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**INTEGRATING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
TRAINING TO STRATEGIC HRM**
Case Lindström

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ABSTRACT

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The demands of work life have changed and increased, and the business environment is more fast-paced and dynamic, which has forced companies to put more effort on strategic human resource management (SHRM), development of human resource (HR) strategies and training. The change in the business environment requires managers to have new skills that help them to respond to the needs of their teams, such as emotional intelligence (EI) skills. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to answer the main research question on how HR can develop their practices to advance the integration of EI to the HR strategy from managers' point of view. Additionally, the study aims to answer two sub-questions: what sort of training plan should be created in order to offer managers strategic EI training and how are EI and its importance understood in the case company. The case company for this study was Lindström Oy, a Finnish family-owned textile rental company with 1700 employees in Finland. The study takes a strategic and organizational point of view on the topics. The theoretical framework is built by combining strategic human resource management (SHRM), training and emotional intelligence studies.

The theoretical framework is built on multiple studies of the three themes, and it aims to understand the background of SHRM, HR as a function, strategy making in HR, training as strategic HR function, different EI models and how EI is presented in managerial workplace context and EI training. This study followed interpretative relativist research philosophy. The method for this study was qualitative single case study and primary data was collected with thematic interviews with six managers and two HR professionals in the case company. Thematic interviews included six themes: strategy and training, HR's role and collaboration, HR strategy, EI in the workplace, EI and strategy and training in general. Secondary data was collected by analyzing the case company's latest sustainability report in order to provide background and context for the study. The collected data was analyzed by data-based content analysis, and following categories were formed: current strengths, points of development, definitions, understandings, strategic linkage and importance. Data was analyzed based on these categories to formulate the findings.

The key findings of this study are that in order to advance the integration of EI to HR strategy from managers' point of view, HR should develop their communication and the IT infrastructure and develop a more strategic role in the managers' work. Communication should be clear, dialogic and it should focus on establishing goals, expectations and common policies for managers. The training plan for EI training should include need assessment, setting goals and objectives, clear planning of practicalities such as group formation and sign-up. The training should be conducted in small groups with a coaching method, and it should start from the definitions and basics of emotions. Communication and data collection and utilization needs to be ongoing throughout the process. After training has been conducted, there needs to be an evaluation and feedback needs to be collected in order to develop future training. Regarding the understandings and importance of EI, EI was understood in various ways. Interviewed managers understood EI primarily as a social skill, and also as they also understood it as an ability to lead different people and self-control on practical and individual level. HR professionals emphasized the role of a manager and their skills and the organizational and strategic level more. The need for soft values, strategic emphasis on people-centricity, ensuring future competitive advantage, securing a place as a wanted employer, increased multiculturalism and market positioning.

This study makes theoretical contributions in the field of SHRM and sustainable human resource management. Managerial implications of this study include practical suggestions for the integration process of emotional intelligence to HR strategy and training planning. Finally, this study provides suggestions for similar future studies with different employee or manager groups.

Keywords: strategic human resource management, training, emotional intelligence, single case study

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List of Abbreviations

HRM: Human resource management
SHRM: Strategic human resource management
HR: Human resources
EI: Emotional intelligence

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

There is a growing need for emotional intelligence (EI) skills in work life. In recent years, organizations and the environment we work in have changed and become more fast-paced and knowledge-intensive, and the role of social interactions has increased. According to the 2018 Finnish Work Life Barometer, most employees experience their work as mentally challenging, and the number of sick leaves has increased when compared to previous barometers (Lyly-Yrjänäinen, 2019). Work life is constantly developing, and the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra has listed the increase of mental health issues in young people as one of the future challenges and megatrends (Dufva, 2020). Therefore, there is a growing need for socially and emotionally skilled employees and managers that can respond to the requirements of modern work life (Khalili, 2012). In Finland, there is a nationwide need to promote well-being in working life, and companies and other professional organizations need to find new ways to support their employees emotionally in challenging situations and help them maintain their occupational capacity. In this task, managers are in key position, often being the first point of contact for their team members, which requires the organizations give attention to this topic and to equip the managers with skills that help them to respond to these challenges. Due to its people-centric nature this challenge, it is often given to the human resource (HR) department of the company and requires that it is included in the HR strategy, and one of HR's key objectives is to recognize and satisfy both the company's and the individual's needs by offering support and security in different situations, such as personal hardships in life. (Shivarudrappa, Ramachandra & Gopalakrishna, 2010, pp. 2–3, 10–11).

Therefore, strategic human resource management (SHRM) is major success factor for the organization (Abdelmoutaleb, 2020). A well-functioning human resources (HR) strategy is something that is hard to copy, and it can give the organization major competitive advantage (Stewart & Brown, 2014). In order for a company to succeed, all functions, HR included, must be working well (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 49) and HR strategy needs to support the company strategy (Armstrong, 2019, p. 1), helping the organization as a whole to reach their goals. A functioning HR department and well-defined HR strategy that takes current and future challenges into account can help employees and managers to succeed in their work. Being the forerunner in the field of SHRM by including softer skills, such as emotional intelligence in the HR strategy might have many successful results for both the company and its employees. Emotional intelligence as a concept refers to an individual's capacity and ability to comprehend, control and utilize their own and other's emotions in an accurate way. Emotional intelligence is associated with skills such as empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivational skills and other interpersonal and social skills (Goleman, 2004; Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004, p. 197). Historically, being emotionally intelligent and expressing emotions such as empathy have not been very respected skills in business (Goleman, 2004, p. 90) and softer emotions have been seen as a sign of weakness

in business (Fambrough & Kaye Hart, 2008). However, a change in attitude has been taking place, as organizations value EI skills more, and are willing to invest in improving them (e.g., Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019, p. 141).

All managers are different, but nowadays the most effective and successful leaders have one common ability – emotional intelligence. The absence of this skill can prevent someone from becoming a superb leader. When compared to other important skills, such as analytical and cognitive skills, EI skills are almost twice as important as the other skills. (Goleman, 2004, pp. 82–83.) Therefore, for managers themselves, their team members and the company, EI skills are very crucial, and attention to EI skills and their development is a strategically profitable choice, since it can create unique competitive advantages for the company. Managers themselves have also generated interest towards the topic, and they feel that in order for them to succeed in their future job positions, they need skills in areas such as leadership, decision-making, change management and interpersonal skills. They also have a positive attitude towards leadership training (D’netto, Bakas & Bordia, 2008, p. 13). To develop and learn new skills, training is often needed. EI training is useful for managers for several reasons. People with high EI often have more successful social relationships, because they have better skills in recognizing both their own and others’ emotions. They can also respond to and reason their own and others’ emotional reactions (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008). High EI managers are able to use the knowledge about the people around them in a way that improves the performance of the company and the job satisfaction of the employees (Goleman, 2004, p. 90). The EI level can also affect one’s problem-solving and social relationship skills (Mayer et al., 2008). EI can also benefit one’s well-being in many areas of life (Raz & Zysberg, 2014, p. 27). Furthermore, EI skills are typical social skills needed in many professional positions, not just managerial ones, which justifies the need and importance of such training (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019, pp. 141). Emotional intelligence training can indeed increase an individual’s related abilities in, for example, work-life and in other areas of one’s life, such as mental health. (Shcutte, Malouff & Thorsteinsson, 2013).

Facilitating the training and providing the managers with the right tools and resources is part of SHRM. Training existing employees is often more economical, and it can act as a motivator for the employees (Becker, 2011) and for the company. Regarding EI, the current paradigm agrees that EI can be trained and learned (Goleman, 2004, pp. 86–87), which only increases the motivation to include EI training in HR strategy. HR practices, such as training and development, should be integrated in the company and HR strategy to reach the company’s goals (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 55). and therefore, SHRM is part of the company’s strategy work. Managers have a crucial role in actualizing the SHRM practices and they should use HR strategies and practices in their daily work (Guest, 1989, cited in Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 50). There is a link between training programs and company strategy (Sawitri & Muis, 2014), since training helps the employees understand the strategic goals and work towards them. When discussing challenges that managers can face, such as a subordinate’s occupational capacity, someone not performing well, big organizational changes, etc.,

delicacy and discretion are needed. Therefore, with training EI can be integrated in HR strategy and managers can be equipped with better skills.

Historically, research has not focused on how much HR and strategy are integrated, and how strategic the HRM function is, creating a niche and research gap for this study. Additionally, the success of the HR function has been linked merely with the financial and other objectively measured parts of the organization's performance (Chandra & Shein, 2009) and the role of HR in strategic training and development planning has not been studied much (Viitala, Kultalahti & Kangas, 2017), creating a research niche. Additionally, there is another research gap for studying the more subjective sides of SHRM, such as emotions and emotional intelligence, which, also influence the company's performance, and how strategic training can increase both the performance of the company, and the overall well-being of managers and employees. Moreover, this research studies the somewhat rarely studied topic of creating competitive strategic advantage through improving and strategizing emotional intelligence, a very "soft skill".

In this is a qualitative case study focusing on developing the integration of emotional intelligence training in the HR strategy and as a part of SHRM of the case company. Furthermore, the idea is to create a strategic training plan for managers' emotional intelligence training at Lindström Oy, a Finnish family-owned textile rental company. Both their local and global strategies emphasize caring for people (Lindström Group, 2020, Lindström Oy, 2020) which has sparked the need to develop the emotional intelligence skills of managers by providing training for them. The research gap and the niche created by it, previous studies and literature and the need of the case company have provided need for a study regarding EI training.

1.2 Research objectives and research question

The aim of this study is to develop the integration of EI training as a part of the case company's HR strategy by studying the ways in which HR's practices can be developed in managers' point of view, and, furthermore, to create a feasible training plan that can be used in practice by studying the perceptions of managers and HR professionals regarding the current state of HR strategy, training and their perceptions about the role of EI in the company. The case company for this study is Lindström, a Finnish family-owned textile rental company with approximately 1700 employees in Finland, with a recently renewed company and HR strategy, with a strong emphasis on caring for their employees and their well-being (Lindström Group, 2020). The case company itself will be presented in more detail in Chapter 3. In a wider perspective, the contribution of this study is that it can provide suggestions for creating and providing successful EI training and help companies develop their SHRM practices and HR strategies. Furthermore, this study will also contribute to the relatively young field of sustainable human resource management, from the social sustainability perspective of the company.

Based on these aims, the following main research question was formed:

How HR can develop their practices to advance the integration of EI to HR strategy from managers' point of view?

And the following sub-questions were formed:

What sort of a training plan HR needs to create in order to offer managers strategic EI training?

How are EI and its importance understood in the case company?

1.3 Key concepts and limitations

Strategic human resource management (SHRM)

SHRM originates from human resource management (HRM). Chandra and Shen (2009, p. 32) define HRM as the strategic people and workforce-oriented processes that aim to improve the levels of both organizational and individual performance and have a positive impact on reaching set goals. HRM aims to help the employees work in a way that is aligned with the organization's strategic goals. (Shivarudrappa, et al., 2010, p. 10). HRM includes functions such as talent attraction, training and development, promotions, compensation, payroll, employment relations, managing employee information, occupational health and safety management and internal communication of the organization (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 31). SHRM aims to align the business strategies together with the HR strategy. It involves long-term planning and planning how HR can support the strategy on a daily basis (Armstrong, 2019, p. 1). SHRM links the HR function with the company strategy, in order to support the organization's performance and gain competitive advantage (Darwish, 2013). SHRM has a long term-approach, and it acts as a bridge between HRM, company strategy processes and performance (Martell & Carroll, 1995). In SHRM approach the focus is on integrating HR practices to the company's strategy work and decision making (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 55) in organizational level (Darwish, 2013).

In this thesis, the abbreviation SHRM is used when discussing about strategic human resource management as a function. When talking about human resources in general or as an organizational function, the term HR is used. When discussing about the actual strategy that SHRM is responsible for, the term HR strategy is used. Company strategy refers to the company's overall strategy. This thesis focuses on examining SHRM and HR function on an organizational level. This study is limited to examining training as a part of SHRM, even though it is acknowledged that both HRM and SHRM include other functions.

Training

Training and development are formal, educational, learning-facilitating activities which are often related to one's job, helping individuals to perform better and achieve their and the company's goals by changing behavior and improving one's skills (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 196). Training on an organizational level as a planned intervention, that aims to facilitate learning in employees by improving their skills, knowledge and attitude and by that, to contribute to the achievement of the company's goals (Edralin, 2004, p. 1). Formal management training and development are "initiatives which can be identified by both recipients and deliverers as an intervention which has a structured mode of delivery, where the aim is to impart new awareness or knowledge of a workplace process or activity" (Patton & Marlow, 2002, p. 261). Training as a planned experience that employees go through in order to learn something that will improve their skills and help them to gather knowledge related to their work or change their job-related attitudes and behaviors (Stewart & Brown, 2014). Training is not the equivalent to natural learning, since it is planned and organized. This thesis focuses on formal training as a strategic tool, not on natural learning or training from a pedagogical point of view.

In this thesis, training is used as an umbrella term for all training and development activities. In previous research, training and development have been used as synonyms also, because the processes are so intertwined (Garavan, 1997). Training and development can be HRD functions also, and they can be examined from a HRD point of view also. Due to the focus of the thesis, in this thesis "training" refers to management and leadership training targeted to managers. This thesis does not study general job-related training targeted to all employees.

Training is often a human resources development (HRD) function, but due to the strategic nature of this thesis, it is treated as a SHRM function, where it can be seen more as a tool for strategy integration. The nature of the case company has guided this limitation: locally, they do not have separate HRD and HRM departments. Due to the focus of the thesis, in this thesis "training" refers to management and leadership training targeted to managers. This thesis does not study general job-related training targeted to all employees.

Emotional intelligence

Mayer and Salovey, pioneers in EI in business context (1990, p. 189) define EI as the "subset of social intelligence, that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one's thinking and action." Daniel Goleman later presented the term "emotional intelligence" in 1995, and again in 1998 in his HBR article, from where it began to be more widely known and popularized in business (Harvard Business Review, 2004, p. 82). Goleman (2004) lists five key components of emotional intelligence to be the following: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill, which will be used as key components of EI in this thesis.

In this thesis, for the definition of EI, Mayer et al.'s definition will be used. When considering the actual EI skills and how they presented themselves in individuals, Goleman's list of components will be used. Mayer et al.'s definition does not provide enough practical information, and these two definitions are used as complementary in this thesis. This study is limited to studying EI in managerial workplace context. This study will not focus on, neurological models or different theories regarding EI, even though these are briefly introduced in Chapter 2 to provide background information on the topic.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five main chapters. In Chapter 1, the background of the study, aim and research questions are presented. After that, the key concepts and limitations of the study are presented and discussed. The key concepts are defined as HRM, SHRM, strategy and emotional intelligence. In the end of the first chapter, a brief introduction to the research process and structure is provided.

In Chapter 2, there will be a literature review about the three key themes and topics: SHRM, training and emotional intelligence. In this chapter strategy is not discussed, since the strategy itself or strategic choices of the case company are not the focus of this thesis. The literature review will begin with SHRM's background and after that SHRM and its tasks are discussed in more detail. This is followed by training. This part of the literature review will present and discuss the management training process as a whole from a strategic point of view. The third part of the literature review will focus on emotional intelligence in management and leadership context. The literature review will present existing literature and previous studies regarding these topics. The focus of this literature review is on combining these three themes together from a strategic point of view. The literature review will be finished with a presentation of the theoretical framework.

In the Chapter 3, the methodology of this study is presented. This chapter includes the presentation of the single qualitative case method and analysis methods used in this thesis. The third chapter also includes a short presentation of the case company and limitations of the study topic. In Chapter 4, the findings of the empirical study are analyzed and presented with the aim of answering the research question. In Chapter 5, the results of this empirical study, managerial implications and suggestions for future research are discussed. The last chapter also answers the research question stated in the first chapter. The last chapter includes an analysis of the quality of this study also. The list of references can be found in the end of this thesis.

2 Literature review

This chapter presents the literature review for this thesis. The literature presented is used to build the theoretical framework of the thesis. This chapter is divided into three main parts: 2.1 will focus on strategic human resource management. Background, different approaches will be discussed and after that, the focus is on strategic planning in HR and functions of HR. Subchapter 2.2 focuses on training, discussing management and leadership training as an SHRM function and from a strategic point of view, HR's role in training and the training planning process. In subchapter 2.3 focuses on emotional intelligence. First, the connection between emotional intelligence and SHRM is presented, then theories and concept of emotional intelligence and lastly emotional intelligence in managers and emotional intelligence training are discussed. Chapter 2 will end with the presentation of the theoretical framework build around the three themes mentioned.

2.1 Strategic Human Resource Management

2.1.1 Background

To understand the current state of SHRM, it is important to understand history of the field. SHRM has its roots in HRM and SHRM can be seen as an extension or the “next step” from HRM. Truss and Gratton (1995, p. 666) see SHRM as the “umbrella”, which connects management and other organizational factors together, and under which HRM falls. In practice, SHRM and HRM have relatively similar functions, but during the years SHRM has developed into a more strategic direction and the HR function in general is less operative and more strategic and supporting the business and company strategy. In practice, HRM manages work, and people doing the work, operating on both the individual and organizational level. Therefore, HRM is an inevitable part of any organization that employees someone (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, p. 1–2,4). One of the significant elements of HRM is that it is strategic (Armstrong, 2019), even though nowadays it is still somewhat separated from SHRM. If a company wants to create competitive advantage, they need to move on from seeing HRM as a cost center and shift their viewpoint on seeing HRM as a strategic partner and a strategic function of the company (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 3), and recently, HR and HRM functions, such as recruitment, development and rewarding, have developed in a more strategic direction (Piwovar-Sulej, 2021).

The term HRM has been used from the 1990's and before that, the HR function of the company was generally called “personnel administration”. As time has passed and industries have developed, the name of HRM and HR has changed due to the developing needs of the companies (Ahammad, 2017, pp. 412–413). HRM is a very young field (Jackson and Seo, 2010), since scientific research in the HRM field originated in the 80's and in the last 20 years, interest towards HR in general has grown (Becker & Huselid, 2016). Despite the brief history of SHRM various theoretical approaches have been developed, and it is important to notice that SHRM

is not bound on any certain theory or ideology (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, p. 28). Porter's (1979) traditional SWOT models have been applied to SHRM (Taylor, Doherty & McGraw, 2008). The SWOT model examines the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization and additionally, the external opportunities and threats of the organization and strategy can be formed based on these evaluations. Later on, more HR-specific approaches have been presented. Paauwe and Boon (2009) mention two most famous SHRM models, the Harvard approach introduced by Beer et al. in 1984 and Fombrum et al.'s (1984) Michigan model. Beer et al.'s model acknowledges the effect of both internal and external situational and stakeholder factors on HR policies and the result of HR practices also includes subjective factors such as well-being. The Harvard model leans more to the "best fit" side, focusing on aligning HR strategy with company strategy (Boxall & Purcell, 2008). The Michigan approach was defined by Fombrum et al. in 1984. This model is a cycle model, focusing on the operational, "hard side" side of HRM and creating a cycle between selection, development, performance and appraisals. It focuses more on the external environment than Harvard Model. (Fombrum et al., 1984, cited in Paauwe & Boon, 2009.)

Later in the 1990's the rather popular resource-based view (RBV) on SHRM emerged after Barney's (1991) introduction of the model, however the original idea has been traced back to Elizabeth Penrose in 1959 (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, p. 86). The RBV focuses more on the company's own, existing internal resources and how they can create competitive advantage for the company. Later on, approaches such as "inside-out" and "outside-in" strategic contingency and institutional approach have emerged. However, what is common to all the approaches in SHRM is that they all emphasize finding competitive advantage from the uniqueness of the organization. (Paauwe and Boon, 2009.) SHRM can be considered to be based on the RBV approach, since HR-related strategic resources are often internal; for example, employee competences, recruitment and training possibilities (Taylor et al., 2008), and in recent years the RBV model has been very popular among HR professionals and academics. Despite that, the RBV model is not perfect, since it can focus too much on the internal factors of the company; it must be noted that all organizations exist in some external, partly uncontrollable environment, and are affected by it (Boxall and Purcell, 2008, p. 107).

To summarize and clarify the different approaches on SHRM, the approaches and models are presented in the table below. It must be noted, however, that other model and approaches are also presented in literature, but in this thesis, focus is not on different SHRM models, and therefore only the so-called classic models are presented only.

Table 1. Approaches to SHRM

Model / approach	Author	Main ideas
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SWOT analysis	Porter, 1979	Analysing both the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization and the external opportunities and threats in order to formulate a strategy.
Michigan Model	Fombrun et al, 1984	A cycle model, creating cycles in between different HR functions. All starts from selection/recruitment and moves on to performance and appraisals.
Harvard Model	Beer et al., 1984	Internal, external and stakeholder effects on HR strategy. Aiming to align the HR strategy with company strategy, finding the best fit for the organization.
Resource-Based View	Barney, 1991, originates back to Penrose, 1959.	Internal resources of the company and how they can create competitive advantage.

However, in all the models and approaches towards SHRM there are common parts that are or should be considered: the external environment of the company, strategy, the internal environment of the company, HR strategy and the outcomes. (Truss & Gratton, 1994, p. 669.) It must also be acknowledged that other models have also been created and this thesis does not provide a complete presentation of all the SHRM models. In this thesis, the strategic planning in HR is based on the RBV model, due to its dominance and popularity in the field (see e.g., Boxall and Purcell, 2008, p. 107), and moreover, it is fitting for the context of this study; the model emphasizes the internal environment and resources of the company, and this study strongly focuses on one of the most important internal resources of the company – the people

In the brief history of HR and HRM, there has been a great amount of development, and HRM has been taken into the strategic process, and this has created the field of SHRM, which focuses on how HRM can “add value” to the organization. (Pauwe & Boon, 2009.) Already in the 1990’s most Fortune 500 companies had linked HRM with strategic planning, however, in strategy implementation it was not seen as important as other functions, such as sales. Despite this, HRM professionals were held in high regard in management’s eyes. (Martell & Carroll, 1995.), which is somewhat contradictory since HRM was still a very operative function. The role of HR has been seen as somewhat irrelevant to strategy, since historically HR’s role has been more functional than strategic. Therefore, HR professionals have not been seen as “hard”-skilled businesspeople (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p .33). HR skills are sometimes undermined as consisting of “common sense” due to the lack of knowledge of the HR function (Stewart & Brown, 2014). HR professionals have long suffered from a lack of credibility and this problem has only started to emerge when HR professionals have taken a bigger role in strategic planning (Collings & Wood, 2009, p. 10). However, HRM has developed from being an operational, payroll and recruitment management office, to having a lot of meaning in keeping the organization functioning. Nowadays, HRM has a more versatile role that involves developing the HR function of the

company in order for the organization to survive (Darwish, 2013). HRM practices are changing towards creating and sharing information and facilitating learning in the company and in today's economy, there is a need for constant learning and renewal. In the business environment, HRM should be supporting this (Gloet, 2006). HRM and SHRM have a short history behind, but during these years a lot of development has occurred, which has highlighted the strategic importance of the HR function as a whole.

2.1.2 Strategic planning in HR

At this moment, there is not a single theory about HR strategy that would fit all organizations, because organizations and industries differ significantly, and therefore each organization needs to find the strategy that best fits their needs and avoid copying the strategies of other organizations (Tayali & Sakyi, 2020). HR strategies and furthermore, leadership and management training based on these strategies, do and should vary among organizations, since each organization has different kinds of needs (Clarke & Higgs, 2016, p. 543). The effectiveness and success of the HR strategy implementation depends on how well HR and different organizational levels are aligned, what is expected from HR and the organization in general (Adriaenssen Johannssen & Sætersdal, 2016). The strategy of the organization becomes concrete in the behavior of the employees, which highlights the importance of SHRM for the company. Many strategic challenges, such as ensuring the viability of the company, are hard to defeat without capable people, and therefore, a functioning HR strategy is needed in order the company to stay viable and all HR-related functions therefore help the organization to achieve its strategic goals (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, pp. 34, 38, 55.). Abdelmoutaleb's (2020) case study showed that there was a significant relationship between HRM and the organization's strategic planning. The results indicated that in order for a company to survive and respond to the external demands, HRM should be integrated in strategic planning.

Despite the differences in organizations, some model for HR strategy formulation process have been developed. Stewart and Brown (2014) propose a 3-step model for formulating HR strategy: gathering information, analyzing information and making decisions and implementing these decisions. Information seeking and gathering involves analyzing both the external and internal environment and finding threats and possibilities (Stewart & Brown, 2014). The dynamic external environment, economic, technological, legal and other external conditions require businesses to plan and forecast their HR needs, which creates the need for strategic HRM and the creation of HR strategy (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, pp. 6–14). In another model, Boxall and Purcell (2008, pp. 56–82) divide the field HR strategy planning into two main ideologies: the "best fit" and the "best practice". The best fit model is based on having the HR strategy aligned with the company strategy, i.e., the HR strategy follows the company strategy and the goals and vision defined in that strategy. According to this model, HR strategy is based on the company strategy and the specific needs of the company. On the contrary, the "best practice" model is based on universal best practices that should work somewhat similarly in all organizations. In practice, this could mean that all HR strategies are planned based on a same

mold or a model, that would serve the needs of all organizations. In general, the “best fit” model is more popular, since it responds to the needs of an individual organization better than the “best practice” models that are sometimes too vague and unable to acknowledge differences in industry-related requirements for HR strategies. In general, organizations often perform better if their HR strategies are aligned with their other strategies (Stewart & Brown, 2014). If HR is unable to form a strategy to allocate resources in a way that supports the company strategy and creates competitive advantage, they might not be valued as a strategic partner. The HR function should focus on developing the areas of the company and its staff that already are a strategic and competitive advantage, since they are harder for competitors to copy in the first place. (Barney & Wright, 1998, pp. 32, 35–36.)

It is important to remember that when aiming to achieve competitive advantage through people, employees need to be treated as a strategic asset, not a cost center (Pfeffer, 1994), however when planning the HR strategy, cost-efficiency must be kept in mind – additionally, a functioning HR strategy can have major effects on the cost-efficiency and performance of the organization: for example, employee satisfaction can actualize itself in higher customer satisfaction or higher sales. In that sense, strategic planning in HR does not differ from any other strategic planning that much (Barney & Wright, 1998, pp. 32–33), even though the human factor and the need to incorporate “softer” themes such as well-being and work capacity in the strategy need to be acknowledged. Moreover, combining HRM with strategic planning can increase the effectiveness of both the HRM function and the whole company. When setting the goals and resources for HR strategy, the HR department itself should be included in the planning process. Their role is to acknowledge the functions of the organization that are most likely to bring them competitive advantage (Barney and Wright, 1998, p. 42). After planning, HRM is responsible for implementing the strategy through, for example, training programs, organizational development and career planning. In practice, the HR function should also support the implementation of the strategy. As with other strategy work, SHRM involves the evaluation of the strategy too. (Rothwell and Kazanas, 2003, pp. 23–24.)

2.1.3 Organizational role and functions of HR and SHRM

SHRM is a diverse field with many goals and roles and high requirements for internal co-operation and collaboration. HR department has various functions and roles in an organization, and they are discussed in this chapter. Basic HR functions include such as talent attraction, training and development, promotions, compensation, payroll, employment relations, managing employee information, occupational health and safety management and internal communication of the organization (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 31), and these functions are SHRM functions also. In SHRM, the focus is on the strategic, long-term planning of these mentioned functions. In general, SHRM functions require a lot of co-operation with other departments and functions of the organization. Truss and Gratton (1994, pp. 665–666) mention that the role of managers is crucial in SHRM, and a lot of responsibility of actually managing people in a company is placed on them. All

managerial positions are somehow linked to SHRM – the field is not only for HR professionals (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, p. 4). Both SHRM and the managers need to be aware of how the HR functions are related to strategy, and how HR can support the employees (Stewart & Brown, 2014).

SHRM operates with many functions of an organization and it can have various goals, such as financial ones, e.g., cost-effectiveness and ensuring the long-term agility and survival of the company. In practice, this means that HR makes sure that the company can e.g., adjust their headcount smoothly and that they have enough skilled workforce. (Boxall & Purcell, pp. 12–16). SHRM’s task is to make sure that the company fits into its social and political environments. This means that SHRM is responsible for making sure that laws are followed, the company has good relations with labor unions, etc. Furthermore, this has to do with the employer branding and the social compliance of the company (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, pp. 17–18). For example, having good relations with labor unions can help the company to maintain a good employer brand and good reputation in the eyes of possible future employees, which then can create competitive advantage for the company, when they can attract the best candidates to work for them. HR also needs to maintain good relations between managers and employees (Stewart & Brown, 2014) and their work requires credibility and partnerships inside the organization (Gilley & Gilley, 2014). HR professionals are required to make challenging, sometimes either/or -types of decisions, human behavior in general is hard to control and the managerial and political barriers inside the company can also possess challenges for the HR professionals (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, p. 29).

SHRM and HR in general can be divided into two sides: “soft” HRM and “hard” HRM. Soft side focuses on being “people friendly” and the hard side sees people more as an asset that needs to be utilized (Collings & Wood, 2009, pp. 3–5). The “soft” side can include functions such as employee well-being and development, recruitment, etc., whereas the “hard side” includes the HR processes, compensation and payroll, employment relations and such. SHRM can be seen as the non-operative side of these functions, focusing more on aligning these with the strategy and focusing more on the long-term goals and solutions, rather than day-to-day operations. For example, the operative side of recruitment can be the recruitment in practice, e.g., posting job ads and arranging job interviews, whereas the strategic side can be more focused on developing the recruitment process and candidate experience in order to attract the right talents for the company.

On a larger scale, SHRM is a managerial process, which aims to create a functioning workplace on organizational and individual level (Boxall and Purcell, 2008, p. 7). Regarding the organizational level, the organization itself should operate in a way that allows the HR department to support the strategy, reach goals and create competitive advantage. (Adriaenssen et al., 2016). To succeed in that, all HR functions should be coherent and aligned (Barney & Wright, 1998, pp. 35–36). On organizational and societal level, the role of HR is important. HR can have an impact outside the organization also, for example regarding employer branding and industry and labor union relations. Therefore, HR works and influences all levels of the

organization, and in a larger scale, it can have an impact on the society outside the organization also. Despite the strategic orientation and task of SHRM, Brown, Metz, Cregan and Kulik's (2009) results showed that in general, HRM can still be a very employee-oriented function of the company, and HR managers can have tasks such as resolving employee conflicts and responding to complaints. Additionally, they found out that HRM often is the supporting function when it comes to individual employee well-being. However, this function was seen as strategic, helping employees with their well-being related issues created tangible benefits for the organization. HR managers saw their employee-centered role as supportive to their strategic partnership. Additionally, Taylor et al. (2008) mention that even though SHRM is sometimes seen as a very operative and technical department, the SHRM profession extends beyond that, SHRM being responsible for how leadership is practiced in the company, employee commitment, among other things.

2.2 Training as a part SRHM

2.2.1 Management and leadership training as a HR function and the role of training in SHRM

In this part of this thesis training is discussed more in depth from a strategic point of view. Having training as a part of SHRM, a company can ensure that it has the means to respond to the challenges of the current business world, and flexibility and long-term orientation in the training are important parts of ensuring SHRM practices. (Piwowar-Sulej. 2021.) When considering training, SHRM's task is to see and use employees as investments, who via training and other activities done by the organization, add value and moreover, are willing to commit and strengthen the organization. (Taylor et al, 2008). Stewart and Brown (2014) mention that one of the HR roles or functions is "human capital developer", and HR professionals focus coordinating and providing training in the organization, and they also point out the constantly increasing importance of this particular role.

The strategic approach adapted in this thesis understands training a conceptual tool that HR uses for strategy integration, and the focus is not on learning or performance development or pedagogical aspects of training. The case company's HR department does coordinate the training process as a whole, which is why some practicalities regarding the method and content of the trainings will be covered later in this thesis. Additionally, the local operations of the case company do not have a separate HRD department. It must be acknowledged that training is often considered a HRD function. However, Garavan (1997) mentions that training and development are used as synonyms in literature, and he mentions that distinctions between training and development are that development focuses more on the individual itself and is more focused on future roles or tasks, and the "behavioral objects" are not that clear. McCracken and Wallace (2000) provide a definition for HRD they mention that it is more about developing "learning culture" which includes training, development and other activities that respond to organizational needs. Moreover, Garavan, Gunnigle and Morley's (2000) study identifies three main perspectives on HRD: capabilities-driven, psychological contract and

collective/organizational learning perspective, which all emphasize HRD's role as learning and development. This supports the view that in this thesis, from a strategic, conceptual tool perspective, training does not fall into the HRD side.

Management training is strongly linked to the areas for which HR is responsible, such as employee well-being and attitudes towards work. Training is one of the key SHRM functions and it can give the organization many benefits (Tolstyakova & Barytova, 2020; Stewart & Brown, 2014) Training has various linkages to other HR functions, and therefore, it is an important part of the SHRM process as a whole. For example, training acts as a complementary function when managing employee abilities. In the recruitment process, individuals with the fitting skill sets are chosen to work in the organization, but not all future abilities can be predicted when recruiting. This is why training is needed and important, especially when thinking about the future, long-term development of employees. (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, pp. 176–179, 180.) Training can be a useful function also when onboarding new employees and it can help them become familiar with the culture and habits of the company. Therefore, training extends to cover many other HR functions and it is an important part of SHRM and should be considered as a strategic function.

2.2.2 Management and leadership training from a strategic point of view

The main aim of training is to help the company to reach their strategic goals and to maintain their competitive advantage (Chandra and Shen, 2009, p. 194), which could be considered as one of the important aims of strategy or strategic work. Pfeffer (1998) has listed “extensive training” as one of the seven practices of successful organizations, highlighting the importance of training. Training involves the whole company and developing strategy and reaching goals often requires the organization as a whole to support the ideas behind the strategy. In practice, this means that the structure and policies of the organization must support development and change. At the managerial level, training is one of the most crucial factors in this area (Hall, 1984). This emphasizing the importance of managerial training in SHRM setting, since HR often has the main responsibility for ensuring that employees behave in a manner that supports the strategy and takes the company into the desired direction. Moreover, people have unlimited capacities for learning, which gives incentive to invest in and include training and development in strategic plans (Nafukho & Muyia, 2014, p. 623). Therefore, training can be treated as a strategic investment.

On an organizational level, training offers many strategic benefits and successful management practices involve training (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 194) and training benefits the organization as a whole (Aguinis & Krager, 2009). High amounts of training also have positive effects on employee attitudes (Tharenou, Saks & Moore, 2007) and it increases efficiency at all company levels, can reduce turnover numbers as mentioned, well-being increases, attitudes towards the organization and its missions can be modified and it helps develop company-specific skills. (Tharoke, 2013, p. 85.) Training can improve organizational stability, achieve goals

and improve overall performance (Edralin, 2004, p. 1) which can be seen as important aspects in achieving strategic goals, and overall, aspects that every successful company often needs. Successful management training supports the needs of the current business environment, for example, a pro-active attitude and is focused on areas in which managers might lack in skills (Yearley, 2011) and therefore, training supports the strategic work of the company in many ways and at many levels. Moreover, training can increase motivation, commitment, performance and profitability, and have many indirect positive effects on the organization (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009). These studies emphasize the role and importance of training as a strategic HR function, and they highlight the various benefits that organizations can get with training.

Clarke and Higgs's (2016, p. 554) study found some support for the argument that leadership training is the "next step" or the secondary HR strategy. They also argue that business goals are the starting point of leadership training, and the training is affected by goals and the leadership philosophy of the organization. The training has impact on the individual, organizational and also the extra-organizational level. (e.g., stakeholders). In practice, the argument is reasonable, since strategy, new skills and wanted behavior is hard to implement without training, and naturally, HR wants to offer training that is aligned with the strategy and supports the goals of the organization. Training planners in HR often work closely with strategic planning and in successful organizations, training is be part of the strategy and it is designed and organized in a way that its main functions are to support the implementation of the strategy. (Sawitri & Muis, 2014.) This highlights HR's role as a collaborator in the organization. Training is strategic whenever it is planned to fit the long-term goals of the organization (Edralin, 2004), and it should be acknowledged that training can be offered to respond to short-term needs, such as training to use a new software, also. Training is strategically beneficial because it enhances organizations in achieving their strategic goals. By providing training that is aligned with the company and HR strategies, the company can subtly provide the employees with the skills and attitude needed to reach the strategic goals, and therefore gain competitive advantage (Stewart & Brown, 2014). Training enhances the performance of the whole organization, however that requires that the organization itself supports training (Barba Aragón, Jiménez Jiménez & Sanz Valle, 2014). Therefore, training should be a fundamental part of the company's HR strategy. However, as was mentioned earlier, training is not a solution that fixes everything – the culture, processes, practices and practices of the organization play a major role in how well the company succeeds and whether the employees behave in a way that takes the company into the right direction. It is important to remember that “learning is what the individual does; training is what the organization does. They can and should go together.” (Rothwell and Kazanas, 2003, p. 354).

In order for training to be strategic, it needs to give the organization noticeable benefits (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009), linking training to SHRM and company strategy. If training is not aligned with HR strategy, it might not benefit the organization that much. If training and development functions are not included in the strategies, benefits can be harder to achieve, and training might not be as cost-efficient and effective as it could be, since there is a chance that training does not respond to the needs of the training. López at al.'s (2016) results indicate

that if training is strategic, it will affect learning at an organizational level, and it helps to maintain both organizational and individual skills and enhances organizational change processes. This supports the view that training should indeed be strategic and that it should be looked into from a strategic point of view. Without strong strategic emphasis training might not produce wanted results, and in these cases the investments made in training might not be profitable. Training is beneficial for companies also because managers are interested in it. Patton and Marlow's (2002) study results indicated that managers have a desire and need for strategic training in order to develop their own skills and following this, the company benefiting from it. Managers in general have a positive attitude towards training and they are willing to take responsibility for their own professional development. This creates a feasible environment in which training can be more efficient. Managers experienced that management training can help them to think in a more strategic way, and that training increases their overall well-being (D'netto et al., 2008, p. 13). If managers have the need for training and they feel that it would increase their well-being, it gives the company a good incentive to offer them training. With managers equipped with the skills necessary to achieve the strategic goals and to promote well-being in the organization, the company has better chances of achieving competitive advantage through their staff. However, this process requires a lot of attention and effort from HR.

2.2.3 HR's role in training

Training has various linkages to SHRM, and therefore, HR department has an important role in training. First, training helps the company to build and keep talent fit to their needs and it can help to improve employees' internal career development, enhance performance and furthermore, with high-performance, well-being (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, pp. 354–355; Hauff, Felfe & Klug, 2020, p. 3.). Secondly, it gives employees the skills to implement the company strategy by providing them with tools and a chance to align projects and strategic initiatives of different departments. Additionally, training helps the company to implement new strategies after e.g., strategy renewals. As strategies always look towards the future, training helps to simulate and create skills that managers might be need in the future. Lastly, training can help the employees to think their work and actions through the company strategy and evaluate their daily and long-term actions and decisions from a strategic point of view. (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, pp. 354–355.) In summary, Ahammad (2017, p. 417) defines HR's role in training as being “concerned with organizational activity aimed at bettering the performance of individuals and groups in organizational settings”.

By developing managers and other employees with training and identifying needed skills, SHRM does long-ranging strategic work, that supports the company strategy also (Hall, 1984, p. 159). Training can therefore help to implement the HR strategy, and people processes in general, and it can steer managers to a wanted direction. Therefore, HR's role is to plan the training in a way that it supports the company and HR strategy. As a part of the planning process, HR conducts surveys about training needs of the employees and the combining them with the long-term plans of the company (Steawart & Brown, 2014; Edralin, 2004, p. 2) in

order to provide suitable training. Additionally, HRM also organizes and coordinates the training (Stewart & Brown, 2014). HR also makes sure that the training process is streamlined, enough training opportunities are offered and that communication about training is effective and it reaches all levels of the organization. (Ahammad, 2017, p. 417). The training planning process is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

However, the overall training and furthermore, learning process of an organization should not be only on HR's shoulders, but all levels of organization should participate in the process (López, Péon, Ordás, Hinterhuber, Matzler & Renzl, 2016). Viitala, Kultalahti and Kangas (2017) point out that sometimes there are challenges in understanding the role of management and leadership development in the organization, which can create challenges for HR professionals which again highlights the need and importance of co-operation when planning trainings and emphasizes the already mentioned importance of learning-supporting organizational culture. Additionally, HRM practices and training efforts should be aligned in order to get the best results. (Ballesteros-Rodríguez, De Saá-Pérez & Domínguez-Falcón, 2012.) Here, HR acts as a mediator between culture and training success. Additionally, HR practices and training efforts should be aligned in order to get the best results. (Ballesteros-Rodríguez, et al., 2012.) If the organization has a learning-supporting culture and training is offered, a positive snowball effect can be created: culture helps training, and training enforces the culture. HR can have a major effect on the culture of the organization with e.g., onboarding, communications and stating values etc., and therefore, on organizational level the culture plays an important part in the training process, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter, training is therefore strongly linked to other HR practices too.

The HR department does not have a strong role in training by accident. Viitala et al. (2017) argue that due to their professional expertise, HR professionals have a strong role in developing leadership in the organization. Additionally, their study results implicate that HR managers felt that in the future there is a need to develop management further, because the workforce is more diverse, the business environment requires more flexibility, the use of technology and because organizations are constantly changing. Besides emphasizing the need for training in general, these results could also be seen as supporting the need for EI training also. HR has a crucial role in ensuring that managers have resources to implement the company practices that HR has planned and set. However, in the actual implementation, managers have a bigger role than HR (Donaldson-Feilder, Yarker & Lewis, 2008, p. 12). Many of the HR policies are filtered through managers, and with training the contingency of the HR policies can be increased (Boxall & Purcell, 2008, p. 220). Therefore, HR as the training planner and provider is the start of the EI and well-being process, i.e., even though the managers are the ones who undergo the training, HR is where the process itself is initiated. The planning and overall training process is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

2.2.4 Strategic training planning process

In this chapter and the few next ones, the focus is on the training planning process. Sawitri and Muis (2014) argue that the training planning should have its own strategic planning, i.e., that the organization could have a training strategy, highlighting the importance of strategic training planning. Training planning strongly links to the HR strategy. By studying the HR strategy of the organization, points of development and needed manager skills can be identified, (Berke, Kossler & Wakefield, 2008, p. 13), which can set a direction and build a foundation for the training plan. Based on existing academic literature on training, this thesis presents training planning process from a strategic point of view. Due to the strategic nature of this thesis, contents of the trainings or pedagogical aspects are not covered. However, some practicalities regarding training planning will be covered briefly, since HR in the case company is responsible for training as a whole and also has a coordinating role in the training process. Table 2 provides an overlook of the process as a whole, based on Rothwell and Kazanas's (2013) suggested plan.

Table 2. Training planning process (Modified from Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, p. 368; Stewart & Brown, 2014 and Thakore, 2013, pp. 86–87.)

Phase	Tasks
Pre-planning	Organizational culture Training climate
Need assessment	strategic needs current and future needs external and internal environment gaps in skills and abilities managers' needs problems, challenges
Setting objective and purpose	defining the objective of the training defining the goals purpose of the training
Deciding method	choosing an appropriate method materials trainer
Planning content	planning content based on needs
Selecting participants	motivation commitment pre-existing skills capability to participate needs and wishes
Evaluation and feedback	how effectiveness and successfulness is measured metrics

The phases mentioned in Table 2 are discussed next in this chapter. However, it must be noted that due to the strategic nature of this thesis, content and methods are discussed in a very brief matter and the focus is more on planning in general, need assessment, participants and evaluation and feedback.

Planning process in general

There are different ways and methods to training planning. Stewart and Brown (2014) propose a model for training planning that involves three phases: needs assessment, design, delivery and evaluation. This model can be used differently in different settings, and it can be modified to fit the needs of different organizations. The “training climate” can be analyzed also to find out the factors that can either hinder or support training, such as attitudes and company policies. (Stewart & Brown, 2014.) The importance of the learning-supporting organizational culture extends to the planning process and need assessment part also. The organization itself can also be analyzed to be aware of the organizational factors that might affect the training. In need assessment the “training climate” can be analyzed also to find out the factors that can either hinder or support training, such as attitudes and company policies. The company’s value and mission statements and business plans can also be relevant sources for the training need assessment process. Before starting the training planning process, the planners need to be sure and aware of the situation in which the organization is, since the culture and attitudes towards training can affect the efficiency and results of the training. Thakore (2013, pp. 86–87) proposes an alternative model for training need analysis that includes the analysis of the current situation, recognizing issues and challenges in the current situation, envisioning future plans, gathering and sorting information. After this, results are shared and an action plan, including the aim and objectives of the training, is created. (Thakore, 2013, pp. 86–87). The planning process should also include planning the content, training methods and a plan on how the learned things are to be utilized in one’s job. (Stewart & Brown, 2014; Bozer, Sarros & Santora, 2013). In the planning process, it is important to find out what is the most beneficial training strategy for the company, and also, how the results of the training can be evaluated afterwards (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, p. 368). Conducting the actual training includes various practical aspects too, such as venue, food, equipment and others (Edralin, 2004, p. 3), which, however, are not discussed in more depth in this thesis, due to the strategic nature and orientation of this thesis.

Need assessment

Training needs can be assessed from several points of view, e.g., organizational needs and individual needs, or the needs can be problem-centric, when they are defined by identifying problems and their root causes (Stewart and Brown, 2014). Training needs assessment should cover both the current and future, long-term needs of the company, including the analysis of both internal and external conditions of the company (Berke,

Kossler & Wakefield, 2008; Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, p. 368). Strategic training is future-oriented, targeted to develop skills that are needed in the next 5–10 years (Hall, 1984). However, need analysis can also start with the company needs and strategy or recognizing current and future needs and gaps in skills and abilities, however it could be argued that often times the need assessment is a combination of many different factors (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, p. 368). Need analysis can also increase the analysis of current training programs and how they respond to the needs of the company (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, p. 368), in order to avoid using resources on training that could be covered with existing training too. The participants and their supervisors can also contribute by speaking out their team members' training needs (Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 202; Edralin, 2004, p. 2).

Barney and Wright (1998) argue that focusing on the company-specific skills that the employees need, training can create the long-term competitive advantage for the company. Their view highlights the importance of through need assessment and the role of HR and company strategies in training planning. Need assessment process is done both for the sake of the effectiveness of the training and when considering the results of the training, they can be measured more easily, if clear goals and aims for the training are set in the planning process. The need assessment is also a part of the financial cost-benefit analysis of the training, since that is an aspect that should be evaluated also (Brown, 2002). Training need analysis includes analysis of the gap between current and needed employee skills, and after that suggestions on how training could close the gap. For the sake of relevancy and efficiency in resource allocation, training need assessment is important (Thakore, 2013, p. 86).

Setting objectives and purposes

After the training need assessment has been conducted, the company should have a somewhat clear idea on the needs and aims of the training, which set the direction for the purposes and objectives of the training. A clear objective for the training should be defined, in order make sure that the expected outcomes of the training are clear to all participants and help the participants to commit to the goal. Evaluating the purpose of the training is also part of the planning process (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, p. 368). Additionally, clear objectives and purposes can help the participants to set their minds to the training and help them understand what is expected from them. From HR's side, clear goals and objectives help to measure the effectiveness and successfulness of the training. Training should also be aligned with the company's needs, but at the same time, it should respond to the personal, intrinsic motivation of the employees who are being trained (Draghici, Fistis, Carutasu, & Carutasu, 2020), which can make setting the objectives challenging. However, on organizational level the objectives can be more related to the strategic goals and needs of the organization than in the development of an individual manager.

Methods

There are several ways to conduct training and planning the method in which training is delivered is part of the planning process. The methods should be fitting for the needs of the participants and to the nature of the training. Draghici et al.'s (2020) results showed that a mixture of theory, examples, exercises and individual projects was preferred as a method of conducting the training by over half of the respondents. Lacerena, Reyes, Marlow, Joseph and Salas's (2017) meta-analysis on management training effectiveness showed that as many different methods of training as possible should be used, and multiple training sessions are often better than one long session. Training should be systemic and include both classroom training, on-the job training, mentoring and coaching, as well as feedback and assessment post-training (Clarke and Higgs, 2016).

Training methods are closely linked to the contents of the training and should be chosen based on the topic of the training, and certain methods can support certain learning better. Multimedia and e-learning have been popular methods in the past years, but among managers it has not been a liked form of training due to the lack of personal guidance. (Rothwell & Kazanas, 2003, p. 364.) However, in some cases e-learning and multimedia learning can be the only option due to the different locations of the trainees. Rothwell and Kazanas (2003, p. 365) present that tutorials are a suitable method for "building skills" in training. They describe tutorials as "one-on-one, structured instructional experience". For introducing a new topic, they present lecture as an appropriate method. Additionally, case studies "stimulate discussion" and help in "identifying problems in realistic situations". For emotional intelligence training, these methods could be suitable and fit the needs of the training. Summarize, it is evident that training can be offered in many ways, and the method of the training is chosen based mainly on the content of the training, participants' learning habits and needs.

Participants

The participants of the training also play a crucial role in the planning process. In order to succeed in training, the participants should be motivated to participate in the training and coaching activities. Participants should also be receptive towards feedback and also self-efficacy of the participant was positively linked to the effectiveness of the training. (Bozer, Sarros & Santora, 2013). Training participants must be capable and fit to participate in the training, and they need to have the necessary skills and motivation. (Stewart & Brown, 2014). In a managerial setting, training can be a response to underperformance or recognized deficiency of skills in some area of work, or for high performers it can be confirmation of their skills (Patton & Marlow, 2002). Therefore, also the participants, in this case the managers, are an important part of the planning and need assessment process – and yet again, the importance of collaboration is emphasized.

Throughout the whole planning process, it is important to keep in mind that tailoring of the training is needed: offering training to those who do not perform well in their job is also important, not only to support the high-

performers and their skill-level. (Pfeffer, 1994.) In this way HR can support the professional development of all level and type of employees and respond to different kinds of needs. However, as was noted earlier in this thesis, training as a function should not be left solely on HR's shoulders, but managers participating in the training are involved throughout the process, from need evaluation to audit and feedback (Chandra and Shen, 2009, p. 66). Therefore, in need assessment and training planning in general, collaboration and co-operation are needed, as was mentioned earlier in this thesis.

Feedback and evaluation

After training has been conducted with the selected content and methods, it is important that participants receive feedback from both their team and from their own supervisors, even from the trainers, on how the training affected their everyday work. It is important for the skill development of the managers that they receive feedback, however, it is crucial that feedback is given in the right way. Feedback should not be too vague, nor too specific. Moderate and general feedback during training practices and after the training improves learning and very specific feedback reduces exploratory behavior, giving one the thought that a task can only be completed in one correct way. Feedback should be presented in a way that it does not lower one's sense of their existing abilities. Also, the feedback recipient should understand the feedback and agree on the need to change or to improve. Feedback should also be presented in a way that reduces the chances of negative emotional responses to the feedback. (Stewart & Brown, 2014.) Feedback should work in multiple ways, allowing the participants to receive feedback, as well give feedback about the training.

Evaluation of the training is done by managers, training participants, the training provider and the HR department. The evaluation phase is important, and it should be continuous and go on throughout the training process. In the evaluation process the training plans are compared with results. Evaluation is important also from a cost-benefit point of view, however, for training the financial benefits might be hard to evaluate, especially in the short-term, but it should not be an excuse to ignore the training evaluation process. (Thakore, 2013, pp. 88–89.) Evaluation can also help and develop future trainings and it gives a chance to modify upcoming training programs. There are many factors that affect the effectiveness and success of the training, such as the general atmosphere and climate of the company (Burke & Baldwin, 1999.) Therefore, HR and the strategy need to support the managers after the training, and HR can include follow-up after the training in their strategy. In training, it is also important to give managers a chance to criticize the current way of doing business, which can then evoke change and understanding (Coleman, 2013), and therefore, it is important the HR and top management of the company are willing to receive feedback from both the training and current ways of doing business. The training climate is not only an HR and the participant issue, but it concerns the whole company. However, it could be argued that in building the climate which supports learning, HRM and managers play a crucial role.

2.3 Emotional Intelligence in SHRM context

2.3.1 Emotional intelligence in workplace and SHRM context

In this part of the thesis, the focus is on EI in workplace and SHRM context. EI includes the skills and abilities to perceive, understand, control and utilize both one's own and others' emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, cited in Mayer et al., 2004, p. 197). According to Goleman (2004) emotional intelligence includes five key skills: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy and social skills. In this thesis, the definition and skills included in EI are based on Mayer et al.'s and Golemans' definitions, due to their popularity and strong stand in the field of EI. Both definitions are used in order to create a more comprehensive definition of EI, covering both the more general description and the actual, practical skills. EI is a new concept (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008) and therefore it might not have been included in many HR strategies yet. Additionally, softer skills have not been valued in HR work for long (Fambrough & Kaye Hart, 2008; Goleman, 2004), which is why including EI as a part of SHRM can be a source of competitive advantage. In order to create competitive advantage through HR strategy, companies should adapt practices that are not generally in use yet, since if others use the same practices, their value decreases (Barney and Wright, 1998, p. 43). This generates the need to include EI in the HR strategy of the company and highlights the importance of EI in workplace context.

Various studies highlight the importance of managerial EI. Goleman (2004, pp. 82–83) argues that EI is one of the most crucial skills or managers, and in the future, managers are required to be more caring, serving, good listeners and coaching (Viitala, Kultalahti & Kangas, 2017). Managers have a crucial role in ensuring motivation, empowerment and well-being in employees, and to succeed in this, EI skills can be of help. Workplace EI skills can increase the feeling of psychological safety at work (e.g., Zhou, Zhu & Vredenburg, 2020; Harper & White, 2013). A manager's behavior for an employee can be either a stress-reducing or stress-increasing factor. Open communication, discussion, proactivity, empathy, collaboration with HR and emotional control are behaviors that reduce stress in employees (Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2008, pp. 12–13). There is also an external pressure to include EI in HR strategies: the current fast-paced business environment requires companies to develop themselves and create new competitive advantages, which makes it important and interesting for companies to have EI-related topics in their strategy – it helps them to nurture and develop one of their important assets, the people (Nafukho & Muya, 2014, p. 624).

2.3.2 EI models

There are several different approaches to EI, but three main models of EI models can be listed based on literature reviewed for this thesis: ability models, trait models and mixed models (e.g., Lanciano & Curci, 2014, p. 20; Goleman, 2004; Mayer et al., 2008). This thesis does not focus on the different models, but in

order to understand the origins of EI and the mechanisms related to the formulation of EI, the models are briefly presented and explained. Table 3 provides a summary of these three models.

Table 3. Emotional intelligence models

Author(s)	Model type	Main ideas	Measurement
Mayer and Salovey (2004), originated in the 1990's.	Ability model	Four-branch model: appraisal and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion and utilization of emotion, both a person's own and others' emotions.	MCSEIT-test
Bar-On (2006)	Trait model	"cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands" (Bar-On, 2006, p. 14)	The Bar-On EQ-I test
Goleman, (2004), originated in 1990's.	Mixed model	EI has five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills. A mixture of abilities and traits, since e.g., self-regulation is related to temperament and motivation skills learned.	-

Mayer and Salovey (1990) ability model conceptualize EI to have three main mental processes: appraisal and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion and utilization of emotion, both a person's own and others' emotions. Therefore, EI has two sides: one's own emotion, and the more social side related to others' emotions. In their later article, Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2004, p. 210) presented more elaborate features of high EI persons with their four-branch model. These features include the ability to perceive, use, manage and understand emotions and their meanings better than low EI individuals. People with high EI also solve emotional problems easier, and they are usually verbally and socially talented, open and agreeable with others. They also note that high EI people tend to work in positions that involve a lot of social interaction, and they are good at describing their motivations, goals and missions. Mayer et al. have developed the MCSEIT -test for measuring EI.

Bar-On's (2006, p. 14) ESI model is a trait model, described as a "cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands" (Bar-On, 2006 p. 14). The ESI model is based on an individual's abilities of self-awareness and constructive expression of one's own thoughts and emotions. At the social level, the model is based on the awareness of others' feelings and ability to maintain and create healthy relationships. Based on this model ESI is the ability to succeed in both inter-

and intrapersonal relationships and manage different social situations well with good coping mechanisms and flexibility. (Bar-On, 2006). The Bar-On EQ-I test is based on this model.

Goleman's (2004) model is a mixed model. Mixed models see EI as a compilation of both constant personality traits and personal cognitive abilities, such as motivation, whereas ability models see EI as a set of cognitive skills and abilities, for example processing emotional information and regulating emotions (Zeidner, Matthews & Roberts, 2004). Goleman lists five key components of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Since it is a mixed model, some components can be seen as traits and some abilities, for example the ability to regulate oneself has to do with temperament and personality, whereas social skills and the ability to motivate others can be more a result of practice and experience. Goleman's definitions are the basis for newer models also, and Drigas and Papoutsi (2018, p. 5) have developed a "9-layer model" for EI, that has many similarities with Goleman's key components.

All models have many similarities and Raz and Zysberg (2014) found out that the brain functions are the same despite the model. They also note that it might not even be relevant to separate personality from cognitive abilities, since they interact with each other. Moreover, the EI model used as a base for EI training did not significantly affect training effectiveness (Mattingly & Kraiger, 2019, p. 142). As was mentioned, this thesis uses Goleman's definition of EI due to its practical nature and strong foothold in the field. It must also be mentioned that EI as a concept has received criticism due to the vagueness of the concept, whether EI can be distinguished as a separate skills or ability from "general intelligence" and due to its low measurability, heavy use of self-reporting in EI tests and the relevancy of the connection of EI and work performance (Zeidner et al., 2004). However, EI can be seen as an extension of intelligence or as being skilled in processing certain type of information (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). However, despite the critique, being aware of EI and understanding the concept might have positive outcomes, when individuals become more aware of their emotions and therefore might more efficiently manage and utilize them. The ways in which these skills present it real-life are discussed more in the next chapter.

2.3.3 Emotional intelligence in managers

In this chapter the key components of EI in managerial context are discussed. Goleman's five key components are used in this thesis. This model was chosen due to its popularity and clarity. Goleman's model has a strong foothold in the field, and it has acted as a basis for other models too, such as Drigas and Papoutsi's (2018) model. The skills and abilities presented are based mostly on Daniel Goleman's list of EI skills (self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills), supported with other literature and studies about the topic. The chapter will end with general notions about managerial EI:

Self-awareness and self-control

People with high EI are self-aware: they know themselves and they have reasonable expectations towards themselves, and they are honest with themselves and others. In practice, when one is self-aware, they recognize their own behavioral traits and how, for example, their own values and outside pressure affect their behavior – for example, a manager who has tight deadlines coming knows that it will be stressful but is able to control and be aware of their emotions, and even admit to others that she or he is stressed because of a certain situation. (Goleman, 2004, p. 85). Individuals who are aware of themselves can name their own emotions and find connections between their feelings and actions, they are reflective and open to feedback and not afraid to speak their mind, even under pressure. They are also able to make decisions under pressure. (Nafukho & Muyia, 2014, p. 629). For an individual working in a managerial position, such skills can help them to succeed in their work. EI also includes the ability of self-control. A manager with high EI does not let their emotions and quick judgements take over in difficult situations, but they will remain calm and professional. Being able to control emotions helps managers to build trust in their team. Additionally, it helps the company since employees who are able to control their emotions adapt to change better. (Goleman, 2004, p. 86.) Self-control also includes the ability to refrain from being impulsive and to think clearly and stay collected (Nafukho & Muyia, 2014, p. 629). Since Goleman's model is a mixed model, self-awareness and self-control can be seen as behavioral traits more than abilities – however, it must be noted that

Empathy

The most evident and maybe the most easily noticed part of EI according to Goleman (2004) is empathy. In a business context empathy can sometimes be overlooked, but it is still important. In the business context empathy means being more considerate with others' feelings and points of view in decision making and other processes. Goleman (2004) also mentions that in business context empathy may not be the same than e.g., with one's friends, but more about understanding and thinking about the current feelings of the other person in order to make reasonable decisions in each situation Empathetic managers discuss with and listen to their employees and aim to bring their team together. Additionally, for the company empathetic managers are an asset, since they are often able to keep talent and increase job satisfaction better than less empathetic managers. Having the ability to understand and react to the other person's emotional responses is crucial regarding the effectiveness of one's leadership. If a person is able to handle for example, a subordinate's negative emotions well, they can be channeled in a productive way. Therefore, to some extent, EI skills such as empathy are positively related to leadership effectiveness. (Edelman & van Knippenberg, 2018.) It could also be argued that especially in challenging or negative situations the manager's emotional intelligence skills are especially needed. Empathy is also important when thinking about the need for coaching leadership style in the future – for coaching and mentoring to work, a functioning relationship between the participants is needed, and also in this empathy is a key factor. (Goleman, 2004, pp. 89–90).

Interpersonal and social skills

Social skills are also a component of EI. Birknerová, Frankovsky and Zbihlejšová (2014) found significant statistical differences in self-reported EI and social skills between managers and non-managers, managers having high scores in all EI factors. Socially skilled people are able to utilize other people without manipulating them, maintain and create networks and find value in working with others and in general, socially skilled people often succeed in managing teams. However, sometimes they might put too heavy emphasis on networking and chatting, which for others can seem like they are not working at all. (Goleman, 2004, pp. 90–91), which in a workplace can cause conflicts. Therefore, the challenge for high EI managers is to maintain a credible image and at the same time, network and chat with their team and colleagues. In general, there are indicators that higher EI is linked to better and more collaborative conflict resolution skills, especially if these skills are taught (Jordan & Troth, 2016).

In more detail, workplace social and interpersonal skills include features such as trustworthiness, ability to act ethically, ability to meet targets and commit, adapt to different and multiple simultaneous demands and to come up with innovative solutions, motivation for the job and the willingness and ability to come up with new and innovative solutions. (Nafukho & Muyia, 2014, pp. 629–631). Since each organization is and has its own culture, in that scale managers and leaders can also benefit from EI skills, since they help them to understand the cultural behavioral norms of the company, and why acting against them might cause emotional reactions in other members of the organization. If managers understand the culture, they are able to utilize it in their work. (George, 2000.) Moreover, to some extent the organizational culture is a representation of leadership and HRM practices, linking managerial EI skills back to strategy.

Motivating others

Motivation is also linked to EI. Most good leaders are motivated by internal motivators, such as the willingness to help others or the willingness to make a change. They want to develop and do better and they stay optimistic and committed to the organization (Goleman, 2004, pp. 88–89). Therefore, high EI managers might be better in supporting the company in reaching their strategic goals and performing in a way that supports the company's strategy. Mayer et al. (2004) also argue that increased EI affects other abilities, academic performance, measures of relatedness and the ability to communicate in a motivating way EI links to leadership and management tasks also in the way that high EI individuals are able to motivate and make others move with creative methods, they want to help out and want to develop others, utilize people's different backgrounds and strengths, communicate well even in challenging situations and they inspire and step forward when needed and lead by their own example. (Nafukho & Muyia, 2014, pp. 629–633). Gardner and Stough's (2002) study results implicated that low EI can be linked with low effectiveness of leadership, whereas high EI can be linked

effectiveness in management and leadership and vice versa, making high EI managers better in motivating, planning and goal-setting tasks, highlighting the importance of motivation skills in managers.

General notions

When discussing EI in managers, some things must be noted. Managers themselves sometimes rate that they have better EI skills than people who do not work in managerial positions. They see that they are skilled in negotiations, considering different opinions and showing and controlling their emotions. Generally, in a business context, managers are expected and need to control their emotions more than other people. (Birknerová et al., 2014.) This can sometimes pose a challenge for evaluating EI in a reliable manner. However, this does not diminish the importance of EI in managers. For example, the results of Carmeli's (2003) study in the Israeli banking sectors senior managers supported the hypothesis that EI was linked with job satisfaction, high emotional commitment towards the organization and their career, smaller work-family conflicts, stronger altruistic behavior, better job performance and smaller withdrawal intentions.

Therefore, high EI has various positive effects on managers, both in their work and family life, and the subjective positive effects of managerial EI can balance out the challenges in accurately measuring and "proofing" the EI level of managers – in practice, it could be argued than to have some subjective effects of EI is better than none, even though the effects were hard to measure. However, EI in managers cannot be discussed without acknowledging the other side of the coin, and Abraham (1999) raises the negative effects of EI in the workplace. Radical honesty about emotions can increase conflicts and high EI individuals might have the temptation to use their skills to e.g., manipulate others, and on the other hand, high EI can, in some cases, increase the ethical conflict that an individual might experience with their job. However, she also proposes that there are positive sides to EI, such as reduced stress, increased commitment and performance, reduced job dissatisfaction and increased organizational citizenship. Resma and Tabassum's (2017) study's respondents supported the view that EI skills strengthen the organization they work in, and they linked EI with high-performing individuals and enhanced career development. Therefore, despite the possible threats, various positive effects of managerial EI have been recognized, again emphasizing and justifying the importance of managerial EI skills.

2.3.4 Emotional intelligence training

In academic literature, there is not a single, set paradigm regarding EI training, its effectiveness and how it should be organized or offered to managers or other employees. As was mentioned earlier there has been criticism towards the whole concept of EI and whether it can be learned and measured in a reliable way. However, various studies support view that EI can be increased with training, and therefore justify the use of formal EI training for managers. Gilar-Corbi et al's. (2019) results showed that with time, EI training for

managers improved their emotional understanding and emotion management. However, some skills, such as intrapersonal EI, self-expression and stress management, among others, stayed at the same level as pre-training. Grove et al.'s (2010) study showed that when using the Mayer and Salovey EI-model, EI scores increased with training when compared to a control group that was not offered training. Mattingly and Kraiger (2019) found in their meta-analysis that in general, EI training has a moderate positive effect on EI scores. By developing EI skills employees can increase their productivity and performance in their own tasks. To add to the importance and justification for EI training, Reshma and Tabassum's (2017) study showed that among the respondents there was a positive attitude towards learning EI skills. Half of the respondents also felt that EI skills help them in making good decisions and understanding their points of development. Their results conclude that EI skills are beneficial to the company, since they help the organization in reaching their goals.

Moreover, the results of Clarke's (2010) empirical study suggest that 6 months post a 2-day EI training, in general project managers' skills and abilities to understand emotions were increased. Therefore, EI training is a long-term project, and a single training might not provide immediate results, which needs to be noted when planning the training. Slaski and Cartwright's (2003) study regarding a 4-day EI development program indicated significant increase in participant EI tests compared to the control group. Additionally, the EI program increased well-being at work, but there was no effect on performance – however, EI is hard to measure statistically, and it could be argued that any positive effect of EI is better than not including it at all. An empirical study with 3rd year medical students showed that EI workshops developed the participants' EI abilities compared to the control group. In their feedback the participants gave positive feedback that the EI training had helped them to manage their emotional responses and see different points of view. Their negative feedback was mainly related to the trainers and the conduction of the training, e.g., lack of coherency. (Fletcher, Leadbetter, Curran & O'Sullivan, 2009.) Therefore, there is relevant evidence for the efficiency of EI training and also in general, managers and other participants of the trainings have positive experience and attitude towards training.

Despite the fact that EI has been linked with effectiveness in leadership, due to the current ambiguity and vagueness of the concept, management training and development should not rely solely on EI training. However, managers and leaders probably benefit from familiarizing themselves with EI, and EI training could be embedded as a part of the general training. (Fambrough & Kaye Hart, 2008.) Farnia and Nafukho's (2016) results imply that not all EI training has a positive effect, and it must be noted that EI as a concept is still relatively vague. There are also risks for EI misuse, which must be kept in mind. Additionally, there are still some disagreements whether EI training can provide statistically measurable differences in EI skills (see e.g., Muiya & Kacirek, 2009). However, Dulewicz and Higgs' (2004) statistical evidence supports the view that EI can be improved with training. Additionally, Groves, Pat McEnrue and Shen (2008) point out that many of the earlier studies regarding the effectiveness of EI training have several limitations, such as control groups, measuring training effect immediately post-training rather than several months later, or the use of conceptually

vague EI models. Groves et al. (2008) mention that when considering the effectiveness of EI training, the model used to measure EI is crucial – with trait models that define EI as a personality trait, which rarely change, it is quite evident that there are no significant changes in EI scores.

In conclusion, it could be said that there is enough relevant academic knowledge that supports the effectiveness of EI training. It must also be acknowledged that EI is hard to measure, and as Groves et al. (2008) mentioned, many EI training-related studies have had several limitations. Therefore, EI training should not be planned or offered with the sole idea of improving profits or measurable performance in mind. Results can be visible only after a long time, and it is natural that changing a behavioral habit can and will take time. EI training requires careful planning, since EI can be contextual, i.e., it exists only in a certain social context (Lanciano & Curci, 2014, p. 20), and the participants of EI training need to be familiar with the environment they are in in order to be emotionally intelligent (Salovey and Grewal, 2016). This, yet again brings out the importance of aligning all training, including EI training, with the strategy and HR practices of the company – including for example the company's strategic goals, leadership philosophy and other HR goals and practices. To succeed in that, collaboration inside the company is needed. However, it could be concluded and summarized that EI has linkages to many areas of leadership and in general, EI skills are beneficial to every leader. This argument combined with the support of academic literature for EI training, the importance and need for EI training and EI in business context in general can be justified.

2.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study aims to present ways to integrate training, and in more detail, emotional intelligence training as a part of strategic HRM. The theoretical framework is presented in the figure 1 below:

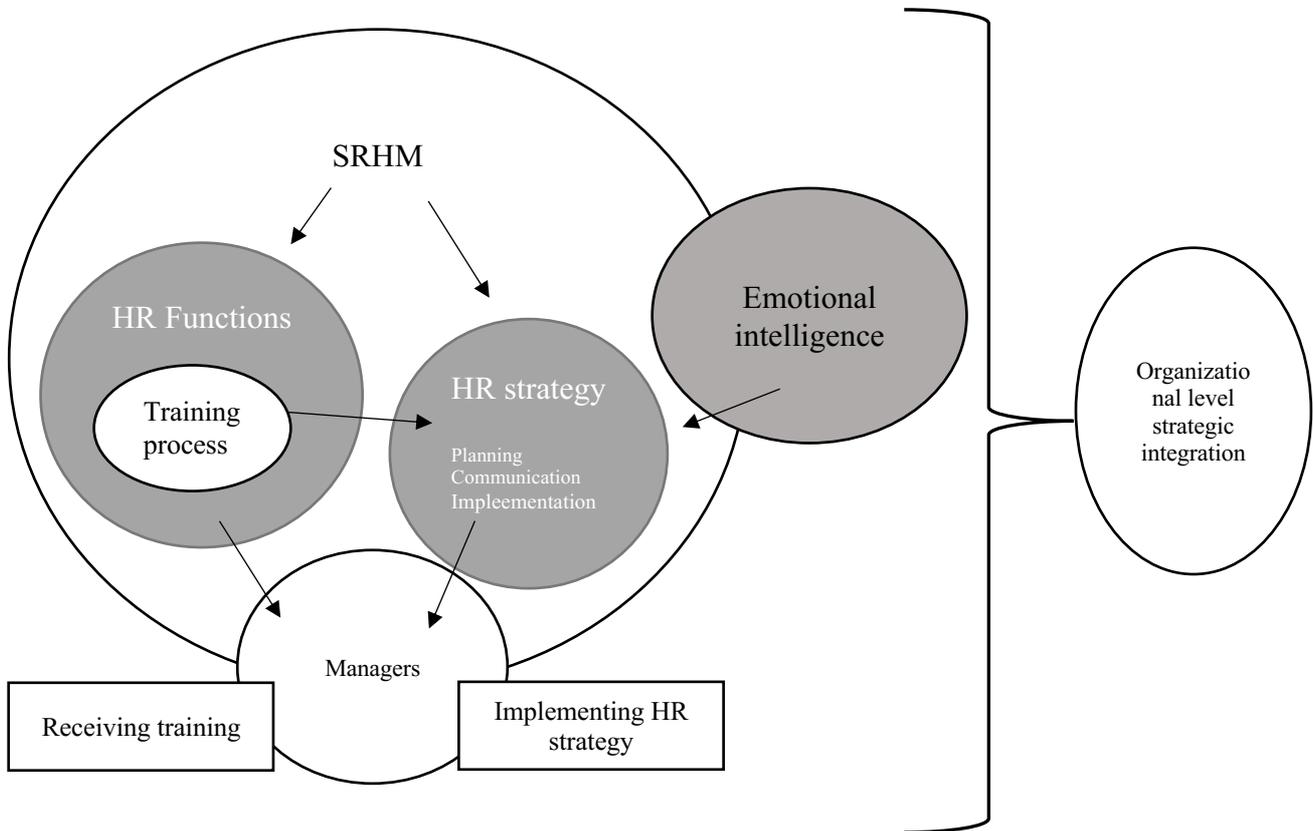


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the thesis

The theoretical framework of this thesis is built upon the need to strategize and to better integrate EI training as a part of the HR strategy and the SHRM process. Moreover, how EI training should be offered and communicated to managers to help them implement it and understand it as a part of HR strategy. The theoretical framework is built SHRM studies, presenting the different HR functions and the strategy formation process in HR. From there, training as a SHRM function is examined, followed with a discussion about strategic training planning and conducting the training itself. In the last part of the theoretical framework, EI in the workplace context is presented and discussed in order to understand which EI skills are important and how EI is presented in managerial context. The theoretical framework also includes the role of managers in SHRM and training processes as training receivers and HR strategy implementors. To conclude, the common thread in the theoretical framework is the strategic orientation and integration, whether it is the HR function, training or emotional intelligence.

3 Methodology

In this chapter the method and research design of the study are presented, justified and discussed. In 3.1. the research philosophy is presented. Chapter 3.2. provides presentation and justification for single qualitative case study method. In 3.3., the data collection and sampling processes are presented and in 3.4. the data analysis process is presented. Lastly, in 3.5. the case company, Lindström Oy is presented.

3.1 Research philosophy

All research is based on philosophical choices that guide the researcher and the aims of the research. This study is based on interpretative relativist research philosophy, that has also guided the choosing of the research method and data analysis. The epistemological assumption for study is interpretative. Knowledge is seen as what the individuals interpret it to which is a common epistemological choice in qualitative case studies (Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabeer & Waseem, 2019 p. 6) and that knowledge is constructed and created through social interaction (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Therefore, this study follows the interpretative research paradigm, which was chosen due to the nature of the topic, which is very socially constructed (Rashid et al., 2019 p. 4). In interpretative paradigm information is subjective and based on “shared meanings”, studying for example the ways in which people understand social situations and meanings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This research philosophy was chosen for various reasons. Case studies “assumes relativist ontology”, starting from the idea that not a single truth exists, leaning on the idea that knowledge is constructed on social interaction and also interpreted socially (Rashid, et al., 2019, p. 3). The topic of this study in general is highly subjective and social, which requires the research philosophy to support the view that an objective truth cannot be found when studying a topic like this. The contextuality of this study has acted as one of the key factors for choosing and guiding the research philosophy; with a contextual and socially constructed topic, a more objective philosophy would not have served the needs and aims of the study.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, abductive and inductive research approaches are followed. The topic of the study is new, and the field is very fragmented and therefore a deductive approach to test a theory or a hypothesis would not have sufficed. Abductive style aims “to understand social phenomena in terms of social actors’ motives and understanding” and it does not aim to test one theory, but to understand meanings of certain social phenomenon and use various theories and therefore, build a framework based on those (Rashid et al., 2019, p. 4). Abduction aims to take what people say, describe and give meaning to in their normal speech and transform them into categorized themes which help to form an understanding about the meanings and describe the subject of the study. However, the data collection and analysis method are very inductive, since it does not base on some theory but on the empirical data. (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008.)

The research philosophy and the method chosen are described in the figure below. More discussion about the chosen method is provided after the figure.

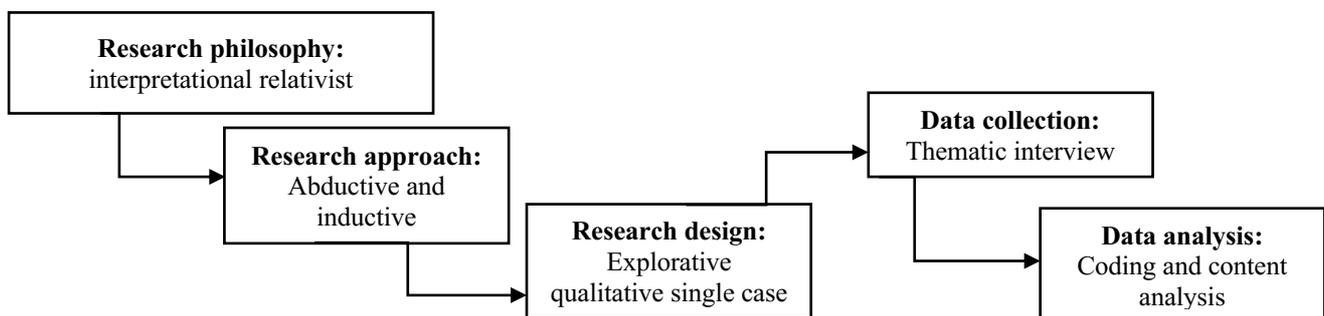


Figure 2. Research philosophy and methodology.

Next in this chapter single qualitative case study is presented and discussed.

3.2 Single qualitative case study

The research philosophy has guided the choice of qualitative single case study method for this study. Scientific studies are often divided in two main categories: quantitative and qualitative studies. Qualitative research differs from quantitative in a way that the aim of qualitative research is not to create statistically generalizable knowledge or data, but it rather aims to describe and interpret a certain phenomenon. (Tuomi & Sarajävi, 2018). Moreover, qualitative studies study social phenomena and the meanings, attitudes and ideas behind these phenomena (Vilkka, 2015). Due to the social context, qualitative studies typically aim to describe and examine versatile, real-life situations that are happening at the moment, in a holistic and broad way (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2007) and they aim to describe and interpret a certain phenomenon (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018), whereas quantitative research aims to formulate results that are generalizable and statistically significant (Vilkka, 2015; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Therefore, one typical feature of a qualitative study is that it does not aim to find the absolute truth regarding some issue, but rather unravel the meanings and thoughts of groups or individuals regarding the studied topic (Vilkka, 2015). One of the main features of qualitative studies is that they use qualitative methods, such as different types of interviews, to collect data. In this way, the researcher is able to collect in-depth data and utilize the opinions and voices of the people who are being studied (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007, p. 160).

A single qualitative case study examines one specific case, and it involves the definition, analysis and the solution of the case. The case is the object that is studied, and the case can be an individual, a phenomenon, an organization, part of an organization, a certain process, situation or a protocol (Vilkka, 2015). In case studies, what, how and why -questions are often crucial, as they are in quantitative studies in general. (Eriksson &

Koistinen, 2005; Baxter & Jack, 2008). Literature shows that there are different types of case studies, such as intrinsic, explorative and instrumental studies (Stake, 1995, p. 3, cited in Eriksson & Koistinen, 2005). According to Stake (1995, p. 3, cited in Eriksson & Koistinen, 2005), intrinsic studies often arise from the author's own interest towards a certain, special topic. This case has these features, because the writer is an HR employee in the case company and therefore has detailed knowledge about the situation and the challenges that the company faces. This thesis also has explorative features, since it aims to produce new processes and information for the case company.

According to Vilkka (2015) qualitative single case studies are a suitable method in situations in which the subject of the study can be strictly limited, and a wide theoretical basis is used as a foundation for the research, and the research happens in the subjects' natural environment, i.e., not in a laboratory setting. In this study, a case study method was chosen because the subject is quite strictly narrowed down, however the theoretical basis for this study is quite broad, covering three categories: SHRM, training an EI. Additionally, this study happens in a real-life environment, and topics such as HR and training are hard to study without acknowledging the effect of context: all companies are different and have different goals and cultures, which strongly affect the way in which HR practices and trainings are conducted. Case studies examine a current phenomenon that is happening in the present (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2005, p. 5) or sometimes in the past (Vilkka, 2015). In this study, the subject of the study is the company's strategy and training, which can be labeled as parts of the HR function. Some writers argue that a whole company can be too broad to be considered as a case (*ibid*) but in this study, the focus is on the HR function of the company, and there is a clear target group the training is planned for, and as Vilkka (2015) mentions, a part of an organization can also be considered as a case.

3.3 Data generation

In case studies, data is often collected from multiple sources. Different types of data often deepen the author's understanding of the case and naturally, create richer information for analysis (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2005). In this study, primary data will be collected from thematic interviews with clerical managers and HR professionals and secondary data from the company's latest sustainability report. Interviews are a very common way of conducting qualitative research (Vilkka, 2015) and in qualitative studies people are often the main source of data, however other sources (e.g., documents, tests and forms) are often also used (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The annual report was used as secondary data to give context and background for the interviews. Interviews were chosen as a data collection method because they produce both experiential and factual data in an effective way, allowing the participants to share their unique experiences, ideas and emotions. Free discussion may help to create more relevant data than a survey would, which can add value to the research (Saldaña, 2011, p. 32). In qualitative studies, interviews are often the

mainstream data collection method (Vilkka, 2015) and interview styles can range from highly structured list of questions to a completely free discussion between the interviewer and the participant (Saldaña, 2011, p. 33).

In this study, thematic interviews were used interviewing method. In thematic interviews the most crucial themes regarding the subject of the study are selected and then discussed in the interviews. The idea behind thematic interviews is that the themes are not discussed in a certain order or structure, but the aim is to find the interviewee’s own perception on the themes (Vilkka, 2015) and the structure of individual interviews can vary, and the questions asked in each interview can be different also (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). For a qualitative case study, thematic interviews are beneficial in the sense that they allow direct communication and interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, allowing flexibility in the data collection phase. The use of interviews is justified in cases like the one at hand, when the study aims to study a relatively understudied topic and therefore, there is a need for an in-depth, wider range of knowledge (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007). Additionally, thematic interviews allow free discussion, and the method leaves room for additional questions and clarifications (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018).

Thematic interviews were chosen as a method also due to the wide topic of this thesis: a very structured interview may not have supported the discussion which involved three relatively big themes that, however, are strongly linked with each other. Despite the advantages of thematic interviews, other quantitative methods could have been used. Surveys about the trainings and strategy could have been used to produce data about the managers ideas and needs regarding EI training and strategy. However, Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) mention that in a sense interviews and surveys can serve the same purpose, but the flexibility and the chance to observe a situation first-handedly make interview a beneficial method, since interviews allow the interviewer to ask additional questions. On the other hand, with surveys a wider sample could have been produced, therefore creating a broader spectrum of managerial experiences and views on EI training. Surveys also allow the researcher to create and test a hypothesis, since the number of respondents is bigger (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). However, this study does not create or test hypotheses but it studies meanings and understandings of the topics. Interviews were also chosen over surveys for anonymity. Vilkka (2015) mentions that especially in business and other organizational contexts quantitative measures might cause an anonymity issue. Additionally, in the case company, managerial positions are somewhat similar and same training is offered to all managers (e.g., sales, support functions and production) and they therefore face same challenges and share same experiences, which is why the choice to interview only a small group of managers and HR professionals in a thematic interview was made. The interview themes are presented in the table below.

Table 4. Thematic interview themes and focus areas

Thematic interview themes and focus areas	
Interview theme	Focus area

Training	<p>Managers</p> <p>Supporting own work</p> <p>Link to HR strategy</p> <p>Needs and wishes regarding trainings in general</p>
	<p>HR professionals</p> <p>Strategic linkage</p> <p>Development and future needs</p>
HR's role	<p>Managers</p> <p>Supporting own work</p> <p>Collaboration with HR</p>
	<p>HR professionals</p> <p>HR's role in supporting managers</p>
HR strategy	<p>Managers</p> <p>HR strategy in their work</p> <p>Importance</p>
	<p>HR professionals</p> <p>HR's linkage to company strategy</p> <p>Strategic goals</p>
Emotional intelligence	<p>Managers</p> <p>Definition and understanding</p> <p>How it is visible in own work</p> <p>Strategic linkage and importance</p>
	<p>HR professionals</p> <p>Definition and understanding</p> <p>Background and reasons for integration</p> <p>Strategic linkage and importance</p>
Emotional Intelligence training	<p>Managers</p> <p>Attitude</p> <p>Ideas</p> <p>Special needs and wishes</p> <p>Method for training</p>
	<p>HR professionals</p> <p>Method</p> <p>Practicalities</p>

The thematic interview themes were based on the research question, literature review, which helped to set the context and acknowledging the unique context of the case company. As can be seen in table 4, the interview themes were relatively same and relatively broad. Managers and HR professionals did not have totally same themes because they have different points of views and their interviews brought different expertise on the topic. However, this was intentional since the author wanted to leave room for free discussion and to allow the interviewees to freely express their own ideas and thoughts, and additionally, since the topic of this study is broad in general, it was seen as more feasible not to ask very strictly limited questions about such a broad and general topic. The themes and some further explanation on what the theme cover were sent to all interview participants so that they had a chance to familiarize themselves with the themes if they wished, but the participants were not expected to study or familiarize themselves with the themes in advance. The interview themes were discussed in somewhat same order in each interview, but if the discussion steered into different direction, the suitable theme was discussed, i.e., there was not a certain order for the themes.

Managers were interviewed because they play a crucial role in implementing the HR strategy and participate in the training. Therefore, it is important for them to have a voice in the process, in order to motivate them and give them a chance to influence on the HR strategy work. Sampling of the managers was based on certain criteria (workplace, position and availability) and volunteerism. The criteria were the following: working in a middle-managerial position in the Finnish organization with a team of clerical employees. Global positions were excluded to rule out the possibilities of cultural differences in leadership. Supervisors without clerical subordinates were excluded because the study was limited to clerical employees and the nature of production level employees differs a lot from the clerical managers because their position is not managerial but more “shift supervisor” type position. Managers who were absent from work were also excluded due to availability issues. Clerical middle-managers working in Finland were chosen as interviewees because they deal more with emotional issues such as stress, burnouts and such and based on the author’s knowledge about the company and different managerial tasks, they also have a background that makes them suitable as interviewees. Some of the clerical managers worked solely with clerical employees, but some of them had subordinates who had production employees in their teams. In this way, the interviews were able to explore different perspectives on leadership in the company and help to find out more about general ideas regarding EI, strategy and SHRM, rather than only focusing on certain manager group (e.g., sales).

The HR professionals were asked to participate due to their professional expertise regarding the topic of this study. The HR professionals were asked directly whether they would be willing to participate in the interviews, which they agreed to. The HR team, in which the author also works in, were aware of their team members’ participation, but otherwise this was not advertised in the company. One of the HR professionals is responsible for HR strategy and has overall responsibility of local HR and the other one is responsible for training process as whole. This is why top management was excluded due to availability and anonymity issues and. Top

managers are not as directly involved in the local HR strategy process as the other HR professional, which together with anonymity and availability issues was one reason to exclude them.

In practice, a list of all managers working in Finland was pulled from HR information system. List included over 170 employees. Managers working in Finland, but in a global position, were excluded from the list, as well as employees in managerial positions, who did not have clerical employees as their subordinates (i.e., they had a “manager” title, but not subordinates). Additionally, top management (Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Senior Vice Presidents, and Vice Presidents) were excluded from the list. Excluding the HR professionals, the author did not personally know the interviewees. If they had had any contact before the interviews, it was an email or a phone call regarding an HR issue. For example, Saldaña (2011, p. 34) argues that interviewing “strangers” can be a good thing, since then there is a smaller chance on presumptions regarding the other person, and more things are laid out loud since the persons do not know each other. The remaining 51 managers with clerical employee teams working in local positions were sent an email from the author’s company email address on 13.1.2021, explaining that she is working on her thesis, what the topic and method are, and offering them a chance to influence future trainings by participating in the interviews. Total ten managers signed up as volunteers, out of which six were interviewed during January–February 2021. Four managers who signed up as volunteers were not interviewed due to scheduling and availability issues.

There has been debates on how many participants are needed for qualitative study interviews, ranging from three to twenty participants, and some argue that interviews should be concluded until data is saturated, i.e., no new information is gained through the interviews (Saldaña, 2011, pp. 33–34). However, Saldaña (2011, pp. 33–34) also notes that since there is not a clear number on how many interviews is enough, if there is enough data to conduct relevant analysis, then there are enough interviews. Therefore, the total 8 interviews were seen as a big enough amount, and also sufficient when thinking about the resources and time used for this thesis. Interviews were conducted in Finnish, which is the native language of both the author and the interviewees. Interviews were decided to be held in Finnish in order to ensure free and elaborate discussion, as well as to make the interviewees as relaxed as possible and not put any pressure on them by making them speak in English. All participants were told that interviews were being recorded and later transcribed. Interviews produced total 68 pages of transcribed material. Participants were also informed that full anonymity is guaranteed and that the recordings will be destroyed after they have been transcribed. The interviews are summarized in table 5 below:

Table 5. Summary of interviews

Participant	Date	Duration	Transcribed material
Manager 1	26.1.2021	31 minutes	7 pages

Manager 2	27.1.2021	49 minutes	9 pages
Manager 3	27.1.2021	35 minutes	9 pages
Manager 4	28.1.2021	30 minutes	7 pages
Manager 5	28.1.2021	56 minutes	14 pages
Manager 6	12.2.2021	50 minutes	8 pages
HR 1	29.1.2021	35 minutes	8 pages
HR 2	2.2.2021	30 minutes	6 pages

The participants were voluntarily taking part in the study. They were informed about the nature, topic, publicity and aims of the study. Participants were guaranteed full anonymity, i.e., their name, gender, title or department in which they work will not be revealed. The participants are told how the information is used, stored and destroyed afterwards, which is also an important part of confidentiality (Byrne, 2017b). In some studies, some information about the participants is given in the study, but in this study a decision was made to not disclose any information about the participants. This decision was made because the study was made inside the company in which both the author and the participants worked at, which can be a risk for anonymity. Additionally, the titles or other information about the participants was not seen as relevant for the study. If the participants mentioned something in the interview that could have revealed their identity or risk their anonymity (e.g., information about their department or other specific information, such as name of their own supervisor), in the quotes it was removed or anonymized in the findings part of this thesis. For example, if they mentioned the name of their supervisor or department, it was changed to “my supervisor” or “in our department”, which did not change the content of the interview quotes.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis method is based on the research philosophical choices and as was mentioned, this data analysis process follows both abductive and inductive research logic, which is an adaptable method for studies that are not based on certain theory (Rashid et al., 2019, p. 4). Abductive analysis can help to formulate a theory from the data by looking at surprising empirical findings on the light of various theories chosen by the author (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012 p. 169), but in this case the aim is to rather formulate framework around different literature, and therefore the analysis method is not strictly abductive, but has many abductive features. Data analysis also has some inductive features, since the analysis is very data-driven, not theory driven. These logics set the basis for the data analysis process. Furthermore, data was analyzed with a content analysis. Saldaña (2011, p. 10) defines content analysis as “the systematic analysis of text and visuals, media and/or material culture to analyze their prominent manifest and latent meanings”. Content analysis is a basic analysis method for qualitative research and moreover, many other analysis methods are in some way based on content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Content analysis aims to create a summarized and generalized

description of the subject of the study, however further analysis and thought on the material is often needed, since content analysis does not provide a full analysis. It rather helps to organize the data, and that is why content analysis has sometimes been criticized (ibid). However, as was mentioned, content analysis is a basic analysis method and due to the novicey of the author and the nature of the data generated, content analysis was chosen as a method. The fact that content analysis might not provide a full, throughout analysis of the data is noted in the process and the author will make further analysis on the data if needed.

Content analysis can be either data or theory-based, and in thesis the content analysis is done from a data-based point of view. Data-based content analysis aims to find patterns and/or narratives from the data. The matters that are searched from the data are decided before the analysis and after the analysis, data is simplified based on the chosen themes. On the contrary, in theory-based analysis, data is analyzed based on a pre-chosen theory. (Vilkka, 2015.) As was mentioned, this thesis and the theoretical framework of this study is not based on a single theory, and therefore, a theory-based analysis would not have suited the aims and the nature of this thesis. For the data-based content analysis, the transcribed material is read through and coded based on pre-set themes that are based on the interview themes. The coding is based on the content of the answer. In some cases, the question might have related to one theme, but the answer was related to two or more themes, out of which one related to the theme of the question and other(s) to other themes. Saldaña (2011, pp. 95–108) defines coding as a method for discovering different sections of data. Codes help to classify and create patterns in data, which is the aim of content analysis. Codes can be different: they can be either keywords, explanative or little pieces of the interview data that in some way for example summarize the idea of the theme at hand or are of high significance regarding the subject matter. After the coding process, codes can be classified into different categories and the categories can be reflected against each other and the links between them can be evaluated. (Saldaña, 2011, pp. 95–108).

These codes each represent themes, which in the framework of this study, is a part of the process of making EI training more strategic from a HR point of view. The interview themes and, respectfully the codes found the basis on finding out what already works well and what needs to be developed when it comes to HR's role, training and strategy. The interview themes were selected in a way that they help to seek answer the research question. Additionally, the interviews were used to find out what is the "starting level" for EI and EI training in managers. Based on theses, the codes mentioned in Table 6 were formed. On the first round, data was coded based on the content and the codes aim to describe the content of the code. After that, each theme was categorized in two categories: development and strengths. After that, a more in-depth analysis of the selected code was analyzed more in depth and common patterns of each code were found. When considering the data analysis process in general, a model presented by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2009, p. 144) is used to clarify and summarize the process of the data analysis of this thesis. The modified model is presented in the table below and it regards mainly the interview material.

Table 6. Data analysis phases

Phases	Actions
1. Transcribing the interviews	Microsoft Word dictating software
2. Listening and editing the material	Spelling errors, separating interviewer and interviewee speech
3. Material is coded in descriptive codes based on pre-set themes	TS; HRRMC; EIW; EIS; TIG
4. Material is analyzed	Finding patterns, differences and similarities
5. Material is categorized	Each coded theme is divided to different categories depending on the theme, e.g., current strengths and points of development, definitions, understandings, strategic linkage, importance.
6. Findings	Based on the analyzed material development suggestions for HR are produced and a training plan is created

Interviews were recorded and transcribed by using Microsoft Word dictating software. The software turns the recorded material into plain raw text. After this, the interviews were listened, and the software-made transcriptions were proofread and spelling, and other mistakes made by the software were corrected and the text was edited in a way that the interviewer and the interviewee could be distinguished. As was mentioned, the interviews were held in Finnish, and the material was transcribed in Finnish, analyzed in Finnish and the final analysis is presented in English in this thesis. Translations were made by the author and the quotes used in this thesis include both the original Finnish quote as well as the translated English one. Translations were made as accurately as possible, but some word choices might have been changed in order to make the quote more understandable, however keeping the same idea and message that the interviewee said.

To provide a practical example of the data analysis process, an example is given in table 7, which illustrates the analysis process of Manager 4's interview

Table 7. Example of data analysis process

Interview theme	Example from data	Code	Analysis note	Categorization
Strategy and training	<i>"The one I participated gave me confirmation in my work and it was good that things were discussed from a Lindström point of view"</i>	ST	Current trainings support strategy	Strengths
	<i>"There are linkages to strategy, and I think it has been good that we have gone</i>	ST	EI links to strategy	Strengths

	<i>to focus on the emotional side and that world”</i>			
HR’s role Collaboration	<p><i>“Yes, every time I have asked something or wondered about something; I have gotten help. And my own manager has forwarded questions to you, and then I have gotten the answer that do it like this, that I have nothing to complain about. It has worked well.”</i></p> <p><i>“It is quite challenging to find information from Intranet, however it is not only a HR problem, but a general one.”</i></p>	HRRCM HRRCM	HR gives support Information channels and communication need development	Collaboration / strength Collaboration, HR’s role / development point
HR strategy	<p><i>“Well yes, that [HR strategy] is one theme which has been left a bit loose, maybe for me, that what the expectations are. We certainly have gone through those with my own supervisor, but on a general level, that do we managers at Lindström have for example a common goal towards which we go.”</i></p> <p><i>“The We Care thing might be a bit too used, I don’t think that everyone agrees on that anymore”</i></p>	HRS HRS	Establishing common practices and themes Clarifications of terms	Development point Development point
EI in the workplace	<i>“A whole picture, that you can read in between the lines and interpret the situation and act according to that”</i>	EIW	Social skill	EI definition
EI and strategy	<i>“I understand yes, definitely it needs to be a part of the strategy because the personnel is the thing, like an important part of the company and its success and a poor HR strategy that doesn’t care about the personnel at all, like, doesn’t give a damn, I don’t think that the performance of the company is that good either. It might work like in North Korea byt not in Finland.”</i>	EIS	Employees give competitive advantage	Strategic importance
Training in general	<i>“I miss practical trainings, on like how to use a system”</i>	TIG	Help in using software regarding e.g., training sign-up	Development point

Table 7 provided a practical example on how the data analysis process was conducted for each interview. After all interviews were analyzed, the analyses were combined based on the categories and analysis notes of each interview.

The sustainability report was used as a secondary source of data to give context and background for the interview material. The sustainability report is a public document that includes a total 55 pages. Report is used to give context on the values, mission, strategy, personnel and leadership of the case company. The report was read through and sections that were related to company strategy, values, goals and SHRM, training and EI were highlighted. After this, the highlighted sections were analyzed in the light of the research questions and the main themes of the thesis: SHRM, training and EI. Regarding this analysis process, it must be acknowledged that since the author works in the case company, she is familiar with the material and the content of it, which has affected the analysis process and made it more straightforward and simpler when compared to the analysis of the interviews.

3.5 Case company Lindström Oy and limiting the topic

A case for a study can be chosen in many ways: theoretically, practically (Vilkkä, 2015) or based on convenience (Saldaña, 2011, p. 9). Vilkkä (2015) mentions that the knowledge and familiarity with the organization and its culture can be of help. The case company for this thesis is Lindström Oy, a Finnish family-owned, unlisted textile rental company. Lindström has operations in over 20 countries across Europe and Asia, and its headquarters are located in Helsinki. Lindström has both global and local operations (Lindström Oy, 2020; Lindström Oy 2021). The focus of this study will be on the Finnish organization that has approximately 1700 employees in 17 different offices around Finland. Of these 1700 employees, around 500 work in clerical tasks. Lindström Oy was chosen as the case for this study for practical and convenience reasons: Lindström Oy showed interest in the study and the author works in the company's local HR department and thus is familiar with the company and its culture. This study focuses on HR professionals and clerical managers working in the local operations in Finland. When considering the topic of this thesis, Lindström Oy is an interesting and relevant company for a case company. Lindström renewed their strategy for the years 2020-2025, making this a suitable time to examine the new strategy. The main idea behind the new strategy is to be the most sustainable company in the industry and to help the customers be more sustainable in their daily actions (Lindström Oy, 2020, pp. 4). The purpose of the company is to care for the people and the planet, and to encourage people to shine and companies to grow in a sustainable way. The strategic goals are the passion to improve, care for the environment, be a desired partner and become stronger. The company's values are profitable growth, long-term customer relationships, sustainability and the joy of learning. Key strategic areas are being the forerunner of the industry, easy to use for customers, sustainable solutions and integration,

(Lindström Oy, 2020, p. 5.) The strategy renewal has, on a local level sparked the interest and need in integrating EI in the HR strategy.

SHRM in Lindström Oy context is strongly related to caring culture. The company has a strong, “We Care” - culture, and they want to care for their employees and their employees to care for each other (Lindström Group, 2020). “We care” culture is part of the responsibility work and responsibility is executed through it at all company levels (Lindström Oy, 2020, p. 8). HR is responsible for developing and steering the “We care” culture and leadership skills, supporting managers in employee well-being related issues and offering them chances for development (Lindström Oy, 2020, p. 9). Lindström Oy sees that that happy and supported employees help create better customer experiences, and therefore, happier customers (Lindström Oy, 2020, p. 6). In practice and in management, this means that managers are encouraged to lead in an empathetic, empowering and caring way. Lindström Oy enforces this culture by offering all managers and supervisors mandatory training conducted by an external training partner. The training encourages and trains managers for coaching leadership. EI training will be used as an additional training for this training.

4 Findings

In this chapter, the findings of the analysis of the empirical data collected are presented. Chapter 4.1. provides background and context for the interviews by presenting the analysis of the sustainability report, helping the reader to understand the background and the context of the case company and the interviews. In 4.2. the findings of the interviews are presented in three parts: SHRM, training and EI.

4.1 Providing background and context: sustainability report analysis

In this part, the analysis of the sustainability report 2020 is presented in the light of three themes: SHRM, training and emotional intelligence. This analysis provides background and context for the interviews. This analysis helps to understand the overall picture of the company's HR strategy.

SHRM

The sustainability report presents the company's strategy for the years 2020–2025. Based on the analysis of the purpose, strategic goals and values, in the context of SHRM themes such as *“encouraging people to shine”* *“we care culture”* and *“people being the center of everything that is being done”* are important and set and have set the tone for the development of the HR strategy. Warmth and people-centricity could be seen as key points that guide the work of HR, rather than strict numbers or financial factors. Moreover, same values are guiding the leadership philosophy in the company. Moreover, based on the analysis, EI seems to fit into the HR strategy quite naturally, which can help the integration of EI and furthermore, on managers' end, the implementation of the HR strategy. The analysis shows that EI as a concept does not contradict with the HR strategy, since terms such as “encouragement” and “caring” can be found from EI-related literature also. Therefore, the company strategy offers a solid basis for the integration of EI in HR strategy.

The report also clearly mentions that HR is responsible for developing and steering the “we care” -culture and leadership skills, supporting managers in employee well-being related issues and offering them chances for development. Therefore, it can be argued that a lot of responsibility for the development of the culture and managers is on HR's shoulders, which requires a lot of actions and attention from HR. However, based on the analysis of the report, not many practicalities regarding this are not provided, which emphasizes the role of communication regarding these matters. However, it must be acknowledged that the report was published just after the strategy renewal and it is a public report, which can affect the detailedness of the report. The analysis of the sustainability report also shows that “we care” -culture is caring about diversity. In Finland, the company employs people from different cultural backgrounds and also people of different ages, which also adds to the diversity of the staff and requires more skills from the managers and also it is a notion for HR that this sort of

a theme could be a part of the HR strategy. Diversity and inclusion can be themes that require attention from HR. Based on the analysis, on an organizational level, HR should promote such themes and communicate the importance of diversity and inclusion to managers. This requires consistent communications from HR.

In the analysis of the sustainability report it was found that responsibility is an important theme for the company. Responsibility is one of the company's values and it includes social, environmental and economic responsibility. It also extends to high ethical standards, respect of cultures and maintaining a good reputation for the company so that it "*future generations can be proud of us.*" In the SHRM context, especially the social responsibility is important, and it highlights the culture of caring. Much of the social responsibility work is on HR's shoulders, and at this moment that it is a theme that might be less outspoken in HR's actions.

Training

The sustainability report mentions "*being the forerunner in the field*" and "*passion to improve*" as the company's key strategic areas and goals. Respectively, "*joy of learning*" is one of the company's key values. By including EI training as a part of the HR strategy, the company might improve their position as a forerunner, since EI might not be included in majority of HR strategies. These strategic goals and values can also help to justify the need for EI training to managers, which is an important part of the training planning and communication process. The actions that the company has taken show the passion for improvement. For example, their "we care" -training program and Growth Academy training platform, which in the year 2020 included over 60 trainings worldwide. The general atmosphere in the company and what can be interpreted from the report is that learning is a joy and there is a positive attitude towards it. Furthermore, importance of leadership training was highlighted in the report. Moreover, the company recognizes the effect of training and well-performing managers and leaders on customer experience: "*when we make our employees to shine, they can encourage our customers to shine.*" In general, the analysis of the report shows that the strategic importance of training is understood in the company and training clearly is a strategic tool. This sets a good basis for future EI training.

The analysis of the sustainability report showed that EI has been partly included in past training for managers. The "we care" leadership training has included themes such as "*leadership skills, emotional intelligence, in-team trust and increasing team efficiency by leading with your heart.*" This shows that previous training has included EI-related themes, but in the local Finnish organization purely EI training has not been offered before. However, past training sets a good basis for future EI training, since the analysis of the report shows that in general the previous training had received good feedback. The analysis also shows that some of the training has been international, and in the future training could be more locally targeted and coordinated, and for smaller groups to respond to the needs of local organizations. However, international and group-wide training is naturally needed on some occasions.

Emotional intelligence

Based on the analysis of the sustainability report, EI as a concept can be linked to many values and goals of the organization. The company's values are "*profitable growth, long-term customer relationships, responsibility and joy of learning*". EI can be traced back to these values at least indirectly. Both inside and outside the company this would, however, require communication about the link between EI, values and strategy. This could also help the strategic integration process of EI. The analysis of the report shows that EI is not a completely new theme in the organization, and was mentioned, EI related themes have been included in past training. However, for many, EI might be a new skill or something they have not focused on before, which offers some of the staff a chance to learn something new, which gives them *the joy of learning*. Based on the analysis EI can also be linked to social responsibility and sustainability. If the company wants to care for their employees, it requires that they are taken care of during hardships and challenges also. It requires certain skills from managers, which can be seen to be related to EI skills and other soft skills.

The analysis of the report also demonstrates linkage between EI and the "we care" culture. Many of the terms used in the report, such as "*leading with your heart*" and "*doing things together and giving feedback to each other*" show that EI is needed and fitting for the HR strategy. Employees probably understand the meaning behind these sentences, but in order to promote the strategic integration of EI in HR strategy, it would require that the connection to EI in particular would be made clearer. Again, this would require communication. In training, clarifications about the connection of EI and strategy are also needed, which comes back to the communication of HR.

4.2 Findings based on the analysis of the interviews

In this part, the findings of the interviews are presented and discussed. The findings of the analysis are presented in three sections: SHRM, training and EI, based on the three main themes of the thesis. Each section will include the analyzed findings of both HR and manager interviews and direct quotes from the interviews.

4.2.1 SHRM

This section covers the SHRM-related findings of the interviews. It examines interviewed managers' understandings about HR strategy and the role of the strategy in their work, the role of HR in the eyes of the managers and managers' work, communication and collaboration with HR and how these could be developed to enhance the strategic integration of EI to HR strategy. In general, the analysis shows that interviewed managers had a positive outlook on HR strategy and their perception was that HR strategy and especially the "We care" -ideas are visible in their daily work. Interviewed managers were satisfied with the HR department and they feel that collaboration with HR on an operational level is functional. To develop the role of SHRM

and the strategic integration of EI to HR department, clarifications about targets and expectation and more communication about the HR strategy are needed.

The analysis of the interviews demonstrates that the HR strategy is visible in the daily work of the interviewed managers. The analysis indicates that especially the “We care” -spirit and coaching leadership are the two main things that guide the work of the interviewed managers. Managers gave practical examples on how HR strategy guides their work and they talked very eagerly about how the company’s leadership practices and philosophies are visible in their work.

“I feel that it [we care culture] guides it, here in our office it is something that we say all the time, to my team members and amongst us managers. I feel that it has given us tools, like self-direction, that we don’t have ready-made answers, that sort of leadership practices. We do it here in our day-to-day life all the time. It has given us concrete benefits and I aim not to give ready answers to anyone, that we try to coach people to understand and learn that how we can forward things together.” (Manager 2).

This can be seen as a sign that the HR strategy and SHRM as a function has worked well in the past and amongst managers there is a general acceptance and enthusiasm towards the implementation of the strategy. When thinking about the integration of EI to HR strategy, this gives a good building ground for the integration. Positive attitude and understanding about the strategy, values and we care culture can be of help in integrating EI to the HR strategy:

According to the analysis, interviewed managers were satisfied with the HR department, but the role of HR in the managers’ daily work is rather limited, focused on the operative side. HR has a small role in their daily work and if support is needed in something, it is mainly related to the use of different software or in something that the interviewed managers do not do daily, such as payroll-related issues.

“I would say that it is, you know, weekly, monthly stuff, in a sense you don’t need HR for anything that often. Then when there is something like, payroll stuff, or anything, I have always gotten help, so there have not been problems.” (Manager 3).

“Yes, every time I have asked something or wondered about something; I have gotten help. And my own manager has forwarded questions to you, and then I have gotten the answer that do it like this, that I have nothing to complain about. It has worked well.” (Manager 4).

The analysis of the interviews demonstrates that on less operative things, such as supporting their leadership work or competence development, HR has a very small role, which can be a sign that the HR department is not as strategic as it could be.

“Well, in a sense it is important, but mainly in practical matters. When they have been dealt with, then like, recruitment, employment contracts, possible problematic situations, something like that, for that it is a very important function. That it exists and in my opinion our HR works well. But when it comes to training and like, competence development, I don’t recognize a very big activity at least towards myself. I don’t know if I’ve had my eyes shut, and on the other hand I have to say that I should take action and see for myself if there is something for me.” (Manager 1).

However, the analysis indicates that when the interviewed managers had greater challenges (e.g., reduced work ability, long sick leaves, team member underperformance) they received support from HR, and they were satisfied with the support they received. Therefore, the HR department has the skills and ability to support managers and collaborate with them also on less-operative tasks, but at this moment their role is very operative.

“I think I have, in my opinion [gotten support from HR], however I have a lot of experience from being a manager which can have an effect. There have been quite a few challenging situations, that I would have needed support in. And they are that kind that I have to get support, that I cannot solve them myself. So I do feel that I have gotten all the answers.” (Manager 2).

The fact that managers do not interact with HR on non-operative challenges at least partly explained through coaching leadership style, which emphasizes independence; managers might deal with their challenges on their own or with their own supervisor rather than with HR. Additionally, many of the interviewed managers had had a long career in managerial positions and therefore they might not need support in every bigger challenge they face. However, when it comes to managers who are in the beginning of their managerial career, they might need more support from HR. It must also be acknowledged that due to the independence of the managers, some issues that HR should be aware of might stay unknown to HR, which then can have negative consequences. To avoid this, communication between HR managers should be developed and clear frames on when to contact HR and when not could be defined.

According to the analysis, the main area of development in the eyes both the interviewed managers and HR professionals is communication. More communication clarifying targets, goals and strategic initiatives is needed to develop SHRM in the company and moreover, the strategic integration of EI to HR strategy.

There's quite a little of any practical instructions regarding this [we care culture], that in my opinion what it means is left for everyone to interpret. And you can twist and turn it all you want in your head and in your own actions. But like, how could we clarify it to be the same for everyone and then put it into action, and even how it could be used in a way that guides people to develop into the same direction.” (Manager 1).

The lack of clear communication and definitions of expectations and targets might lead to misinterpretation of the HR strategy. The analysis shows that “we care” culture was partly misunderstood in the company and it had in some cases led to behavior that was not aligned with the company’s leadership principles, such as not taking actions on underperformance of an employee.

“It cannot be like that emotions are only hearts and empathy. It feels that sometimes the empathy has gone a bit overboard. That it has gone like that it is just hearts everywhere and like, oh I understand you in all things and it is forgotten that we actually need to take things forwards and you cannot be just empathetic.” (HR 2).

“We also need to talk about this at some point, when we talk about in emotions in general that taking action on the hard things is also caring. That it is like neglection if you notice that something is not working, and you do not take action as a manager. And it is everyone’s responsibility to take action if you notice something and if we do not do this, it does not follow the We Care -culture.” (HR 2).

These misunderstandings regarding on what does the “we care” culture mean can be seen as a direct cause of lack of communication. With functioning and efficient communication, managers could better work according to the HR strategy, and therefore, promote the implementation of the HR strategy in general. Clear targets, goals and expectations also help to monitor how well the managers are doing and set clear development points for them. This is something that could be considered with EI also.

The interviewed managers wish for more active communication from HR to them. Interviewed managers do not need one-on-one support from HR, but more general information and communication that is targeted to all managers, for example about expectations and common practices.

“Well yes, that [HR strategy] is one theme which has been left a bit loose, maybe for me, that what the expectations are. We certainly have gone through those with my own supervisor, but on a general level, that do we managers at Lindström have for example a common goal towards which we go [...]” (Manager 4).

If practices, guidelines and expectations are not communicated for managers, it might make HR seem like a more operative function in their eyes, since the way in which HR communicates towards managers does not seem to be very strategic in their eyes. According to the analysis, the interviewed managers wished for clear communication about guidelines, practices and expectations, which gives HR a good starting point for the establishment of the communication.

“Yeah, I don’t know, maybe in daily work it [HR] is visible when – and of course I am a manager, the daily work that I do is with the people, and then there is the personnel management, and doing things around that, but I see HR more as a, for me as a manager it gives safety and like, support, and I have challenging, like what do I do in this situation... However, in some way I also see it in a way that you don’t have to produce everything for us, that we as managers need to be able to search for information and ask for it when we need, that it cannot be in a way that there is an expectation that HR does everything, and if they do not, I am not able to implement our strategy, because HR has not given me the instructions, that is not how it goes. I see it more like in a way, in my opinion, the fact that your team exists, that supports our strategy, because I have that, that if I need something, I know I will get it. So, I feel that in that way you are with me in the daily life, in the background, but managers need to manage by themselves, but you are still needed in the background” (Manager 5).

However, as seen in the quote above, the analysis also shows that the interviewed managers know they need to be independent in their work and they do not require HR to give them instructions on everything on a “silver platter”, but they would hope for more communication and visibility of HR on an organizational level, which could, again be of help when integrating EI to HR strategy and a way to develop SHRM in the company.

4.2.2 Training

In this part, the findings regarding training are presented and discussed. Training is discussed in the light of HR strategy; how current trainings have helped the managers to work according to the HR strategy and what is the role of HR in the training, how training is conducted, and how training could be developed. Current training for managers is based on coaching leadership style, which emphasizes e.g., empowerment and helping individuals to find answers and solutions by coaching them. According to the analysis, current training is strategic, but in general, more communication about the trainings is needed from HR to clarify the reasons and ideas behind the training. HR’s role in training is holistic, and they are responsible for the whole process. The analysis indicated that both HR and managers experienced that communication, IT-related issues and practicalities regarding training need to be developed. Based on the analysis, the EI training plan should include clear communication, target-setting, reasoning for chosen training and offer training in small groups with a coaching method, starting from the basics regarding EI and later, collect feedback from the participants.

The interviewed HR professionals had an in-depth understanding about the strategic nature of training. Based on the analysis, the interviewed HR professionals understood current and past training as the “basis” for future EI training, putting emphasis on elaborating or developing the coaching leadership style further. EI training was described as the “next step” to be taken in the training. This might be of help in the process of introducing EI training, since the integration process might be easier when EI is integrated “on top of” the previous trainings, rather than introducing something completely new.

“I totally agree that we could offer more training [...] But overall, in my opinion, the trainings serve the strategic points very well, but I hope that in the future we can offer more training related to leadership skills and self-reflection”. (HR 1).

“Well yes, coaching leadership surely is the basis for this whole thing, that we can bring the coaching take on the leadership, but the next step during this year, I don’t know yet what it will be in detail, but in some way, we will start from our own feelings from a managerial point of view [...]” (HR 2).

The analysis brings out that the interviewed HR professionals have aligned understandings about their role and responsibilities in the training process and understood that the whole process was their responsibility. However, interestingly the interviewed HR professionals saw the role of managers or other business functions was very small and described that HR has the overall responsibility of the training process. The interviewed HR professionals described that other functions give them insight and HR is responsible for the planning, rather than describing the process as collaborative with other business functions. In order to develop training, a more collaborative take on training could be taken in order to make sure that training is aligned with the company strategy too.

“I think that probably our role is to take this model forward and get insight from other business functions that to which direction we want to take this, that what are the goals. I also think we are organizing this as a whole, and now we have the emotional intelligence clinics as one of the goals, or whatever their name will be, and another new thing for this year will be having peer support groups for managers. So probably we will have the responsibility of those, and like, facilitating role in these support groups. And I try to take that role, like, I try to post stuff and raise different conversations in Yammer and say things, because I believe that if you raise things, it will create openness and then others will also notice that we can discuss about these things.” (HR 2).

Majority of the interviewed managers elaborated why certain training was being offered and on a surface level, they found links between strategy and training, however different opinions were also raised. The interviewed managers understood the strategic importance of training in the bigger picture and had a positive overall attitude towards it. According to the analysis, the interviewed managers had found past training useful in their work and it had given them tools to practice better leadership.

“It has helped, yes, because it exactly supports the idea that, I would say that our greatest strength is the people, that without them we would not be doing anything, whether it is in the laundry, business unit, or in specialist roles, without the people we wouldn’t be doing it. And the trainings support that, and they support that strategy, making sure that the managers who are leading these people are able to lead them in the right way and according to the strategy, so that the people have a chance to shine, and they are being supported, not only that you are there with a stick waving around, saying “not like that, not like that”. That I think that employees have a huge meaning and I think that it has been actualized, but I think that we can have more trainings that support the strategy, like from the employees’ point of view.” (Manager 5).

“Umm, I don’t know what that [the link between strategy and training] would be, because when you think about like good leadership, or being a good manager, well then... Maybe if you put it a bit provocatively, is that in our strategy? Or is it in all companies’ strategies? I don’t think that anyone is going to deny that it is important. In that sense I see it as a common topic despite the strategy” (Manager 1).

Despite the differing opinions on the linkage between training and strategy, based on the analysis, the overall attitude on training was positive. This provides a beneficial starting point for EI training and it can be seen as a positive factor in the integration process. If managers have good attitude towards training, they might be more eager to learn and furthermore, implement the practices in their daily life. All interviewed managers had undergone the mandatory (coaching leadership) training and overall, they had positive experiences from the training. They were satisfied with the content, quality and methods of the training and felt that it had been tailored to serve the strategic needs at the case company. Therefore, same practices could be utilized in EI training also.

Regarding the actual conduction of the training the analysis indicates that small group training, mentoring and coaching are preferred ways of training. Internal coaching circles and “clinic” type of training was also a preferred method.

“I’d say that a good thing would be that there would be small, continuing trainings, that people would know that what was taught it is executed in the right way, so that it not just left as one-time coaching leadership -training. There is now two in person training and a third, common meeting, but the good start could be continued, like in a year and continue through that, with other colleagues or so...” (Manager 6).

“Okay, that’s nice to know that we are in line with the managers’ ideas, because we have discussed in HR and also in collaboration with the training provider, that how we could create these coaching circles during this year. That is one big thing on the agenda this year”. (HR 1).

The analysis shows that managers learn best when they are able to discuss with their peers, rather than on a strict classroom environment. The coaching leadership style was visible in the answers, since being coached and getting the chance to understand and learn by oneself rather than being given ready-made answers, was visible in the answers. Coaching type of training would probably benefit the participants and create a sense of continuum when reflected on past training.

“Well, there are different forms [of training], and what I now think is that coaching is now a very popular method. And if the coaching would like be, that they would come outside the company, some coach would come outside, that would be extremely useful, I think we could achieve quite massive results with that.” (Manager 1).

If it is for managers, then, one good idea would be that there would be people from other companies also and so on. The ones that we’ve had have been nice, because there were managers from different functions, like from the laundries and from sales, and so on. That there are different viewpoints and then maybe you can get some tips to different situations then.” (Manager 3).

However, the analysis demonstrates that with EI training, training should start on a very basic level, by e.g., defining what does EI mean, and training should be well-targeted to fit the needs of a certain group. The analysis also shows that there were concerns among the interviewed managers on how the training groups are divided and there was not a clear consensus on whether groups should be formed based on knowledge level, title, department or random assignment.

“If we have people in the training from a large scale, then, first, in my opinion like definitions on what are emotions, or like start from the very basics and then self-awareness and dealing with your own emotions, what are the effects of these [...] (Manager 2).

” It should be considered like, who do we train, so that people could be somehow grouped, if we think like that, we will have people in the same starting level [...] (Manager 1).

“The direction [to which the trainings are going] is good, but there should be more scale, like targeted in a way that have you a recent recruit, been here for 10 years or 20 years. Like targeted coaching for that.” (Manager 2).

According to the analysis, the main areas of development regarding training are communication, practicalities and IT issues, which were recognized by both the interviewed managers and HR professionals. In some cases, the continuity in the training, communication and strategic reasons were not that clear for the interviewed managers.

“That [the need for more communication] is a good point. I think that at some point, when the whole coaching leadership thing [current leadership training] has started, there probably has been some communication about why, and why it is important for us. Of course, we aim to justify and argue the importance, but communication and changing a culture is repetition, so we aim to just repeat the same things about these topics and try to keep the conversation going” (HR 2).

In the analysis, some practical development ideas were generated: systematic and more organized training process, continuing trainings, follow-up sessions and from HR’s side some monitoring on whether managers participate in the trainings. Additionally, at the moment communication is too generic and does not go enough into detail. It should include more appealing material, more information and justification for certain type of training. Additionally, even though the interviewed managers had a positive attitude towards training, more activity to “push” training for them would be required from HR. The analysis shows that managers had not received enough information about the training from HR. This would require more attention from HR and increased communication would help SHRM to become more strategic, when managers would have increased level of knowledge about HR and training.

“I am wishing for more like, pushing the training, that these are important things for you, that there would be that support from HR also, that why you need to take part in this training, that there would be the vision that when we do this together, we will reach better results and we will keep our employees happy.” (Manager 2).

“[...] We have noticed here at Lindström that in general, there is not much talk about training, and for example, in development plans, well, it is not emphasized enough, or it is not marketed enough, and I maybe wish for that from HR’s side. That we don’t like it, we’re not excited about

it, and we don't bring it up enough in detail. And then it comes force-fed in my opinion. And some new content, marketing-wise, should be brought to the trainings and coaching, and I think that in this sense we have quite a poor situation, that we don't have much material about the content, and the material is just some sentences, that this training is like this or that. I feel that the content of the material should be produced in a more visual and visible way, now they are somewhere in Intranet [...]" (Manager 2).

Based on the analysis, lack of communication is not only a problem for HR. In order to develop training, communication needs to be two-way, and HR needs to receive feedback from training participants also and for example, the planning of the training should happen in dialogue with the participants rather than HR planning it alone. The analysis shows that the lack of feedback channels has been a hindering factor on the development of training.

"[...] some way towards HR from the training participants of staff, a channel which would give us more direct feedback, whether it is anonymous or something else, but something where they could leave feedback either from a training they have participated in or even wishes regarding training, because as was noticed here, I don't really know what the managers have talked about, what they wish for, that I hear it from my supervisor or from the training provider that okay, yes, they liked this, but that is that. That we don't have, that I am not very sure what sort of training our staff actually hopes for, so I think that a feedback channel towards us would be really good". (HR 1).

"I don't have anything special [needs] at the moment, but in a sense, the trainings have been like, that it has just been announced that we have this now, especially now during the pandemic. That I feel that maybe it would be good, to like, go through the training plan about what sort of a training someone could use, that now I feel that it has just been a given factor." (Manager 3).

The analysis raises various IT-related issues that needed development. Both the interviewed managers and HR professionals raised these issues. Communication channels used for the training are not easily accessible, managers do not know where to sign up for trainings and information is not accessible, but behind several links, sign-up process was complicated, and the analysis showed that managers did not know where to sign up.

"[...] I just recently learned, that, I don't remember which one it was, Mepco or HRIS, from some system you can see a list of all trainings, and I finally found it, and there it is, no one hasn't really [told about it]." (Manager 1).

Again, this is a result of lack of communication, because it would be unreasonable to assume that all managers would know where to look for training. The analysis demonstrated various development points in the HR system also: at this moment, it does not support training and it does not provide enough data of the trainings, allow to build training paths or collect feedback. Based on the analysis, developing the IT side would help with the communication and also it would help to develop training towards a more strategic direction when data could be gathered, and training processes could be monitored.

“I agree [with the interviewed managers] that there have been its own insufficiencies, that first off, if we start from the system-based things, in my opinion our HR systems has not fully served this, training-wise, and by this I mean that we don’t have, in my opinion, a system that is good enough that we could in a sense like keep track on who has undergone which training, and which could give us, good, factual information about what should be offered to whom, like a follow-up course, or something like that. And there is a lot of like, operative work to be done, so that we could build these trainings paths to be more systematic and, in a sense, more structured. And... then communications, of course, that is something we could always do more of, and that is one of the big things, that we would have it better marked down, and it would be targeted communication and news to managers and staff in general, and that in the future, we could create these, like, targeted career paths, or like role-based training paths and that is another big thing on our agenda” (HR 1).

The analysis shows that that EI training plan should include clear communication about the training process as a whole: goals, targets and providing strategic reasoning for the chosen training, which would help in motivating and engaging managers in the training. Training plan should include small group training with a coaching method, allowing the participants to learn by themselves by offering them tools to learn. Training should be monitored, and the plan should include a clear continuity. Plan should also include two-way communication by establishing dialogue with training participants and collecting feedback and utilizing it in the development process.

4.3.3 Emotional intelligence

In this section, the findings of the analysis of the EI related themes are presented and discussed. This section examines the interviewed manager’s and HR professionals’ understandings about EI, its meaning and importance in HR strategy and workplace context. Based on the analysis, the interviewed managers did perceive EI more through other people than through their selves and had a positive attitude towards EI. The analysis demonstrates that the interviewed managers and HR professionals saw EI as an important part of the

HR strategy and various reasons for its importance and strategic linkage were given. EI was also seen as an important skill in workplace context.

According to the analysis, the interviewed managers understood EI in three ways: social intelligence, ability to lead different people and self-control. The first and most common way in which EI was understood was social skills. This was linked to being able to be like *“a fish in the water”*, *“to be natural in any given situation”* and *“tactfulness and sensing the situation”*.

“[...] I can observe that this person needs clear instructions, that do like this, and this other person needs that I pat her on the shoulder and say like “hey, we will solve this together”. So, in a sense emotional intelligence is also that I lead every person in their own way.” (Manager 5).

The analysis shows that the interviewed managers had a strong emphasis on understanding EI through social situations rather than through their own thinking processes. This can, however, be explained through their position as a manager, since their work revolves mainly around other people. The analysis indicates that managers' practical examples about the utilization of EI in work environment highlighted the presence of another person and the social context of the situation. Even though social intelligence was, for the interviewed managers, the most common way to understand EI, it was not related to conflict resolutions or empathy, but more on being socially fluent and knowing how to act in a certain situation. This is somewhat contradictory when reflecting the understanding on the “we care” -spirit of the company and might be one point which could be emphasized in the HR strategy and EI training more. However, in managerial context empathy might not be so explicitly expressed, since managers are often required to and want to be seen as professionals and might not want to show too much emotion. On the other hand, empathy might be an underlying function that managers express but they do not do it explicitly or perceive it as a key skill in EI in managerial context.

The second way the interviewed managers understood EI was being able to lead individuals and respond to their differing needs. The analysis shows that managers held this skill in high value, and it was understood as skill that was somewhat undermined in the company and that it would be needed in the future. This section covered many areas of difference: age, stage in career (junior/senior), cultural background and in general the ability to lead very heterogenic groups. Based on the analysis, age leadership and being able to *“lead peoples' careers”* was an important aspect of EI for the interviewed managers. The analysis demonstrates that the interviewed managers experienced it as a difficult task and something that was not well-defined in the HR strategy and that the company does not have clear protocol regarding age leadership. Managers raised many concerns about this topic. Based on the analysis, this links back to the SHRM theme, communication and establishing clearer goals and common practicalities. Moreover, age leadership could be a theme included in the EI training.

“This [leading people of different ages] is something that is maybe sometimes completely missing at Lindström, that we lead the careers of people, that model is sometimes completely missing. In my opinion, supervisors in laundries do not understand what limited possibilities are of a 55-year-old employee compared to a 25-year-old employee.” (Manager 6).

According to the analysis, the third way in which the interviewed managers understood EI was self-control. It was related to control of one’s own emotions. The analysis demonstrates that the interviewed managers understood the self-control skill as helping them to respond and react better in different situations.

“A type of sensitivity to read different situations and the skill to listen and like, good consideration, like how will I react in this situation. When I have heard something, how I react and how I act now.” (Manager 1).

“At least that, I feel that it means, for an individual, that, if you are an emotionally intelligent person, you can control your own feelings, and also manage, and to, mm, control different situations better” (Manager 2).

The analysis also shows that the interviewed HR professionals’ perception on EI had a stronger emphasis on self-awareness and self-control than the interviewed managers did.

That when you in some way can like, think and guide your own emotions, so then you can better lead the emotional atmosphere or the emotional climate in the company or in a team [...] Something that we could think of is that when everyone has these situations, that I think it is a step forward that you are in a certain situation and notice that I always think like this, and my behavior is always the same. Then you look in the mirror and think that why is it so, is there a one certain thing that causes me anxiety or something that always makes me feel angry.” (HR 2).

“Well, in a sense, it in my opinion is, what is the most straightforward thing, is like self-awareness and self-reflection. That it will reflect directly on how you can then reciprocally receive the other persons’ feelings and how you react to them.” (HR 1).

The analysis demonstrates that the interviewed managers had a stronger emphasis on the social aspects of EI (e.g., social skill) than knowing themselves or being able to control their feelings. However, it must be noted that in general, managers might utilize self-awareness and self-control skills, but not consciously. Based on the analysis, the interviewed HR professionals highlighted the importance of knowing yourself and your emotions and they emphasized the role of managers’ self-awareness and self-control in EI more than social

skills. Additionally, empathy and motivation were areas of EI that based on the analysis, were not explicitly mentioned in managers' nor HR professionals' understandings. Therefore, empathy, motivation, self-control and self-reflection could be included in the EI training to help the participants gain a wider understanding about EI and to develop their skills as managers.

The analysis demonstrates that the strategic importance of EI was recognized and it was understood as a legitimate part of the HR strategy. The analysis shows that the importance was understood through the need for soft values, strategic emphasis on people-centricity, ensuring future competitive advantage, securing a place as a wanted employer, increased multiculturalism and market positioning.

“I believe that it would be a very important aspect if we think about our competitive competences. Like how Lindström is on the market. How do we manage to lead our people in a way that it produces good service, you do we succeed in leading ourselves and our people so that it is nice to work here and that we can attract good talents? Yes, so I can find the common thread there.” (Manager 1).

The analysis indicates that the interviewed managers and HR professionals understood the need for soft values and how they are linked to the “we care” -culture and the need to “move towards people-centricity and away from fact-centricity” and emphasized the importance of caring about people because “employee experience reflects directly on customer experience.” The analysis shows that both the interviewed managers and HR professionals perceived that EI helps them to build and implement the future strategy and to create competitive advantage by responding to the external pressure that highlights e.g., the importance of employee well-being.

“That we don't go through how turnover has developed or something, but hey, we are interested in what emotions you have, why is someone crying, why is someone feeling bad, what do we do then? I think that it is a very big step, and I am trustful that with the new strategy we as managers will facilitate people and I think that according to the strategy, everything starts from the people, the numbers and all we do, and we are going to the right direction.” (Manager 5).

Based on the analysis, EI skills were also seen as important future skills for all employees, not just for managers. Ensuring that the company can attract skilled employees in the future was a concern raised by based on the analysis, EI was one way to tackle that issue.

“I believe that the lack of employees is what it is in the future, but I believe that companies and organizations will be measured in emotional intelligence, and young people want to choose and organization that has succeed in leading emotional intelligence.” (Manager 6).

Furthermore, linking strategic importance back to the ability to lead different people, increased multiculturalism and team heterogeneity were seen as reasons to integrate EI to HR strategy. The analysis also shows the importance of EI in the company's market positioning and how they want to appear to others and the need to "stay up to date" and the "need to respond to other companies putting effort on leading emotions and leadership in general." These are things that could be included in HR's communication in order to help managers to better understand the strategic meaning of EI.

"I wish that we can at some point be a forerunner company, or that we are being benchmarked by others in that we have put effort in this emotional leadership, or could I say we have developed Lindström employees to have more emotionally intelligent way of working." (HR 2).

The analysis indicates that the interviewed managers and HR professionals had slightly different approaches on EI. The interviewed HR professionals mentioned things such as "psychological safety, which affects turnover and everything like that directly", "good emotional leadership has many sides" and "empathetic but firm leadership culture", which were not highly emphasized much by managers. Based on the analysis the interviewed managers' approach on the importance of HR was more practical and related stronger to their own job, when the interviewed HR professionals' approach was more on the big picture and the strategic goals behind EI. This can be linked to the need for HR to communicate clearer about targets, expectations and goals and highlight the expected leadership styles and philosophies more. However, it must be acknowledged that the different positions that the interviewed HR professionals and managers hold might naturally have affected their answers. However, the different approaches in their perceptions on HR can also partly be explained through lack of communication. With increased communication and training HR could improve managers' understandings of the meaning and importance of EI in the case company.

5 Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Summary of the study and main findings

This thesis studied ways in which the strategic integration of EI training into HR strategy could be developed. Moreover, this study aimed to find out what sort of a training plan should be created for managers' EI training and how HR can develop their practices to advance the strategic integration of EI to HR strategy on organizational level. The background of the study lays on the general increased need for EI skills in working life (see e.g., Lyly-Yrjänäinen, 2019) and the needs of the case company, since it has undergone a strategy renewal which requires the integration of EI training to HR strategy.

The theoretical framework of the study was formed by combining academic sources and formed from organizational and strategic perspectives around three main themes: SHRM, training and EI. This study combined SHRM, training and EI, studying a relative understudied area of integrating EI training as a part of HR strategy. The theoretical framework of the study is a combination of various theories and literature on the three themes. This study followed an interpretational relativist research philosophy, and the research method was a single qualitative case study. The case organization for this study was Lindström Oy, a Finnish family-owned textile rental company. Primary data was collected by conducting thematic interviews with six managers and two HR professionals. Secondary data was from the case company's latest sustainability report to give background and context for the study.

The data analysis process followed both adductive and inductive logics and included coding the material and analyzing it based on pre-set interviews themes with the principles of content analysis by finding patterns and similarities. Material was categorized based on strengths, points of development, definitions, importance and strategic linkage meanings in order to find ways in which the integration process could be developed, what sort of training plan should be created and how HR could develop their practices. Based on this, suggestions on developing the HR practices and the training plan were developed. The findings of the study provide answers to the research questions, which will be discussed next.

Based on these aims and background, the following main research question was formed:

How HR can develop their practices to advance the integration of EI to HR strategy from managers' point of view?

Two sub-questions were formed to help find answers to the main research question. Next, the answers to these sub-questions are discussed one at a time. The first sub-question was as follows:

What sort of a training plan HR needs to create in order to offer managers strategic EI training?

Stewart and Brown (2014) have proposed a model for training planning. It includes need assessment, plan, methods and evaluation. The findings of the study show that similar model could be of use in the case company also. In the planning, the needs for the company and the participants need to be mapped to formulate goals and objectives for the training. These serve as guides for planning the actual training, helping to design the training. The findings of this study indicate that the training plan should include pre-training assessments to formulate training groups and design the content. Since EI is a relatively new topic which can be unfamiliar to many, mapping current skills and understandings to design the training content can be beneficial. Training should be planned with long-term goals in mind and the trainings should have continuity rather than offering separate trainings that are not linked to each other.

To support the HR strategy and the managers' learning, training should be organized in small groups with a coaching method, that will not give the managers ready answers but tools to understand and learn about EI. Previous trainings that the case company has offered to managers have been conducted with a coaching method, to which managers have been satisfied and which have been efficient and useful. The use of familiar methods would help in the process of continuity, which was lacking in the current training process. In order to support the strategic integration, training should be targeted, and attention should be given to the forming of the training groups. As Rothwell and Kazanas (2003, p. 364) mention, online or multimedia training might not support all types of training, and in the EI training plan training should be in-person classroom training. In order to familiarize the managers with the topic, the training should include an introduction to the basics of EI, such as different definitions and meanings. After that, EI training could go into more detail into the topic. Based on the findings, the topics that could be included in the EI training are self-control, self-reflection and age leadership. The training plan should also include feedback and evaluation, as Stewart and Brown (2014) mention. The findings of this study also show that feedback is important for the development of the training. It can also be seen as a way to include the participants to the process and help them to influence to the future training.

Lastly and most importantly, besides the practical training plan, the plan should include communication plan and schedule also. Chandra and Shen (2009) highlight the importance of including the training participants in all stages of the training process, from planning to feedback and development. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of open, clear and active communication throughout the training process. The participants of the training need to be informed and included in every step of the training, from need assessment to feedback and evaluation. To promote learning and motivation of the participants, they need to be involved

in the planning process. HR should provide information about the reason for offering certain training, why certain method was selected, why certain people are participating, how and why the content is planned and selected, etc. Involving the participants and providing them justification for the choices made are, based on the findings of this study, one of the most important aspects of training plan. Furthermore, HR should take an active role in monitoring and offering training to managers in order to make sure that all managers have the possibility to undergo the training. To summarize the findings regarding the following figure is provided.

Figure 3. Summary of the training and planning process

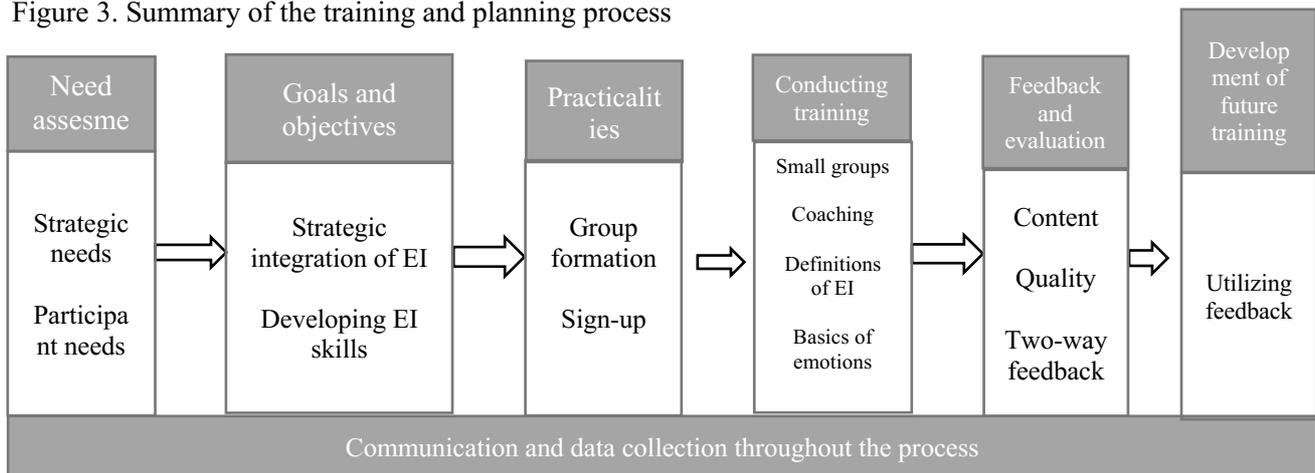


Figure 3 illustrates the training and planning process and highlights the importance of communication and data collection throughout the process. It can be noted that training has various positive effects on the participants. Patton and Marlow (2002) argued that managers in general have a positive attitude towards training and this can benefit the company also, which gives the company and HR an incentive to develop training and allocate resources in training. Next the answer to the second sub-question is presented and discussed.

How are EI and its importance understood in the case company?

Reflection of the findings shows that there is a positive attitude towards the EI in general among the interviewed managers and HR professionals. The findings also support the idea of the the importance of EI in the workplace, which again supports existing literature (see e.g., Carmeli, 2003; Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2003, pp. 12-13). Managers understood EI primarily as social intelligence. They also understood it as an ability to lead different people and self-control on practical and individual level. HR professionals emphasized the role of a manager and their skills and the organizational and strategic level more. Therefore, EI is understood in various ways in the company, which is quite natural given the rather broad definition of EI in literature (see e.g., Zeidner et al., 2004). The importance of EI was also understood in various ways: the need for soft values, strategic emphasis on people-centricity, ensuring future competitive advantage, securing a place as a wanted employer, increased multiculturality and market positioning. These meanings can be linked to the company strategy, however in order to develop the integration of EI to HR strategy, the definition and importance of EI

in the context of the case company should be communicated in order to formulate a shared understanding about EI, which could help the integration process and furthermore, the managers to work according to the expectations and goals.

As an overall summary and conclusion for the findings of this study it could be stated that with developed communication and justification about goals, expectations and common policies and with the development of IT infrastructure to advance the collection and use of data, the case company can advance the integration of EI to HR strategy. Moreover, the suggested training plan can be of help in this process and the revealed understandings about EI and its importance can be utilized in the training and integration process. Based on the answers to the sub-questions, next in this chapter the answers to the main research question is presented and discussed.

How HR can develop their practices to advance the integration of EI to HR strategy from managers' point of view?

The reflection of the findings shows that in order to develop the strategic integration of EI to HR strategy, in general HR should develop their communication practices, develop a more strategic role in managers work and develop the IT infrastructure of the company.

More clear communication and dialogue from HR to managers is required. Communication should include clear target-setting, establishing common policies and leadership practices, expectations and goals regarding the work of the managers. Clear, open communication that justifies the choices and opens the background and reasons for e.g., certain kind of training will help managers to understand why training is being offered or why EI is a part of HR strategy. By communicating in an open, clear and active way misunderstandings can be avoided, and managers can better work according to the strategy and furthermore, they can develop their work and have confidence that they are following the leadership philosophies of the company. Moreover, communication about trainings need to be developed, following the same logic than overall HR communication. This is supported by Truss and Gratton (1994, pp. 665–666) who mention the important role of managers in SHRM: managers have great responsibilities in implementing the HR strategy, which is why communication with them is crucial. However, the development of the integration process cannot be only on the shoulders of HR, but managers need to take an active role on offering feedback towards HR and communicating more actively with HR about their possible leadership challenges, needs and wishes. Therefore, the development of the integration process requires, first and foremost, more active, two-way communication between managers and HR.

HR department should take a more active strategic role in managers' work rather supporting them only in operative tasks. In general, HR departments are and have been operational functions (Chandra & Shen, 2009,

p. 33) and SHRM is still a relatively young field, since scientific research has started in the 1980's (Pauwe & Boon, 2009). In this moment, the role of HR in the work of managers is focused on the operative side of HR. To advance the integration of EI to HR strategy, HR should develop their practices in a way that they would be able to offer both operative and more strategic support for the managers. Managers should be willing and able to contact HR in both issues, and on the other hand, HR should develop their own practices and communications to a more strategic direction. Even though managers are required to work independently, forming a strategic "business partner" relationship with HR could advance the integration of EI to HR strategy.

Lastly, the IT infrastructure that HR uses needs to be developed to advance the integration of EI to HR strategy. The current IT infrastructure need to be developed into a direction that better supports training and SRHM: for example, more accessible sign-up process, information channel for training, follow-up, monitoring and the possibility to get up-to-date relevant data about the training process will advance the integration of EI to HR strategy, especially from training point of view. Furthermore, if HR has access to training data, they are able to use it to develop their training strategies and training in general. Moreover, in the future HR could benefit from the possibility to lead with data, especially when measuring the effectivity of the training. Having data about EI trainings and training in general helps the HR department to do long-term work in the integration process. To illustrate the way in which the practices should be developed, the following figure is provided:

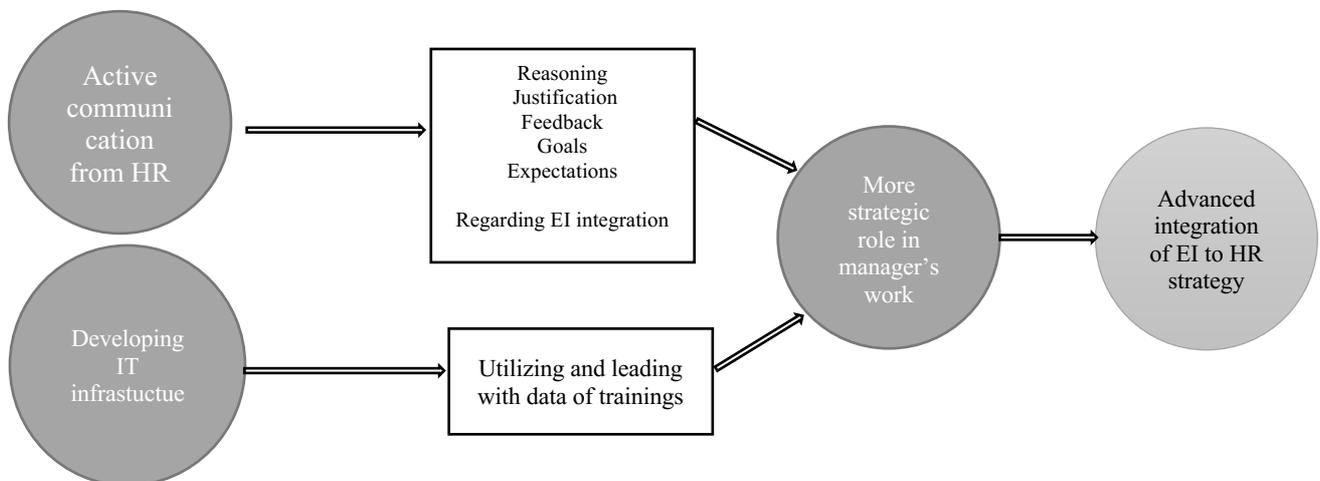


Figure 4. Summary of the development of HR's practices

Figure 4 provides a summarizing illustration of the development of HR's practices and how they together can promote the integration of EI to HR strategy. Active communication that includes reasoning and justification for strategic choices, giving and receiving feedback and setting goals and expectations for managers, together with developed IT infrastructure, which promotes the utilization and leading with data, can help HR to take a more strategic role in managers' work. When HR has a more strategic role, the integration of EI to HR strategy can be advanced.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

The findings of this thesis support findings of previous studies in all three areas of the study: SHRM, training and EI. In SHRM, the findings support the operative role of HR (e.g., Chandra & Shen, 2009, p. 33) and the importance of collaboration (Truss & Gratton, 1994; Stewart & Brown, 2014). Regarding training, the findings of this study support the view of Chandra and Shen (2009) by highlighting the importance of including the training participants in all stages of the training process, from planning to feedback and development and in the field of EI, the importance of EI in the workplace (see e.g., Carmeli, 2003; Donaldson-Feilder et al., 2003, pp. 12–13).

The theoretical part of this thesis builds a framework by combining SHRM, training and EI from a strategic perspective on an organizational level. This thesis makes a theoretical contribution on studying the combination of SHRM, training and EI from a strategic point of view. SHRM and EI are relatively new and fragmented areas, which have not been studied much together and therefore, this study makes a theoretical contribution with the attempt of examining EI from a strategic point of view. Moreover, this study also contributes to the field of sustainable human resource management. The field is quite young, and the existing literature focuses more on pro-environmental behavior than social sustainability. The case company itself has listed responsibility, sustainability and caring for both the people and the planet as one of their core values and it is stated in the strategy, which makes this case study an interesting one when thinking about the field of social sustainable human resource management. Integrating EI as a part of the HR strategy and offering managers tools to implement EI downwards in the company, the company can make a contribution to their social sustainability; they can e.g., increase the well-being of the employees, which can have a positive effect on their quality of life as a whole and help to reduce the number of sick leaves and burnouts. This thesis contributes to the field of sustainable human resource management by offering insight on ways in which companies can increase their social sustainability with EI.

5.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this study offer practical information and suggestions on how the integration of EI into HR strategy, SHRM and HR as a function, HR-manager collaboration, and training planning can be developed on an organizational level on a strategic way. Figure 4 can be of help for managers at the case company and in general when developing SHRM. The case company can benefit from the findings of this study when developing the integration of EI to HR strategy, since this study provides many practical suggestions for development. The results of this study highlight the importance of intra-organizational communication and collaboration regarding HR strategy. Communicating about justifications, reasons, targets and expectations is important for any manager or HR professional. Moreover, communication should be a dialogue between

managers and HR professionals, and HR should not one-sidedly give information to managers without offering background information and justification. Managers and HR professionals need to create communication channels that allow open dialogue, which will then help managers to understand the strategy and reasons behind certain decisions. With open, two-way communication targets and expectations are easier to understand, and especially when it comes to sensitive and broad topics such as EI, functioning communication is crucial for the learning process. Companies who want to integrate EI in their HR strategy should put efforts in communication and collaboration with managers.

Regarding training, communication and the collaboration between managers and HR professionals also becomes crucial. Developing strategic training and implementing new strategies with training requires that training participants are included in all stages of the training process, from planning to feedback and development after the training. If managers or other participants are not included in the planning process, they might not completely understand the reason behind the training, which can then have an effect on the effectivity and results of the training. For managers at the case company and in general, figure 3 can be utilized as guide for training process and training planning and it can be applied to other training planning also. For the case company, this thesis provides practical suggestions for the development of training planning process.

Additionally, for managers this study provides valuable information about the role of EI in the workplace and how EI is presented in managers. For managers working with their team members, understanding EI is important. This study offers managers insight on EI and how it is seen in the workplace context. The findings of this study emphasize that managers have different understandings and definitions of EI, and if EI is integrated in the strategy, the definition and what EI actually means in general and in the context of the organization is important. In summary, for managers the main takeaway of this study is the crucial role of communication and collaboration.

5.4 Assessing the quality of the study

All research has some limitations and the limitations specific to this study are discussed in this section. The main limitations of this study are related to the topic, point of view, sample and the author's role. The topic of the study is relatively new, which might have set a limit on the available academic literature, since SHRM, training and EI have not been studied together very much. On the other hand, by studying a newer topic this study made a contribution on the fields of SHRM, training and EI. Moreover, all three are subjective themes and EI as a concept is rather vague and difficult to measure statistically. However, it must be noted that the nature of this study was not statistical nor quantitative. This study studied training from a SHRM point of view, when typically, training is categorized under HRD or SHRD, which can be seen as a challenge for the

framework building. However, it must be noted that in this study, training was seen as a strategic tool and the focus was not on learning development.

The sampling process was based on volunteerism and certain criteria. The managers who participated in the interview process were volunteers and HR professionals were asked to participate due to their professional knowledge on the topic. The interviewed managers had a positive take on EI, which could have affected the findings of the interviews, since no criticism towards EI was presented in the data. However, it must be assumed that the case company employs managers who do not have as positive take on EI, and therefore the sampling process might have affected the reliability of the study. This study was limited to a certain group of managers, and the views and opinions of all managers are not included, which might affect the generalizability of the findings inside the organization. It must be noted that the top management was excluded from the sampling, which might have affected the strategy description process. Moreover, it must be noted that survey method could have been used to gather a wider sample.

Lastly, it must be noticed that this study was conducted in the organization in which the author works. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that the author's experience from working in the HR department of the case organization might have resulted in some sort of a bias throughout the whole study process. The author's role in working at HR in the company might also have affected the responses of the interviewees. In social studies, the potential harm to the participants might be psychological. (Byrne, 2017a; Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, pp. 57–74), and especially when interviewed managers were aware of the author's role in the HR department, they might have held back some negative opinions or they might have wanted to present themselves in a positive light. However, measures were taken to avoid potential harm by offering anonymity and ensuring informed consent and the confidential nature of the interview discussions. With the HR professionals the author has a close working relationship, which might have affected the nature of the interviews. Moreover, the author's experience in working in the company might have affected the data analysis process and the drawing of the findings. The author has information about the company that is not available to the general public, which might have resulted in some presumptions and shortcuts in the analysis process, however the familiarity with the company has helped the research and analysis process.

5.5 Suggestions for future research

This thesis focuses on relatively new topics: SHRM and EI. As was mentioned, scientific research in HRM originated only in the 1980's (Pauwe & Boon 2009) and Darwish (2013) has called HRM an "immature" field, and therefore more research on SHRM could be done. Training in a sense is not a new topic but combined with the SHRM and EI it makes a combination that has not been studied much. Therefore, more studies in the combination of SHRM, training and EI could be done, from organizational, strategic and individual levels.

Additionally, the said combination can also be studied from a HRD or SHRD point of view. In the future, SHRM, training and EI could be studied by using quantitative research methods to create more statistical knowledge on the topic. In this study, the top management was not included, and therefore, in the future a study about the opinions and point of views of top management on SHRM, training and EI could be done.

The concept of EI was popularized only in the 1990's (Goleman, 2004), which makes it a relatively new topic also. There is still not a clear consensus about EI; how it originates and what is the definition of EI in the workplace and how EI actually affects leadership (see e.g., Zeidner et al., 2004). Future research on EI could help to clarify and sharpen the definition of EI. EI and training could also be studied from SHRD or HRD point of view also to generate more knowledge on organizational learning or how EI can be learned in an organizational context. This study focused on EI on strategic and organizational level, and therefore one suggested future study could be studying EI in workplace context on an individual or team level.

This study has focused on only on mid-level management, and therefore one suggestion for future studies about the same topic would be a similar study but with top management and/or employees, in order to find out their perceptions on the topic. This study could be used as a basis for the suggested study. Other suggestions for future studies are related to the field of sustainable human resource management. This field has focused mainly on environmental sustainability. This focus could be broadened by studying sustainable human resource management from a social point of view via EI could be one suggested research avenue. Also, studies combining SHRM, training EI and sustainability could be done.

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