadogiannis (2010) which are the tools utilized in this study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to better discern ten Tampa VA medical center employees understanding and application of EI competence within their personal and professional lives. The study explores their work environment as well as their success with applying the competencies outside of work. Data to discern both personal and professional impact will come from a variety of interventions. The 360-assessment allows for family and friends to participate and the interview and focus group questions are broad enough to allow for non-work related responses. Implications from this study may further aid in understanding the extent to which training in emotional intelligence is worthwhile for all VHA employees and how this training can support the VHA mission and core-values.

**Research Questions**

The research questions answered in this study include:

1. How do VHA employees describe their understanding of emotional intelligence?
2. How do VHA employees apply emotional intelligence in their professional and private lives?
3. What contextual factors emerge that may present challenges as well as opportunities for emotional intelligence development within the Tampa VA?

4. To what extent did the understanding and application of emotional intelligence change after completion of the EI screening study?

Significance

The World Economic Forum has determined that by 2020 emotional intelligence will be a top 10 competency requirements to succeed in the digital economy (Soffel, 2016). Within VHA, there is a great deal of congruence between EI and the VA mission, but it is not known the extent to which employees believe it is a competency of value and would be willing to engage in training and learning on this topic.

Data for this study was pulled from (IRB PRO#00022936). The purpose of that EI screening study was to determine if in fact PRIDE and Competency Development for Leaders in the 21st Century (CDL) participants at JAHVH emotional intelligence scores correlate with their ability to manage stress, deal with change, and work more effectively on teams while in these programs. These 6-month long programs tend to create a great deal of stress for candidates who must juggle their normal job, attend sessions, work on project teams, collaborate across facilities within the Florida region, and still maintain their own personal lives. Using a mixed method approach combining findings from the EISA, completion of modules and projects, team performance indicators, interviews, observations, and focus groups, the EI screening study sought to become better informed about the potential implications of each of these factors in making a
difference in the behavior for its leadership development program candidates at the Tampa VA.

Findings from the EI screening study are still being analyzed but preliminary findings indicate no significant changes in pre-and post-scores. Data extracted from that EI screening study was analyzed for the purposes of my dissertation research. The analysis conducted has the potential to produce implications for training and education at the Tampa VA. A wider application across facilities based on the findings is anticipated for other employees with similar demographics within other VA facilities (Smith, Bekker, & Cheater, 2011). Additional benefits for these findings could overlap with a variety of program offices within VHA where employee competency development seeks to align with the positive outcomes of high EI competence such as reduced burnout, increased job satisfaction (Nogaye, 2010), employee retention, overall hospital success, improved patient outcomes. In addition, leaders with a greater capacity for EI are better equipped to build motivated productive healthcare teams (Vandewaa, Turnipseed, & Cain, 2016).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations for this study are related to a sample that only considered employees who worked 40 hours or more at the Tampa VA. The sample also sought to find engaged employees by recruiting only from a pool of leadership development participants, applicants, and employees who expressed interest in leadership development. Applicants for leadership development programs at the Tampa VA must be free of any disciplinary action or leave abuse so the results of this study may not fully represent the general population at this facility.
Delimitations include limiting the transcripts to the ten participants with the largest gap score between the pre and post self-assessment and the pre and post manager assessment.

**Assumptions**

There are a couple of key assumptions made about participants in this study. First, it is assumed that employees who apply for leadership programs or attend leadership related classes will be engaged, self-motivated, professionals and that they would complete this study. Because of that assumption, a purposeful sample from leadership pools was used in hopes of soliciting engaged employees.

**Definitions**

The following defined terms were referenced throughout this study.

A **competency** in Veterans Administration (VA) is comprised of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA’s) that are viewed as necessary to create a high performing organization that is ready to face challenges for America’s Veterans ([http://www.valu.va.gov](http://www.valu.va.gov)). The VA competency model is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

**Emotions** are the responses that are a result of feelings, physical action, perceptions, and how we interpret things in the environment, which leads to a certain behavior (Smith, 2002).

**Emotional capital** is “emotionally valued assets, skills, love and affection, expenditure of time, attention, care and concern” invested in others using resources such as support, patient, and commitment that in turn creates a usable resource that can be exchanged for capital (Zembylas, 2007). Emotional
capital is a term that has sometimes been confused with emotional intelligence. Although Bourdieu (1986) does not connect this form of capital to his theory of social capital, other researchers use his work in the creation of this concept which is also believed to contribute to relationships that can net benefits for individuals. Emotional capital has many definitions but the one that seems most relevant in this context is offered in the work of Zembylas (2007). Emotional capital is described as assets grounded in emotion, abilities, intimacy, quality time, attention, and compassion that once invested in others creates a usable resource that can be exchanged for capital (Zembylas, 2007). Other definitions have a tendency to overlap with emotional intelligence when they describe management of emotions and competencies. The clear separation of the two concepts would appear to be in the basic premise of all forms of capital which are assets leading to gain (https://www.merriam-webster.com).

**Emotional competence** is related to using emotional intelligence to learn certain skills that produce success in the workplace. Examples of emotional competencies include customer service, conflict management, or other interpersonal skills that have fundamental foundations in the EI competencies included in EI theory (Cherniss & Goleman, 2002).

**Emotional intelligence** is the ability to recognize, access, and produce emotions that cognitively aid in understanding and regulating emotions and behavior (Salavoy & Mayer, 1990).

**Engage employees:** Engaged employees are those who interact and actively participate within their work environment (Sony & Mekoth, 2016).
Multiple intelligence theory believes everyone has nine types of intelligence, in various degrees, that combined determine individual competence (Gardner, 2006).

Organizational environment: The organizational environment is based on the relationships between internal and external factors that create working conditions for the employees which can determine performance (Farooqi & Akhtar 2014). Organizational success is dependent upon interactions within the system (Flynn, 2015).

Social intelligence is the science of human relationships (Wawra, 2009). Goleman sees social intelligence as one part of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2006) and many theorists of emotional intelligence include social intelligence in their competencies or domains.

Spiritual intelligence is the ability to use higher meanings, values, purposes, and even unconscious aspects of the self and to use these meaning, values, and purposes to live a richer and more creative life (Zohar, 2005).

Unconscious incompetence occurs when an emotional intelligence self-assessment is significantly different than how others rate the individual (Weiszbrod, 2015). The individual does not realize or care about knowing what others see because they are unaware of the views of others (Neal, Spencer-Arnell, & Wilson, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

This study was a qualitative pragmatic content analysis using existing data. A pragmatic philosophy relies on the learners experience in order to gradually learn and develop using a variety of methods, social interactions, and
experiences (Balzacq, 2016). A variety of interventions was used to assist participants through the EI development process. Pragmatism does not provide a moral guide as to whether an idea is good or bad. For pragmatists this is not a relevant question. The relevant question is does the idea work based on experience and practical results (Stephenson, 2002).

Emotional intelligence theory was the primary theoretical framework and experiential learning was the analytic framework for this study. Experiential learning theory is the conduit through which participants are believed to perceive, understand, and apply emotional intelligence theory in their work and personal lives and the learning model used to teach EI competencies.

The use of EI theory for this study is based on the work of Steven J. Stein, Derek Mann, Peter Papadogiannis, and Wendy Gordon. As employees of Multi-Health Systems, Inc. (MHS), the authors created the Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA) and a curriculum to help participants improve their EI skills. The EISA was created using the work of EI theorists Reuven Bar-On, John Mayer, Peter Salovey, and David Caruso, and Daniel Goleman (Stein, Mann, Papadogiannis, 2010). The EISA system defines emotional intelligence as the ability to manage and perceive emotions so that behavior is appropriate in social settings. This behavioral-based assessment seeks to measure perception and management of emotions as well as how individuals use emotions for decision making, achievement, and influence. The associated EISA curriculum is designed to help participants improve on identified areas of weakness while highlighting their strengths. This study will reference quantitative findings from the pre-and post EISA assessment from a prior VA study but will utilize qualitative data from
that study only on the participants that complete both pre and post 360 assessments for this study.

Experiential Learning Theory as developed by David Kolb is the learning model that was used in this study. Experiential learning demonstrates the learning and application process participants used to improve their own EI skills and behaviors. This continuous cycle of learning includes a concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis, 2001).

Figure 1.1 Experiential Learning Model

**Researcher Perspectives**

Potential researcher bias lies in the fact that I am a proud twenty-three year employee of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and a staunch defender of the great work that the VHA offers to its Veterans. I also protest
against the perceived unjust criticism that the agency receives from some politicians seeking media attention. I am also a former coordinator for the LEAD programs and educational facilitator at the Tampa VA and was already familiar with the majority of the participants in this study. At least one of the departments where a participant works was also part of a team training intervention that I facilitated in an effort to assist the team with excessive disgruntled employees so some of the examples provided in the interviews were already familiar to this researcher. As a licensed clinical social worker I adhere to our professions’ code of ethics and am fully alert to the need for confidentiality and unbiased treatment of others.

**Organization of Study**

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study and included the problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, significance, limitations, assumptions, key terms, conceptual framework, and data source summary. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature concerning research on emotional intelligence (EI), leading researchers behind the theory of EI, EI in the workplace, cultural challenges and opportunities for EI development and how to improve EI. Chapter 3 covers the methods utilized in this study as well as an overview of the approach, the population studies, the research site, instruments used, data collection, and the data analysis. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations for further practice and research.
CHAPTER TWO

The purpose of this study was to better discern ten Tampa VA medical center employees’ understanding and application of EI competence within their personal and professional lives. Within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) there has been a great deal of effort made to develop competencies for all employees that include EI related behavioral indicators (http://www.VALU.va.gov).

This study took place in the Tampa VA Hospital with participants from various disciplines. Although there are limited evidence-based articles on EI in healthcare, there have been studies, primarily in nursing, to support the importance of EI in healthcare (Vandewaa, Turnipseed, & Cain, 2016). The nature of healthcare work, a caring profession, lends itself to the need for emotional intelligence. Any aspect of employment within a healthcare facility will require an ability to work with individuals, thus appropriate perception, expression, and management of emotions are important for any healthcare worker (Clarke, 2006).

Empirical studies have also found a correlation between emotional intelligence and healthcare leadership competencies. A recent study utilizing self-assessments and 360-degree evaluations for college students suggested that including emotional intelligence training could have a positive impact on the degree of leader competence of health administration graduates (Weiszbrod,
Another study connected EI to positive aspects of acute care nursing and to nursing clinical performance although the research has not been consistent. Vandewaa, Turnipseed, and Cain (2016) found EI to contribute to retention of nursing staff, overall hospital success, improved patient outcomes, and improved nursing leadership. In addition to the benefits for EI for all employees, leaders who have higher EI are believed to have a greater capacity to build motivated productive healthcare teams who they can positively influence.

This chapter shares the body of literature relevant to the purpose of this study. It is important to adequately describe the evolution of emotional intelligence beginning with the evolution of intelligence theory in general. This chapter addresses multiple contextual factors that may contribute to or hinder the development of emotional intelligence competence. The following section reviews a few of the major contributors to intelligence theory.

**Intelligence Theory**

Intelligence is “the ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations” (https://www.merriam-webster.com). Intelligence has historically been measured using Intelligence Quotient (IQ) assessments which have been in existence since the early 1900’s and credited to Alfred Binet of Paris. IQ assessments did not become popular in the United States until after they were used for the recruitment of soldiers in World War I (WWI). The military used the IQ assessment to test recruits prior to enlistment. After success in the WWI conflict, IQ assessments were viewed as contributing to enlisting the best and the brightest America had to offer (Gardner, 2006). For over a half century, these IQ assessments were believed to be the key indicator to identify a person’s general
intelligence but in the 1960’s controversies and alternate intelligence theories started to arise (Zohar, 2004). Several disciplines including anthropology, neuroscience, cognitive science, and psychology started challenging this notion of intelligence. The emergence of cultural bias, brain organization and function, as well as competing theories of intelligence have altered what is traditionally believed about intelligence (Gardner, 2000).

Explicit and implicit theories of intelligence also have striking but contrasting viewpoints. Explicit theories of intelligence describe measures of intelligence and the associated behaviors or performance (Berg & Sternberg, 1985). Implicit theories of intelligence are based on behavior that is connected to what people believe about the nature of intelligence such as whether or not it is changeable or fixed (Dupeyrat & Marine, 2004). A great deal of research has been done in both regards, also contributing to the shift and challenge to traditional IQ assessments.

Robert Sternberg (2012) describes intelligence based on how individuals use their ability to learn, adapt, and thrive in various environments. Howard Gardner (2006) describes intelligence as a cognitive competence made up of mental skills, talents, and abilities but provides an operational definition that limits it to how well individuals perform on intelligence tests. There is also dissension between researchers in regard to the fixed nature of intelligence. Research has found that raw scores on these IQ assessments have averages that can vary throughout a life span while other research results found that IQ scores are static and difficult to change.
Culturally, researchers argue over IQ scores that fluctuate by race and gender, which warrants’ rethinking the way intelligence is measured (Zohar, 2004). Even from the beginning of IQ tests in the US during WWI (1914-1918), the scores for Blacks were used to not only claim inferiority but also to institute discriminatory laws such as Jim Crow, based on the belief that Blacks were not intelligent enough to live in white neighborhoods, attend school with white children, or even vote for its country’s leaders (Montagu, 1999). These IQ assessments in the early 1900’s were given to recently freed slaves who were not raised to read or write and yet the scores were used to make interpretations about an entire race. It was not until the 1930’s that empirical data demonstrated differences in IQ between children educated in the north versus the south to support the notion of environment and not race in relation to IQ (Montagu, 1999). Sternberg (2012) cites multiple international examples in Africa and Asia where social aspects are more important to the US standards of IQ-based assessments for intelligence.

Over time, IQ tests have been used for a variety of things such as college admissions tests, school curriculum assessments, and gifted program admissions. These tests are believed to be a predictor of who will succeed in various academic programs (Gardner, 2006). Employers outside of the military were using IQ scores to identify potential high performers (Zohar, 2004).

Over the past three decades, however, there is growing literature to offer alternative viewpoints about intelligence as the only predictor of future success. Using neuroscience, the study of the brain, as well as cognitive science, the study of the mind, research has shown other factors related to intelligence that may
lead to overall success in life beyond the classroom (Gardner, 2006). In fact, in 1997 the American Psychological Association (APA) acknowledged that outcomes in life should be considered in determining individual intelligence (Elías, Maree, & Bar-On, 2007). The following review of theorists Edward Thorndike, Howard Gardner, Robert Sternberg, and Dana Zohar will aid in understanding why intelligence, using standard IQ assessments is not enough to define personal intelligence or predict an individual’s future. These theorists will also help explain how and why emotional intelligence has evolved.

**Thorndike’s Social Intelligence**

In 1920, Edward Thorndike attempted to introduce social intelligence as part of IQ. Social intelligence was described in relationship to how well one handled relationships. The connection between social intelligence and IQ was rejected by his peers and seen more as a behavior and by 1960 the concept was rejected all together. In 1987, Cantor and Kihlstrom redefined social intelligence to address an individual’s knowledge about the social world (Joseph & Lakshmi, 2010). In 2006, Daniel Goleman shortened his definition of social intelligence to simply be the science of human relationships (Wawra, 2009). Social intelligence in the workplace is described as those individuals who can effectively interact with others (Goleman, 1998). People with high social intelligence are popular, team players, good listeners, and understand how to navigate and get along with everyone they encounter. They lead with confidence by utilizing superb interpersonal skills, as they know how to perceive others and connect with them at a personal level (Goleman, 1995). Goleman sees social intelligence as one part of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2006) and many theorists of emotional
intelligence include social intelligence in their competencies or domains. Thorndike’s efforts decades earlier created a foundation for the growth and development of emotional intelligence theory (Rathi, 2012).

**Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences**

Howard Gardner started his work on the theory of multiple intelligences (MI) in the early 1980s. MI theory initially identified seven types of intelligence that each individual is believed to possess in varying degrees and combined can determine individual competence in life. His research includes work from a diverse set of specialties including human development, brain studies, evolution, and he also studied different cultures to compare his findings. The seven intelligences of MI theory include musical, bodily kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Dr. Gardner later added naturalistic and existential intelligence (Gardner, 2006). Each individual is believed to have a combination of these nine intelligences at varying degrees of proficiency with everyone having a unique profile. Strengths in certain intelligence categories can also provide insight about which learning methods may have the greatest impact on an individual’s ability to learn.

**Sternberg’s Triarchic Theory of Intelligence**

Robert Sternberg, psychologist and professor emeritus from Yale University focused his research on intelligence and in 1984 developed a Triarchic Theory to support his belief that intelligence can be altered and thus taught. His research found three types of intelligence processes or components including meta/analytical, performance/practical, and knowledge acquisition/wisdom-based (Sternberg, 1984; Sternberg, 2012). Meta-components are the analytic
processes involved in the decision about what to do. Performance components are the creative processes involved in deciding the steps necessary to practically accomplish activities. Knowledge acquisition components are the processes involved in understanding and learning new information (Sternberg, 1984). For adults, the Triarchic theory seeks to better understand intelligence in relationship to the environment (Berg & Sternberg, 1985). To better understand the theory in relation to adults, Berg and Sternberg (1985) identify three parts for the Triarchic theory of adults: contextual, componential, and experiential. According to Sternberg, the meaning of intelligence varies based on the external environment.

The contextual part of the theory seeks to understand the fit of persons in their environment and examines skills and abilities such as problem solving, communication, social competence, and general skills needed to function on a daily basis. These authors believe that changes in environment can have an effect on cognitive functioning for adults. For example, if a good environmental fit is absent for a senior citizen in a nursing home, they may not thrive within that environment. Attempts can be made to alter the nursing home environment in ways that are within the adults control such as social, physical, and intellectual activities in an effort to make their room more like home which can improve their engagement in the facility (Berg & Sternberg, 1985). By researching adults in different stages in their life with varying degrees of intelligence Berg, et al. found that as people age the importance of intelligence factors shift as do the associated adaptive behaviors.

Another part of the Triarchic theory of intelligence in adults, componential, seeks to understand the cognitive processes required for
intelligent behavior. The componential part is divided into two information-processing components: metacomponents and performance components. Metacomponents help adults with problem solving, monitoring decisions in real time, and evaluating results. Performance components are the cognitive skills used to execute a plan of action for problem solving. Reasoning, speech and memory play a role in this component and life experience can greatly improve efficiency and outcomes.

The final part of the Triarchic theory of intelligence in adults, experiential, seeks to understand intelligence in relation to the required adaptations that occur within environments. This experiential component looks at novelty and automatization or how people adjust to new and unusual things in the environment and the habitual responses to change.

**Zohar’s Spiritual Intelligence**

Dana Zohar is credited with the term spiritual intelligence in connection with her book *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*, published in 1997. Within this book she describes the necessity for organizations to attend to mental, emotional, and spiritual intelligence (Zohar, 1997). As a physicist, philosopher, and management thought leader, her quest for developing the theory of spiritual intelligence was purely personal and influenced through her experience with parenting and life observations and disappointment by what she assessed as the absence of moral character in people (Zohar, 2004).

Spiritual intelligence (SQ) is believed to be required in order for IQ and EQ to function (Joseph & Lakshmi, 2010). Dana Zohar (2005) defines spiritual intelligence as “ability to access higher meanings, values, abiding purposes, and
unconscious aspects of the self and to embed these meanings, values, and purposes in living a richer and more creative life”. Zohar never connected the form of intelligence with religion or spiritual practices but she does connect spiritual intelligence to morality. As a management thought leader, she believes that through spiritual intelligence, an organizational leader can unleash power within individuals through the practice of helping others become conscious of their values, meanings, and purposes.

Spiritual intelligence has been met with its critics, including Howard Gardner. Although Zohar identifies three intelligences, human (IQ), emotional (EQ) and spiritual (SQ) (Zohar, 2004), Gardner excludes SQ from his MI theory. Initially, his resistance was due to his assumption that this theory was connected to religion and the soul of man (Gardner, 2006). After researching the concept for more than a year, he held two conclusions. First, he refutes connecting intelligence to the spiritual dimension of ones higher being connectivity which he describes as phenomenological and not associated with intelligence. Second, he does not see how theorists can disassociate spirituality from God or religion. The second concern is described as personally uncomfortable for Gardner and is contrary to known intelligence criteria (Gardner, 2006). However, Gardner did cautiously add existential intelligence to his MI theory but connects it to spirituality which is not what Zohar intended. Existential intelligence is described as a “question of existence” (Gardner, 2006, p.20) seeking answers to big life questions about life’s purpose, the future, and philosophical questions about concepts such as love and war. He argues that this term, existential
intelligence, is broad enough to address all cultures yet still looks to address key questions about human existence in the world (Gardner, 2006).

The following table compares Thorndike, Gardner, Sternberg, and Zohar according to general descriptions, components, and assessments used to determine individual intelligence.

**Table 2.1**

*Selected Intelligence Theory Models*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>The ability to understand and manage relationships</td>
<td>There are nine types of intelligences which determine individual competence</td>
<td>Individual intelligence is defined by the ability to demonstrate skills that are analytical, creative and practical</td>
<td>The ability to apply higher meanings, values and purposes to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Components</strong></td>
<td>Social awareness</td>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>Universal Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social facility</td>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Logical</td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>Self-Mastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Musical</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Mastery</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Visual</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Naturalistic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Existential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessments</strong></td>
<td>Self-report assessments are available</td>
<td>Several measures and modalities are required to assess each area. Several MI and learning styles assessments available</td>
<td>Sternberg Triarchic Abilities Test (STAT)</td>
<td>Self-report assessments are available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These alternative viewpoints about intelligence along with other studies over the past three decades have all contributed to the evolution of emotional intelligence theory. As described in Table 2.1, all of these intelligence theorists have included emotional components in their descriptions of intelligence. Table 2.1 also demonstrates how the core components of each intelligence theory include social and emotional components.

**Intelligence and Emotions**

Emotions are not as easy to define as one might expect. Definitions range from the simple Webster’s description of “a strong feeling” ([https://www.merriam-webster.com/](https://www.merriam-webster.com/)) to more complicated academic explanations that involve descriptors like manifestation over time, psychological, cognitive and perceptual components, or ties to stimulus (Smith, 2002). In relation to EI, emotions can be defined as a feeling associated with thoughts, emotional and physical conditions, and a variety of natural tendencies to act on those feelings (Goleman, 1995). It is important to understand that emotions, good or bad, can drive behavior. Emotional responses are a result of feelings, physical action, perceptions, and how individuals interpret their environment leading to a certain behavior (Smith, 2002). Emotional reactions are inextricably tied to emotional intelligence.

Emotions and behavior are connected in the literature. Human behavior is influenced by one’s reaction to some aspect in life and studies show that emotions result in positive or negative behavior as a result of that reaction (Smith, 2002). Human emotions are also connected to human intelligence in the literature (Zohar, 2004). Every human is different and all people experience and perceive...
emotions in a unique way. Studies have also shown that there are clear cultural differences in the way emotions are perceived. The accuracy of perceiving emotions is improved when similar cultural groups are involved in the study (Cheng, 2007).

The following review of theorists John Mayer, Peter Salovey, Reuven Bar-On, and Daniel Goleman assist with understanding how emotions and intelligence contribute to understanding individual intelligence. Their work demonstrates a different view of how and why emotional intelligence may be more important than IQ alone.

**Emotional Intelligence Theory**

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a complex theory that has multiple definitions, component descriptions, and theorists. Walter, Humphrey and Cole (2012) use the Mayor and Salovey definition of emotional intelligence which is the ability to effectively deal with the feelings of self and others in their work connecting EI and leadership development. Simple yet complex, researchers have developed a large number of screening assessments measuring various competencies but the common thread appears to be that each of the assessments seeks to understand how well people can perceive and manage their emotions.

Theoretical differences in approaches to EI vary. Some argue that EI is more closely related to personality than ability. Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (2000), two of the more popular EI theorists of today, however, see EI as a combination of competence, ability, and non-cognitive skills that come together and assist individuals in coping with their environment.
Emotional intelligence is built on the foundation of multiple disciplines and theories including intelligence theory, behavior theory, and theories of emotion (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003). Although it has grown in popularity over the last twenty years, efforts that have led to the refinement and current wide-spread use of EI theory dates back to the beginnings just described in the intelligence theory section of this paper. The following discussion will outline the key contributors to the development of EI theory over the past thirty years.

**Mayer and Salovey’s Theory of EI**

John Mayer and Peter Salovey are credited for developing the theory of emotional intelligence in 1990 (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003). They define emotional intelligence as the ability to recognize, access, and produce emotions that cognitively aid in understanding and regulating emotions in order to promote personal growth. These theorists created the Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) to assess emotional intelligence-based on individual ability. Key competencies in their theory include perceiving emotion, managing emotions, using emotions and understanding emotions. The MSCEIT is one of the most widely used EI assessments available today (Elias, Maree, & Bar-On, 2007).

As the founders of emotional intelligence theory, it is no surprise that a large number of their peer reviewed research articles are focused on supporting emotional intelligence theory. They also have a number of articles on social intelligence, measuring emotional intelligence, and a few on EI in the workplace. Beginning in 2011 they shifted their research focus to EI among teachers and
students. They have a large number of book chapters as well throughout their careers.

**Bar-On’s Theory of EI**

Reuven Bar-On began developing his theory of emotional intelligence while working on his dissertation in the 90’s. He has been researching emotional intelligence since 1980 but Bar-On did not introduce his model and measurement for EI until 1997 ([http://www.eiconsortium.org](http://www.eiconsortium.org)). He defines an emotional quotient (EQ) as skills and abilities related to knowledge of how emotions and social interactions influence successful coping in life. His five sub-scales of EI include stress management, general mood, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and adaptability. Under each sub-scale there is a total of fifteen competencies including self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, self-actualization, empathy, social responsibility, interpersonal relationship, stress tolerance, impulse control, reality testing, flexibility, problem solving, optimism, and happiness. His assessment, the EQ-I is socially-based and includes a 360 assessment.

The primary focus of Bar-On’s many books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed articles has been the influence of emotional intelligence on the workplace and in the classroom. He also has done research on adolescent cancer survivors, subjective well-being of individuals and he has several publications related to the use of his model of social intelligence.

**Goleman’s theory of EI**

Daniel Goleman also released his theory of emotional intelligence in 1998, three years after his *New York Times* bestselling book *Emotional Intelligence*. 
His book brought emotional intelligence into the limelight as it introduced the topics in a clear concise manner that led to several implications not only for how to improve in this area but also how parents and schools can better prepare children for the world. Although this initial groundbreaking book touched on the workplace, the primary focus was on education. The excitement and inquiries received from organizations pushed his efforts deeper into the work setting. Through further exploration he consistently heard that EI goes beyond education and technical skills when searching for excellence.

Goleman (1998) researched over 500 workplace settings, including government, to study emotional intelligence and all agree that the presence of EI skills leads to excellence regardless of the job performed. Emotionally intelligent individuals are believed to have strong communication skills, an ability to build effective relationships, and have coping strategies that aid them in success personally and professionally (Mann, 2009). With these theoretical promises one would think that training would be more wide spread within organizations that may benefit from these traits.

Although Goleman’s scientific journey into EI started with the exploration of intelligence as a graduate student, his practical journey into researching EI is similar to Zohar in that observations related to life frustrations initiated questions. This curiosity led to dialogues, reflections, and a desire to get to the root of failed interactions (Goleman, 1998). That initial exploration led to the publication of *Emotional Intelligence* in 1995. Additional research related to competencies shared by a host of colleagues, including federal employee HRD
data from the Office of Personnel Management, led to the publication of *Working with Emotional Intelligence* in 1998.

Goleman defines emotional competence as the learned emotional intelligence-based skills that result in successful work performance (Goleman, 1998). His four domains include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Under each domain there is a total of twenty-five competencies including understanding others, developing others, service orientation, leveraging diversity, political awareness, self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, innovation, achievement drive, commitment, initiative, optimism, influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, building bonds, collaboration and cooperation, team capabilities, emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence. His assessment, the Emotional and Social Competence Inventory (ESCI/ECI) is competence-based.

Dr. Goleman has written nine books, his first in 1995 titled *Emotional Intelligence* has sold over 5 million copies and is printed in 30 different languages. His books are evidence-based and he has also written numerous peer-reviewed articles mostly focusing on leaders, work settings, social intelligence, and explaining emotional intelligence theory in general.

**Measuring Emotional Intelligence Competence**

There are numerous assessments that claim to measure emotional intelligence. As mentioned earlier, each assessment is designed to assess the components of the creator’s view of EI. Some EI assessments listed in Table 2.2 evaluate behavior, others competence, while others may evaluate social skills or
individual ability. Unfortunately, many of these EI assessments have not been empirically tested for construct validity and may not have received rigorous enough testing to assure they are accurate.

Information on construct validity is not easily available on each of these tools as it is based on sample sizes, and how often the instrument is used in research (Cherniss, C., Extein, M., Goleman, D., Weissberg, R.P., 2006). The assessments, with the exception of the EISA, listed in Table 2.2 have at least five peer reviewed articles or book chapters that provide evidence-based findings (www.eiconsortium.com). The EISA will be discussed in further detail as it is the tool that was used for the EI screening study conducted at the Tampa VA.

As mentioned above different assessments take different approaches when measuring EI. For example, the MSCEIT is ability-based and seeks to measure how individuals handle their emotions. The ECI is competence-based and will measure 12 of Goleman’s 25 competencies. The EQ-I is social-based and although it has subscales that will line up with some of the ECI competencies there are several that are unique (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004).

TABLE 2.2

Comparison of EI Measurements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Web Link</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory</td>
<td><a href="http://eiconsortium.org/measures/eqi.html">http://eiconsortium.org/measures/eqi.html</a></td>
<td>Self-report; 18 and older; 5 composite scores and 15 subscales; 360 available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory</td>
<td><a href="http://eiconsortium.org/measures/genos.html">http://eiconsortium.org/measures/genos.html</a></td>
<td>Self-report; ages 17-75; 70 questions; 7 areas measured; 360 available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schutte Self Report EI Test</td>
<td><a href="http://eiconsortium.org/measures/sreis.html">http://eiconsortium.org/measures/sreis.html</a></td>
<td>Self-report; 33 questions; 3 aspects measured</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Not all of the instruments available offer a 360-degree assessment. A 360-degree assessment allows individuals to choose a wide range of feedback from managers, subordinates, peers, and others so that a complete picture of how others view them can be compared to the self-assessment. The challenge with self-assessments alone versus 360 assessments is the risk of unconscious incompetence. Unconscious incompetence occurs when a self-assessment is significantly different than how others view the individual (Weiszbrod, 2015). Self-assessments alone may not be sufficient in assisting individuals with self-
awareness in order to develop, grow, and advance in their career (Conine & Leskin, 2016). The assessment phase of individual emotional intelligence is only one step towards improving overall emotional intelligence which takes time and effort to change ingrained habits (Goleman, 2006).

Table 2.3

*Emotional Intelligence Comparisons*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to recognize, access, and produce emotions that cognitively aid in understanding and regulating emotions that promote growth</td>
<td>Learned emotional-based skills that result in successful work performance</td>
<td>Skills and abilities related to the knowledge of how emotions and social interactions influence successful coping in life</td>
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<tr>
<th>EI Domains</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy (SC)</td>
<td>Stress Management</td>
<td>General Mood</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Regulation (PC)</td>
<td>Intrapersonal skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation (PC)</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Skills (SC)</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness (PC)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>EI Competencies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceive emotion</td>
<td>Empathy: Understanding Others</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills: Empathy</td>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal relationship</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service Orientation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leveraging Diversity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Political Awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manage Emotion</td>
<td>Self-Regulation (PC): Self-Control, Trustworthiness, Conscientiousness, Adaptability, Innovation</td>
<td>Stress Management: Stress tolerance, Impulse Control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Emotion</td>
<td>Motivation (PC): Achievement Drive, Commitment, Initiative, Optimism</td>
<td>General Mood: Optimism, Happiness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Skills (SC): Influence Communication, Conflict Management, Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptability: Reality-testing, Flexibility, Problem solving</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change Catalyst, Building bonds, Collaboration and Cooperation, Team Capabilities</td>
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Table 2.3 (Continued)

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instruments</strong></td>
<td>MSCET (ability-based)</td>
<td>EQ-I (socially-based) – 360 available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The assessment being used in this study, selected by the EI screening study, is the Emotional Intelligent Skills Assessment (EISA). The EISA is not a tool created or researched by any of the highlighted EI theorists but is designed to measure similar competencies.

**Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA)**

The EI screening study used the Emotional Intelligent Skills Assessment (EISA) because it was readily available within the Tampa VA. Unlike the theorists listed above, Steven Stein, Derek Mann, Peter Papadogiannis, and Wendy Gordon sought to provide a quick simple assessment that does not require certification or expertise in order to administer the tool. The tool is intended for general self-awareness for individuals and teams and not recommended by the authors as a tool for selection (Stein, Mann, Papadogiannis, 2010). The EISA did undergo research and evaluation in order to create a technical manual to support its validity and reliability of the assessments as discussed earlier. But unlike the other assessment instruments mentioned in Table 2.3, the EISA is not found in peer reviewed literature and no references were located to indicate any use of this tool or curriculum in the evidence-based literature.
Individually, Steven Stein is represented in the literature for his work on organizational development, alternate dispute resolution, family therapy, and a variety of other psychological tests and how they are used. Derek T.Y. Mann has peer reviewed articles related to perceptual cognition, biofeedback, and the importance of social aspects in the field of engineering. Peter Papadogiannis has one peer reviewed article on emotional intelligence in leaders using the EQ-i.

The Tampa VA purchased the Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA) program from a company called HRDQ. This company develops, publishes, markets, and sells a variety of organizational instruments to assist employees primarily with soft skills. The EISA program includes a self-assessment that can be done on paper or electronically, a 360-assessment option, and a curriculum that can be administered in conjunction with the assessment. Multi-health Systems, Inc. employed all the authors Steven Stein, Psychologist, Research Associates Derek Mann and Peter Papadogiannis, and Wendy Gordon, an information specialist at the time of developing the EISA program in 2010.

The EI definition used by EISA is the ability to manage and perceive emotions so that behavior is appropriate in social settings. The EISA includes five factors of emotional and social intelligence including *perceiving, managing, decision making, achieving, and influencing*. The five factors of the EISA are used for the self-assessment, the 360-assessment, and the course. The assessment and the course are behavior-based.
There is considerable overlap in all of the EI theories. The common elements for all of the research, theories, and curriculum developers on the subject of EI as discussed in this chapter boils down to how an individual is able to perceive and manage their emotions in a way that is productive and positive. In all of these EI models described above, the core characteristics overlap. There are additions of competencies, different approaches to measuring, and yet the core base of emotional intelligence, *perceiving* and *managing* emotions, can be found in each author’s work.

Researchers from each theory continue to work collaboratively through the EI Consortium. Founded in 1996, the EI Consortium seeks to continue the research and development of emotional and social intelligence. The EI consortium serves as a resource of empirical knowledge around the world.
Together, all of these EI experts and others are continuing to advance, support, and highlight research in the field.

**The Challenge with Multiple Theories of EI**

Having multiple theories for emotional intelligence can pose challenges for researchers. Regardless, researchers have had overall success with confirming the validity of emotional intelligence theory and confirming that cognitive intelligence alone is not enough to determine success such as individual advancement, promotions, income potential and career satisfaction (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003; Siebert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Emmerling and Goleman (2003) prefer to refer to this challenge as robustness in research and believe this should not be viewed as a weakness. In fact, like the study of intelligence, the variety of theories and viewpoints is believed to contribute significantly to knowledge and application across populations.

My study is interested in how employees at the Tampa VA perceive EI and how the EI competencies are manifested primarily in the workplace but also in the personal lives of these employees. Given the diverse nature of the study participants it is important to explore the different aspects of EI in relation to the impact of environment, gender, race, age, and key components of a strong competency development effort.

**Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace**

Emotional intelligence in the workplace is believed by many to be an important asset contributing to successful work outcomes. Although a soft skill, it is gaining more and more attention among executives (Walter, Humphrey,
Cole, 2012). EI is increasingly being used as a tool for team building, leadership development, training, and hiring decisions (Joseph, Newman, & O’Boyle, 2014). This shift is on the rise over the past 25 years and organizations have connected employee excellence to emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998).

Higher emotional intelligence scores in interpersonal skills and stress management are also found to be connected with higher multicultural competency scores (Chrobot-Mason & Leslie, 2012). These authors describe multicultural diversity competence as “the ability to demonstrate respect and understanding, to communicate effectively, and to work collaboratively with people from different cultural backgrounds” (Chrobot-Mason & Leslie, 2012, page 220)

High emotional intelligence is believed to result in successful and engaged employees across industries. It is believed to contribute to the ability to manage stress, provide superior customer service, increased ability to handle change, working more effectively on teams, employee retention (Blank, 2008) and improved conflict management in the workplace (Connie & Leskin, 2016). The evidence to support the importance of EI on any job is supported by research involving over 500 organizations, in both public and private sectors, conducted by various researchers yet finding similar results (Goleman, 1998). It is important to note that EI alone is not what leads to superior performance but the belief is that high EI contributed to effectiveness in EI related competencies which leads to higher performance (Cherniss, 2000).
EI and Competencies

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, access, and produce emotions that cognitively aid in understanding and regulating emotions and behavior (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Within VHA, a competency describes the skills, knowledge, and abilities that are required to be considered competent to perform a job (VALU, 2011). An emotional competency is rooted in EI, it is learned, and it can result in improved work performance (Goleman, 1998). EI theorists often divide EI into sets of domains, each having competencies. Domains are the overarching theme or category while competencies are the specific skills and behaviors displayed (Cherniss, 2000). Neal, Spencer-Arnell, and Wilson (2009) believe that EI can make a difference in how individuals consciously manifest EI competencies. It is the mastery of our performance or behavior that is the key to success.

In healthcare, including the Tampa VA, technical skills for disciplines are made up of competencies. Social Work and Pharmacy are two examples of disciplines that have evidence-based arguments for EI to become part of their professions’ competency model. Nogaye (2010) recommended that EI be a part of both social work ethical standards and part of all Social Work graduate training programs. Through Nogaye’s study with social workers in health care several key findings were discovered to support adding EI to a competency model. Increased job satisfaction and reduced burnout are possible benefits of adding EI to competencies for social workers. EI has also been recommended to become part of the Pharmacy education as well (Nelson, Fierke, Sucher, & Janke, 2015). Both disciplines agree that emotional intelligence can be taught, that self-
awareness of emotions has a tremendous impact on the employee’s feelings about themselves, and that training can make a difference on the behaviors of professionals.

**EI and Hiring Decisions**

Emotional intelligence is also believed to be useful within organizations that desire to hire employees with positive attitudes. Employers struggle to make the right selection of candidates who not only have knowledge, skills, and abilities, but who can also be guaranteed to provide an effective performance on the job (Blank, 2008). Resumes and interviews cannot necessarily provide the full picture of how well an employee will perform on the job. For example, working well with others could be one missing link that does not show up on paper but could be key to making the right hiring decisions (Wasylyshyn, 2010). Furthermore, Wasylyshyn (2010) believes EI is particularly important for hiring managers selecting leadership positions (Wasylyshyn, 2010).

Assessing behavior of potential employment candidates can be a challenge when limited to a resumé and an interview. Behavior is a subjective measure, based on the observer’s perception, but it has been a common contributing factor when an employee is perceived as a poor performer (Wasylyshyn, 2010). Numerous studies have confirmed that EI can be a predictor of superior performance across industries so hiring EI strong candidates is value added for any organization (Blank, 2008). Poor hiring selections can present a financial burden on organizations as a result of a loss of productivity and poor morale (Wasylyshyn, 2010). Poor EI among the workforce may also increases the risk
and cost associated with bad behaviors such as harassment and even theft (Blank, 2008).

Using emotional intelligence for hiring can be done in a variety of ways. Assessments, such as the ones described in Table 2.2, will have a slight cost associated but the benefit will pay for itself if bad hires can be avoided (Blank, 2008). The risk of using any personality type assessment needs to be balanced by assurance in the validation that it will not lead to any Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) complaints of bias against any group (Blank, 2008). The authors suggest that if an organization decides to pilot, assessment and tracking will help assure that no bias is associated with the hiring practice and the selected test should confirm the tool adheres to the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (Blank, 2008).

Another way to use EI for hiring is to structure interview questions that seek to understand how candidates would behave under certain conditions. After a two-year pilot using a hiring panel in lieu of an individual EI assessment, Wasylyshyn (2010) found great success with structuring interview questions that included behavioral probing to hire top leaders for five organizations. Customized questions were designed to elicit specific EI behavioral responses. Interviews also pose certain risk claims of bias and should have objective guidelines associated with the interview process (Blank, 2008).

Advance preparation for hiring for EI can help any organization avoid potential claims or litigation. Taking time to create a detailed assessment of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA’s) for the position along with job descriptions that detail the characteristics and needs of the role is the beginning
Blank (2008) also suggests hiring managers spend time critically thinking about how KSA's will be measured and which EI competencies apply to the vacancy. Whether managers choose assessments or an interview, the questions should be designed to elicit the desired results to fit the KSA’s for the vacant position.

**EI and Environment**

The VHA demonstrates its desire to improve the working-environment of its employees by launching an organization wide all-employee survey annually. Several questions are introduced to supervisors regarding opportunities for innovation, upward mobility, engagement, burnout, and diversity acceptance. Once the results are received, they are shared electronically, in staff meetings, and each hospital department is encouraged to create an action plan for improving their scores the following year. The action plans are ideally developed by the non-management employees and implementation is enforced by the department’s leadership. Although there are limited peer-reviewed articles examining VHA employees and their environment, there is evidence to support the impact of the environment on emotional intelligence of workers in various settings.

It is known that high trust environments result in reduced cost for organizations (Covey & Merrill, 2006), greater opportunities for advancement, and are places where innovation is encouraged (Timberlake, 2005). Timberlake (2005) found that women are more successful in environments that are open for sharing and employee engagement on a personal level where men prefer an environment that thrives on competition.
The burden of creating a high performing environment often lies within the hands of the supervisor. Qazi, Shafique, and Ahmad (2014) found that supervisor emotional intelligence and leadership style had a greater impact on subordinate performance and professional development than the EI of the worker. However, the EI of the worker is connected with how workers behave as a positive member of the organization, how satisfied they are with their job, how engaged they remain (Shrestha & Banuya, 2016), and the extent to which workers are able to adequately adapt to their environment (Sony & Mekoth, 2016). Another study in a healthcare setting with critically ill patients found that the supervisor and the team played an important supportive role for assisting employees with behavioral expectations for managing emotions (Clarke, 2006).

It is reasonable to assume that the type of environmental culture that is present in an organization could easily, positively or negatively, impact its employees. This study will seek to explore the extent to which employees perceive the Tampa VA environment benefits or interferes with EI competency development.

**EI and Race**

Daniel Goleman included leveraging diversity as a competency for emotional intelligence. This competency expects an individual with high emotional intelligence to be able to get along with people from all backgrounds, to be aware of differences, maximize inclusion, and event speak out against bias (Goleman, 1998). Likewise, the VA includes diversity and inclusion as part of the expectation for competency in leading people (www.valu.va.gov).
Goleman refers to a study by psychologist Claude Steele who found that stereotypes negatively impact work performance as employees need to feel valued and relevant so that they are contributing their skills to the success of the workplace. Without that sense of relevance, performance is hindered. To complicate this, the stereotypes that are common in the workplace lead to low expectations, which further damages workers of color potentially leading to emotional based behavior changes.

Stereotypes lead to negative perception that people from different backgrounds may have of other groups. Stereotypes become beliefs that lead to opinions, assumptions and ultimately our paradigm impacts our behavior. For people of color, particularly Blacks, these beliefs are played out in the news, in movies, and even reality TV, further perpetuating a deep rooted fear in the general public. These paradigms also lead to implicit bias which has been measured nationally with an on-line IAT assessment and continues to find that the majority of all people from different ethnic backgrounds and half from within the African American population have anti-Black sentiments here in America (Godsil & Johnson, 2013). Additional test have even demonstrated that this implicit bias has even created physiological distress symptoms such as sweating, brain image changes, and blood pressure spikes in individuals by just showing photographic images of Black male faces (Godsil & Johnson, 2013). Prevalent in the news are examples of implicit bias that have led to the defense of police officers who claim a real and present fear of danger as part of the defense that has failed to convict murders who wear a badge. Perception and management, as key competencies of emotional intelligence would naturally become impacted by such
implicit bias creating unseen challenges in the workplace for people of color, particularly African Americans.

Reading emotions of people from difference ethnic or racial backgrounds can occur as each group may have their own defined normal reaction non-verbally (Goleman, 1998). Implications for EI assessments could be present due to bias in regard to perceived emotional intelligence. If perception of the expression of emotion by others is skewed because they are different than us, the scores on these assessments may be skewed as well.

Diversifying the workplace is not just about numbers. True diversity and inclusion sets the stage for an environment that appreciates what all team members bring to the table, embracing new ways of thinking about the job to be done. True diversity and inclusion requires that all team members work cooperatively, appreciating the uniqueness of others, and taking advantage of business opportunities that present based on the fresh viewpoint that others bring to the team. The proven results of a successful diverse environment include increased profits, enhanced learning, flexibility, and adaptability (Goleman, 1998).

As with any interpersonal interaction, perceptions of others can be consciously and unconsciously driven by life experiences (Green, 2013). All adult individuals, regardless of racial or ethnic identity, have placed a meaning on race that is now ingrained into human consciousness (Manglitz, Guy, & Merriweather, 2014). Those meanings are the direct result of life experience, messages received, observed interactions, the media, and other sources throughout a lifetime. Thus, race is viewed as a socially constructed meaning and is associated with behavior
and emotion (Smith, 2002). Depending on a person’s lifestyle, those meanings often result in assumptions that go unchallenged into their adult life (Manglitz, Guy, & Merriweather, 2014). Because those thoughts are ingrained, the dominant privileged population will find it difficult, perhaps threatening, to even consider the viewpoints of the others (Manglitz, Guy, & Merriweather, 2014) which creates challenges to building relationships in the workplace.

Barriers to successful interracial relationships may result when non-minorities fear being labeled as racist while people of color fear being accused of being hypersensitive or using a “race card” (Sue and Constantine, 2007). To further complicate things, additional fears arise when one knows she or he may have some negative feelings toward minorities and fear having that reality revealed in public which could lead to confronting white privilege and being held responsible for ending racism (Sue and Constantine, 2007).

Breaking down racial barriers requires a conscious effort to build professional and personal relationships with co-workers regardless of their racial background. All of the emotion-based behaviors needed for building relationships are found in EI competencies as well as the VHA competency model. Achieving these competencies can be challenging for African American workers who tend to avoid getting too personal at work as a protective factor in the workplace (Fernandez & Davis, 1999). Networking opportunities are often handled through informal groups where African Americans are frequently excluded. Fernandez and Davis (1999) encourage African Americans to strategically and cautiously seek out those informal groups when politics and
power are involved and find a common ground in order to join that dialogue where there may also be an opportunity for coaching and information.

**EI and Gender**

Like race, gender is also socially constructed and influences behavior and emotion (Smith, 2002). In terms of EI testing early studies found that women score higher than men on EI assessments (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). More recently, research has found that gender differences in EI depend on the assessment components measured (Siegling, Saklofske, Vesely, & Nordstokke, 2012). Using the MSCEIT and the ECI, women consistently report higher scores in interpersonal skills while men score higher on intrapersonal skills on self-report assessments (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Smith, 2002; Siegling, et al, 2012). Other studies have consistently shown that women score higher in interpersonal skills, are more self-aware of their feelings, and can show empathy more effectively while men consistently have more positive attitudes, adapt and manage stress while demonstrating higher self-confidence (Goleman, 1998). These gender differences are consistent with other research indicating male tendency towards competition while females have a tendency towards nurturing (Smith, 2002; Siegling, et al, 2012). However, there are many gender similarities as well so overall, looking at total scores of EI between males and females, there are no remarkable differences (Goleman, 1998).

At the same time, relationship building can be a challenge for women in the workplace. The networks in the workplace that help build individual career progression often either exclude women or women may self-exclude. Reasons for exclusion in the literature include that some males are not comfortable
communicating with women, informal networks are not always accessible for women, and those in power sometimes simply do not want to risk losing their dominance (Timberlake, 2005). Those who do connect formally and informally with social networks experience similar benefits and promotions as males although overall women continue to lag behind in upward mobility (Timberlake, 2005).

**EI and Age**

Emotional intelligence is believed to improve over time with age and maturity. Studies, using multiple instruments, have consistently shown that older age correlates with higher overall scores than younger individuals in emotional intelligence assessments scores (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Chen, Peng, & Fang, 2016). Similar to improvements in other types of intelligence, age, life experiences, and continuous learning are believed to contribute to the overall improvement of EI in older adults. These seasoned experienced adults have had time to refine their use of emotions, understanding their emotions, and regulating their emotions based on prior success and failure (Chen, Peng, & Fang, 2016). Hur, Moon, & Han (2014) found that older workers are more equipped to manage negative emotions more effectively and are more effective with conflict management than their younger counterparts. They also found a positive correlation between EI and work experience.

**Emotional Intelligence Competence in the VHA**

Although VHA does not specifically identify emotional intelligence as a competency or as a behavioral indicator, they do include emotionally intelligent
behaviors in both their well-defined competency model and their core values as demonstrated in table 2.5 below.

Table 2.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VHA Competence</th>
<th>VHA Behavioral Indicator</th>
<th>Associated EI Competency or Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Uses proper tone when responding in writing; communicates persuasively in writing; avoid miscommunications; adapt verbal communication to diverse audiences; responds to difficult questions with courtesy; produces enthusiasm; fosters and atmosphere of open exchange and support</td>
<td>Use of emotion; self-expression, influencing, interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Stewardship</td>
<td>Exemplifies integrity; brings attention to ethical issues; looks out for the best interest of Veterans; acts ethically regardless of pressures; maintains ethical standards; takes personal responsibility for own actions; ensures a culture of accountability</td>
<td>Social awareness; self-regulation; self-awareness; relationship management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Effectiveness</td>
<td>Conveys respect for others; demonstrated empathy; listens; builds rapport; encourages civility; conflict management; forms effective working relationships; leaves others feeling heard, understood, and valued; presents difficult information respectfully; maintains a calm demeanor; champions a culture of civility; culturally sensitive responses; demonstrates respect for diverse ideas; takes action against intolerance; participates in team meetings; provides assistance to team members; works collaboratively; mentors and coaches others</td>
<td>Inter and intra personal skills; manage emotions; self-regulation; social skills, self-expression, empathy; awareness of others; perceiving; understand emotion; social awareness; relationship management; self-awareness; perceiving; managing; decision making; empathy; social skills; motivator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran and Customer Focus</td>
<td>Advocates for Veterans; acts respectfully and courteously to all Veterans and their families; participates in community or other outreach activities; presents a positive image of the VA; treats customers with respect; develops relationships with diverse customers; creates opportunities and strategies to enhance interdepartmental collaboration to meet customers complex needs</td>
<td>Self-regulation; self-expression; self-management; relationship management; social awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Demonstrates good judgment; makes sound and timely decision based on empathy; identify barriers to serving Veterans; identifies and resolves problems</td>
<td>Decision making;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Mastery</td>
<td>Recognizes own strengths and weaknesses; actively listens to feedback; identifies areas for improvement; creates and IDP; maintains respectful and professional attitude; displays a generally positive attitude and productive behavior; seeks feedback; demonstrates resilience, energy, and enthusiasm; helps others overcome negative feelings and acknowledges when own emotions interfere with productive</td>
<td>Self-awareness; empathy; perception; aware of others; self-management;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.5 indicates the emphasis on emotion-based behaviors expected of all employees and leaders working in VHA. As noted by Dr. Goleman (2005), regardless of the temperament at birth, improvements in behavior-based competencies can be made with time and effort. The competencies described in column one identify the skills, knowledge, and abilities that are required to be considered competent to perform a job. Within the VHA, competencies are broken down by VALU into behavioral indicators, as shown in column two, and
they vary by level of responsibility within the organization. In column three the related EI competency or domain is identified. Competencies should be measurable or able to be evaluated through observation (Ritzhaupt & Martin, 2013). Many organizations have developed competencies for their employees and as described above, the VHA has placed a high emphasis on behavioral based competencies that describe components of emotional intelligence.

Within VHA the effort to develop a competent workforce is broad and extensive. Every employee has access to options for improving their competencies. For example, there are leadership development programs that concentrate attention on improving each competency, employee development programs such as Franklin Covey or Vital Smarts, contracted programs that are selected based on the VHA competency model, and a large on-line course listing within their talent management system (TMS). Unfortunately, the emphasis on emotional intelligence is indirect so concerted efforts to improve EI are primarily targeting managers and supervisors. This is understandable since the vast majority of the literature also focuses on leaders.

As for non-management employees, it has been found that the average employee does not feel they have access to emotional intelligence (EI) training and development activities as many organizations limit it to leadership. There is a limited amount of research on the impact of EI training on non-management employees (Castillo, 2014). Castillo’s interview study also found that EI is teachable and can assist employees with competency development. By assisting non-management employees with emotional intelligence competency development employers will benefit from improved self-management of emotions.
and improved workplace relationships (Castillo, 2014). Schutte and Loi (2014) also found that employees with higher EI are more engaged and satisfied on the job and perceive support and empowerment from leadership.

**Improving Emotional Intelligence Competence**

Studies on whether or not improving EI will help employees with job performance have been both positive and negative, likely due to the quality of the training (Cote & Miners, 2006). Training dollars have proven to be wasted when the traditional academic model of training such as lectures are used in the workplace (Goleman, 1998). Experts argue that the quality of the training is important to successful outcomes and argue that organizations should use proven best practice methods to assure the training that is offered achieves the desired results for their employees (http://www.eiconsortium.org). At the Tampa VA, the most requested course currently offered by VA Learning University (VALU) is “Emotional Intelligence for Leaders”.

Researcher opinions vary regarding the ability to improve an individual’s intelligence. Those who disagree connect emotional intelligence to personality while others believe it can be learned through life experience or maturity. Those who believe it can be improved argue that individuals who invest the time to seriously work on improving in these domains can find success at work and in life over time (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003). Individuals must be ready for change in order for change to occur. Improvement in emotional intelligence behaviors requires changing prior learned behaviors, which must be reprogrammed internally. Sufficient practice must occur so that the prior habits are removed (Goleman, 1998). Scientifically, plasticity of the brain supports this notion of
improvement possibilities for adults (Davidson, Jackson, & Kalin, 2000) with peak improvement occurring in the 40’s (Goleman, 1998).

A longitudinal study conducted by Case Western Reserve University’s, Weatherhead School of Management found improvements in EI. Over a seven-year period following the completion of a course designed to build EI competence, researchers were able to sufficiently demonstrate sustained improvements in four key EI competencies (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003). Another longitudinal study was successful in confirming sustainment for improvements in management and identification of emotions but not emotional understanding using training programs that had short time frames (Nelis, Quoidback, Mikilajczak, & Hansenne, 2009).

Emotional intelligence training has a tendency to focus on leaders within organizations. In fact, many leadership and management training programs are typically based on emotional intelligence concepts (Goleman, 1998). Even the VHA leadership development models are grounded in the VHA competency model, which is heavily dependent upon emotional intelligence skills (http://www.VALU.va.gov). An important aspect of improving EI competence is the training method used within organizations. The EI Consortium has pulled together recommended guidelines to help organizations provide training that works.

For organizations seeking to offer employee development, any lasting emotional or behavioral change for employees has been found to be more effective by following certain guidelines as outlined by the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations.
The consortium identified 22 recommendations, spread out across the phases of program development (Table 2.6), and the consortium believes that the more items used during training, the greater chance that successful change will be realized among learners.

**Preparation**

When planning training courses to improve emotional competence, Dr. Goleman (2000) has clear recommendations that also apply to quality training in general. Table 2.6 below describes how training programs should start with an assessment of needed competencies that will result in excellence and include a baseline and identify where people are so training can be tailored individually. Emotional competence assessment should be done and results should be delivered considerately so as not to harm.

Learner readiness is another key aspect of behavior change. Learners who are not ready are sometimes told to attend training but a better strategy is for a supervisor to gauge the desire to make changes before sending their employees for training. Forcing employees to attend training is counterproductive, results in lost manpower and wastes training dollars (http://www.eiconsortium.org). For EI competency development the ability to change will require a basic desire for true lasting change and the work that goes along with that desire.

The stages of change model developed by J. O. Prochaska and Carlo Diclemente’s in 1983 are taught in the leadership development programs at the Tampa VA. This model describes readiness for change in five stages including pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.
(Pollock, Jefferson, & Wick, 2015). The model has a beginning and an end and does not believe that any step can be skipped in order for lasting change to occur but also recognizes that relapse may occur from time to time (Pollock, Jefferson, & Wick, 2015).

Key cognitive aspects that identify learner readiness include taking initiative, demonstrating independence, persistence, and personal responsibility for their own learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Buy-in strategies will vary by employee and the motivators for learning must recognize learner life experiences, individual goals, and even the learner’s internal and external environment (Brockett, 2015; Tough, 1979). Recognizing and shaping the pre-contemplation stage of change to assure the learner comes in ready to wisely use the time also aides in learner buy-in (Pollock, Jefferson, & Wick, 2015). Helping employees look at the benefits for attending training will assist with engagement and buy-in from employees (Tough, 1979). If a supervisor believes a program will benefit the employee they should engage in activities to obtain the buy-in from that employee before engaging in the training (http://www.eiconsortium.org).

Adult educators are more effective in the training environment when they can recognize learner readiness and how that can vary individually. Some learners may need encouragement from the educator while others just want the technical information. Models of learning should be diverse to account for individual differences (Knowles, 1998).

According to the EI Consortium, organizations should assure learners are ready for training and use motivators related to competency and career excellence. The fact that the majority of adults pursue learning on a regular
basis, at least five times per year, and the majority of these efforts are self-directed (Tough, 1979) aids adult educators in designing training that can address learner variability while providing support and autonomy for learners to develop competency (Knowles, 1998).

Carol Dweck has conducted extensive research on the concept of mindsets in relation to personal success. During her studies she came across a different view of Alfred Binet’s viewpoint on intelligence. Although he is best known for the IQ test he developed, he does not seemingly agree with the vast array of research that believes IQ is static. As documented in a 1909 publication, Binet wrote that he believed IQ was in fact changeable and could be improved with experience, training, and utilizing different styles of learning. Many modern day philosophers now agree that lifelong learning and development of self is possible in spite of intelligence and personality (Dweck, 2006).

Dr. Dweck’s research focuses on how self-perception can impact learning, the pursuit of goals, and quality of life. There are two mindsets she identifies, fixed and growth. A fixed mindset believes our qualities such as intelligence, personality, and our moral character are unchangeable. A fixed mindset leads to a need to prove oneself and over compensate for our limited view of our own potential. The growth mindset believes that personal qualities can be changed with effort and that one’s potential is unknown. Those with growth mindsets will persevere even when things get hard. There are also occasions when mindsets vary depending on the area in question such as intelligence, personality, and moral character. In these instances, the mindset directs behavior in regard to the issue in question (Dweck, 2006). In her book, *Mindsets*, Dweck’s sees her
research as enhancing EI theory because it helps provide an explanation about human behavior in regard to the personal use of certain competencies as well as relationship success and failure as a result of that behavior (Dweck, 2006).

**Training Delivery**

Training delivery refers to the actual implementation of an educational program. Several steps are described in table 2.6 for this phase including setting goals and objectives, agenda planning that include practice and feedback so learners can learn from their mistakes, using real life examples, reflection opportunities, and using experiential and self-directed learning components. (http://www.eiconsortium.org). Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is defined as “both the external characteristics of an instructional process and the internal characteristics of the learner, where the individual assumes primary responsibility for a learning experience” (Brockett, 2015, p. 49). SDL represents at least 70% of all adult learning activities (Brockett, 2015; Tough, 1979).

Individuals need to set goals and strategies for achieving their goals in developing their emotional intelligence (http://www.eiconsortium.org). Because emotional competence change can be slow when changing behaviors, learners should be encouraged to face failures as they occur and resist returning to old habits. Coaching, encouragement, and peer support can assist with lasting change and positive development of EI competencies (http://www.eiconsortium.org). The EI screening study had Tampa VA employees participate in exercises supplied by the training program, and dialogues in focus groups to provide examples of ways to improve EI but the choice of how they crafted their action plan was autonomous.
Table 2.6

EI Consortium Training Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Development Phase</th>
<th>Steps to Consider for lasting change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Organizational Needs Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learner Competency Assessment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide Learner Feedback</td>
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<td>Provide Learner Choices</td>
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<td>Encourage Participation</td>
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<td>Link Learning to Learner Values</td>
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<td>Set Realistic Expectations of the Training</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Learner Readiness Assessment</td>
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<td>Develop Educator and Learner Relationship</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide A Self-Directed Environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Set Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Set Objectives for the Goals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide Practice Opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use Experiential Methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training Delivery</td>
<td>Ensure Support is Available</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide Examples Using Realistic Scenarios</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learn from Mistakes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Transfer</td>
<td>Encourage immediate on-the-job Use of Skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Build a Learning Organizational Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluate Before and After Training and Future</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-Up</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Training for emotional competence is not the same as training for technical competencies in general. Different portions of the brain regulate technical competencies and emotional behaviors. Thus, technical skills training in a traditional classroom setting is sufficient but emotional and behavioral changes that require unlearning habits requires strategies as mentioned in Table 2.6 and have more success through life activities which are primarily outside of the traditional classroom (Goleman, 1998) and is commonly referred to as experiential learning.
Learning Transfer

Learning transfer refers to how people use what they learn in training for performance improvement (Pollock, Jefferson, & Wick, 2015). Learning transfer seeks to reinforce and apply the information learned on the job immediately. This process works best in organizations that have developed a learning culture. Return on investment studies in this area have caused organizations to change their approach to training and development as they have found traditional models do not have the desired lasting impact on workers, resulting in wasted training dollars (Goleman, 1998). Unfortunately many organizations pay more attention to training delivery then learning transfer which reduces the impact on performance improvement (Pollock, Jefferson, & Wick, 2015). Successful training and development programs can pay for themselves through organizational benefits in just one year so it is in their best interest to plan accordingly (Goleman, 1998). Behavior change over time is best improved through life experience and practice. Research has found a 40% increase in performance improvement when learning transfer efforts are in place compared to training alone (Pollock, Jefferson, & Wick, 2015). Lasting behavioral change such as emotional intelligence competencies requires a change in habits, which takes more concentrated time, attention, and repeated practice (Goleman, 1998).

Evaluation

The final recommendation of the EI consortium as noted in Table 2.6 is to assure that an evaluation component is attached to the training program. In today’s competition for resources, training and development efforts must be ready to demonstrate a return on investment (Pollock, Jefferson, & Wick, 2015).
Evaluations are a crucial step towards demonstrating the value of training so that leaders can make informed decisions about continuous improvement and sustainment of training efforts (Pollock, Jefferson, & Wick, 2015). Pre and post-evaluations as well as follow-up surveys are the most common source of evaluation data (Goleman, 1998; http://www.eiconsortium.org). Unfortunately, a simple Likert type scale of satisfaction does not assure that training will make an impact on the job (Goleman, 1998). Today there are a number of return on investment strategies to explore in depth how the training impacted performance.

**American Express Best Practice**

American Express has been identified as a best practice training program in emotional intelligence competence. In the 1990’s, they required their financial advisors to attend a two-day training initially, followed by 3 additional days. They netted a 20% increase in sales during their initial pilot phase and have since expanded this training throughout their financial advising department as well as a leadership program for managers (Goleman, 1998). The content of the program includes a variety of modalities including lecture, activities, small group discussions, reflection, practice, goal setting related to problem areas, visualization exercises, and a focus on topics such as relationship building, listening, empathy, holding difficult conversations, boundaries, stress management, and self-care. Personal action plans are developed as part of the program (www.eiconsortium.org).
**VHA practice**

VHA values its employees and continues to invest in their personal growth through educational offerings geared toward competency development. As described above in the section on competency development, VHA has all-employee and leadership competencies that are heavily dependent upon emotional intelligence for success. The training that the Tampa VA selects is often rooted in emotional and behavioral change such as Crucial Conversations (Patterson, 2002) courses and a wealth of Franklin Covey Development programs ([https://www.franklincovey.com/](https://www.franklincovey.com/)). The developers of these courses are well aware of the neuroscience behind behavior change and have built into their workbooks, videos, and associated job aides components of the techniques described in Table 2.6. Because of this collaboration for employee development training through vital smarts and FranklinCovey, the Tampa VA does a great job with preparation and delivery. All of their facilitators go through a rigorous certification process to assure that they implement these programs as designed. Learning transfer and evaluation efforts are minimal due to limited human resources available to support these efforts. However, the Tampa VA has revised their evaluations within the talent management system (TMS) to ask questions that challenges learners to reflect on how they apply their learning, which is part of the return on investment process. The follow-up process is desired but the feedback required to maximize return on investment data receives minimal responses from learners and supervisors.
Challenges for EI Development in the Workplace

There are peer reviewed articles (Baker, 2000; Clarke, 2006; Hur, Moon, & Han, 2014; Johnson & Eby, 2011; Qazi, Shafique, & Ahmad, 2014; Shrestha, & Banuya, 2016; Sony, & Mekoth, 2016; Timberlake, 2005) addressing emotions, and differences for emotional intelligence based on race, gender, or the environment that indicate a need for further exploration. In the context of this study, I allude to the potential for these workplace contextual factors to interfere with an employee’s emotional intelligence and their pursuit of emotional competence development.

For example, during the interviews for the EI screening study, there were a few occasions where participants seemed to be outliers regarding the positive aspects of emotional intelligence. There were tears, discomfort, and denial of personal responsibility for their own emotional intelligence as they seemed to place the responsibility on unstable work environments or other external factors. Clarke (2006) suggested a major finding in the hospice setting related to the context of the workplace including supervisor and peer relationships. This study explores potential contextual factors in greater detail.

There is a growing amount of literature to support the need for environmental reinforcement of training in regard to social and emotional competence development (Cherniss, Goleman, Emmerling, Cowan & Adler, 1998). A lot of the burden seems to fall on the responsibility of the supervisor. In addition to supervisor reinforcement and coaching regarding the new skills, they are expected to model emotional intelligence in order to support learner application. Supervisors also set the stage for creating a learning culture where a
supportive climate for learning is clear. Learners also have a role in assuring that they apply what they have learned and these authors believe that reflection is particularly valuable (Cherniss, Goleman, Emmerling, Cowan, & Adler, 1998).

This study sought to understand VHA employees understanding of EI. How knowledge of EI was conveyed to them is an important backdrop for this study. Experiential learning was the training approach used and happens to be a preferred method recommended by Dr. Goleman referenced earlier in this study. An exploration of experiential learning as developed by David Kolb is what I turn to now.

**Kolb’s Experiential Learning**

David Kolb developed experiential Learning Theory in 1984. Overlapping with the fields of psychology and philosophy, experiential learning posits that experience is the center of learning. Kolb developed a continuous learning cycle that involves a concrete actual experience followed by reflecting on the experiences. During abstract conceptualization participants modify their pre-existing idea based on their personal reflection and the final part of the cycle involves active experimentation by improving and repeating the experience based on what was learned (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001).

This model is used throughout the literature not only for HRD (Yeo & Marquardt, 2015) but also in various industries including healthcare. Clarke (2006) utilized case study research and focus groups to assess the improvement of EI for hospice workers. Baker, Jensen, and Kolb (2005) proposed a framework where conversational learning or dialogues with other learners can assist with the construction of meaning based on life experience.
This continuous improvement cycle adequately describes how this study assisted participants with learning and applying emotional intelligence competencies over the six-month period of this study.

**Figure 2.1** Experiential Learning Application at the Tampa VA

Figure 2.1 demonstrates how study interventions were utilized to learn and apply the Kolb model of experiential learning. The study participants’ concrete experience included conducting self-assessments of their own EI, reading feedback reports for their 360-assessment feedback from managers and peers, participating in interviews and focus groups, and taking that knowledge to create action plans for improving their EI and reducing the gap between their self-perception and 360-assessment scores. The reflection observation phase on the Kolb model involved interactive exercises and dialogue within the EISA curriculum, self-reflection on not only their scores and perception gaps but also on life experiences that may not have been viewed as successful. The abstract
conceptualization phase of the Kolb model used that reflection to create self-directed action plans for improving EI related behaviors that may improve interactions at work and/or at home. Examples of self-directed activities included the use journals or other means for recording and reporting back on how, and if, interpersonal interactions were improved as a result of changes they made in their EI domains and a final post 360-assessment. Application of those self-directed actions plans completes the final phase of the Kolb model, which is continuous and on-going.

**Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of the literature related to the purpose of this study. It sought to provide a balanced look at both the positive and negative factors that can cause challenges for employees of the Tampa VA. The chapter traced the history and the evolution of theories of intelligence to social intelligence and ultimately to the creation of the theory of emotional intelligence. Also reviewed was literature on EI in the workplace and the contextual factors associated with that setting such as the competency development, the work environment, race, gender, age, hiring and how to improve EI overall. As noted in this chapter, absent from the literature are studies addressing EI in the VHA or the use of the EISA and its associated training program.
CHAPTER THREE

The purpose of this study was to better discern ten Tampa VA medical center employees understanding and application of EI competence within their personal and professional lives. This chapter will provide an overview of the design, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures that were used for this study as well as how specific relevant data was extracted from a larger study. As noted in Chapter 1, data for this study was pulled from the EI screening study (IRB PRO#00022936). The purpose of the EI screening study was to determine if the EI of participants in one of two leadership development programs at the Tampa VA correlate with their ability to manage stress, deal with change, and work more effectively on teams while in these programs. These 6-month long programs have a tendency to create a great deal of stress for candidates who have to juggle their normal job, attend sessions, work on project teams, collaborate across facilities within the Florida region, and still maintain their own personal lives. Using a mixed methods approach, the EI screening study combined findings from the EISA, completion of modules, projects, team performance indicators, interviews, observations, and focus groups, as it sought to become better informed about the potential implications of each of these factors in making a difference in the behavior for the participants.
As noted in Chapter 2, only eleven peer-reviewed articles were located that featured the employee perspectives of emotional intelligence in the workplace. Only two of those studies used a qualitative approach. And of the ten EI quantitative studies one acknowledged that it is difficult to measure emotional intelligence and recommended qualitative studies for future research (Alson, Dastoor, & Sosa-Fey, 2010). None of the studies were affiliated with the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) which is currently the largest integrated health care system in America (www.va.gov). In addition, none of the studies used the Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA) or the EISA curriculum in their study.

Half of the studies examined front line staff and the other half studied managers. The majority of the focus was on how supervisors impacted their subordinates based on their own emotional intelligence. One study found that the emotional intelligence of the employee did not have any effect on the relationship with their supervisor but the employees’ perception of their leader impacted their performance (Qazi, Shafique, & Ahmad, 2014). Another article referenced the importance of supervisors and coworkers creating an environment that is conducive to high performance for their employees (Yuan, HSU, Shieh, & Li, 2012) indicating that the environment can make a difference in how EI competencies are demonstrated in the workplace. My research sought to reveal a deeper understanding from study participants regarding contextual factors within the Tampa VA leading to understanding the implications for education and training of employees on this topic in an effort to support the overall mission of VHA.
Rationale

A qualitative approach was selected for this study in order to seek a deeper understanding of how emotional intelligence manifests itself in the life of VHA employees in their personal and professional lives. Qualitative research aids in understanding participant perspectives by gleaning insights in a way that is not as apparent in quantitative studies (Smith, Bekker, & Cheater, 2011). Qualitative studies in healthcare are helpful in addressing political and environmental factors (Smith, Bekker, & Cheater, 2011), which should be unique within the VHA as the largest healthcare organization in America (https://www.va.gov/). The EI screening study had a quantitative component, which provided the numerical findings for how the 6-month experience made a difference in participant self-perceptions and the perceptions of their supervisors, peers, and others through the 360-assessment process solely examining emotional intelligence behaviors. The numbers alone fall short in helping to fully explain the true manifestation of this new knowledge in the life of the study participants. The data being used from the EI screening study revealed very little quantitative differences between pre- and post-360 assessment scores. Although not reflected in the scores, the interviews provided insight from participants about life changes above and beyond the questions being answered in the EI screening study. This qualitative study allows the researcher to investigate the interview and focus group data and search for a deeper understanding of how the interventions may have helped participants grow and develop (Pistrang & Barker, 2012).
Research Questions

The research questions answered during this study are derived from an EI screening study conducted at the Tampa VA that used mixed methods to determine if EI screening would be useful in the selection process for leadership development programs. The quantitative data from that original study found very little significance between the pre and post-test scores following the intervention. The qualitative data from the original study focused solely on the leadership development efforts of the participants. This study sought to better understand how those same participants perceive and understand EI competencies and how they apply EI personally and professionally. This study may hold implications regarding the extent to which EI training can support the growth and development of all Tampa VA employees in the midst of working within a diverse bureaucratic workplace culture. The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. How do VHA employees describe their understanding of emotional intelligence?
2. How do VHA employees apply emotional intelligence in their professional and private lives?
3. What contextual factors emerge that may present challenges as well as opportunities for emotional intelligence development within the Tampa VA?
4. To what extent did the understanding and application of emotional intelligence change after completion of the EI screening study?
Research Methods

This study was a content analysis of existing data using a pragmatic research framework that sought to better understand the use of emotional intelligence competencies within the personal and professional lives of employees working in the Tampa VA. Semi-structured interviews and focus group data were analyzed to explore the understanding and application of these employees in regard to EI. How they learned from the study interventions including a 360-degree pre and post assessment, completion of an EISA curriculum, and dialogues from individual interview and focus group interviews with each other regarding how they can use EI to improve their personal and professional lives was explored (Conine & Leskin, 2016). Each intervention allowed for the opportunity to share and reflect on both personal and professional examples. The 360-degree assessment allowed participants to choose family and friends for feedback, if desired.

Research Design

A qualitative pragmatic approach (Lichtman, 2013) does not adhere to one specific approach and instead pulls from a variety of research approaches. The participants’ engagement in a variety of experiential learning interventions guided the search for subjective findings regarding how each employee perceived, understood, and applied EI (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003) in their personal and professional lives. All of these experiences, social interactions, personal reflections, dialogues, and learning experiences were combined as I sought answers to the research questions in this study. In the analysis phase, the use of a pragmatic approach provided me the flexibility to explore other aspects of the
existing data as needed (Lichtman, 2013) while recognizing the potential weakness of the research failing to be viewed as clear and logical (Sprenkle & Piercy, 2005). A pragmatic approach allowed me to examine participant meanings in regard to contextual variables (Merriam, 2002) and for this study that will include the VHA contextual factors such as participant race, gender, age, and the Tampa VA environment as a whole.

This study utilized semi-structured interview and focus group transcripts to conduct thematic content analysis and define categories for findings (Pistrang & Baker, 2012). The goal of this study was to understand what emotional intelligence meant to participants in regard to its usefulness personally and professionally. Conventional content analysis allowed me to describe the participants’ experiences with multiple interventions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) in order to reach the goal of this study.

Data consisted of transcribed individual interviews and focus groups. All participants in the original EI screening study participated in three individual interviews and three focus groups plus a six-hour experiential learning based training course on emotional intelligence. The EI screening study originally had a total of thirty participants. Two participants withdrew from that study and nine failed to complete the EISA posttest, which prevented the evaluation of EI change scores while in that prior screening study. The amount of data generated for each participant ranged between 36-90 pages for the three interviews alone. In addition, three focus group transcripts combined ranged between 249-366 pages. This study selected ten of the participants from the screening study. Selection of these ten participants was based on gaps in the pre and post scores for self-
assessment as compared to their supervising managers’ assessment scores for *managing* and *perceiving*. The demographics of the sample of the ten participants can be found on Table 3.3.

Data collected from the interviews and focus groups were professionally transcribed and placed in file folders. Each participant had a file folder that included interview transcripts, pre and post EI assessment scores, handwritten interview notes, and signed informed consent forms. Focus group transcriptions were kept in a locked file cabinet within the principal investigators’ office.

Emotional intelligence theory was the primary theoretical framework for this study combining the work of Salovey and Mayer (1990), Bar-On (1997), and Goleman (1995). Kolb’s (2015) experiential learning theory describes the conduit through which participants learned to apply emotional intelligence theory in their personal and professional lives.

**Participants**

A purposeful sample was used for the EI screening study to target engaged employees. Engaged employees are those who interact and actively participate within their work environment (Sony & Mekoth, 2016). The EI screening study sought to explore the possibility of using EI assessment during future leadership development program selection procedures. Engaged employees were purposely sought for that study in an effort to mirror the type of employee that typically applies for leadership development programs.

All participants were required to be full-time employees, working at least forty hours per week, at the Tampa VA and they were invited to participate in the EI screening study if they attended an Emerging Leaders class or applied for a
leadership development program. These participants represent a broad array of demographics in relation to age, race, gender, and role within the organization. Participants also could not have any conduct or performance infractions on record during the year prior to the study. Human Resource Development (HRD) staff at the Tampa VA assisted with verification of eligibility for all applicants.

Participant recruitment for the EI screening study was done through facility-wide email messages and targeted emails to supervisors and leadership development program alumni requesting recruitment assistance within the facility. Since some of the participants were also applying for one of the Tampa VA leadership development programs, they were notified that participation in the EI screening study was not a requirement of either program. It was also communicated to participants that participation in the EI screening study was completely voluntary.

These IRB-consenting participants were exposed to a variety of learning opportunities over a 6-month period and they shared their experiences with the study team during interviews and focus groups. The leadership development program group they attended offered additional training modules related to the VHA Leadership competency model. That model does not currently identify emotional intelligence as a competency although the behavioral indicators for each competency require EI in order to master the skills. The leadership development program group and the control group attended three individual interviews, three focus groups, and the EISA training course designed to assist participants with improving their emotional intelligence as part of the prior EI screening study. Interviews and focus groups were conducted and led by two
PhD's and a doctoral student. A court reporting service transcribed the interviews and focus groups.

Participants in the prior EI screening study were solicited to participate in one of two groups, a LEAD group or an aspiring leader group. The LEAD group was comprised of participants in one of the Tampa VA's leadership development programs. The aspiring leader group was solicited from a pool of applicants who either applied for, but were not selected for, a leadership development program or employees who attended a Franklin Covey Emerging Leaders one-day training program. During the qualitative analysis, participants who participated in LEAD were compared to those who did not. There was an even split of 15 participants per group at the beginning of the prior EI screening study. Table 3.1 below demonstrates the various demographic contextual factors related to the original sample of 30 participants.

Table 3.1

EI Screening Study Sample Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Factor</th>
<th>Demographic Details</th>
<th>LEAD Group n (%)</th>
<th>Control Group n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7 (47%)</td>
<td>10 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8 (53%)</td>
<td>5 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6 (40%)</td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
<td>7 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nineteen of the 30 participants completed both the pre- and post- EISA assessment. Since pre- and post-test scores were used to determine significance, a sample from those 19 participants was utilized for this study. Of the 19 participants, 63% were female and 37% male. Thirty-seven percent were white, 42% Black, 11% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 5% identified themselves as mixed race. Age was also requested of participants; 53% were under the age of 35, 21% were between the ages of 36-45, 3% were between the ages of 46-55, and 11% of the participants were over 56 years of age. As for positions in the organization, at the conclusion of the study 26% of the participants held management positions and 74% were employees not in a leadership role and who may be the first to serve Veterans on a daily basis. Table 3.2 describes the participant demographics for
the sample of 19 used as a source for the 10 participants that were used in this dissertation research.

Table 3.2

*Participant Demographics for EI Screening Study Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Factor</th>
<th>Demographic Details</th>
<th>Total n (%)</th>
<th>Lead Group n (%)</th>
<th>Control Group n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12 (63%)</td>
<td>6 (60%)</td>
<td>6 (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
<td>4 (40%)</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>8 (42%)</td>
<td>5 (50%)</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7 (37%)</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
<td>5 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>24-35</td>
<td>10 (53%)</td>
<td>6 (60%)</td>
<td>4 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>4 (21%)</td>
<td>3 (30%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>3 (16%)</td>
<td>1 (10%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Non-Manager</td>
<td>14 (74%)</td>
<td>7 (70%)</td>
<td>7 (78%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>5 (26%)</td>
<td>3 (30%)</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to the amount of interview data, the number of participants for this study was reduced to ten, five from each group. The participants were selected based on having a 1 standard deviation difference between their pre- and post-EISA self-assessments and the manager assessment in the *managing* and
perceiving categories on the EISA. A gap score of over 1 standard deviation is considered to be statistically significant (Mann, 2009). Significant differences, of at least 1 standard deviation, between the participant self-assessment and the scores received from others on the 360-degree assessment infer unconscious incompetence. Unconscious incompetence occurs when individuals have a disconnection between how they see themselves as compared to how others view them. The goal of improving EI 360-scores is to reduce that gap as it indicates congruence between how individuals view themselves and how others perceive them. The demographics of the ten participants with the greatest gap score are represented in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

*Dissertation Study Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Factor</th>
<th>Demographic Details</th>
<th>Overall (%)</th>
<th>LEAD Group (n)</th>
<th>Control Group (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>24-35</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Non-Manager</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interview procedures

Three individual semi-structured interviews were scheduled at times that were selected by each participant and each interview was given a 45-minute time slot. Interview questions, located in Appendix B, were designed to gain an understanding of baseline information about EI, encourage self-reflection on experiences with EI, to deepen knowledge of EI, and to connect with peers on their shared experiences with this study (Wolgemuth, Erdil-Moody, Opsal, Cross, Kaanta, Dickman, & Colomer, 2015). Throughout the six-months, the interviews sought to further explore understanding and application of each aspect of EI concluding with how this will make a difference in their lives moving forward (Wolgemuth, Erdil-Moody, Opsal, Cross, Kaanta, Dickman, & Colomer, 2015). A gap score of over 1 standard deviation is considered to be statistically significant (Mann, 2009). Members of the principal investigation team conducted the interviews in conference rooms at the Tampa VA.

Six focus groups were scheduled based on the principle investigator (PAL) team’s schedule and dates were provided to participants at the time of the solicitation for participants. Each focus group was given a four-hour time slot, offering two per day and held in conference rooms at the Tampa VA. The purpose of these focus group sessions was not only to ask interview questions but also to conduct the EISA curriculum as part of the experiential learning process. The focus group questions found in Appendix B were designed to encourage participants to share their experiences in a group setting with a goal of helping group members continue to explore their own perceptions about EI while interacting with their peers (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Average attendance was
between 9-13 participants per focus group. Two hours of the focus group consisted of asking prepared questions and the final two hours of each focus group consisted of administering one-third of the EISA curriculum. This course utilized EISA slides and a detailed participant workbook with a variety of exercises. A facilitator guide designed to enhance dialogue and assist participants with self-reflection about emotional intelligence was also purchased by the Tampa VA Education Office.

Individual interviews and focus groups occurred at the beginning of the study and at the three and six-month time frame during the 6-month study. Individual interviews were conducted in a private office setting. A privately contracted court reporting service transcribed all interviews.

The interview and focus group questions that are most relevant to this study are listed in table 3.4 and aligned with the corresponding research question. Some of the interview and focus group questions could potentially cover more than one research question. The numbers in front of the question in column 2 represent the order of questions on the original interview and focus group protocol. Column 3 indicates which individual interview or focus group the questions were asked.

Table 3.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Relevant Interview/Focus Group Questions</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Relevant Interview and Focus Group Questions
Table 3.4 (Continued)

Q1. How do VA employees describe their understanding of emotional intelligence?

4.1. What meaning do you attach to the category of perceiving in your personal growth and development?
4.2. What meaning do you attach to the category of managing in your personal growth and development?
3. How important do you believe emotional intelligence is in regard to personal growth and development?
4.1. How accurate do you believe this assessment is?
4.2. The five categories are in the order of your strengths. What about that surprises you?
4.3. What are your beliefs about your own assessment of your emotional intelligence?
4.4. What are your beliefs about your supervisor and coworkers’ assessment of your emotional intelligence?

4.1.a. What changes have you made, personally or professionally, in relation to the implications identified in the report?
2 b. How has your understanding of emotional intelligence changed over the last six months?
b.i. To what extent has your understanding of EI affected your work culture?
c. How valuable is emotional intelligence for you now as compared to six months ago?

Q2. How do VA employees from apply emotional intelligence in their personal and private life?

1. iv. How have your beliefs about the meaning or value of emotional intelligence changed?
5. What are the potential risks of not improving these dimensions (failed relationships, stagnant career, etc.)?
6. What are the potential benefits of improving these dimensions (engagement, advancement, etc.)?
7. What changes, if any, do you think you will make as a result of this assessment?

1.iii. What successes can you share about personal changes?
1. Have you been able to sustain change in emotionally intelligent behaviors over the past 6-months?
2. What difference, if any, has understanding emotional intelligence made for you personally and professionally?
3. What difference, if any, do you notice in supervisor/manager relationships?
4. What difference, if any, do you notice in relationships at work?
5. What difference, if any, do you notice in personal relationships?

4.1.a. What changes have you made, personally or professionally, in relation to the implications identified in the report? (Followed by each of the 4 additional categories)
Table 3.4 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q4. 1. What contextual factors emerge that may present challenges as well as opportunities to emotional intelligence development within the Tampa VA.?</th>
<th>4.4. What are your beliefs about your supervisor and coworkers assessment of your emotional intelligence?</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b.i. To what extent has your understanding of EI affected your work culture?;</td>
<td>f. How might emotional intelligence assist you with working more effectively with your team?;</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. In regard to relationships, how has the meaning of emotional intelligence changed over the past six months?</td>
<td>3. What difference, if any, do you notice in supervisor/manager relationships?</td>
<td>FG3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What difference, if any, do you notice in relationships at work?</td>
<td>5. What difference, if any, do you notice in personal relationships?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Site**

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the largest integrated health care system in America ([https://www.va.gov/](https://www.va.gov/)) and has a racially diverse population of employees. The VHA is committed to assuring they have a diverse workforce and strives for diversity inclusion in every aspect of the agency. Assuring a diverse workforce is believed to contribute to better services to its customers. Agency wide, the VA workforce is comprised of over 360,000 employees and its diversity data is displayed in Table 3.5. It employs a higher percentage of women, Blacks, and Asians although lagging in numbers of Hispanic employees as compared to the general workforce ([https://vssc.med.va.gov](https://vssc.med.va.gov)). In 2015, diversity data indicated a workforce that was 72% male and 28% female, 55% White, 32% Black, 8% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 1.5% American Indian/Alaska Native, and less than 1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander or two or more races ([http://www.diversity.va.gov](http://www.diversity.va.gov) and [https://www.census.gov](https://www.census.gov)).
The EI screening study took place at the James A Haley Veteran Hospital (Tampa VA) in Tampa, Florida. The Tampa VA opened its doors in 1972 to serve Veterans and has since grown to become a level 1 facility with state-of-the-art technology and a well-respected education and research reputation. As a teaching facility, the Tampa VA is affiliated with the University of South Florida (USF) College of Medicine. Its main campus sits in the new Tampa area and has facilities in New Port Richey, Zephyrhills, Lakeland, and Brooksville. It is part of the Veterans integrated System Network (VISN) 8 and covers four counties in Florida. In addition to general medicine inpatient and outpatient, the Tampa VA has long term care and a host of specialty services. The Tampa VA is also one of five Polytrauma Centers across the country and these facilities provide care to the most severely injured active duty service members fighting for the US across the globe. The Tampa VA employs approximately 5,000 employees and Table 3.6 identifies the following diversity percentages: 40% male and 60% female, 51% White, 23% Black, 15% Hispanic, 9% Asian, 1% American Indian, and less than
1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander or other race (https://vsse.med.va.gov/ and http://tampaedc.wpengine.com).

Table 3.6

*Tampa Employee and Tampa Metropolitan Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Tampa 2015 data</th>
<th>Tampa Metropolitan Demographics 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander or two or more races</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>All other races 4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection Methods**

Basic demographic data was collected during the orientation session for the screening study. Interviews and focus groups were taped and transcribed. Each individual transcript ranged between 12-30 pages and each focus group transcript ranges between 83-122 pages. Field notes were collected by the PI team during the interviews but they were not value added for data analysis as they simply repeated key points from the interviews and failed to include observations.

This study utilized existing data from interviews and focus groups to identify and examine themes among participants regarding VHA employee understanding of EI and how it was applied to personal and professional growth and development efforts. Table 3.7 demonstrates when the data was collected
during the six-month span of the EI screening study. No additional data collection took place for this study.

Table 3.7

Data Collection Type and Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>3 Months</th>
<th>6 Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job type</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EISA 360</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post-activity data management for this study secured transcripts in a locked file cabinet within the principal’s office. Although the initial study was coded in a timely fashion, the current research re-examined the data from a new lens adding new questions to explore.

Interventions

In addition to the interviews and focus groups, the participants in this study completed an EISA training course written by the same authors who developed the EISA assessment tool. The leadership development program (LEAD) group had the extra advantage of completing a competitive leadership development program, either PRIDE or CDL. Both of these leadership development programs provided a curriculum that teaches participants about the VHA leadership competencies. Although VHA competencies do not specifically identify
emotional intelligence, Table 2.5 identified the behavioral indicators for most of
the leadership competencies and how they connect with emotional intelligence.

**EISA training**

The authors of the EISA 360-assessment developed a training course to help individuals with personal growth in regard to their emotional intelligence. This course covers the five factors of the EISA in detail. Each factor includes activities designed to stimulate discussion and reflection.

Participants completed the EISA course in three parts. Each part was presented in conjunction with the scheduled focus groups for study participants. Each participant received an electronic version of the course workbook from the HRDQ organization that currently manages the on-line assessment program and distributes course materials and facilitator guides.

**Data Analysis**

Conventional content analysis and emotional intelligence theory was used to analyze this study of existing data. The existing qualitative data for this study consists of transcribed interviews and focus groups from the EI screening study conducted at the Tampa VA. The data was collected over a six-month period for a group of employees who volunteered to participate. Through data analysis understanding and application of EI competence is described for the study participants.

EI theory is the basis of the assessment tools, the training program and the interview question route. Figure 3.2 is an example of how content analysis was used to explore the findings related to behavioral changes of participations during the progression of this study. This chart demonstrates how participants

88
described their behavior change and the bars demonstrate the frequency of expression from each of the ten participants.

Figure 3.1 Behavior Change Content Analysis

Field notes were taken by each of the three members of the PI team participating in the interviews and focus groups. Field notes were expected to include observations and key points from the responses of participants. Unfortunately, the team did not sufficiently include the necessary detail in order to integrate this data along with the transcripts during thematic analysis (Strom & Fagermoen, 2012). The review of transcripts involved critically thinking about potential new realizations, or gaps in the findings (Grbich, 1999).

Each participant had three individual interview transcripts and a portion of three focus group transcripts. Transcriptions were organized and separated by
lead and control group prior to thematic analysis. The unit of analysis was each participants’ response to the questions that are relevant for this study as indicated in Table 3.4. The qualitative data analysis reduced this large amount of data into categories and themes. Each transcript was read at least five times during the thematic analysis process. The first read focused on the content and broadly sought potential themes, outliers, or concerns that initially emerge (Grbich, 1999). A few highlights and comments were added to the margins. The data was read again using a combination of in vivo and emotional coding. After a few transcripts, only in vivo coding continued and these phases were marked and notes were added to the margins of the transcript as well. The use of content analysis not only examined the communication of participants but also described the contextual meanings of the interview text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

**Coding process**

Using in vivo coding, phrases from participants were examined to identify short descriptions in search of patterns as well as outliers. Codes succinctly summarized participant feedback into short descriptions. The in vivo codes were initially placed in quotation marks to separate them from other types of coding efforts (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Emotion coding was briefly used to identify any inferences to emotion by the participants in regard to their experiences and reflections shared. Emotion codes were going to be used to assist in identifying understanding and self-awareness expressed by participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) but the in vivo codes also achieved this goal. The interview data continued to be read and examined closely until all data was addressed. Data continued to be read keeping the research questions in mind.
Codes were generated from the experiences of the participants seeking clarity on challenges and opportunities faced in their organizational environment as they sought to improve EI competencies. Referring back to portions of the interviews was on-going throughout the coding process.

There was such a large amount of data that the codes were placed in excel to help with the identification of patterns and themes (Grbich, 1999). Re-evaluation of the codes continued during the entire analysis process. To narrow the codes they were grouped into categories and subcategories. Color coding the boxes in MS Excel helped to identify the major themes.

**Thematic Analysis**

Associations and patterns were sought to help answer the research questions. As codes were merged and refined key thematic categories were identified along with sub-themes. A research team member from the EI screening study was consulted for a second opinion (Grbich, 1999). Each theme was organized and linked to references to the relevant transcript quotes in the excel document to facilitate the clarity of themes, codes, and relationships. Themes and sub-themes were identified, sorted, and analyzed in search of a range of perceptions identified from the field (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña 2015). Details of the dialogue, consistency from participants, and level of importance as described by the participants was sought (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Associations were made and themes were condensed and compared to the literature.
Quality and Trustworthiness

Ethical

Procedural ethics for the EI screening study were covered through the VA Research and Development (R&D) office and the USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines in conjunction with the prior study that was approved in 2015. Those two governing bodies assured that informed consent procedures were followed and covered risk and benefits, adverse event reporting procedures, and confidentiality (Tracy, 2010). Data was pulled from this EI screening study and there is no need to resubmit for IRB approval.

Steps taken to ensure confidentiality of participants were included in the consent forms that were required before beginning the study. All study documents were kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the principal investigator and only members of the PI team had access. Personal identification of each participant was converted to codes and a code list is on file. No vulnerable subjects such as children, prisoners, cognitively impaired, institutionalized, or critically/terminally ill individuals were included in this study.

Worthy Topic

In 2016, the world economic forum rated emotional intelligence as one of the top ten competencies needed in the workforce by 2020 (Gray, 2016). This provides new relevance and timeliness for the topic of emotional intelligence.

In the current political climate America has a direct impact on the Veterans Health Administration as Congress and ultimately the President govern it. Today in our country one can witness the absence of emotional intelligence on several levels. There are a plethora of moral overtones in the headlines as a rise
in attacks on the marginalized are challenging America’s critical intelligence (Cohen, 2017) and demonstrating low emotional intelligence. In airports, Walmart’s, subways, restaurants, and even on public streets, people are being attacked for their skin color, clothing, their efforts to not be a bystander in the face of racial attacks, or simply for speaking in a foreign language. Recently a reporter at a press conference was physically attacked by a candidate for Governor (Cohen, 2017) and still won his election. Unlike decades of the past the details of these social political attacks are rapidly shared via news outlets and social media sending messages of acceptance of bad behavior for some and fear, shame, and disgust for others.

Also, seeking to understand the VA culture and the potential contextual challenges or opportunities within the organization challenges assumptions in the literature regarding the potential for EI change regardless of external factors (Tracy, 2010).

**Credibility**

Data for each participant from transcripts and focus groups ranged from 36-90 and 249-366 pages respectively. A thick description of concrete detail was provided in the data analysis process to assure that a clear and vivid path was described leading from findings to conclusions within this study. An effort was made to use data to address VHA contextual issues as it may impact behavior and interactions within this unique setting. Credibility was also demonstrated through the use of a very diverse group of participants in this study. Differences of age, race, gender, position, and work settings are present which will allow for a variety of opinions. The final research question for this study sought to
determine if these contextual factors played a role in challenges or opportunities for EI development within the Tampa VA setting.

Sincerity

As the researcher for this study, I acknowledge that I was an active participant in the EI screening study (IRB PRO#00022936) and served as the principal investigator. I participated in almost all of the interviews and all focus groups along with a co-principal investigator and a USF professor. I currently hold two master’s degrees, one in social work from the University of Georgia and a Master of Science in public and urban affairs with a concentration in non-profit management from the Andrew Young School of Public Policy at Georgia State University. I have worked for the Veterans Health Administration for 23 years, primarily in Social Work. I am currently the Education Coordinator for the National Center on Homelessness among Veterans where I am responsible for population-based competency development of 5,000 VHA employees serving homeless Veterans.

Throughout my career at the VA I have had the pleasure of working with Veterans and employees facing a variety of challenges personally and professionally. Before beginning this study I never used the words emotional intelligence as a description for what the Veterans and employees were demonstrating on a regular basis. It was not until my position in the Education Office that this concept became prevalent and it was also my first time attending a course on emotional intelligence, in spite of serving five years in a mid-manager position within VHA. My feelings about EI are that the competencies are necessary for employee engagement and quality of life and a natural part of any
rational, ethical, or moral individual. I also feel that these skills were likely taught to all as children but either enhanced or hindered somewhere along the way for many depending on life experiences both good and bad.

At the beginning of the EI screening study, I was a training specialist in the Education Office at the Tampa VA. In that role potential biases are noted in chapter 1 under researcher perspectives. In my current role I am now outside of the Tampa VA and there is no anticipated conflict of interest created in the function of this research.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the pragmatic research design that frames this study as well as the thematic analysis approach that was used to analyze the existing data. The existing data consists of transcripts from individual and focus group interviews conducted during the 2015 Emotional Intelligence Screening Study. A detailed description of how the 30 participants were selected for the original EI Screening Study was included and an explanation of how 10 participants were chosen for this study was provided. Tables 3.1 - 3.3 describe the demographics of all participants. A display of questions, the responses to which will be extracted and used as the data for this study, was displayed in Table 3.4. Finally, researcher reflexivity, confidentiality and verification of interpretation were reviewed.
CHAPTER FOUR

The purpose of this study was to better discern ten Tampa VA medical center employees understanding and application of EI competence within their personal and professional lives. Answers to my research questions and the themes that emerged from those responses constitute the findings described in this chapter. This chapter is organized by research question. Answers to the research questions are comprised of content pulled from both interview and focus group transcripts. A thematic analysis of participant responses used to answer the research questions resulted in themes for this study. Examples of participant responses are included in this chapter not only to answer the research questions but also to demonstrate how the themes emerged.

Overview of Qualitative Findings

The major themes found in the data are relationships, behavior and the environment. These themes confirm benefits to all levels of employees including increased self-awareness and self-management of emotions leading to organizational and individual benefits such as improved relationships, teamwork, and the ability to manage stress and change. Challenges were identified in the findings regarding the organizational environment within the Tampa VA and
African American employees report feeling invalidated. The three major themes and subthemes identified from the data are displayed in Figure 4.1. These themes stress the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships, awareness and management of emotions so that the resulting behavior remains appropriate and communication is clear, and the extent to which the organizational environment can influence performance, engagement, and overall satisfaction. The relationship theme revealed sub themes of person-to-person engagement, inclusion, and empathy. The behavior theme revealed sub themes of self-awareness, self-management, and improved communication. The environment theme revealed sub-themes of adaptability, organizational engagement, and civility. The major themes and sub-themes were developed based on participant frequency of mention, the dialogue details, and the stated importance expressed by participants.

Figure 4.1 Themes
The level of unconscious incompetence (UI) was used to determine participation in this study. Unconscious incompetence occurs when an emotional intelligence self-assessment score is significantly different than how others rate the individual (Weiszbrod, 2015). The EISA 360-degree EISA assessments scores were used to determine unconscious incompetence. A 360-degree assessment allowed participants to invite feedback from managers, subordinates, peers, and others so that a complete picture of how others view them can be compared to the self-assessment. EISA 360-degree assessment data was used to select participants and participant results were discussed during the interviews for self-awareness purposes. The EISA 360-degree assessment data was not analyzed statistically as part of this study.

By using the 360-degree assessment scores to identify participants with the largest difference between the self-assessment score the scores of managers; I sought to find the highest levels of unconscious incompetence. This lack of awareness of how others perceive them seemed to present the greatest opportunity for EI competency development. EI competency development such as self-awareness helps individuals have the insight to correct the misperceptions of others.

**Participant Demographics**

Participants were all considered to be potential leaders but divided into two groups, LEAD and aspiring leader, for comparison. The LEAD group included five participants who simultaneously participated in one of the hospital’s competitive leadership development programs, PRIDE or CDL. The
aspiring leaders group was comprised of five employees who either applied and was not selected for one of those programs or who voluntarily participated in the Emerging Leaders course at the hospital (a non-competitive program).

Demographic details for participants in this study can be found in Table 3.3. Of these ten participants, 60% were female, 40% were male, 30% percent were White, 60% Black, and 10% Hispanic. Ages ranged from 60% under the age of 35, 20% between the ages of 36-45, 10% between the ages of 46-55, and 10% were over 56 years of age. As for roles within the organization, 80% of the participants were not in a management position at the conclusion of the study. Table 4.1 provides a brief description of each participant using pseudonyms.

Table 4.1

*Participant Descriptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candace</td>
<td>29 year old Black female LEAD participant working in a non-management position. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above managers and peers for perceiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>56 year old Black female aspiring leader participant working in a non-management position. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above managers and peers for managing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fern</td>
<td>55 year old White female aspiring leader participant working in a non-management position. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above managers and peers for managing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>31 year old White male LEAD participant promoted to a management position during this study. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above managers and peers for perceiving post-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>29 year old Black female aspiring leader participant working in a management position. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above managers and peers for managing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>EI Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karl</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>aspiring leader</td>
<td>participant working in a non-management position. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above managers for managing and above peers for perceiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>LEAD</td>
<td>participant working in a management position. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above direct reports for perceiving and managing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>LEAD</td>
<td>participant working in a non-management position. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above managers for perceiving but 1 standard deviation below others on managing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>aspiring leader</td>
<td>participant working in a non-management position. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above others on perceiving and managing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>LEAD</td>
<td>participant working in a non-management position. Scored more than 1 standard deviation above manager, peers, and others on perceiving and managing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings by Research Question**

The following sections share responses from both interviews and focus groups that help answer the following four research questions for this study:

1. How do VHA employees describe their understanding of emotional intelligence?
2. How do VHA employees apply emotional intelligence in their professional and private lives?
3. What contextual factors emerge that may present challenges as well as opportunities for emotional intelligence development within the Tampa VA?
4. To what extent did the understanding and application of emotional intelligence change after completion of the EI screening study?
Data collected in response to research question one demonstrated how understanding was described in the first three months of the study. Data collected in response to research question two regarding how participants applied the information was collected throughout the study. Data collected in response to research question three explored participant descriptions related to contextual factors such as the work environment, race, age, gender, and details on how application is achieved in spite of these throughout this study. Data for the final question in this chapter was collected during all six interviews and described changes made over the six-month study timeline and how understanding and application of EI has changed over time and how it will be sustained.

**Research Question 1 – Understanding**

The first question for this study asks how VHA employees describe their understanding of emotional intelligence. Over the six-month period for this study, it was interesting to note the change in how participants described or explained emotional intelligence. As each participant progressed through the interviews, focus groups, EI curriculum, and self-directed action plans, their understanding improved. This section will discuss participant responses to the EISA 360-assessment, initial expression of understanding, followed by a description of how this changed over time. A few examples from the interview data will be shared for each section.

The initial experience for establishing understanding of emotional intelligence was through the 360-degree EISA assessment. Assessment feedback reports assisted participants with becoming more aware of their emotional intelligence and encouraged them to begin thinking about how to improve their
own EI. Each participant received an EISA 360-degree assessment report at the beginning and end of the study. The reaction to the report received at the beginning of the study set the stage for their participation in this 6-month study. Key issues impacting the participant’s reaction to the EISA assessment feedback appeared to be connected to the extent of participant engagement, mindset and unconscious incompetence. Engaged employees are viewed as those who express leadership interest and are actively involved in workplace activities and have positive relationships with others within the hospital (Sony & Mekoth, 2016). There are two types of mindsets, fixed or growth (Dweck, 2006). A fixed mindset holds that a person cannot change qualities such as intelligence, personality, or moral character while a growth mindset holds that with exposure and effort personal improvements have unknown potential for enhancement. As unconscious incompetence occurs, the individual may not realize or care about knowing what others see because they are unaware of the views of others (Neal, Spencer-Arnell, & Wilson, 2009).

Having unconscious incompetence does not mean that the feedback will be rejected. Instead, receiving the feedback will likely be a surprise but the response to that feedback may vary. The data for this study showed that the lack of self-awareness led to initial skepticism and rationalization regarding why the discrepancy between the self-assessment and the scores of raters may have occurred. The majority of participants accepted the initial 360- feedback and immediately began to consider what changes they should make in order to reduce those gaps in how others perceived them by the time they took the posttest.
For the purposes of the EISA, the standard deviation is 1.0 for each EI factor. Perceiving emotions and managing emotions are the prime factors for the EISA and lay a foundation for the other three factors which are applying emotion to one’s own decision-making, achievement, and influence of self and others. In this study there was more than a 1.0 difference between participants’ self-assessment and the assessment of them by others in either perceiving or managing emotions. The difference could have been 1.0 deviation above or below the participants’ self-assessment scores. By selecting participants with the highest levels of unconscious incompetence, richer data was anticipated in regard to reactions to assessment feedback and hopefully greater detail for change strategies. By becoming aware of the misperception of others these VHA employees were asked to determine changes they planned to make as well as the challenges they might face in their effort to close the gaps between how they see themselves and how others perceive them.

The majority of participants expressed a general familiarity with emotional intelligence when they entered the program. The following initial descriptions indicate their elementary understanding of the concept as they describe EI in general behavioral terms using broad examples of how they generally operate instead of describing what emotional intelligence actually means to them and how they use it in their life. For example three of the participants made the following statements about their understanding of EI:

**Victor:** “I think it’s paramount” “There are some very basic things like not using foul language at work, be nice to your coworkers. You’re like, wow”. “My feelings are my guide...Everything I do is, in my opinion, is genuine”

**Karl:** “How I express myself is how people perceive me ... to be authentic, to have my own emotions, my own feelings based on this.” Good or bad people make
emotional responses, some choose to show negative emotions and others can manage to stay focused and do what’s best for the customer.”

Candace: “When you shut off your emotions, you tend to just stick to the facts and just get it done just to say I got it done because business first. If you do it passionately, you’re going to do it to the best of your ability. And sometimes maybe think outside the box and achieve it the way you have perceived it to begin with.”

The emotional intelligence skills assessment (EISA) was taken prior to the first interview and repeated after the final interview. The assessment results were sent to participants in narrative format detailing each category, explaining the feedback results, and making recommendations for how to improve upon the perception of others. The majority of participants, 8 out of 10, describe initial surprise, rejection, or a little skepticism or rationalizing of scores received from others but overall they also demonstrate improved self-awareness. For example:

Candace: “...because it’s emotional, like it was more emotional... inner type of questions. I think that may have...affected...the results as well.”... “One person who I had invited ... to do the assessment... stated that...what they were rating... was kind of personal and they weren’t sure how to rate a lot of those things because they never really saw me ... weren’t that close to me to kind of know how I would react to certain things.”... “People may not... able to see those things... me enjoying my success and me being happy, me being excited about something or me taking...responsibility for my actions”

Frank: “I’m a little surprised to see decision-making last, but that is an area that I have wanted to improve on personally.”

Wanda: “The only thing that was kind of surprising that – well I think the only thing I can really say, like some of the peers and others may have been a little lower than mine and the manager’s”

Robert: “I wish they would have rated me higher on influencing. My lowest point from the” [assessment]. “I tend to rate myself lower than other people do. I’m surprised that in this case I rated myself higher

Fern: “It appears I have a much higher opinion of myself than others do of me.”

Victor: “I never thought I would rate myself a little necessarily higher...I was a little surprised that I rated myself pretty much higher on, I think every single one than most of my peers.”

Two of the eight, Darlene and Karl, appeared to be outliers in regard to embracing this new EI concept. Their responses demonstrate self-awareness but they just do not believe these
assessments warrant any personal changes. Karl even expressed that changing because of the assessment would be non-authentic even though the assessments seek to assure that your authentic self is actually being reflected to others. This contradiction likely reflects the initial misunderstanding of what EI is:

_Darlene_: “I don’t plan to do too much of anything because I feel like my scores are fine. I am where I want to be.”

_Karl_: “I figured that would be one of my strongest points, but I guess not.” “So in perspective to this, it wouldn’t have mattered the results, I still would have been me. Changing for somebody who’s not me is not me. You wouldn’t have been an authentic person to deal with, in my opinion.”

Two participants were surprised that they scored themselves lower than their raters in key areas but knowing that others are seeing them differently raised self-awareness for both participants. The EISA authors note that scoring yourself significantly lower than your raters could demonstrate a lack of self-awareness regarding the inability to see yourself critically, or even an effort to protect self-esteem and maintain your self-image. This alternative explanation does not fit the following examples that actually seem to support increased self-awareness, flattery, and perhaps humility. For example, those two participants stated:

_Tanya_: “I was surprised that other people rated me higher than I saw myself...On managing and decision-making, I was very surprised. I was surprised that other people saw me, I guess – I don’t know – would it be better... than [how] I see myself? I was very surprised by that.”

_Georgia_: “Well I guess my surprise was the decision making, others rating was higher than mine. That’s a good thing though”

As the study progressed it was clear that understanding improved for all as they continued to experience opportunities for learning through: dialogues with
others, completion of the EISA curriculum, and through individual reflection and application of EI knowledge. Table 4.2 demonstrates the increased understanding of emotional intelligence for a sample of the participants.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Growing Understanding of EI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 month point in the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wanda</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m here to work, get a paycheck. I’m not here to be your friend. I’m not here to be at any of you-all’s cookout. I’m not here to be at your child’s party.” “I don’t really have other interactions with my peers in the department, you know, just the cordial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My heart was pierced that last meeting. I was like, oh, my God. I really saw myself for who I really am, you know, and I’m like wait a minute, that’s not me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I understood it a little, and then I think the whole thing was accepting it, looking at myself for who I really was and applying it. That was the hardest part, you know, looking at myself and saying, you know what, you really need to grab onto this. I don’t know. I just felt like that’s probably the reason why I haven’t been promoted in my department because, you know, the attitude I had. I was like, okay, whatever. So, yeah, I’m ashamed of it. As a matter of fact, I just had my – what they call the pre-evaluation and my supervisor was telling me that her and our team leaders had been talking about me and that they see growth in me, you know, that I’m getting involved more and stuff life that so – but she was telling me that she though that PRIDE had something to do with it and I was like no, not PRIDE. I think this had more to do with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Georgia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI “will help to grow me as a stronger leader”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Now I’m more aware of it, as well as I can also kind of prepare myself for maybe the angle I may want to approach that person with”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| “Truly understanding what emotional intelligence is and the depth of how it affects your everyday aspects of life has changed and also emotional intelligence thinking from the group perspective. I’m noticing the units that I work with how when people are mostly charged one way or another, it monumentally affects the whole group for the whole day
Trajectory analysis can be used to demonstrate the change over time for participants (Grossoehme & Lipstein, 2016). Using Wanda, Darlene, and Frank as examples, Table 4.3 describes their progression of understanding during this six-month study. Column one identifies the identified themes for this study. Columns two through four describe her transformation related to themes and sub themes. Wanda was by far the one participant who showed the greatest growth through this study. Darlene was viewed as having a closed mindset and yet the trajectory of understanding still demonstrates improvement. Frank was selected as an example of a new manager and his trajectory demonstrates how his understanding initially focused on self but after his promotion to manager his understanding of how to use of EI shifted to talking about taking care of his team members.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wanda</th>
<th>Darlene</th>
<th>Frank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationships did not matter, only managers. She did not care how her co-workers felt</td>
<td>Professional but does not need friends at work. Works well with those who respect her. People don’t know her personally.</td>
<td>Realizes the 360 is based on perception of others and desires to improve that perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cares about how peers perceive her</td>
<td>Not willing to change to get others to like her</td>
<td>Remaining positive and aware of how he and how others feel. Connecting with staff and keeping them connected with the team. Coaching team members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships with peers at work. Managers are commenting on changes they see in her</td>
<td>Talks about EI to more people. Enjoys hearing other participant stories of success with EI. Interactions have a lot to do with success “If you are in a negative system it doesn’t matter how positive you are”. Systems influence behavior. In the right environment EI would work well and she could use all of this information.</td>
<td>More connected with staff. Realized how much a leader sets the tone for the team. Adjusting expectations of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior: Self-awareness, communication, self-management</strong></td>
<td><strong>Behavior: Self-awareness, communication, self-management</strong></td>
<td><strong>Behavior: Self-awareness, communication, self-management</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No social intelligence demonstrated at work, easily frustrated, didn’t bother speaking to peers unless it was work related</td>
<td>At this age she doesn’t see a need to make many changes. Scores were fine and she is where she wants to be</td>
<td>Work on weaknesses. Not improving will limit leadership potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-aware of how she is perceived and felt bad. Stated communicating peers and began self-reflection</td>
<td>Believes that others inaccurately judge her because they don’t know her. She can see why others may fear her or have the wrong perception</td>
<td>Listening and perception improved. Seeking to influence others. Mindful of how he handles situations. Practices self-reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aware of self and others. Share EI with others, including peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>More aware of how staff feel. Will continue to look for ways to increase his EI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment: Adaptability, engagement, civility</strong></td>
<td><strong>Environment: Adaptability, engagement, civility</strong></td>
<td><strong>Environment: Adaptability, engagement, civility</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No role in creating a civil work environment. Does not participate in team activities</td>
<td>Some people just go along to get along. Some like you others go against you. This new system did not embrace her. In this system changing will not stop her from being shut out.</td>
<td>Believes that as he improves others around him should improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in team activities</td>
<td>She feels management controls her by limiting her engagement on the team. She has adjusted in order to survive and manage in the environment. Systems and cultures don’t fit everyone.</td>
<td>Being perceptive of how subordinates feel about situations and seeking to keep them engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks to influence others</td>
<td></td>
<td>EI is improving the culture in his department. Will continue to use EI in day to day activities to impact his work environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In summary, initial understanding of emotional intelligence was limited to broad general statements. By the end of the study, the descriptions of EI were more specific and personal. Reaction to the difference between the self-assessment and the ratings from others, resulted in surprise, but overall self-awareness increased. Self-awareness is a pre-requisite to empathy (Goleman, 1998) and empathy helped participant social intelligence improve. Initial understanding of emotional intelligence was divided regarding the importance of EI in their personal and professional life but it grew throughout the study ending in a consensus of its importance. Additionally, a few participants were initially unsure if EI was necessary for job success at the beginning of the study, but there was a consensus of the value of EI by the end of the study. Participants clearly expressed a need to improve EI personally, specifically social intelligence competence, in order to make a difference in relationships and interactions with others.

Research Question 2 – Application of EI Competencies

The second question for this study was how do VHA employees apply emotional intelligence in their professional and private lives? Over the six-month period of this study participants progressed from minimal understanding to clearly understanding emotional intelligence. The data describes how they utilized their improved understanding of EI and applied what they learned, and how they viewed the actual and potential for application of EI in their personal and professional lives.

This study focused on perceiving and managing emotions, the foundational factors for the EISA. Perceiving is defined by EISA as “the ability to
accurately recognize, attend to, and understand emotion”. Managing is defined as “the ability to effectively manage, control, and express emotions” (Stein, S., Mann, D., & Papadogiannis, P., 2010).

During the interviews, participants were asked about success stories they have had regarding making any personal changes as a result of participating in this study. Several participants reported an increase in self-awareness, recognition of feelings, and delayed impulses to assure they do not overreact. Optimism was also a new behavior that helped to prevent overreacting, particularly reactions and behaviors exhibited when dealing with difficult colleagues or in times of conflict. Data also showed how adaptation success left Candace feeling mentally, emotionally, and spiritually strong enough to adjust in a new work environment. There was also evidence of a heightened awareness by Victor and Wanda regarding how others demonstrate emotional intelligence, which seemed to help them as they seek to apply emotional intelligence. Here are a few examples of success stories shared by participants:

**Victor:** “… overall, intrinsically, … we have more opportunity, … you’re in a little more control of possibly how you can affect the outcome … whether it’s an irrational coworker or a physician. You may not be able to win, but you know, you go into a situation,… with a positive perspective. You can…make the effort to commit some of these things … it’s almost like you … discriminate yourself and then see if it changes your behavior and that of the people around you. I think for me, just [having] more perspective, … [being] more positive, more open towards things…things aren’t going to be the way they have always been just because that’s the way it works.”

**Candace:** “But recently … the xxx office…has been a huge challenge for me. I hate the first two weeks of being new anywhere. I just feel like a fish in a barrel type of thing. Like I just feel so lost, out of place, and it just makes me feel very uncomfortable. … I know most people feel the same way… for me, the last couple of days, it’s been …a very good experience. I have seen a lot of familiar faces, which has helped me through the process. Everybody’s been very supportive. And just seeing people that I know amongst all the new faces in such a high intense position has really helped me to kind of get through. The encouraging words have definitely helped me the first few days, letting me know that I can do this, that I’m strong enough mentally to and emotionally to get through this and I’ll be okay. That’s really been helpful. Spiritually, I’ve prayed often, and I have people that support me spiritually. So that’s been the key to me not wanting to
give up so quickly or just, like, I can’t do this, you know.” ... “I definitely am conscious of the effort that I’m putting forth to sustain the change, if you will. Like I have to say, okay. I have to, like literally talk to myself and just you know, not react emotionally to everything that occurs because 9 times out of 10 it’s not even about me.”

Wanda: “I feel funny because I find myself in -- in situations where six months ago I would have reacted, you know, in a very, I guess, negative way. And now I’m just like, you know, it’s not even addressing this issue. You know, you need emotional intelligence. I find myself – really, sometimes, like, I’ll be in meetings, and I hear, you know, people say certain things, and I’m like you know what, you need to be in an emotional intelligence class. You know, that’s what I think to myself, so yeah, that’s what I find myself doing a lot, looking at other people and saying, “You need EI.”

Smith (2012) describes the application of EI in terms of behaviors such as listening, self-awareness, managing feelings, analyzing thoughts, delayed impulses, hope, optimism in spite of setback, empathy, interacting harmoniously, resolving conflicts, motivating self, and recognizing feelings. Utilizing these descriptions, table 4.4 summarizes the progression of individual application of EI behaviors for participants in this study. Starting with the first interview and progressing through interview 3, behavior changes are tracked throughout this six-month study. Each column in table 4.4 summarizes responses for each of the three individual interviews. The first column in the table shows the responses received during interview 1 when asked what changes they plan to make as a result of their assessment results. The answers were quite brief as participants were just learning about EI. At the three-month mark, during interview 2, the participants were asked to share individual success stories that were personally achieved during the prior three months and the depth of the responses were stronger. The final question, during interview 3, asked what participants planned to continue as a result of this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Change plans (Interview 1)</th>
<th>Change success (Interview 2)</th>
<th>Change sustained plan (Interview 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fern</td>
<td>• Analyze thoughts</td>
<td>• Increased Self-awareness</td>
<td>• Increased Self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Manage feelings</td>
<td>• Recognize feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyze thoughts</td>
<td>• Analyze thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Increased Empathy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Manage Feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitor</td>
<td>• Analyze thoughts</td>
<td>• Delay impulses</td>
<td>• Increased Self-awareness</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Manage feelings</td>
<td>• Manage feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyze thoughts</td>
<td>• Increased Empathy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Analyze thoughts</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognize feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Conflict management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanda</td>
<td>• Increased Self-awareness</td>
<td>• Increased Self-awareness</td>
<td>• Increased Self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Harmonious relations</td>
<td>• Increased Empathy</td>
<td>• Delayed impulse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Manage feelings</td>
<td>• Harmonious relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Resolve conflicts</td>
<td>• Increased Optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Manage feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darlene</td>
<td>• Indicated no change</td>
<td>• Increased Self-awareness</td>
<td>• Manage feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>required</td>
<td>• Manage feelings</td>
<td>• Analyze thoughts</td>
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<tr>
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<td>• Delayed impulse</td>
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<td>• Harmonious relations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased Optimism</td>
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</table>
The only meaningful difference between the two groups, LEAD and aspiring leaders, was the level of interest in understanding the concept of EI. Two of the aspiring leader participants remained skeptical about the need to make any changes as they seemed to believe their understanding and associated behaviors were already appropriate. In spite of the skepticism, one of these two participants did express minimal self-awareness by acknowledging that she can see why others scored her differently than she scored herself but still failed to see any reason to make adjustments.

Overall, in answer to research question two, the majority of participants demonstrated progressive improvement in understanding what emotional intelligence is and how they have applied EI to their personal and professional lives. Increased self-awareness and increased effort towards building positive relationships were key outcomes for application of EI competencies. Perception of self and others, listening, and reflection were identified as behaviors used by the majority of participants overall and they also recognized the importance of emotional intelligence for their careers.

**Research Question 3 - Contextual Challenges**

Research question three asks what contextual factors emerge that may present challenges as well as opportunities for emotional intelligence development within the Tampa VA? Responses to this question were spread throughout the six months of interviews, sometimes through indirect inferences. Overall, the most prominent findings were the influence of the organizational environment on the development of emotional intelligence and the challenges
faced by African American employees at the Tampa VA.

The contextual factors explored in the data from this study include organizational environment, race, gender, and age. Managerial level was added as a result of the data analysis. The primary data supporting the significance of contextual factors were organizational environmental influences that were mentioned by all participants and the concerns described by the six African American participants.

**Organizational Environment**

Environmental factors were a major theme for VHA employees. Nine of the ten study participants discussed or inferred environmental concerns during this 6-month study. A few of the comments describe the VA culture, in general, as a unique culture with its own language, rules, and a military cultural influence in how the VA does business. The VHA has a high number of Veterans working as employees and a more diverse employee population than the general public. Policies and procedures are intense as we are a large bureaucratic entity, which can stall local or individual change efforts leading to frustration. These factors were not described as barriers in regard to the major environmental theme. The challenges expressed regarding the organizational environment connect back to the people within the organization. The sub themes for the environment were importance of adaptability, the need for engagement, and significance of civility.

The data showed an overwhelming amount of comments connecting the organizational environment to emotional intelligence. Darlene, an aspiring leader believed strongly that the work environment made a difference on the
EISA assessment scores in that her ability to do her job, connect with others, and her level of engagement would change depending upon where she works and who she works with:

Darlene: “I think that when you’re asking questions, you have to also... [understand] that the system doesn’t fit everybody. If you take these same emotional intelligence [assessments and] you meet me someplace else and you ask these same questions... [There would be different results]. That’s what I’m saying; your system impacts how you’re going to answer these questions because you are asking questions about where you are.” Interview 3: “I still think it has a lot to do with where you’re working, who you’re around. Of course, the interactions have a lot to do with that. Yeah. I think it’s...the system that you work in. ... if you have one that’s very positive, very open, where you can kind of ... [have] a lot of reciprocal relationships. ... if you’re in a closed system, you might not be able to do a whole lot of changes...if you’re in an open system, I feel that you can do a lot more. ... But listening to other people around me, you could tell the ones who are in a[n open] system.... I think that they are kind of growing and they can see themselves being allowed to do more...”

In general, six participants in the study had quite a bit to say about the VHA culture and its impact on EI. Only Fern acknowledged the formal structural characteristics of the Veterans Health Administration and how EI could help build relationships within her work environment:

Fern: “The VA’s different than other environments that I’ve been in. It’s very structured. It’s kind of silo’ed, you know, there’s – it’s got some evolving to do, and I think that the emotional intelligence aspect could go a long way to building relationships that are what I perceive to be broken at this point. When you have employees that don’t have trust in their supervisors, their managers the organization; that if you’ve got people at the top of the heap – and I use the term euphemistically – the people at the top are trying to filter down this and have acknowledged that, you know, their people need something from them more than just direction on their job, that it needs to be an emotional connection that the emotional intelligence thing does have potential to have a big impact.” Interview 2: “You’ve got to figure out what are their motivations, you know, how are you going to help that person relate to what you are trying to achieve. I think this is key to any organization because the mission at the top and how it gets translated through the tree to the people at the bottom, and that’s not saying the bottom folk, I’m just saying the people on the front line, the people face to face with the patients, they have to know what that mission is at the top and how it relates to them and how they deliver it to the patients. I think that is pivotal” Focus group 2: “I can’t say that I could specifically say the changes that I have made recently have changed the dynamic of the particular work environment. It’s been a gradual thing. I think what’s changed is my awareness and perception, and my ability to look at the awareness of perception of what’s going on – the relationship dynamic and approach things differently for resolution.”

The majority of the dialogue below is focused on interpersonal experiences with teams, supervisors, and colleagues. Communication, working as a team, and
just being civil in the work environment was reoccurring feedback received.

Participants also discussed how the environment could improve through their own self-awareness and personal adaptations. Although Fern seemed to be an outlier initially, others below confirm her concern about the VA environment but the approaches taken by participants were quite different. Darlene, who demonstrates a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006) shared that there was nothing she could do personally to make a difference in her environment. Two other participants below acknowledge that individual behavior and perception can make a difference in the organizational environment:

Darlene: “Some people like people who kind of go along/get along. “ “Sometimes you are liked by somebody that may be all you need. And then somebody else may not be like, that would kind of go against you.” “So I can make changes. But if you put me to make the changes and put me into a system that’s not going to be receptive, it doesn’t matter. I’m still going to be shut out.” “Where I came from I was liked, I was the best person you know. Then you come to another system, that system may not embrace you.” “It depends on the system you are in.” “Today you’re a star, tomorrow you might not be” Interview 2: “I think the system has a lot to do with how people are going to answer you.” “So I think at first you have to define the culture. The culture has to be...a good fit and the [right] perception. I may not change because I might say well, I’m a go-getter and I can’t work down underneath what I want to before myself. Interview 3: My perception is the people who are in the group they can be part of something. And if they’re a part of something that’s positive, they can perceive what they’re doing and be fine. If I’m perceiving my emotional intelligence that way too, because I’ve been in the field and out of the field and in the field, I can say the same thing depending on where I’m at. No. my reaction is [not determined by others]. I’m saying my perception of emotional intelligence for me will always be dependent on the system. The system can be a positive system or a negative system. All the systems are not going to be the same. And they also compete with how you feel. Because if you’re in a negative system it doesn’t matter how positive you are. You can walk into a system, ...and the system itself can influence you. You can walk in with all the good intentions all you want. I’m going to make a difference. And somebody else or a lot of other people say not really because we’re not going to allow you. ... You are either going to hit your head up against the wall or you’re going to say they don’t want me to make a difference so I might as well either leave or whatever... I’m aware of what I’m doing and I’m fine with that too. But I’m also saying that I’ve had years and years of working in different systems, and I can see that I was very much aware of what I was doing when I was someplace else... It changes. It’s not going to be one way. Your emotional intelligence, for me, is going to be also changing. So if I have different experiences... I look at myself and might say right now my emotional intelligence and the way I see life right now is a little different. I’m perceiving myself in this system as being the way I am right now... The people, the places, the experiences, I bring everything to the table. I don’t see things in a fragmented way. So decisions that I make, my achievements, things that influence me, I don’t see myself as being broken up in all these little compartmental [pieces]... And I manage a certain way. Now if I’m in... a foreign country, I’m going to perceive myself in a different way in a foreign country. I don’t see myself as...one way all the time. So I don’t see how that can
be. You’re asking me how I see myself. So, no, it’s not by being positive… I change according to my experiences and according to where I’m at. [when asked if she thinks emotional intelligence declines in environments] “I wouldn’t say decline. I’m not trying to fit it into any compartment. I think it’s fluid. I think things can start out a certain way and it’s adaptable… I think that for me, my emotional intelligence adapts to my environment.”

Candace: “I guess in certain situations certain working environments, you have to be able to kind of read people and just read, just be aware… of … what the job is expecting of you, who you’re dealing with, like whether it’s the VA or you know patients, physicians, or whoever.” “I think it’s important in any work environment, whether you work at McDonald’s or the president of a company… I think you have to be able to kind of look at each situation differently and approach it or address it according to, you know, who you’re dealing with.” Focus Group 3: “It’s about the environment or what’s going on around me or other people… So, like I said, it’s not constant, but… when… a situation comes up that’s either new or just extremely stressful or bullying… [or] a Veteran or something like that, where… I’ve never dealt with this before. I catch myself… I’m talking to myself through different steps… “If a manager doesn’t like you, you know it and that’s a problem. Like if they have an issue with you. First of all, the whole bias, favoritism, you know… And it’s like you feel either discriminated against or you feel like they’re treating you some type of way… and it’s hard for you to feel like you can open up and communicate with them whether its job related, whether it’s something personal… because … there’s no trust there.”

Georgia: “I would say for me, being on the xxx side, since I am kind of in between leadership and the bedside xxx – I’m in a hybrid position – I hear both sides a lot being that I technically had just recently came from the bedside. But now I’m learning the administration leadership side. I tend to hear xxx complain about certain things, and they’re thinking more of an ‘I’ mind frame in their little bubble instead of the grand scheme of things, something as simple as, why don’t they hire more xxx for our floor? We’re always short. And so you think about it this way. If the census isn’t at least 80 percent and they hire as many nurses as they can for the shift that means you’re going to be floating all the time. And she likes to float all the time. And they think, like, yeah, I don’t want to float. I said so it’s either you’re staffed just right and you need overtime, or you’re staffed to the capacity and you’re constantly floating. Because it is summertime. Our census are going to start dropping. People are on vacation. So you have to think about it both ways. And usually when – if explained that way to staff from a leadership and administrative point of view, they kind of, oh, okay, well I guess it’s not that bad. And that kind of changes their mentality about what’s going on in their unit.”

Additional negative aspects of the VA work environment were described as a lack of trust, favoritism of supervisors, stress and change in the department, and a lack of inclusion. Wanda and Robert describe their challenge in the following excerpts:

Wanda: “One of the reasons why I don’t have a lot of communication with my peers is because there’s just been so much stress within that department. There has been a lot of changes within xxx so there’s a lot of negativity going on in that department for the last two to three years. And when I realized that, I just kind of like, you know backed off a little bit and just kind of… there’s a few that I communicate with on a daily basis but for the most part, I try not to get involved in the conversations and you know when we go to trainings, I kind of do what I’m supposed to do and just you know, because there just a lot… going on right now
in the department. There's a lot of stress"

Robert: That's a part of EI. That's a part of performance. You are causing a problem for a manager if the rest of the people around you don't like you. Because now there's a conflict there that really should not be there — it's really baseless — that you have to deal with as a manager. [Your peers matter] "a lot" and it really... puts a kink in your day when somebody takes their time away from their work to come in your office and close the door to say: 'did you see how they parked today?' Like that's ridiculous. That's indicative of the way that... But if there is a better interaction between the two people. Between that person and the other folks, that wouldn't be something I'd have to deal with at all if everybody — that's why I say there's two sides to the coin. If everybody had paid attention to emotional intelligence in the way they are interacting with other people, a lot of that stuff would leave and go away. And then when you add that attitude where it's not my problem the way they feel about it, you become my problem. It's just very, very important for you to participate toward the elimination of stuff. .... Because when somebody's performing poorly, I can deal with that. Because, you know, we can sit down and talk about what kind of training they need, talk about what I need to give them to do better on their job. You know what I'm saying. When there's a work issue, somebody was supposed to do this, they weren't supposed to do that, that's a process issue. We can work that out. But where I've had major issues is with the people that have that attitude of I don't really care what my coworkers think of me because then it comes a festering issue. And the person may be a great worker. Most of the people that I had in that situation had a good work ethic, you know, they did their jobs. But because of that attitude, they weren't personable enough about it and then they would make that same quote, well I'm not here to be nobody's best friend... You have to act well when people still believe you caused — you cause all these other issues that are unrelated to work that I, as a manager, still have to deal with so, you know, you have to meet me half way. I can understand when people are being irrational towards you, but you have to help me fix that because you are at the center of the problem."

A key factor described in regard to the environment and EI included the importance of positive interactions with colleagues. This was viewed as simply having interpersonal skills such as effective communication skills, an ability to build trust, and positive relationships with coworkers at varying levels, and basic civility, which many felt they could exhibit and make a positive impact on their work environment. A couple of participants agreed and shared their thoughts as follows:

Tanya: “I think that people underestimate or they don’t see the importance of just being friendly to people. Like just be friendly. Keep your nose clean. Don’t get involved in, like, mess, as I call it. Don’t be pulling your boss aside to talk about so-and-so. People underestimate just being friendly and having good internal customer service...I think that part of having a positive work culture is when you interact with people, like finding a way to relate to them and kind of adjusting yourself. Like, for example, when I interact with providers, I feel like I have to adjust myself because I realize that providers, like the way their brain works is different than someone’s who’s an administrator. ... Interview 3: “I
think I’m doing it more and I’m more conscious of it. So yeah, I think I have a better understanding of how a negative or a hostile work environment, you can’t function in that.”

Frank: “I’m definitely going to, like, keep looking into ways to increase my emotional intelligence to try to learn more about emotional intelligence and how I can incorporate it into my day to day activities and how I can use it to have a greater impact in my work environment.”

In summary, the organizational environment became a major theme as 90% of participants acknowledged it in some way. One of the participants, Darlene, also viewed the environment as a factor in the emotional intelligence assessment scores in the workplace indicating that it would be higher or lower depending on your organizational environment. She felt so strongly about these beliefs and related ideas that she repeated them in all interviews in which she participated. Interestingly, she is the one employee that fits the description as disengaged with a fixed mindset and virtually refused to try anything to change the perception others have of her during this study. After leaving an international job where she was highly regarded, she came to the Tampa VA and has felt she has not been embraced in this environment and thus has not had a positive experience. She believes that the environment is the sole reason for her current understanding of emotional intelligence and does not believe that there is anything she can do to change as long as she is in her current work environment. However, the remaining members of this study demonstrated a growth mindset and saw adaptability and personal behavior changes as a factor in improving their organizational environment, even when it might be negative. They viewed the potential for change with a positive attitude and had a willingness to do their part for the benefit of all.
Race

As noted in Chapter 2 regarding EI and race, stereotypes and bias can have a negative impact on the performance of marginalized employees if they do not feel like a valuable contributor to the team. Without that sense of relevance, performance is hindered (Goleman, 1998). The literature also suggests that people from one ethnic or racial group may have non-verbal mannerisms that result in being perceived in unintended ways (Goleman, 1998).

African American. There were five Black female participants and one Black male in this study. Smith (2016) found that African Americans score lower on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. EISA scores for perceiving and managing emotions were used in this study to compare interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Interpersonal skills involve social skills while intrapersonal skills involve internal processing abilities. African American participants in this study actually self-scored higher on perceiving and slightly lower than other participants on the managing scale. Interestingly, managers scored African Americans higher than all other races on both perceiving and managing emotions.

Analysis of the transcripts revealed that there was a consistent expression of disappointment from African Americans who did not feel their contributions were appreciated or accepted by others on their team. All of these were Black female participants, all described themselves as hard workers who desire to contribute, offer new ideas, master their job but depending on the environment
they do not feel they have the opportunity to make a difference. For example, some of the statements made are as follows:

**Tanya**: “He” [My supervisor] “doesn’t value and it’s not just me, he does it with everyone. so maybe [I] shouldn’t say that. I don’t know how to approach him. He doesn’t listen. I feel like he wants to think that he values other people’s opinions and inputs, but at the end of the day he really does what he is going to do and its wrong a lot of the time”

**Candace**: “It’s been very overwhelming for me. Because as much as I’m trying to understand it’s like nobody else really cares what’s going on with me.”…“Actually on my way over here, I got an email saying ‘Yeah your idea’s great, but you know I can’t do that’ for whatever reason. So it’s just like okay now what? ”

**Darlene**: “So my perceptions of myself, I’m a go getter. I’m a person that likes challenges. I can’t do less work and I’m not unethical. I can’t do something that I can’t do just to make other people like me. But their perception of me might be dependent on the culture. I may not fit.”

Four of the five Black females and the Black male in this study demonstrated growth mindsets where they desired to make personal improvements, were always seeking to improve, self-reflect, and remained open to the assessment feedback. Only one of the Black females expressed a lack of interest in making any changes throughout the study. Two African American manager participants, Georgia and Robert, embraced the EI concepts and competencies and thrived in their work environments. Darlene was not interested in making any changes and did not accept the 360-degree assessment feedback as valid.

The Black male in this study, Robert, reported that he is often misread based on physique. As a tall black male around 6’4”, one interviewer pointed out that he may intimidate others because of his size and he agreed that this has happened to him in the past:

**Robert**: [Inferred race related as this is a black male, very tall, large] “Because I do know – I have taken not that a lot of people, once they get a chance to work with me for a while, they say: ‘Oh, ...I wasn’t expecting you to be the way that you were. Or ‘I didn’t expect you to be a nice guy. I thought you were mean.’ that type of stuff. So I need to work on that perception people have of not being [judged by] my appearance.”
African American employees were the only participants who mentioned spirituality. Spirituality and relationships were discussed in the context of early development of EI, a source of encouragement, and an environment that warranted different behavior. Examples included:

Georgia: Spiritually, I've prayed often, and I have people that support me spiritually. So that's been the key to me not wanting to give up so quickly or just, like, I can't do this, you know."

Darlene: "We went to church all the time, and we had bible study and it was rigid. And it's not like the children today that you get to give her a word and, you know, you get to, you know, engage her. It was very authoritarian." "I think my mother taught us how to use EI, though, because were all... it was discipline... we could not talk when she spoke. It was "I'm talking. You be quiet"

Candace: "If I'm at home and around family, it's different. If I'm at church, I'm expected to do something a little bit differently...it depends on exactly, you know, what environment I'm in."

Although participant concerns by race were not specifically explored, it is interesting that half of the African American participants expressed similar negative feelings in the workplace related to inclusion to some degree.

Hispanic. There was one Hispanic male, Victor, in the study. Victor demonstrated a growth mindset, used self-reflection on a regular basis, described how his self-awareness has grown in this study, and he repeated a desire to grow professionally multiple times. He notes that personal growth is just as important as professional growth. There were no hints of ethnicity or race related challenges impacting his experience at the Tampa VA.

White. There were two White males and one White female in this study. The males were polar opposites in this study. One had a fixed mindset and the other had a growth mindset. One was open to making positive changes and provided examples of the steps he was taking to grow as a new manager while the
other did not seem to see the value of EI until the end of the study. Even in the end he identified only one area to consider making changes. The White female had a growth mindset and actively participated throughout the study. She had an emotional revelation midway through the study recognizing that she was not in touch with her emotions throughout her life and she was not making a conscious effort to acknowledge and utilize her emotions in a favorable way. There were no hints of ethnicity or race related challenges impacting their experience with emotional intelligence at the Tampa VA.

In summary for EI and race, the only meaningful findings were regarding African American participants who did not always feel valued or included in the Tampa VA.

**Gender**

Gender differences have been identified in the literature regarding emotional intelligence. Consistent findings in the literature have revealed that females score higher on interpersonal skills while males score higher on intrapersonal skills (Siegling, Saflofske, Vesely, & Nordstokke, 2012). In agreement with the literature, self-assessment scores in this study reveal that females score themselves higher on perceiving and males score themselves higher on managing emotions. However, manager assessment scores were also lower for men on perceiving yet equal on managing for both male and female participants.

Interview data revealed only one comment that was specifically gender
related. It was shared in relation to age but it reveals sexism in the workplace as well as age discrimination concerns:

Tanya: “I’m 25...within the work environment, it’s probably because everyone is old enough to be my parent. Some people still call me, like, sweetheart and honey, and they can’t help it. “

There were no meaningful findings related to gender in this study. The self-assessment scores are consistent with the data. Although I saw sexism in the comment used as an example, the participant viewed it as age discrimination and did not mention gender.

Age

As noted in chapter 2, emotional intelligence is believed to improve with age and maturity and it is expected that older participants would have higher scores. Older adults, through continuous learning, should anticipate overall improvements. For the participants in this study, interpersonal influencing scores are highest among participants over the age of 56. However, intrapersonal managing scores are highest among participants between the ages of 36-45. Managers, on the other hand rated participants over 56 considerably higher in both categories.

The findings from interviews only revealed a couple of age related findings. One comment is from a 25-year-old and the other a 56-year-old participant. The younger participant felt that her age resulted in being treated differently in the workplace and not being heard. One other participant was clear in understanding that EI improves with age:
Tanya: “I’m 25…within the work environment, it’s probably because everyone is old enough to be my parent. Some people still call me, like, sweetheart and honey, and they can’t help it. When I first started working, it offended me…I’m afraid for people to not take me seriously” “Sometimes I just don’t say anything because I’m afraid that, you know, it might not be good enough and then… that’s probably what it is. I think my age has to do with a lot of that.”

Victor: “Some people have the skill, but obviously the majority of leaders in this world are not under 30. It is for a reason. Their skills are developed through experience and time. Very few people under 30 have that skill, and those people are either born with it innately or developed rather quickly. But most people tend to take a lifetime to develop those skills. So sometimes you just need to prompt someone, cue them to get them to realize it within themselves and then once they realize it, then they can really start to see the growth because EI comes within versus an external environment.”

Although the EISA scores, when analyzed by age, were consistent with the literature, the one participant, Darlene, who is over 56, did not demonstrate high emotional intelligence competence during the study. Her responses lacked self-awareness, relationship management, and she was not willing to make any changes based on the perception of others as reported on her 360-degree assessment. No other meaningful findings reported in relation to age for this study.

Darlene: “I really would not say for me personally being the age that I am, that I’m going to necessarily say, oh, yeah, because they have said this that I’m going to necessarily do a lot of changes.”

**Managerial Level**

Managerial level was not an original contextual issue examined in the literature but there were findings directly related to this area that warrant examination. It is often assumed that managers would exhibit higher emotional intelligence competence since the bulk of a manager’s job is to lead people. As noted in chapter 3 the literature reveals that supervisor EI has an impact on their subordinates and the employees’ perception of their leader impacted their performance (Qazi, Shafique, & Ahmad, 2014). Supervisors and coworkers have
also been found to be responsible for creating an environment that is conducive to high performance for their employees (Yuan, HSU, Shieh, & Li, 2012). Only three of the participants in this study are supervisors within VHA. Self-report EISA scores and the supervising manager scores for these three supervisors were lower for perceiving emotions and slightly higher for managing emotions as compared to the scores of other participants.

Only a few comments during the study placed responsibility on the managers for their employee’s behavior. During focus group 1 a participant made it clear that managers are responsible for the engagement of their staff:

Karl: “Well I think it like – starts at the top. I mean, it has to – the engagement should come from supervisors. Your supervisor should allow you to engage in things that you’re supposed to do. Like in my opinion, for CFC for example, the supervisor is supposed to assign the canvassers to do what they need to do, but the supervisor doesn’t allow them the time to do what they need to do so there comes that battle again. Okay, You’re giving me this project but you’re not going to give me the opportunity to do it.” “You either win or you learn. There’s nowhere to lose. Move the factor altogether, win or learn.” “Isn’t that called GRIT? Never give up. “The happier the employee, the more successful the business”.

There were three managerial level participants (one aspiring and two LEAD). Robert comes to the defense of managers during focus group 3 after Candace vented about her frustrations regarding favoritism shown by a manager which she believed was hurting the team. In this example, the manager clearly demonstrated higher emotional intelligence in managing his emotions than the non-manager participant who continued to fight this battle in a non-professional manner, which was not representative of the positive nature she had demonstrated in previous interviews and focus groups:

Candace: “If a manager doesn’t like you, you know it and that’s a problem. Like if they have an issue with you. First of all, the whole bias, favoritism, you know, just whatever. And its like you feel either discriminated against or you feel like they’re treating you some type of way or… and its hard for you to feel like you can open up and
communicate with them whether its job related, whether its something
personal, whether whatever, because you don’t know – you can’t ...
there’s no trust there.

Robert: “Alright. So I’ll defend the managers. This is why emotional
intelligence is important for everyone at all levels. Because, you know,
having been in that position and having observed that position,
especially observe it, a lot of time it’s the people’s perception. It’s not
that the manager actually doesn’t like a person or has something against
him. It’s the perception of the employee for whatever reason. It is
[perception both ways]. And I’m not saying that it doesn’t happen. So I
know that there are some - there are some supervisors that are really
just behinds and they don’t treat people well. There are those folks. But
for the most part, what I see is something goes wrong. Somebody
doesn’t like the way that whatever went wrong was handled. All of a
sudden that person doesn’t like me. Here’s what happens versus actually
looking at what happened, what that person’s responsibility is, how they
were supposed to handle it, you know? So it goes both ways, you’ve got
to look at it – both sides of the coin. You got to evaluate your own
behavior in the situation too and ask the right questions to figure out
how it got to that point if it is a situation where that manager does not
like you as a person. Because usually it’s not a personal level that a
manager doesn’t like you, it’s usually a work ethic thing. You know, it’s
usually on a professional level that they are not fond of. Most of the
time, it’s not personal. Most of these times, it’s simply a work thing or
it’s the way you are handling a situation that’s turning it caustic.

Candace: “You have some good leaders and good managers. But then
there are some that will let you know that they don’t like you. Because I
have a great work ethic. “I’m just saying – they’ll just do things that let
you know, like it’s clear, like you’re not, you know misconstruing
anything. And It’s just some managers out there that just don’t have
that, that leadership skill not to be biased or not show favoritism or just
whatever.

Frank, another manager did not defend managers during that focus group
exchange above but during his third interview he spoke about how a manager
could use EI in setting the tone on the team:

Frank: I’ve realized that the leader really guides the tone of the group. I
always felt like it didn’t matter what they did – the leader did was, it was
all on the people doing the work. But it’s kind of, like, where the leader
is it helps the people that are doing the work get in the right mind-set to
do it. Personal development... just developing myself into getting to the
end point, being better at influencing others.

Darlene spent a great deal of her interview time passively referring to her
supervisor, her team, and describing a closed system where she cannot contribute
or grow. Throughout the six months, she has referred to not having any decision
making authority, not being allowed to participate in hospital activities, going
from a positive environment where she was accepted before transferring to the
VA to an environment where she is not accepted. Although indirect, she seemed convinced that her own personal emotional intelligence was dependent upon her manager. Here is a direct example about her disappointment with management in general within the Tampa VA:

Darlene [on addressing barriers] “… some of us have strong personalities. So I think that if you’re going to become a manager, you should step up or don’t become one. Because you should not be so easily intimidated… I think management should be required to take it.”… Yeah, to me, to be over a lot of people, you need to have some skills. I mean, I took management [classes] but my thing of it is, I work here and I don’t see a lot of that [management skill]. It’s almost like they’re very sensitive to it. Everything you say has to be put in a certain way. It’s like, why are you in management if you want to go and walk on egg shells every day?"

The interview excerpts shared above support the findings in the literature regarding the importance of the supervisor for setting a tone on a team. Although managers are not a subtheme under the organizational environment theme, managers are viewed in the literature and in this data as playing a role in creating a civil and more positive work environment. The intensity of the statements made by Darlene and Candace demonstrated a real concern for those two participants. Their belief that VA supervisors show favoritism and are not inclusive of all has created a challenge for their EI development. It is not a sub-theme as this challenge is not a common concern found in the data for this study. The majority of participants in this study seemed to be working in supportive organizational environments that encouraged their professional growth and development.

**Research Question 4 - Changes after Study Completion**

Research question four asked to what extent did the understanding and application of emotional intelligence change after completion of the EI screening
study. Findings show improved understanding and behavior changes that resulted in improved relationships, teamwork, and an increased capacity to manage stress and change. Understanding over time was portrayed in table 4.2 above which demonstrated the progression of change in understanding during the six months. Table 4.4 demonstrated the application of behavior change over time. This section describes how participants, at the end of the six-month study, have applied and intend to continue to apply EI competence. Data for research question four came primarily from interview three and focus group three when participants were asked about whether any changes have continued over the six-month span of this study and what they will do moving forward. These findings demonstrate overall and future application for individual participants and then outline the specific outcomes for relationships, stress management, working with teams, and managing change. During the final focus group, questions explored the extent to which participants have sustained any changes over time and how they will continue this effort for personal and professional growth.

The aspiring leader group members, Fern, Georgia, and Karl, report that analyzing situations before responding helps them make the best decision to gain desired outcomes. Continuing to delay impulses also allows for a more calm reaction to situations where emotions are involved. Maintaining a positive attitude and accepting people for who they are and where they are helped reduce overreactions to things that participants may not agree with. These concrete examples demonstrated the essence of how participating in this study has improved their interpersonal skills in dealing with people:

Fern: “I’ve had a couple of occasions recently, and I was really kind of ticked, and I knew that anybody sitting in my seat would have been ticked about it too. And
then to sit back and say, okay. How am I going to effect change? How am I going to get the response I want? How am I going to come across in a totally non-threatening, non-adversarial way, which is you know, which makes people feel bad and that really not the intent. The intent’s never to make somebody feel bad. It’s to, you know, impart your perspective on things and the outcome that you want and to get them to buy into it, which is not accomplished in any … but, yeah, it’s — I appreciate my little successes… capable of it… if I give myself time and space I can wrap my head around it and create … an acceptable way of dealing with”

Georgia: “I would agree I have. More on the personal side, something happened in my personal life and I was about to react in the moment, thinking life or death. But after stopping myself for a moment and thinking about it, I said let it sink in, wake up the next day, see how you feel. It ended up by uncovering something that ... was perceived one way, but that was not the reality. So I was able to... mitigate blowing up or feeling guarded for no reason at all.”

Karl: “I wouldn’t really say it’s a change...what I normally do is j... look at it, okay, that’s great, that’s your opinion, and just move on, you know? ...whether it’s right or wrong doesn’t really matter. ...they’re going to feel the way they feel, you’re going to feel the way you feel. But bringing yourself up to that boiling point is not worth it.” “It is just a perspective... and I think it also goes to pick your battles. ...even getting into the discussion would not change the overall end result.”

At the end of this study, participants were also asked what difference this study made for them over the six-month program, how they applied the information learned, and how they planned to sustain their efforts to improve. They spent a lot of time being interviewed, participating in focus groups, attending the EISA class on emotional intelligence which included learning activities, action plans, and reflection exercises. After completing such a long and detailed commitment, they were asked to share whether or not their experiential learning activities would make a lasting difference in their understanding or application of EI competence. Table 4.5 summarizes their answers.

Table 4.5

**Change plans after participating in this study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karl</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Well just the way I interact in the team that would be one of the biggest things [that] will probably change. In a way, what each position, let’s say, whether it’s management or a supervisor position whatever the case may be, and what is required for that position to be as an effective leader on an emotional scale. On an emotionally intelligence scale.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
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<td>Candace</td>
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<td>Frank</td>
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<td>Robert</td>
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"I think I will refer back to some of the information I still have from this study from time-to-time and just make sure that I’m still improving my interactions with people, make sure that I keep a good understanding of how my interaction can be perceived, if I’m not going about it the right way, and continue to improve on it.” I think it is important that I get better especially moving forward in my career. As I get to that point where I’m managing you know potentially hundreds of people, it becomes extremely important."
Table 4.5 (Continued)

Tanya

“I will try to remember the things that this program has brought to light for me, and I will try even harder to – I think what I need to work on is influencing. I don’t think I have strong influence over people I’m not really sure how to influence other people’s emotions. That’s something that I’m going to try to work on moving forward. …I tutor a little girl, and I notice that sometimes when she come in, she doesn’t …feel like being there because she went to school enough and now she has more school. And if I seem like I’m kind of [not enthusiastic] …we’re not having a good session. But if I just take a deep breath and pretend to be really excited and ask her something off topic, something fun, I can get her in a better mood. So I’m trying to learn how I can do that with adults. I don’t know how you do that basically, because she’s seven. Because I think that’s part of being able to be a good leader. … If I ever have people who report to me, you know, how do I make our work environment, positive and make people actually not dread coming to work every day?”

“Overall, being part of this research project and being part of PRIDE, mixed in with getting a chance to do a job that’s different from what I was doing before has really helped me be more aware of myself and it’s shown my weaknesses and my flaws. But at the end of the day I think that I’ve grown to be more confident in myself and I’m able to handle myself in a way that I never thought I could and do things that I never thought I could do so that’s good.”

Wanda

“Well, I’m going to continue to stay on the path that I’m on right now. I’m going to continue to, you know, think about my actions, you know, before I act on anything, try to influence people as much as I could. Yeah. My biggest thing, again, is the perceiving part. I want everybody to perceive me the same way and to recognize, you know, the good qualities in me, the characteristic of xxx and not just, oh, she’s a good employee, but yeah she has an attitude.”

Overall, Table 4.4 displays the narrative description of how all ten of the participants believe that EI can have a positive impact as a result of participating in this type of study. The specific behaviors are summarized in column three of table 4.4. Only one participant, Darlene, minimized any personal application of EI as a result of participating in this study due to her current work environment that she describes as closed. However, she still acknowledged an increased awareness of EI. The other nine participants reported positive efforts to apply EI competence as a result of participating in this study, particularly with the outcomes of improved relationships, teamwork, stress management, and managing change. Six participants noted that they would continue EI self-
improvement efforts. Four participants believed EI will help them advance in their career. Three participants note the impact of self-awareness on their ability to apply EI competence.

**Relationships**

The importance of relationships was not only a major theme for this study but also a key outcome for participants as they increased their understanding and applied EI competencies in their life. Social intelligence was a key description for building and maintaining relationships. Data from this study demonstrated overwhelming evidence of changes or adjustment to how participants manage their relationships. Eighty percent of participants stated the importance to them for building relationships in the workplace.

From the beginning of this study, the majority of participants recognized the importance of relationships in their personal and professional lives. Positive and negative relationship related dialogues occurred throughout this study. Here is one example from an aspiring leader during focus group 1:

*Victor:* “I think it’s the people you surround yourself with and learn from, you know, people who are, you know, maybe physicians or have achieved things, they inspire you to achieve yourself or that you value and want to see yourself doing.”

“I think the acquisition of moving about a lot, emotional intelligence for me was acquired through relocation.

The following examples demonstrate how participants describe the impact of negative interactions on relationships:

*Darlene:* “I think the people I probably work well with respect me. I think that the ones who have seen my work since I got here in 2012 see me as very consistent. You know, I – I’m good with my families. So I think that’s a sense of respect.” “They probably won’t know me personally because I don’t think that many people know me personally.” “I don’t really talk to that many people. Yes, I just continue. I’m a professional. So yea, I just do my job – I you know, I’m not angry or anything like that.”
Georgia: “It greatly affects how others perceive you and how they may interact with you.” “If I’m not in tune with my own emotions and how I interact with people it could be a negative – have a negative relationship or a negative rapport with my peers in leadership.”

One participant in particular made a complete turnaround after interview one from total disengagement with peers to embracing the social aspects of working harmoniously in the workplace. Prior to this study she was not interested in having a relationship with her peers:

Wanda: Interview 1: “I’m here to work, get a paycheck. I’m not here to be your friend. I’m not here to be at any of you-all’s cookout. I’m not here to be at your child’s party.” “I don’t really have other interactions with my peers in the department, you know, just the cordial good morning, how are you doing” My managers opinions are the only two people that I’m, like, interested... to see how they view me. Because they’re the only two that actually can make a different to me in whether or not I’m being promoted or not” “…As far as peers, I don’t really socialize a lot or have any interaction with my peers so they wouldn’t really know me” “If I was in a leadership position, then, year, you know, it would be important to, you know, sit there and have conversations and be involved more, you know, with things going on within the department, within the hospital. But you know as of right now, my job is just to sit down...so I really don’t have to to know be involved with everybody and go to all the parties and you know all that kind of stuff.” “…But I look at is as this is my care, this is my work, I don’t have to be best friends with, you know I’m – I try to be professional.”

Wanda: Interview 2: "I don’t want to be perceived the wrong way. Sometimes, we have those emotions going on, we don’t think " " I have pretty much been trying to get more involved with them do different activities and stuff in the department...Normally I’d be like, ‘oh, no you go. I don’t want none of that stuff. But I went ahead and you know yeah, so I’m trying to not be isolated, but be more involved in what’s going on in the department”

Wanda: Interview 3: "It’s so valuable that I am paying attention to this, like, every day. I mean, not that I’m just looking at it, but I’m aware of it. I’m aware of it. Like, I said, I am going to be perceived. That’s the biggest thing. I’m always thinking about that. Not only how I am going to be perceived, but I want to influence other people.”

Two of the five aspiring leader group members indicated no changes were made in their relationships while participating in this study. They were satisfied with their status quo:

Karl: “Nothing has really changed. I still stick to [my] ground [and] treat everybody how you want to be treated no matter the position. Treat the President of the united states the same way as you treat a gardener or a housekeeper.”

Darlene: When asked if anything has changed in her relationships as a result of this study, she replied ‘It hasn’t’.
The majority of aspiring leader group members spoke of improvement at work and home through increased self-awareness, being more accepting of others, self-reflection, and a greater willingness to engage with others personally and professionally:

**Fern:** “I think from a personal perspective – well for both – being aware of one’s own emotions and being able to think about, analyze, manage them is very important both at home and at work not that you’re trying to manipulate anybody but for understanding for building consensus, for gaining understanding. I’ve never been one to fly off the handle and scream and shout. I live in a household that did that. It wasn’t very effective. But to be able to break down to what really is going on and what you’re feeling and then being able to share that.” ... “I can report a much increased relationship with my immediate coworker – one of my immediate coworkers. I’m still working on the other one. We still argue, but we [are cordial]... Yeah, it’s much better.”

**Georgia:** “Personal relationships in particular – not to be so – this may sound harsh, but not being so eager to wipe the slate completely clean and start from scratch. Everybody deserves a second chance, whether it be a family member or friend, from doing something, but being a little bit more cautious. Because in that moment, you’re more excited about, okay, they’re ready to try it or we’re going to try this again as friends and see if we can rekindle it as a friendship, but kind of – you’re so consciously knowing where it could go just means I need to be a little bit more guarded when it comes to that. You know you have an argument with your friend about something or something was said and ... just being mindful of what happened and knowing the warning signs when it comes to relationships and knowing my emotional state of being sometimes overly enthusiastic at times can kind of be a blinder. It’s not necessarily a bad thing, but just being more aware.”

**Victor:** “It’s definitely made me look at myself a little bit more in terms of like, why people may perceive me or relate to me the way they do and how I can change that, how I can be more clear in my intentions both at work and at home.” ... “You know, just while I may be able to read people always been able to read people fairly well, I think I’ve tried to do a better job so that people can read me. Because my personality is not to, like, be boisterous and be loud and just, you know. So, like I say, I think some people have a difficult time reading, gauging, my true emotions. So definitely that’s one area that I’ve tried to work on so people can have a better understanding of, like, me, per se, and how I may perceive them, their actions.”

**Karl:** “I’ve noticed my peers, like, seeing me differently in a sense, you know, with some skepticism, like, why is he changing? What’s the reason for it? And you know, what’s his motive? There really is none, nothing personal. So I think that, in turn, you know, changes the way they respond or react with me.”

The following excerpts from aspiring leader participants demonstrate personal relationship improvements were also achieved. The same benefits described at work are also being applied in their personal lives using delayed impulse reaction,
managing feelings, empathy, and harmonious relationships. Old relationships are now being rekindled.

Georgia: “So funny story. My boyfriend tends to ask questions, but then he doesn’t listen to the answers especially when it comes to restaurants and food. So he’ll ask a question, doesn’t listen to the answer or something comes back with something that he doesn’t want, that frustration of just — if you just would listen when you’ve asked a question. And usually I’ll get very frustrated and say, ‘well you asked and he answered your question. I though they answered it for you’. And usually I’ll get agitated and just be ready to go home because he’s agitated now. But now I kind of, like, ‘it’s okay. We can switch plates, it’s okay. You like mine better than yours, we can switch. Or you can always order something different. Let’s walk through the menu. We’ll see what you can get different.’ So I act a little more calmly now. It’s not so frustrating.”

Victor: “I notice that people, like, in – like specifically in private will try to engage some old – and as tempting as it is, sometimes just out of, you know, fun type, no, I don’t want to do that anymore. You know, it doesn’t help for someone to change if you, like try to, you know…”

Candace: “I mean as far as how I interact with people outside of work… [with] my mom, my sister, family, friends I’ve noticed that I’ve been … less abrasive. Because if somebody comes to me with an issue… I’m going to just give it to them straight. I’m not going to sugar coat it. That’s just not what I do. However, I …realized … before emotional intelligence [which] actually helped me to articulate [feelings] … I could be a bit too abrasive or too blunt at times, and everybody doesn’t react or receive that well… From the reactions I’ve gotten from them, I can tell that it’s been a positive change.”… “I can say I actually have taken an approach to befriend someone that — in my department that I haven’t talked to really in, like, years. And that’s something I usually don’t do. When I cut somebody off, that’s it, I’m done. And I’ve actually kind of taken that approach and started back talking to the person again. I noticed that the person has been coming to me, you know, for help and stuff like that. [Asking if this EI study helped with this] “I know it did”… “For one, I was thinking, …I do want to eventually be promoted into some type of leadership position. And when that happens, I can’t allow my personal feelings to dictate how I respond to someone at work. Especially because you just can’t be biased whenever you’re in a position of leadership… So that’s the main reason why. And then too, I was thinking, … When you’re in a leadership position, you should never interact with a person in a way to let them know that you don’t like them.”

During interview 3 and focus group 3, all five LEAD group members agreed they are more aware of themselves. Participants describe being able to now perceive what others are seeing in them. They now pay more attention to how they are communicating when emotions are involved so that they are less likely to be viewed as harsh, and seen as wanting to connect with team members in a deeper fashion. Participants recognized that developing EI or
recognizing the absence of it in others helps them to accept people and not judge or dismiss them. Participants also described that listening more attentively has helped change their perspective overall. For example they made statements like:

Candace: “Well with work relationships, I know I had an issue with perceiving... how people perceive me and how... I thought I was in tune to others when I really wasn’t. So I definitely make myself more aware of how people are perceiving me and what like, what vibe, I guess you could say, that I’m giving off to others. And I try to be just more cautious of the way I say things or the way something might sound or the way something might come off in the workplace and personal. When you’re talking to somebody, make sure tone is you know appropriate. If I feel I might be getting short with somebody, maybe just taking a deep breath and then... I’ve just kind of made myself more aware...”

Frank: “I think I’m more connected with – I mean, I go to, like, my staff. I feel like they’re all family. But I think if I was probably a little bit more closed off, not engaging in what they’re actually doing historically. So I’ve been a little bit – tried to be more aware of what they’re doing and what they’re actually feeling and how that affects them. I’m just trying to use what they’re doing at home – from a personal perspective. Just kind of taking them as a whole person instead of just a tool to get a job done, but more of like, a person, that they have feelings and they have emotions.”

Robert: “It’s just something that I actually think about now versus before it wasn’t –you know, I just kind of went about my day-to-day. But now in the moment, you know, those interactions with people sometimes I think about what’s going on and how I can make sure that I’m coming across the right way. “

Tanya: “For me, I think I can see in my personal relationships the meaning of it. Well I realize that the meaning hasn’t changed for me, but I realize that a lot of people don’t have it. I don’t think people realize – I learned that every action doesn’t warrant a reaction. Like every time someone does something, I don’t need to react to it and I wish that other people would feel like that. I think I have a little bit more patience with people because I try harder to understand where they’re coming from.” Focus group 3: “I think I’m less apprehensive to interact with people. I think – I think people’s perception of me is really funny to me because I actually really don’t like interacting with people sometimes. And it’s well I have to work myself up to it internally. I would rather send someone an email rather than go in their office. Things like that, I kind of, you know, I’m the person that I want to each lunch by myself. I don’t feel like being bothered. I don’t want people in my personal, mental space. But I feel like I’ve actually enjoyed interacting with people more, I guess, and I’m becoming more of a people person than I thought I was before. I’ve always kind of not really cared to interact with people too much or I just did the bare minimal interaction to get work done.”

Wanda: “it’s changed a lot. I’m really starting to listen more to people. Because normally a person may come to me and they, you know, want to talk to certain things. Sometimes you’re like, you know, I ain’t got time for that right now. I’d be like, huh-uh, no, I don’t have time for that. But now I’m starting to listen and try
to help them change the way they deal with things or help them to look at it from a different perspective.”

Overall, the importance of forming relationships was a key finding in the data. Relationships were a primary focus of most dialogue within individual and group interview sessions. Whether participants discussed facing challenges such as unfair supervisors or a lack of inclusion, the undercurrent of the discussion was connected to relationships. As a result of understanding emotional intelligence participants report now being more engaged with people around them, possessing an improved ability to manage conflicts with others, a greater interest in repairing relationships damaged in the past, and creating new connections.

**Working with Teams**

Working effectively on teams was explored as an important type of relationship in the organizational workplace. The literature identified teamwork as an indication of high EI (Goleman, 1995). Participants agreed that EI training benefits teams and helps them understand how they can apply emotional intelligence. Only one aspiring leader group participant, Darlene, failed to acknowledge any connection between emotional intelligence and teamwork and instead continued to believe that the environment determines team functioning:

Darlene: “You adapt and you change your teams [because of closed systems]. Emotional intelligence has nothing to do with that. Environment is everything.”

The other nine participants acknowledged improvements in these excerpts:
Karl: “I think with teams, I think with me I have to literally step back when I’m working in a team and let the team kind of help out. I think that was one of my biggest things is when I’m put in a team I tend to like to take over. I guess that’s one of the negative things about me. But I guess this is about the decision making, to let people be part of the team and actually help you deal with the situation. But I guess on a positive note I do like to lead.” “I think I learned that the last time I ran CFC that was one of my biggest problems.”

Fern: “I think that’s probably the biggest one. The perception of what’s going on with the individuals on a team particularly when you go to a multi-disciplinary team, everybody comes from a different perspective with a different view of things, not always with the same mission in mind. It doesn’t help anybody to dismiss other people’s opinions or missions, being aware that everybody’s needs to be considered and accommodated. I think it’s important when you’re trying to accomplish for the bigger picture, you know.”

Georgia: “I would say, for myself, knowing when I’m the most beneficial to staff; knowing that I’m not a morning person. I know I’m more efficient and more – I’m not saying that I’m not approachable, but I’m approachable and more engaged after 10 a.m. knowing that and being aware of that. And then with my staff knowing when I see that certain characteristics or certain words are being said on report; or I’m in one of my units, knowing when they’re starting to become agitated and/or negative connotations are being thrown, to say, … guys that’s not the place for it. We need to refocus back on the topic at hand and take all of our personal emotions out of it and stay on focus to kind of keep group from being distracted.”

Victor: “Yeah. Certainly. Like, you know, one showing that you can, you know, step up and lead a little bit in some instances when one is kind of stepping up or you know, and then definitely just being open and more receptive to other people’s point of view and feedback. Like I said, even though you may not agree with it, it doesn’t hurt to at least hear some of them.”

Candace: “Definitely being more… [of] an open person, but really listening to others. Like I’m good at hearing people, but I already know what I want to do. So if I heard you, that’s cool but this is what I think we should do. So I’ve definitely been more open, which is sitting back and really...hearing what others are saying. And in the xxx office we actually have to be a team, have each other’s back, [and] work together. So it’s been really... [an] interesting experience, even with my PRIDE [team], to just be open and ...really considering what other people are saying. So yes, it’s been really helpful, I think in those areas.”

Frank: “Working on teams. I think – I think CDL is this – this incumbent in here. Because working on the team in CDL it was people … – I’ve never met, and they are everywhere. So just trying to deal with them work with them on motivating them to the level where we need to be to complete our project. It was interesting. It was eye opening when a group of people were not showing up to meetings at the beginning. And it’s like, wait. Why are – I was under the impression everybody was here because of the same reasons I was, you know. Some of you seem to be here just to graduate. Put those letters behind your name. to me it was more about learning something. The graduation doesn’t mean as much as the values I’ve gained from it. So it was, like, you know let’s talk to you, see what’s going on. Why are you where you’re at? So I think before I probably might have been a little more aggressive about it instead of trying to find – figure out what their challenges were and bring them in line. Instead of being aggressive or just telling them to show up to the meeting, I tried to look into the back of it and kind of perceive what they were having issues with, you know – and then I guess I’m reading words here – influencing them to promote them to change to do what I wanted them to do.”

Robert: “[EI is] ultra-important for working with teams. Because, I mean, you know, it’s all about interaction, dealing with each other and being able to be on
the same page with people. So you can’t work effectively as a team if you don’t have at least decent emotional intelligence.”

Tanya: “Generally speaking, I’ve never really had issues getting along with people, but like I said I’ve always kind of been a peacemaker for a group of people. But – I mean, it just – it’s helped – like, for example, in Pride, I’m my group’s team leader... I think my role is more of making sure that everyone is included, making sure that everyone feels like their opinion is valued. Being aware of emotional intelligence helps me to kind of make sure that other people’s perception of me is such that I’m a good leader in the way that I include everybody and make everyone feel equally as important in the group.”

Wanda: “I have to work well with everyone and, you now, have the same attitude with everyone, the same approach to everyone, so that I can be perceived the same from everyone across the board. That’s how it’s helped me.”

Overall, participants in this study believed emotional intelligence was beneficial for effective teams, working harmoniously with others, improves self-awareness and accurate perception of self and others, communication skills such as listening and empathy, accepting people for where they are and what they bring to the team, valuing the opinion of others, and inclusion.

Managing Change

Managing change was also explored as a type of relationship in the workplace. Participants agreed that EI competence can assist with managing change. Managing change was not an area found in the literature as associated with emotional intelligence but was viewed as crucial by participants for working within the VHA where change is constant. Flexibility and adaptability are described in the Bar-on and Goleman’s EI competency models (insert dates). Managing change is also a VHA competency for all employees. Participants were asked if they believed their ability to manage change could be influenced by emotional intelligence.

Seven participants noted the most prominent statements for how EI
assists with managing change. As described below, participants see emotional intelligence as a means for remaining positive during times of change, which in essence helps with managing change:

**Fern:** “I’m not sure. Because change for me has always been it’s like it’s inevitable like okay, if you can give me the whys and then wherefore’s then what I feel about it doesn’t matter. That’s were subjugation comes in. If you’re saying we’re going from point A to point B and we’re doing that because, and you can lay it all out, okay. If you’re going to tell me we’re going from point A to point B because I said so, that I have a problem with. That’s when I would have to use my emotional intelligence to get more information because – I’m okay with change provided its not change for the sake of change.”

**Victor:** “So it’s you know, changes in our department in the particular clinic that I work in, you know, I think over the course of my life, I’m able to deal with change a little bit better. I don’t see it necessarily as a negative thing. I see it as largely an inevitable thing. Everything has to change on some level. And so it doesn’t scare me. It doesn’t you know, sometimes it comes out good and other times it doesn’t but you know you always focus on those ... the change, that it can hopefully be a positive thing and less focus on oh, this is a negative aspect and I don’t want to change.”

**Candace:** “I think it’s also been a positive influence on how I manage change just coming in with a clean slate and ... a new attitude and, hey this is a fresh start or just whatever, and not really carrying a chip on your shoulder or feeling like I have to prove myself ...This is a chance for me to just shine not necessarily prove, like come in with the attitude of I need to prove myself.”

**Karl:** “So managing change, I think very similar situations I mean, change can be stressful. But, again, it’s more like, looking at what’s going to be changing. I think at the beginning, whenever I saw change, I immediately went to all the negative things that could possibly happen because of this change. And now it’s more of well let’s look at how this can benefit us and how it’s more of a let’s just see what happens and how we an modify the change to do some good things.”

**Wanda:** “Well I guess for the most part I would just think about, you know, what is going to be the outcome to what direction am I moving forward, you know, or is this change going to move me backwards, you know to think about what’s going on. And if it’s work related, I’m going to have to of course, if it’s coming down from someone in authority, I have to, you know, prepare myself to say, okay, you know what? It’s coming down from authority. I have to go with the flow where it’s good or bad.”

**Tanya:** “I think before I started working in the xxx office, before I was in PRIDE, before I was still in this study, I hated change, but now I welcome change. And I hated change mainly because – the type of person I [am. I] ... fear ..., being able to be – you know, once I get good about something, I’m like, let me just stick with this. I don’t think I can do something different. But I think I have just – I’ve been able to realize that I am pretty much – I can handle situation a lot better than I did before and so that gives me the confidence to believe that if and when things do change, I can kind of, you know, I’m able to handle myself.”

**Georgia:** “I would say it would help me with knowing when it’s the right time for change. Again, it goes back to knowing what are my emotions in the moment. And yet sometimes you may not have the ability to negate when you have to change something. But if you do have the ability to say this is a good idea to change something but let’s wait a day or let’s wait another day. That way the emotions or whatever’s going on has subsided and I can fully give my focus to
that change as opposed to jumping into it and then having my attention be
diverted everywhere and I’m not as effective.”

Darlene, an aspiring leader viewed managing change as an environmental
adaptation. She acknowledged that a mental shift is required in order to survive
in a changing environment but still feels helpless to make any individual mental
shifts to improve her environment:

Darlene: “They can probably adapt. I think that one of the things ... you can use
this for is adaptation, which is ...one of the things that you have to use in order to
survive. When you’re thinking about looking at what you can’t change, that’s
what I meant when I say adaptation. You have to survive in a different way. So
you could use this as [a tool] if you don’t have influence in something. You have
to adapt. So that’s kind of a mind thing. You can’t [change things if] you have. ...
no leadership to change anything, you don’t have the authority to change
anything, so what do you do? You adapt to your environment.”

Robert, a LEAD participant recognized the importance of two EI specific
competencies for managers to successfully manage change:

Robert: “It’s helpful with managing change for sure because – especially, you
know, with perceiving and influencing. Those things are very important to
actually producing change in people.”

Overall, the majority of participants note that emotional intelligence will
help them recognize and manage emotions associated with the change and that as
a result they will be able to maintain a positive outlook and ability to adapt to
change. Recognizing feelings, particularly fear and delaying impulses to avoid
responding negatively is aiding participants with positively addressing and
adapting to the inevitable changes that occur in the VA.

**Stress Management**

Stress Management was also explored as a benefit of high EI competence.
Participants agreed that EI training can benefit how they manage stress. Another
documented benefit of emotional intelligence in the workplace is the improved capacity to manage stress (Bar-on, 1997). During interview 3 I specifically asked participants if there had been any changes for them over the past six months in relation to stress management after learning about emotional intelligence. Two participants denied any personal changes to managing their stress as a result of this study. They indicated they were already well aware of how to manage their stress and saw no need to make any changes to their current strategy. Three participants from the aspiring leader group and all five LEAD participants shared the following thoughts on stress and EI:

Fern: “If you have the awareness where your emotions are, then you’re going to be cognizant of your stress. Hopefully you have the wherewithal to figure out how it is that you can manage or deal with your stress, what your stressors are, where it’s coming from. Because it’s not always blatantly obvious. It could be, you know, a combination of things. And realizing how stress can manifest itself in your outward appearance an actions, reactions, to the world around you, it’s important to obviously get that under control so that everybody doesn’t think they’re dealing with a crazy person.”

Georgia: “It’s definitely helped me to not be as stressed knowing how – where I am emotionally; knowing that if I am feeling stress, meaning that I’m not sleeping well, that’s my first trigger; and then knowing that I need to go work out to relieve stress; also, reflection [on] what I may do and have ...[awareness of patterns such as] if I know I’m constantly going for sweet stuff, that’s a sign too that something’s not right. But I’m able to do it with stress a whole lot more efficiently and kind of combat it before I get to the point where it overwhelms me.”

Victor: “I mean, everyone has stress on some level, but I’ve always been able to deal with it well. And I think now, just kind of going through this, I tend to look – really focus a lot more on the positive aspects and how I can influence those positive aspects to make the situation less stressful and, you now, in the end get a better outcome. And then that extends to working with other people too. Like I’ve really kind of taken it as s challenge to, like, people who I didn’t see eye-to-eye with before and who I strongly disagreed with, tending to, you know, give them more of a benefit of the doubt or at least listen and you know, be less judgmental of them – off the bat just so that you know I can show them that I’m willing to change. It’s like even though I may not agree with you a hundred percent, you know, I’m certainly able to work with you and have a positive, you know, work relationship.”

Candace: “Well definitely just helps me to just look at the bigger picture and I’m slower to get stressed. Like this has been going on for a few weeks. I’m just kind of – it took me, like three weeks to get to that point of where I’m just like, oh, my gosh. Because it would have been like, the first day, you know, this email got sent out about me I would have been just crushed and freaking out, but I didn’t. Initially, I just said you know what, I’m just – step outside the situation and just
figure it out. Let me just see, you know what is the issue here? What’s going on? So I’m definitely slower to get really freaked out and stressed out. And I don’t take it home with me. I’ve learned that as well not to let [work issues] carry over into your home life or not have it just weighing on you when you leave here. When you leave, you should just let it go.”

Frank: “So emotional intelligence with dealing with stress, I mean, it helps me to kind of, I mean, just be aware of it in myself and how I’m – how it’s – how I’m reacting to a situation, to be aware that I’m actually stressed and how it’s going to affect my responses. So it helps me to kind of take a step back and think about what I’m going to say, you know, give it 10 breaths or something and count to 10, bring it back down and respond appropriately and try to get more out of less.”

Robert: “That’s a tough one. I don’t know how it would help me deal with stress. [I typically deal with stress] “by being stoic...[and] not spazzing out... calm down and think thing through things (EI?) I mean, I guess, yeah.”

Tanya: “It has assisted me in dealing with stress because I get less stressed. Like I said before ... I used to take things, ... really personally all the time. You know, sometimes things would bother me at night, when I was trying to fall asleep. Now that I understand that people react more to their environment, not necessarily a specific person. I’m just more able to go with the flow and let roll off my back. So I find myself being less stressed.”

Wanda: “Well, if a stress situation comes up, which it has, I will just – you know, like I said, just think about, okay, what’s going on? What’s really going on, you know, and then try to think, now how am I going to respond to this or how am I going to react. So I try to think about it. I’ll really think about it first before I respond and just try not to let it stress me out for the most part. Before I would just go ahead and went to managing it, wouldn’t even think about it and would [not] care about how I was perceived.”

Overall for stress management, 80% of the participants agree that EI helps manage stress. EI competencies needed included self-awareness, managing feelings, having a positive outlook, delayed impulse which gives them time to pause and calm down when under stress, and awareness of the perception of others as key to improving how they react to stressful situations:

In summary for research question three, VA employees found participating in this EI study was beneficial to them personally and professionally. Participants in this study have shared how their understanding of emotional intelligence has improved their workplace relationships, how EI competency behaviors have improved and the outcomes that have been beneficial include improved relationships, their ability to work on teams, and they now feel
able to more effectively manage change and stress. The importance of relationship building was a key finding and benefit for these participants as it was not only explored during interview three but also was found to be prevalent in multiple interviews and focus group transcripts. All of these benefits should produce a more efficient and civil work environment.

**Summary of Findings**

The coding and thematic analysis process was clear in revealing the major themes of relationship, behavior, and environment. All three of the themes and nine subthemes are interrelated. The people within any environment represent and create the environment. The people within the organizational environment determine their behavior and decide how relationships will develop. Emotional intelligence is a tool available to all and can strengthen all of these thematic areas.

Figure 4.2 Theme Interconnectedness
Initial understanding of emotional intelligence was minimal but by the end of the study there was a consensus on the value of EI for workplace and individual success. The majority of participants applied behavioral changes. Fern, in particular, described how her awareness and perception and ability to examine what is really going on around her has helped her with her technical skills and she has a new awareness of the importance of relationships. Candace also described in detail how her understanding of EI now aides her in “stepping outside of the situation” so that she can make better choices with her reactions to things that used to cause her emotional upset.

Ninety per cent of participants experienced positive changes in their personal and work lives after participating in this study. Darlene was the only participant who decided she did not need to try anything new in order to improve how others perceived her. She agreed that EI was important and that it has its benefits but she did not feel any effort on her part would make a difference in her current organizational environment.

Contextual factors that created challenges for emotional intelligence development were apparent in the organizational environment and African Americans expressed concerns related to inclusion. Eighty five percent of the African American female participants expressed feelings of not being valued or heard on the job. The one Black male in the group shared how he was misjudged and feared because of his size, which he did not attribute to race. The majority of participants adapted positively to their work environment and sought to do their part to create a positive work culture. Chapter 5 will discuss these findings,
implications for theory and practice while integrating a comparison to existing literature. Recommendations for future research will also be provided.
CHAPTER FIVE

The purpose of this study was to better discern ten Tampa VA medical center employees’ understanding and application of EI competence within their personal and professional lives. Although a great deal of research has been conducted on emotional intelligence, it was not clear whether the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) environment would benefit in the same manner as the private sector or if leaders and aspiring leaders would grow personally and professionally as a result of learning and applying EI competencies in their life. This chapter will discuss findings, implications for theory and practice, and provide recommendations for future research. This chapter is organized by research question and includes a comparison to the literature.

Summary and Discussion of Study Goals and Methods

This study was a qualitative pragmatic content analysis using existing data. A variety of interventions were provided during this six-month study including individual and group interviews, an EISA curriculum, pre- and post-360-degree EISA assessments, and individual action plans were encouraged. These interventions were designed to assist participants with their individual EI development. Three semi-structured interviews and three focus groups were conducted with each participant and the transcribed data was analyzed to explore
EI understanding and application for ten Tampa VA employees. There was a large amount of data to review in order to conduct content and thematic analysis. Reduction of the large amount of data began with thirty individual and six focus group transcripts followed by coding after which themes were derived. The data analysis steps taken followed models described in chapter 3 by Lichtman (2013), Krueger and Casey (2015), Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), and Grbich (1999).

Thematic analysis included reading each or the 10 transcripts at least five times. The initial three cycles started with an uninterrupted read, followed by a preliminary coding read looking for commonalities and outliers using highlighters and taking handwritten notes. The third read began placing in vivo codes initially onto flip charts and eventually into Microsoft excel. Additional readings of the transcripts were needed to clarify and confirm codes and to identify relevant quotes. This process took almost two months to complete thirty individual transcripts and six focus group transcripts.

Content analysis was used to examine the communication of participants as well as describe the contextual meanings of the interview text. The codes were eventually organized into themes using color-coding within Microsoft excel. By placing codes into excel I was able to sort and color code similar items while searching for a range of perceptions and commonalities. By organizing the codes and themes by interview, I was able to have a visual of the frequency and consistency among the participants and could more readily identify major commonalities. Quotes were then organized to assess the importance and strength of thoughts shared by participants. Figure 3.2 in chapter 3
demonstrates how content analysis was used. Figure 5.1 shares a small section of the Microsoft Excel sheet that was used to identify themes and their associated codes and sub-themes. That process applied to all codes and themes during data analysis. Themes were reviewed with an IRB team member to obtain concurrence.

Figure 5.1 Thematic Analysis Process Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Application 10/10 participants RQ 2 (deductive codes from Smith 2002)</td>
<td>Self motivated, Analyze, Self Awareness</td>
<td>Self-awareness, Delay Impulse, Harmonious, Listening, Conflict Management, Improved Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment 10/10 participants</td>
<td>System fit, System impact on EI, Positive vs. negative, Open vs. closed, VHA structure, VHA silos, VHA unique culture, Adapt to your environment/system, Change causes stress, Stress causes disengagement, Positive in negative situations, Poor communication of mission, Trust for leaders/org, Must connect to your employees</td>
<td>Adaptability, Engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the findings are discussed by research question in this chapter, a comparison to the literature will also be included. The literature review in chapter 2 provided an overview of intelligence, emotions, emotional intelligence, EI assessments, how to develop EI, and key research findings for EI and the workplace. This study found consistency with previous research in areas related to intelligence theory, EI theory, competency development benefits, and challenges in organizational environments and the presence of potential micro invalidations for African Americans in the Tampa VA.
Discussion of Findings and Literature Comparison

Chapter 4 described the findings for each question by sharing a summary of the data and citing quotes organized by research question and a brief synopsis for each section. In this section findings will be discussed by research questions and the relevant literature.

Research question 1- Understanding

The first question for this study asks how VHA employees describe their understanding of emotional intelligence. The findings demonstrated a consistent improvement of understanding among participants and the outcomes of this improvement resulted in improved social intelligence and self-awareness. Participant interview quotes demonstrated an initial elementary foundation using general non-specific descriptions but concluded the study with specific examples that indicated an increased understanding of EI as they described associated EI competencies from both Goleman and Bar-On theories (Goleman, 1995, Bar-On, 1997). They also expressed a clear understanding of how EI can benefit participants both personally and professionally. Self-awareness and social intelligence are competencies within various emotional intelligence theories (Goleman, 1995, Bar-On, 1997).

Self-awareness is not only a part of some emotional intelligence theories but it is also a part of the VHA personal mastery competency (www.valu.va.gov). Having personal mastery from a VHA perspective means that you actively listen to feedback and identify areas for improvement. Personal mastery expects the associated behaviors to include a positive attitude and productive behavior (www.valu.va.gov). In order to improve self-awareness a learner must be ready
and open to accept feedback from others (http://eiconsortium.org). It was interesting to note that even though two participants declined to make any personal improvements as a result of this study, they did express increased self-awareness by acknowledging that they understood why their peers perceived them differently than how they intended.

The majority of the participants came into this research study knowing very little about emotional intelligence. The first step was to take a self-assessment and invite their managers, peers, subordinates, and others in their life to take the same assessment and see how the perception of self as compared to the perception of others. The results from these assessments were different than other 360-degree assessments taken within the VA. EI assessments asked participants and others to make a determination about how they respond emotionally in various situations. For someone else to accurately assess what is going on inside of a person emotionally during difficult situations, times of conflict, or when you have to solve a problem a relationship is necessary. As a result, the majority of participants rated themselves higher on the EI assessment than the raters they invited to provide feedback. The feedback some of the participants received from raters indicated they were not always sure how to score some of the questions. Regardless, the reaction to the assessment results was the beginning of self-awareness for participants. Some participants agreed with the assessment feedback, others were surprised. The two participants with fixed mindsets (Dweck, 2006) did not see the relevance of adaptation rather; they believed the assessment reflected misperceptions of their raters. Regardless of
the reaction to the assessment, self-awareness was a key to improving understanding of emotional intelligence and it was achieved for all participants.

Although participants improved in EI understanding at varying rates, all of the participants described an improved understanding of what emotional intelligence is and how it can make a difference for them and others. Table 4.2 in chapter 4 highlights a few significant shifts in understanding over the six-month timeframe of this study. The training curriculum played a role in this increased understanding of EI as well. Nelson, Fierke, Sucher, and Janke (2015) found that training on EI helps with self-awareness which has a great impact on how employees feel about themselves.

Social intelligence as defined by Goleman (2006) is simply the science of human relationships. Relationships were a major theme found in the data for this study. Sub themes for this relationship theme included engagement, inclusion, and empathy. Goleman revisited Thorndike’s failed effort to launch social intelligence theory in the 1920s when he was developing his own theory on emotional intelligence. He includes social intelligence as a competency in his EI model (Goleman, 1995). Goleman goes on to note the benefits of individuals with high social intelligence and describes them as popular, team players, good listeners, and the ability to get along with anyone (Goleman, 1995). These positive outcomes were evident for the majority of participants in this study. As social intelligence improved, participants described these same benefits for themselves both personally and professionally. Stories were shared about not only making new relationships and improving relationships but a few
participants even found that they were not able to mend previously broken relationships simply by adjusting their behavior.

The greatest example of understanding EI and the impact it had on relationships comes from Wanda. Her trajectory analysis of improvement over time can be found in table 4.3. Wanda is a 40-year-old non-manager participant in a leadership program. Wanda’s perspective of EI went from being adamant that her peers did not matter and that social events for her team were of no interest to now being more aware of her role in that disengagement to being significantly more engaged with her team, making friends at work, and since the end of the study she was promoted to team leader. She admitted in interview 2 that she was embarrassed by her behavior in the first interview and realized after reflecting on that interview how wrong her behavior had been towards her team members. Her initial scores on the EISA were 2.5 standard deviations below her self-assessment on the perceiving factor and over 4 standard deviations on the managing factor. Wanda by far demonstrated the greatest improvement for participating in this study and it all surrounded her social intelligence or ability to handle relationships in her life.

In summary, participants in this study describe their understanding of emotional intelligence from a practical standpoint and not necessarily from the multiple definitions provided in chapter 2. Participants express their understanding in terms used within the various competency models (Goleman, 1995, Bar-On, 1997, Salovey & Mayer, 1990) such as improved self-awareness, self-reflection, active listening, managing reactions, becoming more aware of how others see them and mindful of how they present to others, and how important it
is to network and be civil to others (Smith, 2006). By being more aware of their emotions they have been able to recognize how emotions determine their behavior. Recognizing emotion and behavior helped participants see how social interactions can be positively altered. The skills participants gained from their self-awareness and social intelligence include an improved ability to connect with others and they now mindfully seek to portray how they desire to be perceived by others. These findings support the leading experts in EI (Goleman, 1998; and Bar-On, 1997) on the importance of emotional intelligence for success. If this level of improvement can be replicated in this manner throughout the Tampa VA where personal engagement of employees within this organization can be shifted to create positive relationships on teams, with managers, and peers, the impact of EI could be monumental and invaluable.

**Research question 2 - Application of EI Competencies**

The second question for this study was how do VHA employees apply emotional intelligence in their professional and private lives? The data relevant to research question two showed primary application of the increased self-awareness and social intelligence resulting in key EI competency improvements. The majority of participants discussed applying competencies and demonstrating behaviors such as empathy, listening, managing feelings, delayed impulse, reflection, civility, optimism, and improved conflict management.

EI Theory and competency development identifies these outcomes and behaviors as key benefits of improving emotional intelligence (Smith, 2012). Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, access, and produce emotions that cognitively aid in understanding and regulating emotions and behavior
(Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The EI competencies and mastery of them are believed to produce success in the workplace. High EI is also connected to job satisfaction, and reduced burnout (Nogaye, 2010).

During this study it seemed that mindset (Dweck, 2006) created a challenge for learner readiness for change in a couple of the participants. Dweck believes that mindsets help explain why people do not learn or do not use certain EI skills, AND why some fail at relationships while others thrive (Dweck, 2006). Although 80% of the participants demonstrated growth mindsets where they sought personal growth and development during this study, there were two participants with fixed mindsets who did not believe understanding EI warranted any needed personal changes.

Gardner’s (2006) multiple intelligences includes inter and intrapersonal skills. These abilities are also important for displaying emotional intelligence competence. The EISA foundation factors include perceiving and managing emotions. Perceiving emotions requires interpersonal skills while managing emotions requires intrapersonal skills. Interpersonal and intrapersonal are often referred to in the literature when measuring contextual factors.

During all of the interviews and focus groups, questions were asked regarding how participants were using what they learned in their personal and professional lives. During the completion of the EISA curriculum, exercises were used to pull in real life interactions and reflection was encouraged to explore how they would do things differently if these interactions repeat. Table 3.6 in chapter 3 and Table 4.2 in chapter 4 display the progression from beginning, middle, and end on the increase in behavioral application of emotional intelligence. 90% of
participants reported increased self-awareness as explained above. Behavioral changes included a 60% improvement in empathy and managing feelings, 50% or half of all participants now analyze or self-reflect on their behavior, and 40% expressed improvement in delaying their impulse by thinking before they react.

In summary, participants are well on their way to demonstrating the behavior of key performers as described in the literature. Key performers are described by Blank (2008), Connie and Leskin (2016), and Goleman (1998) as those who can manage stress, work on teams, provide good customer service, manage conflict, communicate effectively, and work well with people from different backgrounds. For example, Candace covered three of these benefits during focus group 3 when she shared how she has personally improved stating, “...when a situation comes up that’s either new or just extremely stressful or bullying... [or] a Veteran or something like that, where... I’ve never dealt with this before, I catch myself... I’m talking to myself through different steps...”. The findings in this study are consistent with this literature indicating that Tampa VA participants displayed improved EI competency and behavioral characteristics of key organization performers at the conclusion of this study.

**Research question 3 - Contextual Challenges**

Research question three asks what contextual factors emerge that may present challenges as well as opportunities for emotional intelligence development within the Tampa VA? The answer to this research question explored participant descriptions of contextual factors including race, age, gender, and the organizational environment. The greatest findings for this
section were related to the environment and the possibility of African Americans experience micro invalidations in the workplace.

There was one work culture question during this interviews but the amount of responses related to the organizational environment were abundant throughout the six-months. Environmental concerns ranged from being responsible for EISA assessment scores to silos and supervisors were occasionally blamed for the environment. There was one description of the VA being different than any other environment but the majority consensus regarding the environment centered on the people within the organization. Concerns about supervisor favoritism are supported by the literature of Qazi, Shafique, & Ahmad (2014) who found that supervisors have a great impact on subordinate performance and professional development. Participants’ realizing that they can change their behavior to improve their organizational environment supports the findings of Shrestha, & Banuya (2016) who found that an individual's EI determines if workers will be positive, engaged, and satisfied on the job. In essence, the people represent, shape, and determine the organizational environment and work culture. Ninety percent of all participants acknowledge their part in improving the work environment.

Only one participant, Darlene, felt helpless and defeated in her current surroundings. Sternberg’s Triarchic theory includes a contextual aspect. This type of intelligence for adults could support Darlene’s feelings about the environment. The contextual part of Sternberg’s theory seeks to understand the fit of persons in their environment (Berg & Sternberg, 1985). Problem solving, social competence, and communication are key skills believed to assist an
individual with thriving in their environment. Darlene’s insistence that her emotional intelligence would be higher if she was in a different environment and responses about the absence of positive relationships at the Tampa VA leaves questions about her social competence or social intelligence. Darlene is a bright, 56-year old aspiring leader non-manager participant in this study who was consistently reminding researchers of the importance of the environment. She has had a rich and rewarding career prior to joining the Tampa VA a few years ago but not satisfied in her current environment. Based on Sternberg’s theory, a change in environment could have affected her cognitive functioning but an adjustment to the environment could have improved this functioning for her (Berg & Sternberg, 1985). Again, Darlene was adamant that the supervisor was responsible for not improving her environment yet as she reported he refused to make any adjustments on her behalf. Darlene had several quotes in chapter 4 about the closed system in her current work environment, which prevents her from being a part of the team. With age, Sternberg also notes that adaptive behaviors shift as well. Darlene was also consistent in noting the importance of adapting to the environment in order to survive but still was not perceived as thriving in place. Sony and Mekoth’s (2016) research does not support Darlene’s failure to adapt as they found that high EI aids workers in adequately adapting to their environment. From an EI theory perspective, Darlene’s lack of social intelligence is likely the true reason for her inability to adapt to the Tampa VA environment.

All of the negative aspects described about an environment by a few participants including a lack of trust, favoritism, stress, and managing change are
also areas that can be fixed with social intelligence. Relationship building can reverse all of these negative factors.

The other significant finding on contextual issues was related to concerns shared by African American study participants. It is interesting that managers view these African American employees as stronger in perceiving and managing as it is contrary to the literature that states the scores should be lower. Self-perception of perceiving abilities is also higher for African American participants in this study. In spite of being thought of so highly by their manager, the six African American participants in this study identified concerns that were unsolicited by the interview questions. During the individual interviews, 50% of these African American participants shared that they don’t feel valued, listened to, or cared about by their manager. One stated specifically that she does not fit in. Although there were no specific questions during the interviews regarding these types of subtle attacks, these employees were describing racial micro-aggressions. Micro-aggressions have been defined as micro-assaults, micro-insults and micro-invalidations (Sue & Constantine, 2007). Micro-assaults seek to harm through blatant acts or racially motivated statements; micro-insults are rude, demeaning, insulting or insensitive statements; and micro-invalidations dismiss feelings, perceptions, or experiences of a person such as denying racism is real (Torres and Driscoll, 2010). Micro-aggressions are racial when they are directed at a race other than your own and may be unconscious as a result of stereotypes. The discriminatory behavior is often discrete and hidden in the eyes of the mainstream or ignored by those who have never experienced racism, yet the behavior may have a negative impact on marginalized populations (Cortina,
2008). Micro-invalidations are the potential assaults these employees could be facing that leave them feeling invalidated although it would be an assumption as none of these participants associated race with these feelings in the workplace.

Research is growing in the area of unconscious bias, which is rooted in stereotypes that people hold (Lee, 2005). The one and only Black male in the study did not identify race but described a challenge he has with people misperceiving him or making assumptions that he is not friendly simply because of his size. Could this be directly connected to how society continues to misread, stereotype, fear, and even dehumanize large black males as a way to justify excessive force by police in America (Godsil & Johnson, 2013)? Again, it would be an assumption as this participant did not associate race with these misperceptions in the workplace.

African American participants were also the only employees to mention spirituality. Fifty percent of these employees credit their spirituality for their perseverance, upbringing and discipline, and their comfort in the religious environments. Although Zohar (2005) seeks to separate religion from spiritual intelligence, she does connect morality. Participants described religion as their source of right from wrong and they credit religion for the initial introduction to emotional intelligence competence. Zohar’s spiritual intelligence was relevant to the study for the African American participants. Zohar believes spiritual intelligence is required in order to have emotional intelligence (Zohar, 1997). By nature of the VA’s I-CARE principles described in chapter 2 core values is expected of all employees. The theory is clear that it is not connected to religion or spiritual practices, which were referred to, from time to time by a couple of
participants. Spiritual intelligence is connected more to basic civility, morality, and good will towards others (Zohar, 2005), which is in fact a sub-theme for this study. As spiritual intelligence grows in participants, Zohar believes they will become more aware of their own values, meanings, and purpose. These outcomes are also connected to our major theme of behavior, which includes self-awareness, communication, and self-management. In this category, Georgia is our best example. As a 29-year-old aspiring leader manager, Georgia consistently placed the needs of her team in the forefront of her change efforts. Already skilled at reflective listening, Georgia made a point to consistently share how her efforts have shifted to take care of her team members by paying attention to verbal and non-verbal signs of emotional stress and stepping in to help even if it meant doing their job while they take a break and regroup. Her focus was on her core values with a goal of superior customer service, internal and external. She also happens to be one of the two participants who mentioned how spirituality was an important part of her upbringing and that emotional intelligence training started at home as a child.

When comparing gender differences for participants in this study, self-assessment scores were consistent with the literature. The 360-degree assessment feedback from managers, however, indicated that females were seen as stronger in perceiving and equal in managing. Only one participant mentioned a gender related issue which appeared to be sexist when she is constantly called sweetheart or honey yet her offense to those nicknames were believed to be associated with her young age and not her gender. Either way, the name calling is inappropriate yet it is unclear if those statements came from a
fellow employee or a Veteran as Veterans can at times be inappropriate with their words.

Age data for this study was inconsistent with the literature as the participants between the ages of 36-45 had the highest EI scores (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Chen, Peng, & Fang, 2016). Typically, the older you get, the higher your EI scores should be based on experience. The highest EI scores on the self-assessment were found for participants between the ages of 36-45. One participant spoke of herself being set in her ways at her age and another young manager mentioned how some older workers are only coming to work for a paycheck. Overall, there were no significant findings related to age.

Participants in managerial roles had self-assessment scores that were higher for perceiving but lower for managing when compared to the scores of their supervisors. Quazi, Shaffique, and Ahmad (2014) found that a manager’s level of emotional intelligence can impact their subordinates performance and development. Supervisors are also believed to assist with behavior and management of emotions of their subordinates (Clarke, 2006). A few participants would agree, including Darlene who was primarily speaking of environmental fit but credits supervisors for creating the right environment. Candace also spoke of the difficulty with supervisors who are not hiding their bias or favoritism and how that impacts the work culture for all. Frank, as a new supervisor, stated during his interviewing that supervisors are responsible for setting the tone on the team. The heavy pressure on supervisors to demonstrate high emotional intelligence makes it clear why so many organizations focus EI training on the higher level employees instead of offering it to all.
In summary, the majority of participants are working in supportive organizational environments within the Tampa VA. The challenges expressed about the organizational environment are directly connected to the importance of positive interactions within the environment. Even the few outlier negative references to the VA organizational environment such as supervisors who are not viewed as supportive, showing favoritism and even the micro-invalidations can directly connect to and can be improved through building positive relationships. African American participants have a perception of feeling invalidated and one seems to be repeatedly stereotyped. It is not clear if this is race related. Only two of the six communicated a sense of helplessness to make a true impact on the job as a result of these judgments. Two of the six are managers and two others are optimistic of future promotion. The study did not specifically seek to explore any questions related to race during the six-months of interviews so these findings were unexpected and yet concerning as no other race demonstrated such unsolicited feelings. Further study into these challenges will be recommended.

Research question 4 – Changes after Study Completion

Research question four asks to what extent did the understanding and application of emotional intelligence change after completion of the EI screening study? The answer described changes participants made over the six-month study timeline and how understanding changed over time. Research question 4 goes beyond application of EI and seeks to truly understand what difference this study made for participants. During interview 3 and focus group 3 questions were asked to see how participants have not only used the EI information so far but also were asked what they planned to do moving forward. All participants
were able to identify something from this study that they could continue moving forward, even those with a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2006). Interview 3 and focus group 3 questions showed the positive qualities this study has fostered in the participants and potentially the organization.

All participants benefited from this study and after completion they planned to continue learning about EI, ongoing self-improvement, remaining mindful of EI in their interactions with individuals and teams, and a couple of non-manager participants plan to start acting like leaders. Interview questions at the end of the study also elicited participant input on whether or not they believe EI is something all employees could benefit from. Emmerling and Goleman (2003) found that individuals who invest the time to seriously work on improving in these EI domains find success at work and in life over time. Sufficient practice must also occur so that the prior habits are removed (Goleman, 2000). Participants in this study invested fourteen hours in interviews and applied the lessons outside of class. Their efforts and outcomes have demonstrated success professionally and personally. Thirty percent of the participants made a point of commenting that the entire study was an “awesome” experience for them personally.

Organizationally, two of the participants pointed out that the people and the system as a whole must be open to emotional intelligence for it to make a difference for employees. This is consistent with a need for learner readiness and growth mindsets as these two participants were not demonstrating a growth mindset placing the burden of their EI development wholly on the system where they work (www.eiconsortium.com, Dweck, 2006). The consortium’s 22
recommendations for how organizations should provide EI training is located in table 2.6 found in chapter 2. This study sought to follow those recommendations and the EISA curriculum included the training delivery components. It is anticipated that the benefits achieved will last for years to come (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003; and Nelis, Quoidback, Mikilajczak, & Hansenne, 2009).

In summary, EI training that follows the EI consortium guidelines will benefit employees at the Tampa VA. The extent to which it benefits all employees is limited by the fact that our sample was not random and does not adequately represent the entire workforce. Learner readiness and a growth mindset will aid in maximum benefits of participating in this type of training. Training should adhere to the recommendations of the EI consortium as outlined in chapter 2. The extent to which understanding and application of emotional intelligence changes after completion of this EI study shows a great amount of potential for advancement and positive benefits for the individual and the organization as a whole.

Conclusions

This study and its associated training efforts were consistent with the literature in securing the outcome of key improvements for employees within VHA. As a result of participating in this study, employees report improvements that demonstrate the strengths and benefits of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, the ability to build relationships, being a team player, inter and intrapersonal skills enhancements, and coping strategies such as the ability to manage stress, change, and conflict. The details within the content of the study
may aid organizations with planning of EI training. Key conclusions associated with answering the research questions for this study include:

1. Emotional intelligence can benefit employees at the Tampa VA, regardless of their position. It can be a tool for improved performance in the workplace. It is unclear if EI training will benefit actively disengaging employees since the sample for this study included employees who were actively engaged in facility activities.

2. Participation in EI training is beneficial to individuals personally and to the organization as a whole.

3. Developing positive relationships has direct ties to high performing employees.

4. There are benefits individually, for teams, and organizations to have employees complete emotional intelligence 360-degree assessments and training sessions.

5. 360-degree assessments can provide important insights into strengths and weakness for personal development planning. The potential for bias should be recognized when raters are not from the same affinity group or if they don’t know each other personally.

6. The people represent the work environment and development of EI skills within the general workforce can have an impact on the environment at large.
7. The VHA is a diverse, inclusive environment and yet there is something, perhaps hidden bias, which has led to African American employees to feel invalidated in their work spaces.

**Implications for Practice**

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has an all employee and leadership competency model that deeply embeds emotional intelligence competencies without referring to EI. The model is designed to assist employees with career development while working for the agency. The problem is that employees are not aware of this competency model and thus cannot utilize it for their personal development planning (PDP). The only employees who learn about this model are those selected to participate in a leadership development program. At the Tampa VA that exposure is limited as approximately 20 employees per year are selected annually to participate in those leadership programs. The VHA competency models should be accessible to all employees at the time of employment as it provides a roadmap to career success beginning with the entry-level employee all the way up to the top leaders of the organization.

The Tampa VA Education Office offers a variety of employee development programs that help improve soft skills but emotional intelligence training is currently targeted to leadership only. This study implies that emotional intelligence training may improve the organization as a whole and should be made available to all employees. The current soft skills programs include components of emotional intelligence such as conflict management,
interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and should continue. The current EI training program offered at the hospital does not include a 360-degree assessment so it will not net the same benefits as the course that was used during this 6-month study. Overall, the soft skills courses are estimated to reach only a small percentage of the employees within the organization even though the benefits of attending and applying the skills learned in these programs could reap great benefits for the organization.

VHA also has a comprehensive diversity and inclusion system. It has affinity groups for race, gender, and LGBT. There is a lack of attention given to unconscious bias, micro-aggressions, and supervisor practices that could be addressed more thoroughly given that 50% of the African American participants referred to feeling undervalued. Although unclear from the data in this study what is causing African American employees to feel invalidated, could be a result of unconscious bias and on-going micro-aggressions that are not being identified. These two issues are gaining attention in the literature and within VHA but the strategy for dissemination of micro aggressions and unconscious bias training across VHA have been stalled. Supervisor encouragement of employee participation in culturally specific activities should also be stressed by top leadership for all employees, not just those who are a part of that cultural group. Exposure increases understanding of different cultures. Diversity and inclusion concerns can provide insight for additional EEO office interventions.

Implications for Theory

Emotional intelligence theory holds that EQ is more important than IQ and it is believed to be the foundation of competency for any job success. The
theory describes successful individuals as those who are perceptive of and understand emotions, manage, problem solves, and connects with others effectively, and has superior communication skills. Organizations that employ high EI individuals can anticipate fewer problem employees, which can negatively impact the organizational culture. EI theory seems to assume that individuals can make that choice to not be negatively impacted by the individuals or sociological factors such as racism, stereotypes, or gender bias within their environment. The findings regarding the environment and the concerns expressed by a marginalized group of African American employees requires that further research be done in this area.

This research followed the cycle of the experiential learning theory. All participants went through the four phases of the cycle including concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Details of the components included in this study for each cycle stage are detailed in chapter 2 on Figure 2.1. The reflective observation and abstract conceptualization seemed to be effective for all participants. However, the theoretical implications for the processes of concrete experience and experimentation within the workplace are challenged when African Americans express feelings of being undervalued. The six African American employees and a couple of participants who are concerned about their supervisors and work environment are facing challenges with assessments, application, and feedback. It is unclear why these employees are feeling a lack of value and acceptance on the job. If related to misperceptions, supervisor bias, unconscious bias, or challenges connecting with employees outside of their own cultural group then
completing this cycle is threatened. All of these potential factors based on interview data could result in biased scores on the 360-degree assessment. Biased assessments could then negatively impact the entire circle and even damage self-confidence and self-perception. EI Theory also seems to assume that high emotional intelligence will result in success at work in spite of potential barriers faced by sociological factors such as racism or gender bias. The feelings of invalidation expressed by participants in this study challenges EI theory assumptions in the literature regarding the potential for EI change regardless of external factors (Tracy, 2010).

**Recommendations for Practice and Future Research**

The following recommendations are offered to the Tampa VA Education Office:

1. Provide access to 360-degree EI Assessments and offer training to all interested employees. Continue to have a second course that focuses on leaders that addresses the importance of creating an environment that provides safety, inclusion, and fairness. The all-employee course should focus on self-awareness and social intelligence and should be evaluated for effectiveness.

2. Recognizing that the cost of the 360’s can be expensive, consider collaboration with the National Center on Organizational Development (NCOD) or use a paper version during the training, providing pre-work to obtain the 360-degree feedback. You may also want to consider developing the EI curriculum within the facility and incorporate the VHA
competency model and following the educational recommendations outlined in chapter 2 from the EI consortium.

3. Supervisors should be made aware of the benefits for self and team members when properly applying and reinforcing EI training

4. VHA has a well-structured, well-defined competency model that the majority of staff is not even aware of. This well-kept secret needs more exposure. All employees should receive this model at the time of employment and supervisors should be briefed on how to best utilizing these competencies in their personal development planning with staff. If not helping their staff complete it at least briefing their staff on the resources and how to use them and provide coaching as needed. Assure that all employees not only receive the document but that supervisors use the competency in their performance appraise, personal development planning, and mentoring as it truly does provide a roadmap for all potential leaders as well as successful employees.

5. The Tampa VA has for many years used a performance based interviewing (PBI) process designed around their VHA competency model. It has not been formalized in assuring that EI related questions are designed to fit the position descriptions and KSA’s. Supervisors should be mindful of key EI behavioral characteristics of high performers when evaluating responses during the PBI interview process.

6. Due to the potential for rater bias, it is not recommended that a 360-degree EI assessment be used as a selection tool for programs or employment. The self-assessment can still be useful in the program
screening and hiring processes but designing interview questions to screen for high EI helps prevent the potential for complaints from non-selected candidates.

7. Conduct additional research on the organizational impact on the environment pre and post EI training.

Recommendations for future research include

1. A study on EI and its relationship to diversity and inclusion within the VA that could further explore whether race in fact influences emotional intelligence development and the perception of inclusion. This study did not ask any specific questions regarding race so using a larger pool of African American employees to specifically explore their beliefs about the role of race, diversity, or inclusion may play in their job satisfaction. Racial differences can be inferred from these findings yet raises interesting additional questions for future research to explore in more detail within the VHA setting.

2. Research related to assessments of individuals by members of their own racial, nationality, or gender group could reveal a difference compared to assessments done by those who are different.

3. Should the VA desire to utilize written assessments for hiring, additional research is needed in regard to the validity of EI screening assessment producing high performers within VHA.

4. After EI training, follow-up research should be done to assess the impact of EI for staff, particularly in areas related to relationships, behavior changes, and organizational impact.
5. Future research could also seek to evaluate the direct impact of improved emotional intelligence and customer service to our nations Veterans.

6. EI has been on the decline over the years (Goleman, 1998) as technology has been on a steady incline. Research on the impact of this communication shift, particularly in healthcare could also provide interesting insights for healthcare teams.
References


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http://www.eiconsortium.org/pdf/Assessing_Emootional_Intelligence_Competencies.pdf


http://www.eiconsortium.org/reports/what_is_emotional_intelligence.htm


doi:10.1080/13678860601032585


Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations website.


Nogayye, M. S. (2010). *The impact of emotional intelligence training on social workers and human service providers in health care settings* (Masters


9/17/2015

Brenda Johnson
L-CACHE - Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career & Higher Education
4202 E. Fowler Avenue
Tampa, FL 33620

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review

IRB#:Pro00022936

Title: Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA) as a tool for selecting future leaders in LEAD Programs at JAHVH

Study Approval Period: 9/17/2015 to 9/17/2016

Dear Ms. Johnson:

On 9/17/2015, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
EI and LEAD at the JAHVH Protocol

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
EI and LEAD Consent Form.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent
document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
Appendix B

Interview Questions

Individual Interview 1

1) Introduction – Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. Our discussion today will focus on both emotional intelligence and personal growth and development.

2) You recently completed an Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA) and you identify people who you believed would provide good feedback. You now have the results and we will review the summary in greater detail and answer any questions you may have.

3) The EISA provided a breakdown of your scores based on the five areas perceiving, managing, decision making, achieving, and influencing. At the end of each section they describe challenges and benefits for each area. (Review document with participant)

4) Prepared Questions
   (1) How accurate do you believe this assessment is?
   (2) The five categories are in the order of your strengths. What about that surprises you?
   (3) What are your beliefs about your own assessment of your emotional intelligence?
   (4) What are your beliefs about your supervisor and coworkers assessment of your emotional intelligence?
   (5) What are the potential risks of not improving these dimensions (failed relationships, stagnant career, etc.)?
   (6) What are the potential benefits of improving these dimensions (engagement, advancement, etc.)?
   (7) What changes, if any, do you think you will make as a result of this assessment?
   (8) Do you have anything to add that we have not talked about yet?
   (9) Thank them for their participation

Individual Interview 2

1) Introduction – Thank you for taking the time to talk to me again. Our discussion today will focus on the five categories of emotional intelligence from the EISA.

2) Our last interview reviewed the overall Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA) report.

3) Today let’s talk more about the EISA scores for each of the five areas perceiving, managing, decision making, achieving, and influencing.

4) Prepared Questions
   (1) What meaning do you attach to the category of perceiving in your personal growth and development?
   (a) What changes have you made, personally or professionally, in relation to the implications identified in the report?
(2) What meaning do you attach to the category of managing in your personal growth and development?
(a) What changes have you made, personally or professionally, in relation to the implications identified in the report?

(3) What meaning do you attach to the category of decision making in your personal growth and development?
(a) What changes have you made, personally or professionally, in relation to the implications identified in the report?

(4) What meaning do you attach to the category of achieving in your personal growth and development?
(a) What changes have you made, personally or professionally, in relation to the implications identified in the report?

(5) What meaning do you attach to the category of influencing in your personal growth and development?
(a) What changes have you made, personally or professionally, in relation to the implications identified in the report?

(6) Do you have anything to add that we have not talked about yet?

(7) Thank them for their participation

Individual Interview 3
Introduction – Thank you for taking the time to talk to me one more time individually.
a) Can you tell me more about what you have done in each of the 5 categories over the past three months?
b) How has your understanding of emotional intelligence changed over the last six months?
   i) To what extent has your understanding of EI affected your work culture?
c) How valuable is emotional intelligence for you now as compared to six months ago?
d) How might emotional intelligence assist you with dealing with stress?
e) How might emotional intelligence assist you with managing change?
f) How might emotional intelligence assist you with working more effectively with team?
g) In regard to relationships, how has the meaning of emotional intelligence changed over the past six months?
h) How has the meaning of personal and leadership development changed over the past six months?
j) Do you have anything to add that we have not talked about yet?
k) As a result of participating in this program, what will you do differently going forward?

Thank them for their participation
Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

(Focus Group 1)
1) Introduction – Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. Our discussion today will focus on both emotional intelligence and personal growth and development.
2) Each of you has completed an Emotional Intelligence Skills Assessment (EISA) and you identify people who you believed would provide feedback to help you grow. You now have the results and have had a chance to review the summary in greater detail.
   a) Prepared Questions

(1) How valuable is EI to JAHVH

(2) How important do you believe emotional intelligence is in regard to personal growth and development?
(3) How do you believe you developed these skills? What examples can you share?
(4) Do you believe these skills can be improved as an adult? If so, what would help to strengthen these five areas.
(5) What social interactions with friends, family, or co-workers assist in your ability to use emotional intelligence at home or in the workplace? What gets in the way?
(6) Do you have anything to add that we have not talked about yet?
Thank them for their participation

(Focus Group 2)
1) Thank you for talking with me again. We will be doing a follow up and adding on to our last focus group interview. At that time we discussed the EISA, the importance of emotional intelligence, success and barriers to using emotional intelligence skills for personal and professional growth. Today, we will discuss how it has been going over the last three months and what change efforts have been made.
2) Prepared Questions
   i) Over the last three months, what have you personally done differently in regarding to using emotional intelligence for personal growth and development?
   ii) What barriers have you faced?
      (1) How did you address them?
   iii) What successes can you share about personal changes?
   iv) How have your beliefs about the meaning or value of emotional intelligence changed?
   v) Do you have anything to add that we have not talked about yet?
vi) Thank them for their participation

(Focus Group 3)
Thank you for talking with me again and for the final time. We will be doing a follow up and adding on to our last two focus group interviews. At that time we discussed your efforts to improve your emotional intelligence in regard to personal and professional growth. We also revisited your meaning and value of emotional intelligence.

1) Have you been able to sustain change in emotionally intelligent behaviors over the past 6-months?
2) What difference, if any, has understanding emotional intelligence made for you personally and professionally?
3) What difference, if any, do you notice in supervisor/manager relationships?
4) What difference, if any, do you notice in relationships at work?
5) What difference, if any, do you notice in personal relationships?
6) Do you have anything to add that we have not talked about yet?
   7) To what extent has your change in EI affected your work culture?
Thank them for their participation
**Appendix D**

**VHA All Employee Competency Model**

**All Employee Competencies**
T VA identified six broad All Employee competency categories that apply to all employees at VA. Each category includes more specific competencies, which define success for all roles across the Department.

A sample competency definition is presented below. Note that:

The competency category is identified and described (i.e., Communication)
The name of the competency and definition is presented (i.e., Demonstrates effective written communication skills)
Five proficiency levels are identified (e.g., Novice, Foundational, etc.)
Each proficiency level is defined by specific behavioral indicators (e.g., Writes basic communication…)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Novice</td>
<td>- Writes basic communications (e.g., an email requesting straightforward information), proofreading before sending to others. - Uses appropriate grammar, punctuation, and spelling. - With guidance, applies the Department’s style and format guidelines to written products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Foundational</td>
<td>- Drafts concise, straightforward summaries of information (e.g., portions of plans/reports). - Prepares routine written communications that are accurate, clear, concise, and well-organized. - Answers routine or basic questions to internal and external customers appropriately (e.g., tone, detail) and when responding in writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Intermediate</td>
<td>- Prepares, edits, and revises documents and produces recommendations independently; written communications require little to no editing. - Reviews and edits materials prepared by others for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and conformance to style and format guidelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Advanced</td>
<td>- Writes complex documents, using clear terminology and a concise format appropriate for decision-makers. - Tailors written communications to address the most critical issues in a compelling and diplomatic manner. - Writes clear, concise, issue papers or policy documents on complex topics, such as establishing VA-wide guidance or guidelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Expert</td>
<td>- Prepares highly complex written communications for national distribution that have significant implications for the VA. - Communicates persuasively in writing to multiple stakeholders about programs, projects, and proposals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The image above is a screen shot of the first table (Leading People) on page four of this document. A callout bubble with the words “competency category” points to the paragraph above the table. A callout bubble with the word “competency” points to the first row in table. A callout bubble with the word “competency” points to the first row in table. A callout bubble with the words “proficiency scale” points to the left-hand side column of the table, second cell from the top. A callout bubble with the words “behavioral indicators” points to the right-hand side column of the table, fourth cell from the top.

**Communication**

**Demonstrates effective written communication skills.** Selects appropriate communication channels and tools using appropriate media and technology. Conveys written information in a clear, concise, organized, and convincing manner for the intended audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Demonstrates mastery of oral, non-verbal, and written communications principles.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Chooses the appropriate communication channel for the audience and purpose.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Adapts communication style and tone to various audiences and contexts.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Uses effective written communication skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Effective Written Communication Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 – Novice  | - Writes basic communications (e.g., an email requesting straightforward information), proofreading before sending to others.  
- Uses appropriate grammar, punctuation, and spelling.  
- With guidance, applies the Department’s style and format guidelines to written products. |
| 2 – Foundational | - Drafts concise, straightforward summaries of information (e.g., portions of plans/reports).  
- Prepares routine written communications that are accurate, clear, concise, and well-organized.  
- Answers routine or basic questions to internal and external customers appropriately (e.g., tone, detail) and when responding in writing. |
| 3 – Intermediate | - Prepares reports, summaries, or recommendations independently; written communications require little to no editing.  
- Reviews and edits materials prepared by others for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and conformance to style and format guidelines. |
| 4 – Advanced | - Writes complex documents, using clear terminology and a concise format as appropriate for decision makers.  
- Tailors written communications to address the most critical issues in a compelling and diplomatic manner.  
- Writes clear, concise issue papers or policy documents on complex topics, such as establishing VA-wide guidance or guidelines. |
| 5 – Expert  | - Prepares highly complex written communications for national distribution that have significant implications for VA.  
- Communicates persuasively in writing to multiple stakeholders about programs, projects, and proposals. |

The first row in the table above defines the competency. **Demonstrates effective written communication skills.** The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

### Effective Oral Communication Skills

**Demonstrates effective oral communication skills.** Verbally communicates ideas and issues in a clear and convincing manner as appropriate to the audience. Seeks feedback to determine that understanding has occurred. Recognizes impact of own non-verbal signals on others and demonstrates positive non-verbal behavior (e.g., eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and posture).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 1 – Novice        | - Provides verbal updates on work assignments/task status to immediate supervisors and others as directed.  
- Uses appropriate language and grammar when speaking to others.  
- Demonstrates a basic understanding of appropriate non-verbal communication (e.g., makes eye contact). |
| 2 – Foundational  | - Presents information in own area of expertise to small or moderately-sized groups. |
### Demonstrates effective oral communication skills

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Demonstrates effective oral communication skills.** The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

### Interpersonal Effectiveness

**Interpersonal Effectiveness.** Demonstrates mastery of interpersonal interaction, encourages diversity, develops collaborative relationships, and contributes to a culture of civility and trust.

**Demonstrates empathy.** Treats others with courtesy, sensitivity, and respect, contributing to a culture of civility. Builds trust and commitment by acknowledging, valuing, and appropriately responding to others’ feelings, requests, and concerns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 – Novice</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conveys respect for others by consistently communicating in a courteous manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gives others the opportunity to share their views and waits to speak until others have finished making their points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 – Foundational</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carefully listens to others’ ideas and concerns and appropriately responds to questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paraphrases what others have stated to demonstrate understanding of messages received.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 – Intermediate</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sets other people at ease by creating a relaxed atmosphere and open</td>
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</table>
dialogue.
• Builds rapport by asking open-ended questions and accurately restating and reflecting concerns or feelings expressed by others.
• Encourages civility by setting expectations for courteous and respectful behavior.
• Works out differences without involving management when possible.

| 4 – Advanced | • Forms effective working relationships even in difficult and sensitive situations.
|             | • Leaves people feeling their ideas have been heard, understood, and valued even when there is disagreement.
|             | • Presents difficult or sensitive information respectfully (e.g., constructive feedback), focusing on the issue rather than the person. |

| 5 – Expert | • Maintains a calm, open demeanor while resolving highly sensitive or controversial issues; models civility.
|           | • Champions a culture of civility, promoting respectful behavior and confronting incivility.
|           | • Provides guidance and expertise in navigating complex interpersonal interactions. |

The first row in the table above defines the competency, Demonstrates empathy. The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

**Fosters diversity and inclusion**

**Fosters diversity and inclusion.** Values and leverages all aspects of human diversity to achieve the vision and mission of the organization. Contributes to an atmosphere of open communication and inclusiveness by seeking out diverse ideas, opinions, and insights and respecting the differing values and perceptions of others. Examines biases and seeks insights to avoid stereotypical responses and behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **1 – Novice**    | • Explains the rationale for and essential components of VA’s diversity-related policies and practices.  
|                   | • Seeks supervisory guidance when unsure how to handle matters related to diversity. |
|                   | • Actively applies knowledge obtained in diversity and sensitivity training. |
| **2 – Foundational** | • Responds to others in a culturally sensitive manner.  
|                   | • Recognizes inappropriate behavior and seeks coaching for how to address it.  
|                   | • Demonstrates respect for and openness to alternative points of view and diverse ideas. |
| **3 – Intermediate** | • Encourages others to embrace and respect diversity and inclusiveness.  
|                   | • Seeks out diverse ideas and alternative points of view.  
|                   | • Involves people with diverse backgrounds in solving problems. |
| **4 – Advanced**  | • Educates and advises others on all types of diversity (cultural, racial, occupational, generational, etc.) and inclusion.  
|                   | • Encourages others from different backgrounds (in all types of diversity) to share their ideas and experiences. |
• Takes appropriate action to address acts of intolerance or discrimination.

5 – Expert
• Develops a culture that encourages and reinforces the open exchange of ideas and inclusive and diverse work teams.
• Actively champions and promotes VA’s diversity-related and cultural awareness policies and programs.

The first row in the table above defines the competency, Fosters diversity and inclusion. The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

Contributes to high-performing teams

Contributes to high-performing teams. Encourages and facilitates cooperation and collaboration among all team members by seeking opportunities to contribute to team goals, share information and knowledge, and support others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Novice</td>
<td>• Participates in team meetings and events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides assistance and information to team members when asked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Follows through on commitments to the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Foundational</td>
<td>• Proactively seeks opportunities to assist others with tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Works collaboratively with all team members to accomplish shared goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shares relevant knowledge and experience with others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Intermediate</td>
<td>• Shares ideas proactively with team members, encouraging others to do the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Understands different team members’ roles, how these various roles interact with each other, and the resulting impact on workflow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shares knowledge and skills, providing training to others to help them acquire knowledge or develop skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Advanced</td>
<td>• Uses the strengths and development needs of each team member to organize work effectively and foster development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creates opportunities for sharing knowledge, experiences, and best practices within and across work units and organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mentors and coaches others to be more effective contributors to the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Expert</td>
<td>• Establishes communication processes that ensure work activities are well-integrated and knowledge is shared across teams, business units, or organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Guides others to become effective mentors and coaches; facilitates learning in the organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first row in the table above defines the competency, Contributes to high-performing teams. The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking. Uses systematic approaches to gather, analyze, and evaluate information to make sound, well-informed, and timely decisions or recommendations.

Demonstrates good judgment

Demonstrates good judgment. Recognizes relevance of information. Identifies, evaluates,
and assimilates information from multiple sources. Translates data into meaningful information. Examines and considers all aspects of a situation, including its context and complexity, in order to identify the best course of action and reach an informed decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 – Novice        | • Determines when it is appropriate to make a decision on his or her own and when it is appropriate to seek help.  
• Makes sound and timely decisions in well-defined, low-risk situations that affect own work. |
| 2 – Foundational  | • Makes sound and timely decisions about own work based on policy, logic, and empathy.  
• Considers alternative courses of action when making decisions.  
• Recognizes when information is lacking and seeks out additional information to assist in decision-making. |
| 3 – Intermediate  | • Interprets data to identify relationships, issues, assumptions, and emerging trends in order to make recommendations for change or improvement.  
• Makes sound and timely recommendations and/or decisions in a variety of situations, including those that affect others’ work; uses decision-making tools as appropriate (e.g., decision trees).  
• Considers alternative courses of action and makes decisions that take into consideration future risks and opportunities. |
| 4 – Advanced      | • Integrates and analyzes complex data from multiple sources; identifies connections between seemingly unrelated information.  
• Thoroughly considers and accurately evaluates the costs, risks, and benefits of alternatives and chooses the best courses of action for which the benefits outweigh the risks.  
• Makes decisions and takes action when complete knowledge and information are not available. |
| 5 – Expert        | • Develops measurement systems to analyze current processes.  
• Makes timely decisions or recommendations regarding highly complex technical, administrative, or policy issues and in sensitive, difficult, and ambiguous situations that have significant organizational impact. |

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Demonstrates good judgment.** The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

**Demonstrates creative problem solving skills.** Identifies and analyzes problems and their root causes. Generates creative ideas and potential solutions. Resolves barriers and chooses course of action that optimize chances of achieving desired outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 1 – Novice        | • Recognizes and refers issues that deviate from standard practice to immediate supervisor.  
• Identifies problems and information that may be relevant to a solution.  
• Applies clear and concise guidelines to resolve routine problems. |
| 2 – Foundational  | • Identifies and communicates barriers to performing daily duties.  
• Identifies problems, considers available information, and evaluates |
alternative solutions to problems affecting own work.

| 3 – Intermediate | • Identifies barriers that interfere with achieving team goals and serving Veterans and independently develops possible solutions.  
|                  | • Anticipates potential problems and takes or proposes corrective actions.  
|                  | • Generates multiple ideas for addressing barriers or problems; is not limited to suggesting conventional approaches. |

| 4 – Advanced     | • Synthesizes information from internal and external sources to address complex issues (e.g., applying information from VACO to VISN or VBA Regional Office problem; updating guidelines with new technologies).  
|                  | • Manages a group's problem solving process, assisting others in staying focused on the current problem and systematically working through the issue.  
|                  | • Develops new and innovative methods for addressing barriers and problems. |

| 5 – Expert       | • Identifies and resolves problems of particular difficulty, sensitivity, or strategic importance that cross organizational (i.e., VACO, VHA, VBA, NCA) lines.  
|                  | • Generates highly novel and groundbreaking solutions to complex problems. |

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Demonstrates creative problem solving skills.** The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

**Organizational Stewardship**

**Organizational Stewardship.** Takes responsibility and initiative, sets and meets priorities, follows through on commitments, safeguards information, and organizes and uses time and resources to achieve desired results.

**Exemplifies integrity.** Behaves in an honest, fair, respectful, and ethical manner. Puts VA mission and values before own self interests. Upholds VA’s high standards of integrity and ethics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 1 – Novice        | • Explains VA's standards of ethical conduct and the implications for violating ethical standards.  
|                   | • Completes required ethics awareness training.  
|                   | • Recognizes and seeks guidance when dealing with an ethical dilemma. |
| 2 – Foundational  | • Brings concerns about ethical issues to the attention of supervisors or managers.  
|                   | • Demonstrates integrity in work assignments and in working with others. |
| 3 – Intermediate  | • Consistently balances the needs of VA with the best interests of Veterans or customers.  
|                   | • Acts ethically and in line with VA values in performing duties, regardless of internal and external pressures.  
|                   | • Advises others on VA’s ethical standards and policies. |
### Demonstrates accountability

**Demonstrates accountability.** Performs work in a thorough and conscientious manner, ensuring that work products and services provided are accurate and complete. Follows through on commitments. Accepts and assumes responsibility for one’s own actions. Follows relevant policies and procedures. Knows when to ask for help and seeks guidance when necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 – Novice</strong></td>
<td>• Completes assigned tasks in a timely manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Takes personal responsibility for own actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 – Foundational</strong></td>
<td>• Follows policies and procedures with minimal guidance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Notifies supervisor when obligations are unable to be met so that alternative plans can be made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 – Intermediate</strong></td>
<td>• Keeps supervisor and stakeholders informed of changes in schedules and deliverables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conveys to others the importance of accomplishing goals and delivering results on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 – Advanced</strong></td>
<td>• Takes responsibility for work unit or project outcomes, regardless of positive or negative results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establishes expectations for self and/or work unit so that goals are reasonable and achievable and projects are set up to succeed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 – Expert</strong></td>
<td>• Provides guidance and communicates methods for achieving results to correct failed or delayed department-level efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensures a culture of accountability among others by defining roles and responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Guides others in the interpretation and application of policies, procedures and guidelines.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Demonstrates accountability.** The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

### Organizes and prioritizes work
**Organizes and prioritizes work.** Plans work, manages time, and balances priorities, taking into consideration VA’s mission. Sets short- and/or long-term goals and determines strategies to achieve them. Monitors progress toward goals, evaluates outcomes, and makes appropriate adjustments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Novice</td>
<td>• Organizes assigned tasks to accomplish them on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Seeks guidance on setting work/task priorities and follows priorities as assigned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Maintains appropriate files and records to document progress toward goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Foundational</td>
<td>• Sets measurable goals for self that are on target with departmental goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Systematically breaks large tasks down into smaller, more manageable subtasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Prioritizes work on subtasks based on project timelines and scheduled tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Intermediate</td>
<td>• Determines when additional resources are required to complete tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses effective strategies to balance multiple projects and ensure completion of all assigned tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Prepares plans for non-routine projects to provide deliverables within established parameters (e.g., budget, resources, timeframes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Advanced</td>
<td>• Prepares for and manages complex projects and/or assignments that directly address organizational goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reviews project plans of others, providing adequate feedback as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reallocates resources or negotiates revised deadlines when conflicting priorities impact timelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Expert</td>
<td>• Evaluates department or administration progress and makes adjustments according to mission and vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Anticipates changing workload requirements well in advance and advocates for needed resources based on strategy and planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Implements multi-department, multi-year, large-scale efforts based on VA goals and strategic direction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Organizes and prioritizes work.** The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

**Makes effective use of resources.** Identifies and effectively manages resources (e.g., material, equipment, space, and money) in order to achieve VA’s goals and objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Novice</td>
<td>• Explains the importance of energy and resource conservation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Protects sensitive information, systems, and the workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Maintains appropriate documentation of resource use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Foundational</td>
<td>• Uses resources prudently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identifies and reports fraud, waste, or abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Intermediate</td>
<td>• Looks beyond existing programs to identify additional ways to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reduce waste and recycle.

- Assists peers and co-workers with their efforts to more effectively use resources.

| 4 – Advanced | • Develops procedures and guidelines for appropriately managing resources.  
|             | • Identifies innovative strategies to reduce operating costs. |
| 5 – Expert  | • Balances multiple departments’/units’/locations’ needs to achieve optimal use of resources.  
|             | • Oversees management of resources (e.g., money, equipment, security, and/or material) across multiple work units.  
|             | • Partners with senior leaders to ensure effective resource management across VA. |

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Makes effective use of resources**. The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

**Veteran and Customer Focus**

**Veteran and Customer Focus.** Understands VA’s mission and uses this knowledge to guide actions; provides outstanding customer service and represents the organization effectively.

**Advocates for Veterans**

**Advocates for Veterans.** Demonstrates awareness of the Veteran population (including generational differences), their needs, and the benefits and services available to them. Demonstrates an understanding that serving Veterans, families, and other stakeholders is VA’s mission. Represents VA effectively to both internal and external audiences. Keeps respect and advocacy for Veterans at the forefront of actions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 – Novice        | • Acts respectfully and courteously to all Veterans and their families.  
|                   | • Maintains Veterans’ privacy.  
|                   | • Describes VA’s basic mission and goals and the needs of the Veteran population. |
| 2 – Foundational  | • Clearly articulates VA’s mission and goals to internal and external audiences.  
|                   | • Routinely strives to maximize service to Veterans when prioritizing and completing own work.  
|                   | • Presents a positive image of VA through language and actions. |
| 3 – Intermediate  | • Participates in community or other outreach activities that are consistent with VA's mission.  
|                   | • Represents VA in a professional and respectful manner in the community. |
| 4 – Advanced      | • Identifies issues that distract from VA’s mission of respect and advocacy and takes steps to address them. |
| 5 – Expert        | • Expands VA initiatives throughout the community.  
|                   | • Initiates and shares best practices with outside organizations/agencies to promote Veteran advocacy. |

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Advocates for Veterans.** The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

**Meets customers’ needs**
Meets customers’ needs. Seeks information to understand customer needs and manage expectations. Communicates with customers to provide assistance and resolve problems. Anticipates and meets expectations; follows up to ensure satisfaction and improve service quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1 – Novice**    | • Treats customers with respect.  
                     • Maintains documentation of customer requests and/or complaints.  
                     • Responds to questions or requests from customers in a timely and professional manner.  
                     • Refers unresolved customer complaints to supervisor. |
| **2 – Foundational** | • Manages customers’ expectations to ensure that they are in alignment with applicable policies.  
                        • Identifies and recommends to customers products and services that meet their needs/objectives.  
                        • Communicates with customers to verify that products and services meet their requirements.  
                        • Identifies potential problems that could affect customer relations and informs supervisor, thereby avoiding escalation of problems or issues. |
| **3 – Intermediate** | • Gathers customer feedback to identify opportunities to enhance customer satisfaction.  
                         • Anticipates customers’ needs or questions in advance.  
                         • Develops relationships with diverse customers (e.g., external offices/departments, other administrations, etc.). |
| **4 – Advanced**    | • Develops processes that take into account the needs of all customers (Veterans, families, employees, staff, etc.)  
                        • Creates opportunities and strategies to enhance interdepartmental collaboration to meet customers’ complex needs.  
                        • Resolves contentious situations with customers while still maintaining strong working relationships. |
| **5 – Expert**      | • Develops and/or implements customer service initiatives which significantly improve quality and enhance customer satisfaction.  
                        • Prepares for the consequences of policy changes and improvements on customers. |

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Meets customers' needs.** The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

Personal Mastery

Exhibits self-awareness and commitment to self-development

Exhibits self-awareness and commitment to self-development. Actively seeks and acts on feedback about how one is perceived by others. Recognizes own strengths and weaknesses and takes action to improve performance and effectiveness. Takes initiative and responsibility to manage own career and pursues self-development through education, training, knowledge sharing, experiences, coaching, mentoring, and self-reflection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 – Novice</strong></td>
<td>• Recognizes own strengths and weaknesses.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• With prompting from others, participates in training to improve performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Actively listens to feedback offered by supervisors, mentors, coaches, or peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 – Foundational</strong></td>
<td>• Uses constructive criticism to improve performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identifies areas for improvement; creates an IDP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Seeks guidance for self-development and career advancement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 – Intermediate</strong></td>
<td>• Actively participates in self-development and career advancement opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Asks for feedback regarding performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Regularly examines and applies past experiences to improve current performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4 – Advanced</strong></td>
<td>• Obtains additional training in an effort to build subject matter expertise.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourages others to participate in learning opportunities and programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Continues to build own skills by acting as a coach/mentor.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5 – Expert</strong></td>
<td>• Seeks out innovative ways for self and others to acquire new knowledge and skills that contribute to the VA mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Champions coaching and mentoring activities; encourages and helps others to become effective coaches and/or mentors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Exhibits self-awareness and commitment to self-development**. The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

**Demonstrates resilience, agility, and a sense of urgency**

**Demonstrates resilience, agility, and a sense of urgency.** Deals effectively with pressure and work stress, such as ambiguity, emergencies/crises, emerging conditions, and multiple tasks. Remains optimistic and persistent, even under adversity or uncertainty. Recovers quickly from setbacks. Adapts behavior and work methods in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles. Examines mistakes and identifies and applies lessons learned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 – Novice</strong></td>
<td>• Maintains a respectful and professional attitude even in changing conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Displays a generally positive attitude and productive behavior in times of mild adversity.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• With support from others, persists when faced with small obstacles or minor work pressures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 – Foundational</strong></td>
<td>• Identifies alternative options and ways to shift priorities when conditions change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recovers quickly from setbacks with some encouragement from others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Persists and remains productive when under pressure and experiencing stress.</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Intermediate</td>
<td>• Seeks feedback to help understand and learn from mistakes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Responds appropriately to emergencies and other situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adapts readily to changing work conditions with minimal support and encouragement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Remains productive and optimistic under moderate levels of uncertainty and ambiguity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Advanced</td>
<td>• Analyzes unexpected outcomes and demonstrates flexibility to change processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Remains productive, persistent, optimistic, and even-tempered, even in the face of significant pressure, stress, or uncertainty; encourages others to do the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – Expert</td>
<td>• Demonstrates resilience, energy, and enthusiasm even in the face of great pressure, uncertainty, and adversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Helps others to overcome negative feelings or emotions and acknowledges when own emotions interfere with productivity in order to process them effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Helps others analyze their setbacks and develop plans to avoid similar mistakes in the future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first row in the table above defines the competency, **Demonstrates resilience, agility, and a sense of urgency**. The proficiency levels are in the left-hand side column of the table. The behavioral indicators are in the right-hand column of the table.

**VA Learning University: Your Partner for Change**

Powered by ADVANCE, VALU works with VA employees and leaders like you to put effective change management in the forefront of our operations. As VA begins implementing steps to transform into a 21st century organization that is people-centric, results-driven, and forward-looking, engaging change leaders is critical.

VALU is your partner in driving this historic transformation and motivating your team to be unifying, innovative change agents that make a difference in the lives of our Veterans.

VALU your potential. VALU our Veterans. Be a positive force for change.

For additional information about the VA Learning University’s Leadership and Change Programs, please write to us at VALU.Training@va.gov.
APPENDIX E

VA Leadership Competencies
VA has identified six broad leadership competency categories that apply to anyone in a formal leadership role. Each category includes more specific competencies, which define success for leadership roles across the Department. Although these competencies are only required for formal leaders, aspiring leaders should refer to them to begin developing the skills needed for career progression into a leadership role. The leadership competency categories, specific competencies, and behavioral indicators are presented on the following pages.

**Leading People.** Demonstrates commitment to employees and VA. Empowers and trusts others. Builds high-performing teams. Develops the ability of others to perform and contribute to the organization. Promotes leadership at all levels. Develops the potential in others by identifying strengths and providing opportunities for others to take on leadership roles. Delegates effectively and inspires, motivates, and guides others to take initiative and achieve desired results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Novice</td>
<td>- Talks with employees about their interests in pursuing leadership opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Offers suggestions and encourages employees to pursue leadership opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Foundational</td>
<td>- Identifies employees’ strengths and areas for growth and assists them in setting realistic objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Provides opportunities for employees to lead work groups or projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Intermediate</td>
<td>- Establishes clear directions and maintains dialogue with others on assignments and results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Provides regular feedback to aspiring leaders on how to develop leadership skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Provides support and necessary resources so that subordinates can meet their goals and develop their skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Advanced</td>
<td>- Creates work opportunities and stretch assignments that lead to growth and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Delegates authority and responsibility to build the leadership capacity of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - Expert</td>
<td>- Guides subordinate leaders on how to identify and develop leadership potential in others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Develops/advocates programs for leadership development.**

**Inspires continual learning and development.** Designates resources and time for learning across the full range of development opportunities (e.g. education, training, knowledge sharing, mentoring, coaching, and assignments). Removes barriers to and encourages application of new knowledge and skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Novice</td>
<td>Describes the value of long-term development to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supports development initiatives of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourages employee involvement in learning opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Foundational</td>
<td>Assists employees in developing short- and long-term career goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifies resources and opportunities for growth and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Intermediate</td>
<td>Adjusts behavior to support the different development needs of individual employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allows flexibility and provides resources in accomplishing daily work to support employees’ efforts to participate in training and other developmental opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supports employees’ efforts to apply what they have learned in training on-the-job.**

| 4 – Advanced | Provides challenging and stretch assignments to employees to leverage and improve their skills. |
|             | Allocates unit or department-level resources in support of employees’ development needs. |
|             | Serves as a coach or mentor to employees, emphasizing the value of continuous development. |

| 5 - Expert | Creates opportunities and processes for others to develop and apply new skills in the organization. |
|           | Evaluates success of development initiatives in the organization and makes adjustments as necessary. |
|           | Establishes and supports organization-wide training and development policies that foster continual learning and development. |
Builds high-performing, diverse teams. Builds high-performing, diverse, and inclusive teams that capitalize on the skills of all members. Promotes teamwork and participative work processes in VA by building a supportive work environment where employees feel free to raise questions and concerns.

**Proficiency Level**

1 – Novice

- Encourages team members to participate in discussions.
- Defines characteristics of a high performing team and ensures a common understanding of purpose and direction among members.

2 – Foundational

- Manages team in a way that builds morale and achieves results.
- Fosters and models an open dialogue among team members.

3 – Intermediate

- Creates an environment that promotes collaboration among team members.
- Recognizes and rewards team efforts and individual accomplishments.

4 – Advanced

- Recognizes and utilizes the strengths of all members.
- Gives credit to and shares successes with the team.
- Creates an environment where team members can raise sensitive issues and concerns.

5 - Expert

- Creates an overall climate in the organization that is conducive to high-performing teams by establishing expectations and reward and recognition systems that reinforce teamwork, honest communications, diversity, and inclusion.

**Partnering.** Develops networks and builds alliances. Collaborates with stakeholders to better achieve objectives. Finds common ground with a wide range of stakeholders and uses these contacts to build and strengthen internal support bases to better serve Veterans. **Drives integration.** Recognizes interdependencies among internal and external processes, resources, and capabilities. Demonstrates understanding of how Administrations, Staff offices, stakeholders, partners, and customers work together to achieve the VA’s mission. Applies a departmental perspective when planning, coordinating, and communicating the organization’s policies and processes. Considers cross-organizational requirements and information-sharing needs so that initiatives are integrated across organizational lines.
Proficiency Level | Behavioral Indicators
--- | ---
1 – Novice | - Explains how organizational units and external stakeholders work together to fulfill the VA's mission.
2 – Foundational | - Encourages others to make decisions with all key stakeholders in mind.
| - Keeps work unit's stakeholders updated on changes that may affect them.
3 – Intermediate | - Ensures programs and policies are integrated with needs and/or resources of key stakeholders within and outside of own department.
| - Champions a stakeholder perspective to decision making at all levels.
4 – Advanced | - Clearly conveys information to multiple stakeholders so that initiatives are integrated across the entire organization.
| - Implements processes that foster a cross-organizational approach to achieving VA's mission and strategic goals.
5 - Expert | - Creates systems and processes for sharing information to facilitate the integration of initiatives across the VA.
| - Considers and aligns the various perspectives and needs of the entire VA when planning, coordinating, and communicating organization's policies and processes.

Builds and maintains partnerships. Networks with others internally and externally. Builds and maintains strategic relationships to achieve common goals. Participates in and contributes to collaborative work by sharing information and soliciting input from others.

Proficiency Level | Behavioral Indicators
--- | ---
1 – Novice | - Identifies networking opportunities inside and outside of the organization.
| - Establishes relationships with internal and external colleagues.
2 – Foundational | - Builds upon existing and new relationships to achieve organizational goals.
| - Uses internal projects as opportunities to collaborate and establish strategic relationships.
3 – Intermediate | - Maintains strategic relationships and collaborates with internal and external colleagues to fulfill the organization's mission.
| - Identifies and works to eliminate conditions
that impede within-department and across-department collaboration and knowledge sharing.

4 – Advanced
- Contributes to collaborative work by proactively sharing information and providing input and support to strategic partners.
- Provides guidance to others that fosters the development of cross-department and organization partnerships.

5 - Expert
- Develops strategic partnerships with other organizations.
- Creates a process and develops criteria for evaluating the success of internal and external collaborative efforts.
- Possesses an extensive professional network across and outside the VA and leverages this network to contribute to the mission.

**Effectively manages conflict.** Embraces differences of opinion and openly considers alternative perspectives. Manages and resolves conflicts in a constructive manner and creates a positive environment that leads to accomplishment of VA’s goals. Creates and maintains an environment where employees can raise difficult issues and engage in constructive disagreements and debates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Novice</td>
<td>□ Responds to conflicts as if they are an inevitable and potentially productive part of business, rather than personal attacks. □ Acknowledges differences of opinion and considers alternative perspectives. □ Resolves simple disagreements with others, with supervisor (or other third party) acting as mediator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Foundational</td>
<td>□ Encourages discussion of differences of opinion as a means to stimulate healthy debate. □ Addresses conflicts by providing a safe and respectful environment for each party to discuss their needs and concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – Intermediate</td>
<td>□ Mediates conflicts in a direct and straightforward manner that focuses on the issues and keeps the situation from escalating. □ Creates an environment where employees can openly raise and debate difficult issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – Advanced</td>
<td>□ Mediates complex conflicts and disagreements to ensure solutions that are</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Identifies potential conflicts and proactively addresses them before they escalate.

5 - Expert

- Diffuses high-tension situations comfortably, empowering others to develop their own approaches to effective conflict resolution.
- Uses conflict productively to address challenging issues without damaging relationships.

**Leading Change.** Positions the organization for future success by identifying new opportunities, implementing new strategies, and developing and improving products and services. Creates a culture that fosters creativity and applies innovative solutions to drive organizational change. Communicates the mission and values and provides milestones for decision-making and action.

**Champions Innovation.** Looks beyond current reality and the “status quo.” Challenges assumptions. Creates a work environment and culture that values, fosters, and rewards creativity and innovation. Positions the organization for success by identifying, developing, and implementing new or cutting-edge programs, processes, or strategies. Anticipates the potential impact of decisions on existing delivery systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **1 – Novice**    | □ Describes trends and innovations within personal area of expertise.  
                   | □ Makes incremental improvements by adapting solutions from similar settings.  
                   | □ Recognizes and supports creative ideas proposed by others. |
| **2 – Foundational** | □ Identifies new ways of performing work that may increase efficiencies.  
                      | □ Makes improvements by adapting solutions from loosely related settings.  
                      | □ Supports others in challenging the status quo. |
| **3 – Intermediate** | □ Looks beyond organizational boundaries to identify opportunities for improvement.  
                        | □ Makes small, but meaningful shifts in programs or processes by helping to develop and implement novel ideas.  
                        | □ Encourages creativity of others by recognizing employee efforts to generate new ideas. |
| **4 – Advanced**  | □ Looks inside and outside of the government to identify opportunities for improvement or anticipated demands for improvement.  
                   | □ Makes significant shifts in programs, processes or overall strategy by generating |
novel ideas.

- Develops new procedures or processes for increasing efficiencies and works with senior leaders to communicate the ideas and implement changes.

5 - Expert

- Continually scans the broad environment, looking for strategic opportunities or demands for strategic change.
- Transforms organizational processes, programs, and overall strategies by generating groundbreaking ideas and creating movement in an unprecedented direction.
- Inspires creativity of others by challenging them to think beyond current assumptions and conventional wisdom and guiding them to generate innovative and viable new ideas.

**Communicates vision and drives change.** Builds a shared sense of purpose and communicates the need for change. Acts as a catalyst for organizational change. Translates vision into action by inspiring others to act, while providing guideposts for decision-making and action. Recognizes challenges and deals effectively with resistance.

**Proficiency Level**

1 – Novice

- Communicates the vision and need for change to others within own work group.
- Follows guidelines for decision-making that have been established to achieve changes.

2 – Foundational

- Translates the organization’s vision for the future into work group actions and provides direction by helping employees understand what is important.
- Communicates the work unit’s mission and vision clearly to others.
- Addresses challenges and resistance to implementing changes with guidance.

3 – Intermediate

- Creates a vision that is simple, clearly captures a desired future state, and provides direction by helping employees see their role in achieving that vision.
- Communicates the work unit or department’s vision in a way that establishes a shared understanding of the desired future state of VA.

4 – Advanced

- Creates a compelling vision and communicates it in a way that motivates and mobilizes employees to help achieve it.
- Translates broad organizational goals into well-defined strategies, plans, priorities, and
Assignments.

- Anticipates challenges and resistance to implementing planned changes and develops strategies to address them.

5 - Expert

- Creates a vision that guides the short and long-term activities of VA at every level or the Department.
- Communicates a vision for the future in a way that inspires and captures employee’s imagination.
- Considers various viewpoints from internal and external sources when developing new organizational mission and vision.

Results Driven. Guides and inspires others to achieve results and improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Implements effective control measures. Fosters a climate of reasonable risk taking. Fosters reasonable risk taking and drives execution. Determines priorities and sets clear objectives for workgroup. Defines evaluation criteria and continuously collects, shares, and evaluates data to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Takes calculated risks to accomplish organizational objectives and empowers employees to do the same.

Proficiency Level

1 – Novice

- Prioritizes day-to-day activities with supervisor’s guidance and provides input into standard operating procedures.
- Identifies performance measures and evaluation criteria that apply to own workgroup.
- Clearly explains tasks and expectations to work group members.

2 – Foundational

- Monitors performance of workgroup and reports results; relates workgroup performance to organizational performance.
- Identifies potential barriers to achieving results and provides recommendations for overcoming them.
- Identifies the potential costs and benefits of taking specific business risks.

3 – Intermediate

- Analyzes performance measure data and takes action to improve or sustain performance.
- Interprets organizational goals and directives and translates them into procedures and guidelines.
- Makes well-reasoned recommendations for taking calculated risks based on a cost/benefit analysis.
4 – Advanced

- Establishes criteria against which project/program success will be evaluated.
- Specifies data to be gathered and utilizes data and information to formulate policy and strategic plans.
- Identifies potential risks and barriers; removes barriers and takes calculated risks to achieve results.

5 - Expert

- Specifies data to be gathered and develops systems for collecting and sharing data on progress towards achieving organizational objectives.
- Sets organizational goals and performance measures based on the VA’s mission/vision/values.
- Establishes a climate of reasonable risk-taking, empowering and rewarding employees who demonstrate entrepreneurial behavior and the ability to take calculated risks.

**Fosters accountability to Veterans.** Acts in a manner that instills public trust while accomplishing the mission. Ensures compliance with established control systems and rules. Holds self and team members accountable for measurable, high-quality, timely, and cost-effective results. Balances competing demands, and employs sound management processes and procedures to ensure that Veteran, employee, and other stakeholder interests are well-served.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency Level</th>
<th>Behavioral Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Novice</td>
<td>With guidance, ensures that established control systems and rules have been correctly followed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintains accountability when faced with competing demands and priorities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 – Foundational</td>
<td>Monitors and ensures adherence to established control systems and rules.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With guidance, measures work quality against established standards.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Holds employees accountable for achieving results.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 – Intermediate</td>
<td>Contributes to establishing control systems and rules.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Guides employees in prioritizing among tasks with competing deadlines and balancing the needs of varied stakeholders.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifies or establishes quality standards and holds employees accountable.</td>
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</table>
4 – Advanced

☐ Creates formal systems for monitoring progress and holds teams/units accountable for meeting or exceeding goals.

☐ Assumes ownership for own and organizational mistakes and takes steps to mitigate their impact.

☐ Leverages lessons learned from mistakes and failures to improve the VA.

5 - Expert

☐ Models behavior that instills public trust, balancing achieving results with the highest ethical standards.

☐ Balances multiple competing demands to develop solutions that optimize outcomes for employees, Veterans, and other key stakeholders.

☐ Designs enterprise-wide mechanisms for taking corrective actions when aspects of the VA mission are not being met.

Global Perspective. Demonstrates a broad view of the VA’s mission, strategic priorities, and role within the Federal Government and broader community (e.g., healthcare community, public at large). Understands and integrates stakeholder perspectives and takes action to improve delivery of benefits and services to Veterans. Ensures strategic alignment. Promotes an awareness of all factors that influence desired outcomes, including economic, political, technical, demographic, environmental, and social trends that affect the Veteran. Examines key national policies and VA strategic plans to develop and implement plans, objectives, and measures with a short and long-term perspective. Aligns organizational objectives and practices with public interests and needs.

Proficiency Level

Behavioral Indicators

1 – Novice

☐ Describes the major internal and external factors that affect the organization.

☐ Explains at a basic level how changing conditions, current events, and historical contexts influence own work and unit’s work.

2 – Foundational

☐ Keeps abreast of current events and changes in policy and legislation; describes how these events and changes could potentially impact the VA.

☐ Ensures work group goals and priorities are consistent with the VA Strategic Plan, as well as public interests and needs.

3 – Intermediate

☐ Educates others on how major internal and external factors affect the organization.

☐ Evaluates how changing conditions and current events will impact work group and incorporates this information when making
plans and decisions.

- Responds to external changes that affect programs and policies (e.g., changes in administration or a new Veteran-related bill) by refocusing efforts, redistributing resources, or otherwise overcoming roadblocks.

4 – Advanced

- Conducts environmental scanning to stay abreast of relevant, emerging trends and uses this information to adjust goals and priorities as needed.
- Contributes to the development of long-term goals by recommending effective strategies that take into account external factors that may impact the VA.
- Anticipates how work processes may be affected by changes in the external environment and develops alternatives.

5 - Expert

- Demonstrates expertise in internal and external factors impacting the VA and shares this expertise broadly to enhance the understanding of others.
- Forecasts the probability of future trends and external factors relevant to the VA and Veterans, evaluates their impact, and takes proactive action.
- Creates and implements strategic programs or initiatives (e.g., Veteran Reintegration, Ending Veteran Homelessness) based on stakeholder needs and views, public interests, and organizational objectives.

**Enhances outcomes for Veterans.** Models commitment to public service and advocacy for Veterans. Uses multiple modalities to clearly and regularly communicate the VA’s mission, vision, and values both internally and externally. Encourages and empowers employees to ensure their daily work is focused on supporting or providing better services to Veterans and other stakeholders.

**Behavioral Indicators**

1 – Novice

- Demonstrates commitment to serving Veterans and other members of the public.
- Demonstrates understanding of Veterans’ needs and their impact on daily operations.
- Explains the VA’s role in advocating for Veterans both inside and outside the VA.

2 – Foundational

- Provides coaching and guidance to employees to ensure their daily work is focused on supporting or providing better services to Veterans and other stakeholders.
- Reviews policies and procedures on a regular
Encourages and supports employee participation in various public service programs targeted at awareness of Veterans and their needs.

3 – Intermediate

- Uses Veteran feedback to make improvements that better support the VA’s mission.
- Reinforces employee actions that are Veteran and customer focused through rewards, recognition, and feedback.

4 – Advanced

- Guides others in advocating for Veterans and other stakeholders.
- Creates a climate that is Veteran and customer-centric, empowering employees to continually improve the VA’s services.
- Strategizes with other leaders to develop action plans to meet public needs.

5 - Expert

- Champions the VA mission internally and externally to further the VA’s strategic objectives.
- Creates strategic direction that is customer and Veteran-centered; evaluates current outcomes and provides direction for continuous improvement.
- Models dedication and passion for serving Veterans in daily actions and speech; inspires other leaders to follow suit

**Business Acumen.** Demonstrates exceptional judgment and applies resource allocation and management skills to optimize business operations and quality of service. *Applies forward-looking human capital management principles.* Identifies staffing needs and builds a diverse workforce based on organizational strategy, priorities, and budget considerations. Leads comprehensive succession management and workforce development efforts. Evaluates performance fairly and accurately and effectively rewards and recognizes employee performance.

### Proficiency Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – Novice</td>
<td>Identifies high potential employees and encourages their development.</td>
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<td>Provides fair and accurate input into performance appraisals for others.</td>
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<td>Acts consistently with HR policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 – Foundational</td>
<td>Prioritizes current human capital needs to meet organizational priorities within the constraints of budget allowances.</td>
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<td>Ensures that succession management</td>
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activities initiated by HR are completed and that leaders within own organization have individual development plans.

- Evaluates performance fairly and differentiates rewards and recognition based on performance.

3 – Intermediate

- Forecasts future human capital needs to meet future organizational priorities within the constraints of budget allowances and partners with HR to source, select, and develop necessary talent.

- Leads efforts to create succession management activities tied to strategic needs and reinforces the importance of manager support of employee development.

- Identifies poor performers and creates opportunities for them to improve performance; identifies opportunities for ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) when necessary.

4 – Advanced

- Leads efforts to create succession management activities that will develop the next generation of leaders and rewards managers who support employee development.

- Ensures that managers are fairly managing performance, providing feedback on an ongoing basis, and regularly rewarding/recognizing superior performance.

- Proactively partners with HR to generate a system of HR practices that will most effectively source, select, and develop talent to meet strategic needs.

5 - Expert

- Champions a culture where development of the next generation of leaders is a strategic priority and everyone embraces succession management and individual development.

- Champions a culture of high performance where everyone is committed to and accountable for ongoing performance management and feedback.

- Partners with HR to develop strategic programs designed to source, select, and develop talent to meet future needs.

Applies sound financial and material resource management principles. Demonstrates understanding of the organization’s financial processes. Applies sound resource management principles, best practices, and applicable policies, regulations and laws to
support operations. Aligns resources with policy, strategic direction, and priorities.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 – Novice</strong></td>
<td>Allocates resources efficiently (time, money, materials, people) in support of operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 – Foundational</strong></td>
<td>Effectively and efficiently manages the expenditure of resources (time, money, materials, people) in support of operations, providing justification in relation to program objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 – Intermediate</strong></td>
<td>Works with others to generate and manage financial allocations in support of strategic priorities and consistent with appropriation laws.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4 – Advanced</strong></td>
<td>Applies a comprehensive knowledge of Department financial processes and appropriation law to establish cost-effective organization-level (e.g., VISN, VBA Region, MISN) budgets and/or financial processes that tap into financial resources from conventional and unconventional sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 - Expert</strong></td>
<td>Identifies financial resources available internal and external to the VA, and skillfully gains access to these resources.</td>
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**Employs Technology Effectively.** Makes effective use of technology to achieve results. Leverages technology to improve decision making and outcomes. Keeps up-to-date on technological developments and decides when technology changes are needed. Ensures access to and security of technology systems.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 – Novice</strong></td>
<td>Ensures that technology resources are up-to-date, secure, and accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 – Foundational</strong></td>
<td>Ensures that technology resources are</td>
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deployed efficiently.

3 – Intermediate

☐ Explores the adoption of alternative technological solutions to improve organizational performance, consistent with strategic priorities.

☐ Ensures technology resources are deployed in a manner consistent with strategic priorities.

4 – Advanced

☐ Identifies innovative technological solutions to drive strategic priorities.

5 - Expert

☐ Champions innovation of technological solutions to drive strategic priorities.
Appendix F. EISA Curriculum Agenda

EISA Workshop for Tampa VA
Focus Group Agenda’s

Focus Group 1
1. Focus group questions from our guide
2. Part I: Introduction and Overview (30 minutes)
3. Part II: What Is Emotional Intelligence and Why Is It Important at Work? (30 minutes)
4. Part III: The Five Factors of Emotional Intelligence (30 minutes)

Focus Group 2
1. Focus group questions from our guide
2. Part IV: Perceiving (30 minutes)
3. Part V: Managing (30 minutes)

Focus Group 3
1. Focus group questions from our guide
2. Part VI: Decision Making (30 minutes)
3. Part VII: Achieving (30 minutes)
4. Part VIII: Influencing (30 minutes)
5. Developing Your Emotional and Social Skills