

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE


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## The effects of emotional intelligence and ethics of SME employees on knowledge sharing in Central-European countries

**JEL Classification:** D83; D91; J24

**Keywords:** *emotional intelligence; business ethics; personal ethics; knowledge sharing; small and medium enterprises*

### Abstract

**Research background:** The research examines the impact of emotional intelligence and ethics on knowledge sharing within organizations. It examines the impact of emotional intelligence (EQ) on the ethical behavior of the individual. The focus is on the individuals working in the SME sector. A questionnaire survey was considered the most appropriate technique to conduct the research. The study is based on 1162 responses, collected from three countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia).

**Purpose of the article:** The aim of this article is to examine the relationship between knowledge sharing, ethics and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, nationality, gender, education, and the

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age of the respondents influencing EQ are also examined. The additional goal is to explore the factors that influence employee behavior.

**Methods:** We identified four hypotheses. To test these hypotheses, we used variance analysis and logistic regression. The AES scale was chosen to assess EQ, which consisted of 33 items. The results obtained are compared with the opinion of SME owners resulting from structured interviews.

**Findings & value added:** About 20% of enterprises are not using any motivation tool to initiate knowledge sharing of their employees. The most common (47.2%) reason for silencing knowledge — the lack of appreciation — did not appear among the answer of company owners. According to the employee perceptions, gender has impact on the level of emotional intelligence, while nationality, education and age group have no impact on the EQ. SME owners do not address much attention to gender. The occurrence of unethical behavior does not depend on the size of the enterprise. According to employee opinion, the EQ has positive impact on knowledge sharing, while it is not affected by ethics. The majority of owners also agreed with the positive impact of EQ. The attitude of employees and owners differ in different aspects. The results have shown that gender plays an influential role in EQ. The research of this complex problem laid down the empirical foundations for the V4 countries.

## Introduction

The research in the field of emotional intelligence has increased in recent decades. The study of emotional factors plays an important role both in the field of psychology and management. The main driving force of functioning company are the individuals, who cannot be treated as machines, determined for rational decision-making. Leaders have to motivate them to do their best. Individuals with advanced emotional intelligence differ from the average, so companies should recognize this ability of their employees and utilize it as an advantage.

Our objective was to choose a direction that is new, but can have a crucial importance for companies. After considering a number of alternatives, we decided to focus on the emotional intelligence. This has been supplemented by the concept of ethics. We decided to examine all of these factors in relation to knowledge sharing, which is also important for the company to be successful.

During the elaboration of theoretical part of the study, we recognized that the relationship between the three studied areas has hardly been studied before. Moreover, the number of bilateral studies (e.g., knowledge sharing and emotional intelligence, knowledge sharing and ethics, emotional intelligence and ethics) is still negligible. This is why we decided to address it in our research. We were interested in the relationship we can detect between the three mentioned fields.

Our main goal is to examine the impact of emotional intelligence and ethics on knowledge sharing within the organization. We decided to examine the Czech, Hungarian and Polish SME sector. In the case of these econ-

omies, SMEs are a significant sector of the economy (Cepel *et al.*, 2020; Du & Wang, 2020; Marisova & Maris, 2015; Durda & Ključnikov, 2019; Forte & Oliveira, 2019; Čera *et al.*, 2020; Wach, 2020; Kozubíková *et al.*, 2020). We conducted both quantitative and qualitative research. The results are presented in the empirical part of the work. Practical recommendations, which might have positive impact on the willingness to share knowledge at a certain level of emotional intelligence, are provided. Our research is a relevant step both in theoretical and practical terms. We consider our research to be original, since no research examining such attitudes has been conducted in V4 countries. Therefore, a comparison to other research related to the studied field is not feasible. The conducted research might be an essential milestone for further international research.

## **Literature review**

One of the basic pillars of emotional intelligence is recognizing, interpreting and responding to our own feelings and the feelings of others. This has a huge impact on the role of individuals in teams and teamwork. According to Pawlak (2019), the most effective decisions can be made by sharing the implicit knowledge within a group. It has positive impact on the organizational intelligence and requires the skill of self-management and relationship management skills.

The specific impact of emotional intelligence on knowledge sharing has not been adequately addressed. Stifter (2013) and Magyar-Stifter (2016) came to conclusion that organizational emotional intelligence has a strong relationship with knowledge sharing, especially in the case of implicit knowledge. The scientific work of Rechberg (2020) can also be highlighted, who conducted the most detailed in-depth research in the studied field. While Magyar-Stifter (2016) based their conclusion on the “*emotionally intelligent organizations*”, Rechberg (2020) focused on individuals working in the company in terms of emotional intelligence. According to this, emotional intelligence allows the knowledge to be processed in the company. He presented this also in a model (Figure 1).

Emotional intelligence can contribute to development of the individual’s self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management skills. All of these have positive impact on the knowledge processing activity of the individual. According to the model, knowledge is generated by the abilities of individuals, which help them to recognize and interpret emotions correctly. Knowledge sharing is facilitated by interpersonal and communication skills of individuals. Knowledge can be main-

tained long term in those companies, where individuals are committed to the organization, have excellent adaptability skills and feel satisfied with their job (Jaskeviciute *et al.*, 2021; Rahman *et al.*, 2020; Szostek *et al.*, 2020; Shafait *et al.*, 2021).

An individual with higher emotional intelligence can gain an advantage in generating knowledge with help of self-awareness and an ability to distinguish emotions. Self-management, social awareness and empathy, as well as the skill of relationship management allow the individual to communicate effectively, participate in teamwork and build relationships, thus facilitating knowledge sharing. Emotional intelligence helps to develop the self-management skill of individuals, enabling them to deal with dissatisfaction and move towards adaptability and commitment. All of this contribute to keeping important knowledge within the organization (Rechberg, 2020).

According to Rechberg (2020), it is important to highlight that individuals with high emotional intelligence are also influenced by negative workplace feelings and job insecurity. Based on the model introduced above, companies need to develop knowledge management strategies that take into account the emotional intelligence of individuals and focus to develop it. It will make the knowledge management more effective. A well-organized company is not only a group formed by individuals, but collaboration of employees with emotional motivation (Gavurova *et al.*, 2020; Galabova *et al.*, 2021).

In our research, we wanted to examine the relationship between ethics and knowledge sharing, as both areas play an important role in everyday life of the organization. Unethical behavior often occurs both within and between organizations. The managerial approach has already been addressed, but less attention was paid to examining the ethical issues of company employees. The research of relationship between ethics and knowledge sharing is incomplete. According to Berber *et al.* (2019), individuals recognize the ethical behavior and are aware of rules, but in critical situations they concentrate on the consequences of their behavior. Instead of the values set in the company, what really matters are the expectations of the superior. If individuals focus on achieving the goal set by their leader, sometimes they will apply unethical methods. It can happen that an employee needs some specific knowledge to perform a particular task and will obtain the necessary knowledge unethically. Another situation is when the employee will not share their knowledge with other employees in order to maintain and protect their position in the company. According to Wu *et al.* (2021), the employee refuses to share their knowledge if it is directly linked to their workplace identity. Vlachos *et al.* (2020) said that the employee

attitude is extremely important in terms of knowledge sharing, as sharing implicit knowledge works on a voluntary basis. It is an intrinsic motivation. Employees of the company do not share their knowledge in order to remain irreplaceable and would not like to benefit other employees. Siachou *et al.* (2021) emphasized that knowledge is a source of power and job security, so regardless to the level of emotional intelligence, the individual may weigh to share the knowledge or not. However, in some cases, “retaining” knowledge is considered unethical behavior. It allows the individual to prioritize his/her interests over the interests of the organization. It is important to point out that employees need to be aware that sharing their knowledge can facilitate their own work as well (Maňák & Fialová, 2020).

If employees feel safe, and have developed a certain level of trust, they are more likely to share knowledge with their colleagues (Kessel *et al.*, 2012). Rechberg (2020) points out that respecting employees can influence them to participate in the process of corporate knowledge management. Managers need to figure out how to persuade their employees to share their knowledge. Bavik *et al.* (2018) emphasized that the loss of valuable knowledge can result in inadequate motivation of employees. These organizations consider only the corporate needs, while neglecting the needs of their employees (Sołtysik *et al.*, 2020; Ciobanu *et al.*, 2019; Myšková & Hájek, 2019; Szostek *et al.*, 2020; Bhatti *et al.*, 2020).

Longmire and Harrison (2018) highlighted that individuals with advanced emotional skills are more successful in interacting with others, as they achieve their goals by being able to recognize and adapt to emotions of other individuals. Emotional intelligence and transparency are closely related to the success within the organization (Androniceanu, 2021). Ethics also contributes to success. In addition to general skills and abilities, self-management, empathy and interpersonal skills play an essential role. All of these help in recognition, regulation and expression of emotions.

McManus (2021) argues that emotions are present in ethical decision-making processes, as ethical debates in organizations are influenced by emotions. He adds that the relationship between ethics and emotions is not yet professionally established. According to Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2010), an emotionally intelligent individual is less likely to behave unethically to achieve success. They identify the relationship between ethics and emotional intelligence with self-esteem. Individuals with higher level of self-esteem are more aware of their own competence and trust (Oláh *et al.*, 2021). It was proved that ethics, perception of ethics, self-esteem and emotional intelligence are interrelated, and greatly influence how individuals react on unethical behavior as a necessary success factor (Caha, 2017).

Based on the above, Cabral and De Oliveira Carvalho (2014) came to similar conclusions. Their research has shown that individuals with higher emotional intelligence feel less likely to use unethical tools to achieve success. Individuals with higher emotional intelligence have higher ethical standards and consider other individuals ethical. Individuals with lower level of emotional intelligence will be less ethical and will consider other individuals unethical as well. Valentine and Godkin (2016), Shaheer *et al.* (2019) came to conclusion that individuals with unethical behavior think that those in their environment will make unethical steps. Cabral and De Oliveira Carvalho (2014) stated that the emotionally more developed individuals do not consider themselves more ethical than their colleagues. They also found that individuals who recognize their own emotions easily are less likely to behave unethically than those with lower level of EQ. The authors, Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2010) found no evidence that self-esteem had a mediating role between ethics and the emotional intelligence.

Based on the arguments above, we cannot present the work of other researchers from Central-Europe in this field. Our research is presented as a “stepping stone” for further research in the studied field for the pointed group of economies.

## **Research method**

Our main objective is to examine the impact of emotional intelligence and ethics on knowledge sharing within the organization. The first sub-goal in theoretical part of this work was to present the coherence between emotional intelligence, knowledge management and ethics by processing the relevant foreign literature (secondary research). We also wanted to approach the discussed field in theoretical terms. The chosen topic is examining the factors that requires processing of online publications. We used professionally approved publications, as well as articles listed in international databases WoS and Scopus. The next sub-goal was to determine which factors have a statistically significant effect on the level of emotional intelligence. Further sub-goal was to determine the dependent relationship between ethics and the emotional intelligence, and the impact of these on knowledge management. Our next sub-goal was to compare the results of the questionnaire survey with the interview results of company leaders.

The topic was mainly approached from the perspective of employees. Employees of small and medium-sized companies were addressed, representing the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. The questionnaire survey was proved to be the most appropriate quantitative research technique.

The questionnaire included 30 structured (selective-, alternative closed) questions. In addition to Likert (1932) scale and the Semantic differential scale (Osgood *et al.*, 1957) questions, the questionnaire we elaborated included some unstructured questions as well. The respondents were provided an opportunity to express their own opinion.

The questionnaire survey also addressed to examine the attitude related to knowledge management and ethics. We have also examined the level of emotional intelligence of the respondents in the survey.

Various scales have been developed to measure the level of emotional intelligence. One of the widely used is the Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS) developed by Lane *et al.* (1990). The scale is based on 20 different situations, each including two characters. The role of the characters is to identify themselves with the situation of the other character and describe in words how they would feel in that particular situation. The responses are assessed with a help of a manual, to find out how many times each type of emotion is included in the responses of the individual. The scale has a short version as well. It contains 10 situations. This method is called LEAS-A (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2002, Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2003; Kessler *et al.*, 2010).

It is important to highlight the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Scale (MSCEIT). The scale was based on the Multifactorial Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS) elaborated by Mayer and Salovey (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997), but the authors wanted to make small modifications. During the test, different images are shown to individuals or sounds are played. The responses are assessed (Mayer *et al.*, 2003; Rivers *et al.*, 2020). The LEAS and MSCEIT methods were not found suitable to be applied in the form of a questionnaire survey.

The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory is one of the most commonly used scales in the form of a questionnaire that measures social skill in addition to emotional competencies. The original model includes 133 questions. The respondent should indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 how true the statements are for themselves. There is also a 51-item version of the Bar-On method. The questionnaire is too long, and there was a risk that individuals can refuse to fill in the survey (Bar-On, 1997; Bar-On, 2002).

The Assessing Emotions Scale (AES) created by Schutte *et al.* (1998) was found to be the most suitable method. It includes 33 items. There are different approaches to interpret the results obtained by using this method. Petrides and Furnham (2000) and Keele and Bell (2008) classified the items into four factors. Saklofske *et al.* (2003; 2007) also confirmed the use of four factors, but did not reject the one-factor solution either. The four factors fall under one main factor — the global emotional intelligence. Gignac

*et al.* (2005) preferred a six-factor method. Since the authors (Schutte *et al.*, 1998; Schutte *et al.*, 2009) of the scale suggest the one- or three-factor solution, the use of one-factor is also widespread. We applied the one-factor solution that makes interpretation of the research results easier. The highest value on the 33-item scale is 165. Schutte *et al.* (2009) examined the results of several researches. Based on the research results, the mean value for emotional intelligence is 124, while the standard deviation is 13. Thus, in general, we can conclude that less than the value 111 proved to be low, while the value over 137 indicates a high level of emotional intelligence. The mean value in our sample was 123, the standard deviation 16, so the value less than 107 is considered low, and the value above 139 is high. 3 items from 33 are reversed (Fernández-Berrocal *et al.*, 2016; Kessler *et al.*, 2010; Gong & Paulson, 2016; Maul, 2012; Minářová *et al.*, 2020).

Our questionnaire addressed the opinion and attitude of the employees. The majority of active employees work in the SME sector. These employees make up the research sample as well. Our main goal was to make a transparent sample. The sampling units were the companies themselves, while the observation units were the employees of these companies. There is no standardized list of employees working for SMEs. They were addressed through their workplaces. A list of companies was prepared using different publicly available databases in the countries where the research was conducted. We filtered the self-employed and the companies that do not have employees. Each database was managed separately for each country, and a systematic sampling was applied by selecting each 20<sup>th</sup> item. Due to the pandemic situation, we found the online questionnaire survey the most appropriate technique (Survio).

The survey began on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and finished on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2021. We managed to conduct the questionnaire survey in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Hungarian respondents were surveyed from 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021 to 27<sup>th</sup> June 2021. The incomplete and incorrectly completed questionnaires were excluded from the research. We processed 1162 responses provided by the respondents. The SPSS statistical program was used for data processing. In the case of univariate analysis, we applied a position indicator number (average, mode and median). In order to test our hypotheses, we applied multivariate methods — univariate (Fisher, 1918; 1922) and multivariate variance (Wilks, 1932) logistic regression (Berkson, 1944).

In the case of logistic regression, the variables have to be clearly defined. In *Hypothesis 4*, the categorical dependent variable was “*Ethics*” (“0” means “*Not ethical*” and “1” means “*Ethical*”). The independent (explanatory) variable was the score of the “*EQ*”, which was measured on



an interval scale from 33 to 165. In our *Hypothesis 5*, the categorical dependent variable is “*willingness to share knowledge*”. It should take two values — “0” (“*Not willing to share*”) and “1” (“*Willing to share*”). The independent (explanatory) variables were “*Ethics*” (“0” means “*Not ethical*” and “1” means “*Ethical*”) and the score of the “*EQ*”, (interval scale from 33 to 165).

Before performing the variance, we used the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (Smirnov, 1939) and Shapiro-Wilk (1965) test for normality, and the Levene's test for standard deviation homogeneity. In the case of each hypothesis, we set Hypothesis  $H_0$  and an alternative Hypothesis  $H_1$ . We used a significance level of 95% when testing our hypotheses.

The results obtained are worth to compare with the opinion of company owners (control research). Structured interviews were conducted in order to obtain the opinion of company owners. When formulating the questions of the survey, we have already taken into account the results of the employee questionnaire. Univariate analyzes were used to evaluate the research results. Our data collection took place from 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. We used online platforms (Meet and Zoom) to conduct the interviews. 91 respondents agreed with the interview, finally 77 interviews were conducted. The obtained data was summarized in Excel. The structured interview contained 18 questions and included 5 sections. The first section addressed demographic data. This was followed by questions related to knowledge sharing, ethics and emotional intelligence. The final part examined the hypotheses from the perspective of company owners.

## **Results**

### *About the sample*

33.4% of the respondents opening the application completed the survey. The average time the respondents spent with completing the questionnaire was 10-30 minutes. 71.1% of the respondents needed the mentioned time interval to submit their answers. The demographic data of our respondents is presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Regarding the number of employees, we included only those micro enterprises that have at least one employee who is not the owner of the business or not self-employed. Thus, “*1–9 employees*” is referring to this type of company. Most of the respondents (49.2%) work for medium-sized enterprises. This is followed by small enterprises (28.6%) and micro-enterprises (22.2%). Statistical offices use the number of employees when

preparing their reports, so we followed this practice. The results show that most of the companies (26.3%) operate in trade. It is followed by processing industry (12.4%), education (8.1%) and construction industry (7.2%).

In order to test the emotional intelligence, we used the Assessing Emotions Scale (AES) and performed a reliability calculation. According to Cronbach (1990), the higher the value of the indicator, the higher the reliability of the questionnaire — below 0.5 “unacceptable”; above 0.5 is “bad”; above 0.6 is “disputable”; above 0.7 is “acceptable”; above 0.8 is “good” and above 0.9 is “excellent”. One of the biggest problems with the indicator is that increasing the scale items, the value of indicator will increase, and it does not ensure a greater consistency between the items. According to Aldrich (1995), the acceptability interval falls between 0.7 and 0.85, while a scale with a higher value contains unnecessary statements. Based on our result ( $\alpha = 0.902$ ), we can speak about a strong reliability (Table 3.). Schutte *et al.* (1998) reported a reliability of 0.9 in their research. Schutte *et al.* (2009) examined the results of different studies. In the sample of these studies, the level of reliability ranged between 0.76 and 0.95. These results refer to research that used only one factor. The reliability of 4 factors recommended by Petrides and Furnham (2000) was examined by Ciarrochi *et al.* (2002), who came to conclusion that the values are in the interval between 0.58 and 0.80. Compared to the findings of Aldrich (1995), this is higher in our case, so the scale contains unnecessary statements. In order to delete some statements, further detailed research is required.

Based on the results (Table 4), considering the median, it can be concluded that the best evaluation (5) was achieved by statements no. 6, 10, 14, 17 and 24. Regarding the mode, statement 24 — according to which the respondents praised others when they were doing something well — was the only one that reached score 5. If we consider the lowest achieved median statement 28 (“*I give up when I face challenge, because I believe will fail*”) was on the first place, with median score 1. This was followed by statement 5 (“*I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of others*”) with median score 2. Both achieved mode score 2. The results are not surprising, as the discussed statements are all reverse, which have negative impact on the level of emotional intelligence.

According to Schutte *et al.* (2009), values below 111 on the scale are low, while values above 137 indicate high emotional intelligence. The mean based on our research was 123 and the standard deviation equals to 6. Based on this, the value below 107 is considered low, while the value above 139 is high. There is a larger difference between the classification

methods, however, the number of those with average emotional intelligence level is the highest. The authors of the AES test do not mention specific groups. They only summarize earlier research results. When testing our hypotheses, the EQ value measured using the scale was treated as an interval scale. Based on the responses, the value of median is 124, while the modus value is 130 (Figure 2.). We had to use reverse coding in some cases when calculating the EQ score, since there were reverse items (5.28 and 33).

### *Differences in the attitude of employees and employers*

90.9% of the company owners expect their employees to share their valuable knowledge. 87.3% of employees possessing valuable knowledge is open to share his/her knowledge with the colleagues or managers. The opposite case, when the business owner is sharing his/her knowledge with the employee, shows a lower a ratio. 40.3% of the business owners reported to share their knowledge in all cases, while 14.3% said “yes” for the question. We were interested what percentage of our respondents had already withheld important data or information. Companies make decision based on this information, which has impact on the future of the company. According to our results, 24.8% of the employees had already withheld important information or data. 75.2% of the respondents had never done that. 20.8% of the leaders reported that their employee had withheld some important information. It is important to highlight that 23.4% of the leaders were uncertain whether it happened or not. Based on the results, it might happen that data about withholding information in the company remains hidden for the company owners. The majority of owners (55.8%) reported that it had never happened that an employee did not pass on an important data or information. The information obtained from company owners on sub-questions shows that the main reason of withholding information was jealousy (18.8%), while 18.1% of the employees withholding important information explained their negative step with the success of others. The ratio is, therefore, similar for both groups. The most frequent reason indicated by employees (47.2% of those withholding information, 11.7% of all respondents), was the lack of recognition of their work. It has not been mentioned as a possible reason by company leaders. It would be important to warn the attention of the leaders to consider this fact, as well as improve the quality of communication between the owners and the employees. In order to support the willingness of knowledge sharing, it is necessary to identify the appropriate channel of communication.

As a similarity, it can be emphasized that 19.1% of the employees and 19.5% of the owners reported that they do not reward the transfer of knowledge in the company. Learning and professional development as a means of reward were mentioned only by 6.5% of the leaders, while “*learning opportunity*” was mentioned by 26.9% of the employees, and “*new, challenging tasks*” were mentioned by 28.1% of them. It is important to highlight that during the interviews with company owners, we could identify three motivation tools, which were not listed in the questionnaire survey. These were the following: “*praise, appreciation*”, “*conversation, communication with employees*”, “*creating good workplace atmosphere, improving cooperation*”. It seems to be a good idea to involve these motivation tools in a revised questionnaire and conduct a future survey.

Based on the research results, most of the company owners (27.3%) reported that there are no obstacles of knowledge transfer in their company. Only one leader indicated lack of time as an obstacle of knowledge transfer. However, 20.3% of the employees indicated that lack of time is an obstacle to knowledge transfer. In our opinion, lack of time is an existing phenomenon in most of the companies, so the results obtained from company owners do not entirely reflect the reality. Based on the results of the research conducted by Siuta-Tokarska (2013), 64.0% of the respondents reported lack of time as an obstacle to knowledge transfer, while the research of KPMG (2014) reported 58.0%. It is important to emphasize that the research mentioned first examined large Polish enterprises, while the second research examined Hungarian companies, including the SME sector. In the second place (24.7%), the “*lack of trust*” and “*bad workplace atmosphere*” were indicated by the company owners. If we sum up the “*Absolutely*” and “*Rather yes*” answers provided by the respondents, 29.3% of them think that lack of trust is an obstacle to knowledge sharing in the company. Selfishness, envy and competitiveness were indicated in the third place by the owners (20.8%). Employees reported excessive competition as the least influencing factor in knowledge sharing in the company.

A majority of company leaders (77.9%) reported that there is not ethical requirement applied in their company. In the case of company employees, this ratio is 56.5%. Respondents of both groups agreed that ethical corporate behavior is a benefit. 33.8% of the company leaders and only 19.4% of the employees reported that the organization is shaping the employee ethics. This can be explained by the fact that the company owners want the company they run would influence the employee ethics.

The research results show that the company owners experienced a much higher level (49.4%) of employee unethical behavior than the employees reported about themselves (24.3%). Therefore, we can summarize that the

company employees did not consider their behavior to be unethical. It is necessary to highlight, that most of the owners (42.1%) indicated that employees showing unethical behavior were dismissed after the incident. Only 18.4% of the employees who behaved unethically reported that they did so, as they were afraid of losing their job. The results show that the redundancy ratio was higher in the reality. 90.9% of the owners think that ethical company culture contributes to employee loyalty. This ratio was higher than in the case of employees. The employees were provided a five-point scale, where they had to indicate how ethical culture of the company contributes to the loyalty of employees, customers and suppliers. 60.0% of the employees agreed or rather agreed that the company culture has positive impact on the loyalty of the mentioned groups.

59.7% of the company leaders find it important that their employees have high emotional intelligence. However, the results of AES scale show that only a small ratio of the employees have high emotional intelligence. Most of the employees have an average emotional intelligence (Figure 2).

### *Main results*

We formulated 4 hypotheses in our research. We applied quantitative techniques in order to approach the issue from the employee perspective. We found it interesting to examine the questions from the perspective of company owners as well. Our main objective was to compare the opinion and standpoint of both sides.

According to Hypothesis 1 “*Nationality does not affect the emotional intelligence*”. Based on the obtained results, the hypothesis was approved (Table 5–6), as we found no differences between the level of emotional intelligence of the respondents in the researched countries. Based on the obtained results, the respondents were not differentiated in terms of their nationality. The result is not surprising, as the examined countries are close in geographical terms. The mentioned countries share historical past, they have long record of common cultural and historical development, which has influenced the psychosocial development of individuals and the pattern of behavior. The Kingdom of Hungary or the era of Dual Monarchy (1867–1918) has to be highlighted in historical terms. It is worth to mention the Czech and Slovak coexistence during the era of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1939, 1945–1992). In addition, the era of socialism has also influenced the social and cultural development of these countries. These countries have been the members of V4 since 1991. The main purpose of Visegrad Group is the joint representation of economic, political and diplomatic interests of the member countries (Green, 2021).

According to Hypothesis 2 “*Gender has, while qualification and age have no impact on the level of emotional intelligence*”. The hypothesis was approved. It is presented in Table 7-8 that gender has impact on the level of the emotional intelligence, while qualification and age have no. The company owners were also asked their opinion. While in-depth statistical analysis of responses has shown that gender can be a decisive factor in terms of emotional intelligence, the company leaders did not address adequate attention to this result. Most of the company leaders (42.8%) think that neither the gender nor the qualification can influence the level of emotional intelligence. However, 29.9% of the respondents reported that both of these factors have impact on the level of emotional intelligence. 9.1% of the respondents said that only the education, while 5.2% reported that only the gender influences the level of emotional intelligence. We also distinguished Category 5 for those respondents who thought that our statement was partially true (13.0%). With reference to deeper analysis and the AES scale, our thesis 1 can be formulated as follows: “*While gender influences the level of emotional intelligence, the qualification and age group have no impact on EQ.*”

Hypothesis 3 “*The level of emotional intelligence affects the ethical behavior of the individual*” was rejected (Table 9). Based on that, Thesis 3 was formulated as the following: “*The level of emotional intelligence does not influence the ethical behavior of individuals*”. More than half of the company owners (57.1%) thought that individuals with higher emotional intelligence behave more ethically in their workplace. 27.7% reported that the statement is partially true, while 18.2% simply refused that. A difference again can be detected between the responses of company owners and their employees.

Hypothesis 4 “*The willingness of individuals to share knowledge also depends on the ethical behavior of individuals and the level of emotional intelligence*” was rejected. While the level of emotional intelligence influences the willingness to share knowledge, it cannot be said about the ethical behavior (Table 10). That is why in the interviews we examined the opinion of company owners in terms of the level of emotional intelligence. We were curious whether the individuals with higher level of emotional intelligence showed more willingness to share their knowledge. More than half of the respondents (58.4%) thought that employees with higher emotional intelligence are more open to share their knowledge. 19.5% of the respondents did not detect any relation between the discussed factors. 19.5% of the respondents were indecisive. 2.6% of the respondents could not be classified to any of the listed categories, so created a separate group of respondents. Thesis 4 was formulated as the following: “*While the level of emo-*

*tional intelligence has positive impact on the willingness of knowledge sharing, the ethical behavior does not influence it all.*” This statement partially supports the research conducted by Magyar-Stifter (2016) and Rechberg (2020), which reflects the relationship between EQ and knowledge sharing.

## Discussion

According to obtained results, the deeper analysis of employee responses is not always reflected in the responses of company owners. The reason is not necessarily negative. It highlights that the company owners do not always perceive the particular phenomena in the right way.

Two of our hypotheses were approved and two were rejected. In the case of the Czech, Slovak and Hungarian employees, there is no difference regarding the level of emotional intelligence. We cannot declare that nationality of the respondents has no influence on the level of emotional intelligence, since the history and culture of the 3 neighboring nations is similar. It would be worth to study cultures different from the examined.

The hypothesis test confirms the results by Saklofske *et al.* (2007). If a company wants to hire an emotionally intelligent employee, it may be worth considering the gender, but this should not discriminate against other applicants. The qualification and age of the applicant are negligible.

The research found no clear relationship between the ethical behavior and the level of emotional intelligence. McManus (2021) highlighted that the relationship between ethics and emotions is not professionally established yet. According to Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2010), it is less likely that an emotionally intelligent individual uses unethical practice to succeed. Cabral and De Oliveira Carvalho (2014) argue that individuals with higher level of emotional intelligence have higher level of ethical standards, but do not consider themselves more ethical than the others. This might be one of the reasons why our research failed to prove this relationship.

Based on the hypothesis, if a manager is trying to find an employee for managerial position, where knowledge sharing is crucial, it is important to consider the level of emotional intelligence of the candidate. It is important that the candidate is not only willing to share knowledge with the rest of the employees, but it is also important for them to have the appropriate knowledge, abilities and skills. Our results support the research output of Magyar-Stifter (2016) and Rechberg (2020). They came to conclusion that the organizational emotional intelligence has strong relationship with knowledge sharing.

Knowledge sharing has to be encouraged. If the employees are not adequately motivated, it can happen that they will not share their knowledge with their colleagues. If the position of an employee is not endangered and motivation is lacking, it is not likely they will make an effort to move the company into beneficiary position. It is important for the employees to feel the company success as their own. This fact is proved by the research by Bavik *et al.* (2018).

It is essential to provide time for knowledge sharing. In a short-term, it is a money consuming activity, but it can prove to be a beneficiary investment in a long-term. Lack of time is an obstacle to knowledge sharing. Although, the company owners feel that it does not hinder the knowledge sharing in their company, employees perceive it as a barrier. The research by Siuta-Tokarska (2013) and KPMG (2014) came to similar conclusion.

The introduction of Code of Ethics is strongly recommended, as unethical behavior is frequent, while Code of Ethics is easy to implement.

It is worth employing an emotionally intelligent employee if the position requires teamwork or cooperation within and outside the company (e.g. corporate partners) or interaction with customers (customer service, in-store sales, other services, etc.). It is also important that the middle management and all of those working with subordinates have high emotional intelligence, since the employees cannot be treated as machines. Their feelings need to be recognized and addressed.

AES scale can be an appropriate tool to measure the emotional intelligence. AES can be the shortest questionnaire to be filled in by the respondents measuring emotional intelligence. It is important to provide adequate time for applicants to fill in the questionnaire. One of the solutions might be to complete the questionnaire electronically and not as a part of the interview process in order to decrease the stress factor. At the same time, the respondents can find tactics to look for and provide the correct answer. It can be prevented if the questionnaire is filled in on the Survio platform. This platform shows how long it took the respondent to fill in the questionnaire. It allows to filter the suspiciously outstanding results. It is also possible to mix the 33 statements of the questionnaire or replace the 3 original statements with their reverse version. The possible statements should not be listed under one question and further questions can be placed in the questionnaire. It prevents the individuals to figure out the essence of the questionnaire. A possible alternative is, when the questionnaire is completed personally, so the respondents are likely to have less time to check the possible answers.



## **Conclusions**

The research results show that individuals need trust and emotional safety. If they trust their co-workers and leaders, they are more likely to act and behave ethically and show willingness to share their knowledge with co-workers. Company leaders need to keep in mind that emotions play an essential role. In order to recognize this, leaders should have a certain level of emotional intelligence to identify and understand the emotions of their employees. Emotional intelligence is also important for the employees of the company, especially when performing tasks that require teamwork. Developed emotional skills contribute to improvement of interpersonal relations. High level of emotional intelligence can also help employees to establish and maintain good relationship with external staff.

In order to develop the appropriate company culture, it is important to ensure that good mood cannot result in disrespect to each other. It is necessary to apply certain ethical rules that should be respected by everybody. If any unethical step is detected, communication can play an essential role as it opens a dialogue between the parties. The company management needs to consider whether it is a good idea to provide a new chance for employees practicing unethical behavior. It depends not only on the particular mistake and ethical norms of the leader, but also on her/his emotional intelligence.

The added value of our research can be explained by the fact that these attitudes had not been earlier examined on the Central European level. Therefore, we have opened a completely new interdisciplinary research field in the V4 region, which can form the basis for further research. We offer a completely new and original field and results to researchers and readers.

We had to face certain obstacles during our research. We experienced financial obstacles and lack of time, which also limited the research activity. In addition to this, we also have to highlight the criticism of quantitative methods. Since this is considered to be a self-reporting test, it might happen that the respondents will interpret the questions from different perspectives. These tests show how individuals judge and perceive their own qualities and themselves, which can deteriorate from the reality. It is also important to mention the scope of the questionnaire. At the beginning, we thought that most of the respondents will show no willingness to fill in the questionnaire. Despite of our expectations, sufficient amount of data was collected. The disadvantage of the structured interview is that it allows only a minimum deviation from the prepared interview draft.

Some individuals may not have received the questionnaire, as it was submitted online, and not all of the respondents have Internet access at their

workplace. As we worked with a selected sample, the research results provide relevant information related to this sample.

We would like to approach more potential respondents in the future, use not only online, but offline opportunities as well. Furthermore, by increasing the number of the interviews, we can get an even more transparent picture about the opinion of managers. Our goals include to involve more countries in our research. The results of the current research we plan to incorporate into this process.

On the other hand, it is also useful to apply new research techniques as well, as self-administered questionnaires do not necessarily reflect the reality. Furthermore, as long as there are specific sensitive scales for measuring the emotional intelligence, it cannot be said about measuring the corporate ethics. Nevertheless, we had to rely on employee responses as they provided adequate statistical base to conduct our research.

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## Annex

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of employees

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Nationality</b>	
Male	46.8%	Czech	21.0%
Female	53.2%	Hungarian	37.7%
<b>Age group</b>		Slovak	41.3%
1946-1964		<b>Type of employment</b>	
1965-1979		Part time	15.8%
1980-1994		Full time	84.2%
1995-2002		<b>Length of employment</b>	
<b>Residency</b>		Less than 1 year	19.6%
Village	43.4%	1-2 years	27.4%
Town/City	56.6%	3-4 years	18.9%
<b>Education</b>		5 years	7.6%
Secondary	53.5%	6-10 years	11.7%
Higher	46.5%	11-20 years	13.3%
<b>Monthly net income</b>		21-30 years	2.9%
Less than 500€		More than 30 years	1.4%
501-1000€		<b>Position</b>	
1001-1500€		Employee	73.7%
1501-2000€		Middle manager	18.2%
2000€		Top manager	8.1%

**Table 2.** Demographic characteristics of owners and basic characteristics of SMEs

<b>Nationality</b>		<b>Age group</b>	
Czech	25.1%	1946-1964	13.4%
Hungarian	36.2%	1965-1979	38.8%
Slovak	38.7%	1980-1994	41.8%
<b>Gender</b>		1995-2002	6.0%
Male	66.2%	<b>Year of foundation</b>	
Female	33.8%	Before 1989	2.5%
<b>Number of employees</b>		1989-1999	18.2%
1-9	79.2%	2000-2009	29.9%
10-49	14.3%	2010-2019	37.7%
50-249	6.5%	2020-	11.7%

**Table 3.** Reliability calculation — AES (33) scale

<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items</b>	<b>N of Items</b>
0.902	0.906	33



**Table 4.** Results of responses (AES–33)

	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mode</b>
1. I know when to speak about my personal problems to others	4	4
2. When I am faced with obstacles, I remember times I faced similar obstacles and overcame them	4	4
3. I expect that I will do well on most things I try	4	4
4. Other people find it easy to confide in me	4	4
5. I find it hard to understand the non-verbal messages of other people *	2	2
6. Some of the major events of my life have led me to re-evaluate what is important and not important	5	4
7. When my mood changes, I see new possibilities	3	3
8. Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living	4	4
9. I am aware of my emotions as I experience them	4	4
10. I expect good things to happen	5	4
11. I like to share my emotions with others	3	3
12. When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last	4	4
13. I arrange events others enjoy	4	4
14. I seek out activities that make me happy	5	4
15. I am aware of the non-verbal messages I send to others	4	4
16. I present myself in a way that makes a good impression on others	4	4
17. When I am in a positive mood, solving problems is easy for me	5	4
18. By looking at their facial expressions, I recognize the emotions people are experiencing	4	4
19. I know why my emotions change	4	4
20. When I am in a positive mood, I am able to come up with new ideas	4	4
21. I have control over my emotions	3	3
22. I easily recognize my emotions as I experience them	4	4
23. I motivate myself by imagining a good outcome to tasks I take on	4	4
24. I compliment others when they have done something well	5	5
25. I am aware of the non-verbal messages other people send	4	4
26. When another person tells me about an important event in his or her life, I almost feel as though I experienced this event myself.	3	4
27. When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to come up with new ideas	3	3
28. When I am faced with a challenge, I give up because I believe I will fail *	1	2
29. I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them	3	3
30. I help other people feel better when they are down	4	4
31. I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles	4	4
32. I can tell how people are feeling by listening to the tone of their voice	4	4
33. It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do *	3	3

\* *Reversed items***Table 5.** Test of Normality — Hypothesis 1.

		<b>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</b>		
		<b>Statistic</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Czech</b>	0.36	480	0.186
	<b>Hungarian</b>	0.51	438	0.08
	<b>Slovak</b>	0.67	244	0.10

**Table 6.** ANOVA — Hypothesis 1.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Between Groups</b>	812.359	2	406.180	1.529	0.217
<b>Within Groups</b>	307866.002	1159	265.631		
<b>Total</b>	308678.361	1161			

**Table 7.** Test of Normality — Hypothesis 2.

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov test		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	0.038	544	0.200
	<b>Female</b>	0.038	618	0.200
<b>Education</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	0.035	622	0.200
	<b>Higher</b>	0.040	540	0.200
<b>Age group</b>	<b>1946-1964</b>	0.144	46	0.200
	<b>1965-1979</b>	0.058	248	0.200
	<b>1980-1994</b>	0.031	520	0.200
	<b>1995-2002</b>	0.050	348	0.200

**Table 8.** Multivariate analysis of ANOVA — Hypothesis 2.

	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Corrected Model</b>	9532.626	15	635.508	2.454	0.002
<b>Intercept</b>	7086009.269	1	7086009.269	27366.622	0.000
<b>Gender</b>	3066.022	1	3066.022	11.841	0.001
<b>Education</b>	82.488	1	82.488	0.319	0.573
<b>Age group</b>	387.880	3	129.293	0.499	0.683
<b>Gender*Education</b>	423.485	1	423.485	1.636	0.201
<b>Gender*Age group</b>	989.024	3	329.675	1.273	0.282
<b>Education*Age group</b>	1082.664	3	360.888	1.394	0.243
<b>Gender*Education*Age group</b>	571.618	3	190.539	0.736	0.531
<b>Error</b>	296732.517	1146	258.929		
<b>Total</b>	17967930.00	1162			
<b>Corrected Total</b>	306265.143	1161			

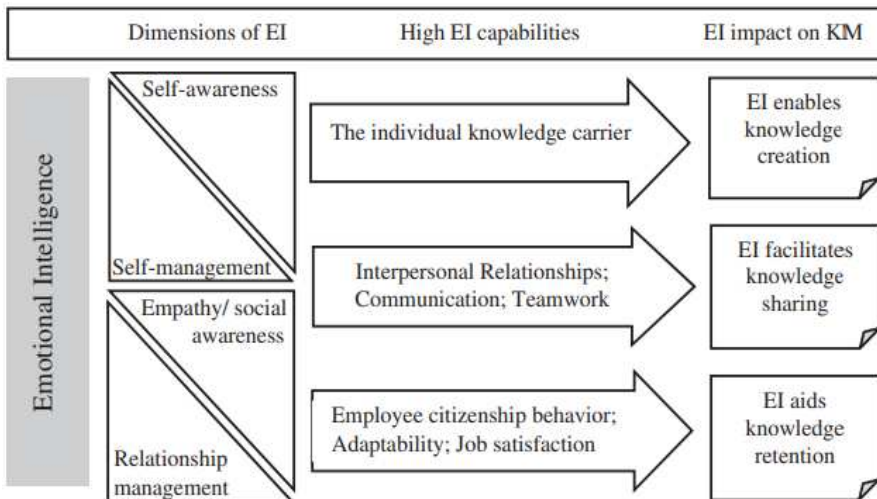
**Table 9.** Logistic regression — Hypothesis 3.

	<b>B</b>	<b>S. E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp (B)</b>
<b>EQ</b>	0.011	0.006	3.185	1	0.074	1.011

**Table 10.** Logistic regression — Hypothesis 4.

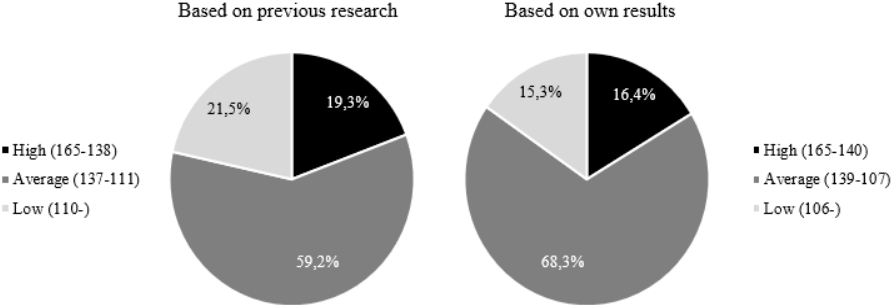
	<b>B</b>	<b>S. E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp (B)</b>
<b>EQ</b>	0.082	0.040	4.221	1	0.030	1.085
<b>Ethics (1)</b>	0.199	0.392	0.256	1	0.613	1.220

**Figure 1.** The relationship between emotional intelligence and knowledge management



Source: Rechberg (2020, p. 5).

**Figure 2.** Categorization of respondents by their EQ scores



Source: own calculations based on Schutte *et al.* (2009) and own survey.