

2021

## Hiring Manager Perceptions of the Emotional Intelligence Skills of Urban Community College Graduates

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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Janice Sullivan English

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2021

Abstract

Hiring Manager Perceptions of the Emotional Intelligence Skills of Urban Community

College Graduates

by

Janice Sullivan English

MS. Columbus State University, 2006

BS, Mercer University, 1996

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2021

## Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) skills are an important factor in the successful entry in the labor market of the fresh graduates of urban community colleges. Even though previous studies provided substantial evidence to the importance of these skills, these studies also recognized a lack of preparedness for the newly community college graduates and add to the voices of local business communities who manifest concern in this regard. The purpose of this basic qualitative research project was to explore local hiring manager perceptions of the EI skills of community college graduates they have hired for knowledge work roles. Goleman's theory of EI guided the two research questions, which asked which EI skills hiring managers consider essential for professional success in knowledge work, and, respectively, what are local hiring managers perceptions of EI skill gaps of community college graduates they have employed as knowledge workers. Thematic analysis of interviews with eight purposively sampled hiring managers revealed core themes that emerged from the data analysis: (a) situational awareness, (b) communication for relationship management, (c) assertiveness in knowledge work, (d) generational understanding of EI, and (e) EI coaching for professional success. The findings were used to design a 3-day online EI professional development seminar, which could create positive social change by bridging the communication gap between college administrators and employers and could also serve as a supplemental tool for community colleges to equip graduates with essential EI skills necessary for knowledge work roles.

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## Dedication

*Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalms 37:4.*

I want to dedicate this body of work to the Glory of God and my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He has allowed me to pursue a dream that was deferred for many years and now my dream is a reality. I would also like to dedicate this project to Charles and Annie Ree Sullivan, my parents who instilled in me that I can do everything in Christ, who is my strength. In dedication to Kenneth, my husband who inspired me daily and lifted me when I thought I could go no further. To my son Chadwick Zellner, my niece Maya Jackson, my granddaughter Anaiah Rollins, and grandson Joseph Messam. I hope I have been an exemplar role model in aim, you will continue the legacy of learning in our family.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
The Local Problem.....	1
Rationale .....	4
Definition of Terms.....	5
Research Questions .....	7
Review of Literature .....	8
Conceptual Framework.....	9
Review of the Broader Problem.....	16
Implications.....	22
Summary .....	23
Section 2: The Methodology.....	24
Research Design.....	24
Population .....	26
Participants.....	27
Sampling and Sample Size.....	27
Participants Confidentiality .....	29
Data Collection .....	29
Instrumentation .....	30
Data Collection Procedure .....	31
Data Analysis .....	31



Coding Strategies .....	32
Credibility Strategies .....	33
Dependability Strategies .....	34
Confirmability Strategies .....	34
Transferability Strategies .....	35
Limitations .....	35
Data Analysis Results .....	36
Data Collection .....	37
Data Analysis .....	39
Quality Assurance and Trustworthiness .....	42
Demographics of Participants .....	45
Findings.....	45
Themes Generated from the Findings.....	46
Connecting the Findings to Literature on EI.....	63
Project Deliverable.....	65
Summary .....	66
Section 3: The Project.....	67
Introduction.....	67
Recap of the Basic Qualitative Project’s Essential Themes .....	67
Goals of the Project.....	70
Project Outcomes .....	71
Rationale of the Project.....	71

Review of Literature .....	72
Applying Basic EI Skills in Knowledge Work Roles in Healthcare .....	74
Integrating EI Competencies into Community College’s Academic Curricula .....	77
Recommendations for Creating Effective EI Training Programs.....	79
Description .....	81
Project Evaluation Plan.....	82
Project Implications .....	83
Section 4: Reflection and Conclusions .....	85
Project Strengths and Limitations.....	86
Limitations .....	87
Recommendations for Alternative Approaches .....	88
Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change .....	89
Project Development.....	90
Educators are Social Change Agents .....	91
Reflection on the Importance of the Work .....	92
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research .....	93
Conclusion .....	94
References.....	96
Appendix A.....	121
Appendix B .....	124
Appendix C .....	126

Appendix D.....	127
Appendix E.....	128
Appendix F.....	129

## List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics.....	44
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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

Community colleges, including two-year technical colleges and trade schools, play an essential role in a metropolitan region's economic development by preparing students to be skilled and qualified employees in the workplace (Thornton et al., 2019; Tyndorf & Glass, 2017). However, business leaders have questioned whether the local community college system equips graduates with essential workforce readiness and emotional intelligence (EI) skills. Gauthier (2019) implied that local community colleges offer career and technical programs allowing students to graduate within 2 years. Students also enroll in community colleges because these schools tend to be cost-efficient, convenient, and flexible with the delivery of courses (Bailey, 2016; Mann, 2017). The primary goal of community colleges was to transform local regions by educating the public, engage citizens, and producing skilled and lifelong learners for the workplace, and equip students with skills needed to succeed in today's competitive global workforce (Jones, 2016). Although community colleges provide locals in the area educational opportunities, employers often criticize 2-year colleges for offering curricula that are "too narrow in scope and breadth" (Gauthier, 2019, p. 57). Others doubt whether community colleges equip students with skills needed to succeed in today's competitive global workforce (Carbone & Ware, 2017; Moore & Morton, 2017; Suleman, 2018).

In knowledge work roles, community college graduates must possess an array of skills and knowledge to be considered competent in the workplace (Hahn & Gangeness, 2019). Carbone and Ware (2017) suggested that most employers prefer to hire graduates

who understand the importance of communicating effectively, thinking critically, and cooperating in a respectful way. Companies also rather hire competent workers who display solid EI skills (Bartock, 2019; Geofroy & Evans, 2017). Community colleges are expected to prepare students for the workforce, but many lack academic curriculum that train students on how to recognize and manage EI competencies (Irlbeck & Dunn, 2020). Bartock (2019) encouraged more researchers to examine the role EI plays in community college graduates' success in the workforce since information appears to be limited. In response, I performed basic qualitative research methods to understand local hiring managers' thoughts about the EI skills of community college graduates.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2020) reported that community colleges awarded 852,000 associate degrees during the 2017-2018 academic year. Employers pressure community colleges to meet the evolving demands of the workforce today and to fill positions in the future (Latz, 2015). In higher education, it is tradition for faculty members to develop curricula preparing students to perform well in the workplace (Hahn & Gangeness, 2019). Some community college graduates describe feeling ill-prepared on the job after finishing college (Lee & Sim, 2020). Because newly graduated employees often lack EI, companies require new workers to go through additional training and development programs once hired (Bartock, 2019; Sharma, 2018).

Knowledge work represents one of the fastest-growing industries in today's everchanging global workforce (Annett, 2019; Block, 2017; Pettersen, 2019). Employees who perform knowledge-based work understand the importance of acquiring information, dissecting it, interpreting it, and applying it effectively when making workplace decisions

(Butler, 2016; Collet et al., 2015; Marshall & Reed, 2016). Knowledge workers must also possess EI skills since they typically work in high-demanding and cross-functional careers (Block, 2017; Rønningstad, 2019; Surawski, 2019). Conversely, students enroll in community colleges to gain essential knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively in today's ever-changing job market (DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016; Sansone et al., 2017; Suleman, 2018). A gap between what new community college students learned in the class and what they are expected to know on the job concerns employers Bennett, 2017; Moore & Morton, 2017; Tulgan, 2016).

The problem addressed in my study related to the EI skill gaps of knowledge workers who graduated from an urban community college system. To explore this gap, I interviewed eight hiring managers who have employed community college graduates since the 2015-2016 academic year. My goal was to gain more insight into local hiring managers' perspectives regarding EI skills that community college administrations could integrate into academic curricula. The region where the study was conducted is home to major global corporations, as well as ample local businesses that hire skilled knowledge workers in accounting, corporate training, human resources, and information technology (IT) positions. The area under study also houses nine two-year higher and postsecondary institutions (i.e., six technical colleges and three community colleges), which served as the central context for my study. An urban hospital system represented the research site since it hires graduates of local community colleges for knowledge work roles.

New community college graduates are often perceived by employers to lack essential skills on the job (e.g., EI skills; Rao, 2015; Sharma, 2018; Stewart et al., 2016;

Suleman, 2018). The primary purpose of this study was to examine and understand hiring managers' perceptions of the EI skills of new community college graduates hired for knowledge work roles. A local hospital near an urban metropolitan city in the southeast served as the research site in this study. Central Health Services (CHS) replaced the name of the healthcare facility to protect the identity.

CHS employs over 1430 workers in four divisions: nursing residency, nursing, allied health, and system support and professional services. The system support and professional services team performs nonclinical support roles involving knowledge work including (a) administrative duties, (b) case management, (c) clerical work, (d) IT, (e) training and development, and (f) supervision and leadership. CHS also employs financial employees, human resource personnel, and others for knowledge work roles. Conversely, knowledge workers must possess basic EI skills because they work in high-demanding and cross-functional careers (Kach et al., 2015; Mueller & Gopalakrishna, 2016). EI skills are also vital in healthcare knowledge work roles since employees interact with patients, co-workers, and leadership (Raffoul et al., 2019). The study site has a long relationship with the local urban community college system and CHS leaders serve as advisory board members at these schools.

### **Rationale**

Community colleges offer a variety of programs and services supporting local economic development (Gauthier, 2019). These schools are also primarily responsible for preparing students to be competent in the workplace (Mann, 2017; Thornton et al., 2019; Tyndorf & Glass, 2017). However, employers have expressed concern that community



college graduates are not equipped with fundamental skills to function effectively on the job (Moore & Morton, 2017; Sharma, 2018). In this project, I sought to uncover hiring managers' perceptions of community college graduates' EI skills. Understanding employers' experience in hiring local community college graduates could provide a more in-depth insight for administrators to create programs and services for students to succeed as knowledge workers.

Knowledge work research has been conducted extensively since Drucker (1959) proposed an operational definition of the profession. The term *knowledge worker* was used to describe “an advanced progressive worker with formal training and the abilities to resolve complex problems as well as provide innovative foresight to issues related to the specifics of a relevant field” (Drucker, 1959, p. 1). Knowledge work can be defined in many ways and all lead to careers that solve complex problems (Field & Chan, 2018; Mueller & Gopalakrishna, 2016). Knowledge work, especially tasks that can be done remotely or at a distance, is a core function of a modern society (Block, 2017). Recognizing vital elements of EI for students interested in pursuing knowledge work positions is an important academic and business issue worthy of academic attention during the global pandemic that is changing all aspects of modern workplaces.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Community colleges:* Gauthier (2019) described community colleges as 2-year schools that offer a variety of career and technical programs. The local area identified in my research project has over six public technical colleges and three community colleges providing students with the essential skills for the workforce. In this study, all two-year

postsecondary institutions in the local area represents community or technical colleges since they prepare graduates to enter knowledge work roles.

*Emotional Intelligence (EI)*: Barchard, Brackett, and Mestre (2016) stated that the original concept of EI focused on a person's ability to monitor his or her thoughts and emotions and others' thoughts and emotion. However, Jafri (2018) implied that today EI connects emotions to different behavioral personality traits in the workplace. For the purpose of this project, EI skills served as a common vocabulary for practitioners.

*Hiring managers*: Torres and Gregory (2018) described hiring managers as personnel primary responsible for reviewing potential candidates' resumes, conducting interviews, and selecting new employees. In the context of this project, hiring managers must have selected local community college graduates in professional roles to qualify to participate in my qualitative investigation. For my study, I worked with a lead administrator affiliated with the local community college advisory board to obtain contact information for hiring managers who have employed knowledge worker graduates since the 2015-2016 academic year.

*Knowledge worker*: Field and Chan (2018) defined knowledge work as a job in which people manipulate and transmit ideas rather than goods. Block (2017) asserted that knowledge workers also possess high levels of knowledge; their primary task is creation, sharing or communicating, and application of knowledge. Throughout this project, the term 'knowledge worker' referred to skilled employees who are critical thinkers and experts at addressing employers' expectations and solving problems.

### **Significance of the Study**

The rising cost of education, global corporate competition, and outsourcing require businesses to recruit knowledge worker graduates from community colleges who are expected to possess critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills (Kach et al., 2015). Today's community college students represent the next generation of potential social change agents (Jacoby, 2017; Lechner et al., 2017; Phillips et al., 2017). Many of these students seek employment in their local communities after graduation (Betz et al., 2016; Field & Chan, 2018). However, some higher learning communities do not equip students with the EI skills to be successful in their respective careers (Sharma, 2018; Stewart et al., 2016). Results generated in this project might provide community college administrators, in the southeastern region of the United States, a more in-depth insight into local hiring managers' perceptions of the EI skills graduates need to sustain social change careers.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions explored the perceptions of hiring managers in a metropolitan setting about the EI skills of community college knowledge worker graduates. Two research questions guided this basic qualitative project:

RQ1: What are the EI skills hiring managers consider essential for professional success in knowledge work?

RQ2: What are local hiring managers perceptions of EI skill gaps of community college graduates they have employed as knowledge workers?

## **Review of Literature**

Community colleges represent the driving force behind training students to perform complex tasks in a competitive workforce (DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016; Gauthier, 2019; Mann, 2017; Mayorga, 2019; Roksa et al., 2016). Employers expect community college graduates to be prepared to handle day-to-day concerns on the job (Andreas, 2018). Furthermore, most companies today depend largely on those capable of creating effective solutions for multifaceted problems in a fast-paced work environment (Block, 2017). Knowledge workers typically perform in fast-paced roles requiring them to “think for a living” (Annett, 2019, p. 10). Therefore, CHS hiring managers who have employed a community college graduate in a knowledge work role recently may provide more insights into what administrators could do to improve students EI skills before they apply for jobs at the local research site.

The following review of literature is divided into three sections: conceptual framework, historical overview of knowledge-based work, and context of the problem. Information presented in this section was primarily published between 2015 and 2020. Articles predating the 2015-2020 research window provided historical aspects related to the concept of knowledge worker and EI. To gain a basic understanding of key terms used in my study, I searched research databases extensively. EBSCOhost, ERIC, ProQuest, SAGE, and Wiley Online Library provided valuable leads to strengthen my understanding of knowledge work, EI skills, and college students’ experiences. I found that articles related to hiring managers’ perceptions of knowledge workers’ EI skills were limited.

More than 37,560 peer-review articles on “knowledge work” exist in EBSCOhost. However, only 16 articles appeared in EBSCOhost when I paired knowledge workers and EI skills together. I also entered the key term “knowledge work” in ProQuest Central, one of the world’s largest research databases. ProQuest Central generated over 1 million articles on knowledge workers. The oldest article on knowledge workers in the ProQuest Central database predated Drucker’s introduction of the term in the 1950s. Over 20,450 articles on ProQuest related to knowledge workers and EI. I did not locate articles about hiring manager’s perception of new community college graduates’ EI skills entering the knowledge work industry.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The emotional in theory guided this basic qualitative research project since it involves managing emotions and applying social intelligence, which are vital components in the workplace (see Chinyere & Afeez, 2019). Introduced in the 1990s, the original concept of EI involved recognizing, understanding, and expressing emotions (Barchard et al., 2016; Hendon et al., 2017; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The theory also focused on processing emotional thoughts and managing oneself and others’ positive and negative emotions (Gómez-Leal et al., 2018; Kewalramani et al., 2015). Scholars implied that Goleman’s (1995) business perspective on EI emphasizes personal attributes in work settings (Carillo et al., 2018; Kanesan & Fauzan, 2019). Therefore, I chose Goleman’s EI theory instead of the original EI theory since it highlights skills necessary for community college graduates to succeed in knowledge work roles.

### ***Goleman's EI Theory***

Goleman's (1995) EI theory assumes that emotional competency leads to a successful career (Carillo et al., 2018; Ikpesu, 2017; Kanesa & Fauzan, 2019; O'Connor, Hill et al., 2019; Ugoani et al., 2015). In his work, Goleman argued that 80% of work-related tasks require some form of EI and the other 20% involves hard skills linked to the traditional definition of intelligence (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2019). Goleman's EI theory also considers (a) self-awareness, (b) social-awareness, (c) self-management, and (d) relationship management skills. Each of these components help employees make responsible career decisions (Carillo et al., 2018; Ikpesu, 2017; Nanda & Randhawa, 2019; Ugoani et al., 2015). Drawing on Goleman's four domains of EI, the following subsections examine literature connecting the theory to the workplace since CHS hiring managers provided context for this research project.

**Self-Awareness and Social Awareness.** The self-awareness aspect of Goleman's EI theory encourages individuals to recognize certain moods and emotional states before making decisions based on emotion (Martin, 2019). Self-awareness also forces people to examine core values to understand emotional triggers and why these things are upsetting (Nguyen et al., 2019). Employees who manage emotions in a work setting tend to be self-aware and think more realistically in terms of accomplishing organizational goals and expectations (Bower et al., 2018). Self-aware workers also understand personal strengths and weaknesses, receive constructive feedback without being defensive, and work due diligently to achieve organizational goals. Conversely, social awareness represents another cornerstone of Goleman's EI theory (Martin, 2019).

Social awareness connects people to social and emotional environments (Carillo et al., 2018; Martin, 2019). It also optimizes collaboration and cooperation in groupwork (Grunberg et al., 2020). More importantly, social awareness refers to a person's ability to recognize other individuals' cognitive behaviors (i.e., emotion and motivation). Bacon and Corr (2017) maintained that people who score high in social awareness often feel "agentic" in social settings and demonstrate strong interpersonal skills (p. 254). Social-aware individuals also tend to be empathetic by feeling what others feel, understanding others' perspective(s), and sensing what another person needs to complete tasks (Martin, 2019). Furthermore, social awareness requires individuals to gain an appreciation for developing and nurturing external relationships (Janke et al., 2020).

Together, self-awareness and social awareness set the foundation for Goleman's (1995) EI theory. Hinkle (2018) implied that a person cannot accomplish self-awareness in isolation. Instead, people become self-aware when they understand how to internalize or process experiences cognitively – think critically about emotions and recognize social cues – when interacting with others. Social awareness helps individuals trust and build a rapport with people (Janke et al., 2020). A strong sense of both self-awareness and social awareness also help employees manage emotions in the workplace (Hinkle, 2018; Martin, 2019). The next section highlights self-management, which represents another crucial factor in Goleman's EI theory (see Carillo et al., 2018; Ikpesu, 2017).

**Self-Management.** Scholars agreed that self-management (also known as self-regulation or self-control) forces people to assess thoughts, feelings, and other emotions inward while keeping internal impulses in check (Ikpesu, 2017; Kanesan & Fauzan,

2019; Nanda & Randhawa, 2019). Self-management involves calmness and maintaining one's composure throughout unpleasant circumstances regardless of how one feels about the experience (Ikpesu, 2017). Additionally, Ugoani (2015) alleged that self-management requires people to be conscientious and delay gratification while pursuing goals. Insight on the self-regulation domain has been proven to assist employees manage emotions and impulsive behavior in the workplace (see Ikpesu, 2017; Kanesan & Fauzan, 2019). Like most humans, individuals with self-control have good days and bad days (Bower et al., 2018). Employees who demonstrate self-control in the workplace effectively also respond to situations fairly and handle issues ethically rather act on emotional impulses. Thus, it is crucial for employees to understand the importance of self-management since it can lead to a healthy work-life balance and positive work relationships (Martin, 2019).

**Relationship Management.** Relationship management represents the fourth domain of Goleman's (1995) EI theory. This component involves managing emotions, interacting with people properly, and reading social cues accurately (Carillo et al., 2018; Ugoani et al., 2015). The relationship management domain of Goleman's EI theory also considers coaching and mentoring, conflict management, influence (e.g., personal and leadership), and teamwork (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017). It also helps mitigate workplace disputes between employees and management or employee versus employee (Ugoani et al., 2015). Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2019) implied that the relationship management aspect of Goleman's EI theory influences the other EI components since it entails understanding oneself and others to achieve organizational goals. Relationship management also shapes how employees make organizational decisions.



Martin (2019) and Nguyen et al. (2019) agreed that relationship management require employees to engage others, build and sustain positive relationships inside and outside the company. Good relationships also increase a team's productivity (Martin, 2019). Relationship management also relies on trust between a leader and employees (Nguyen et al., 2019). Successful employees not only build a rapport with co-workers, but also get to know colleagues by asking questions (e.g., career, family, or personal interest) and showing empathy in the workplace. For this research project, I focused on hiring managers' perception of the EI skills of community college graduates hired for knowledge work roles since the 2015-2016 academic year. The proceeding section connects research on EI competencies and the knowledge work industry.

### ***Knowledge Workers and Emotional Intelligence***

Today's employer expects college graduates to understand how to manage emotions when entering the workplace (Hart Research Associates, 2015; Matteson et al., 2016; Sharma, 2018; Wolff & Booth, 2017). In knowledge-based roles, employees must be innovative problem solvers who think critically about complex solutions in fast-paced work environments (Block, 2017). Pettersen (2019) identified expert thinking, complex communication, and analytical reasoning as three crucial factors in knowledge work. All three components require some form of emotional intelligence (see Coady et al., 2018; Hendon et al., 2017; Makkar & Basu, 2019). Knowledge work positions also require employees to be innovative problem-solvers and adjust to challenges in the workplace quickly (Parke et al., 2015; Pettersen, 2019). In agreement, Kach et al. (2015) and Wagle (2016) stated that employers want to hire employees for knowledge work role who are

effective communicators, self-sufficient, and solid team players. Employers also rather employ knowledge workers who adjust to challenges in the workplace quickly (Pettersen, 2019; Sansone et al., 2020).

CHS, the local research site for this basic qualitative research project, employs knowledge workers recently graduated from local community colleges. College students must understand basic EI skills to be successful in today's global workforce (Sansone et al., 2020). As an example, according to Sansone, college students should learn to act and work intentionally and effectively in the workplace. They also must be able to work well independently and within groups (Sansone et al., 2020). Community colleges' primary obligation is to prepare students to think critically, solve complex problems, and create innovative solutions, which aligns with the concept of a knowledge worker. College administrators must equip students with vital resources necessary to maintain a successful career in knowledge work after graduation (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Griffiths et al., 2017). Conducting program evaluations can help administrators assess whether graduates of community colleges develop essential EI skills before applying for knowledge work jobs (see Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). More importantly, a program evaluation can produce objective, quantifiable data related to performance tasks and EI skills.

### ***Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace***

EI plays an increasingly integral role in the workplace, mainly when employees perform emotionally intensive knowledge-based tasks (Alfonso et al., 2016; Lee, 2018); Makkar & Basu, 2017). For example, public service workers often take on dutiful roles requiring them to juggle between knowledge-based tasks, think critically, and monitor

their emotions before making impactful decisions (Marshall & Reed, 2016; Rønningstad, 2018). Baksh Baloch et al. (2014), as cited by Luncheon and Kasztelnik (2021), linked EI to employee performance, job satisfaction, and productivity. A person's leadership style also shapes EI and how employees engage in the workplace (see Luncheon & Kasztelnik, 2021). In contrast, Lee's (2018) qualitative results showed that self-awareness effected public service workers' EI positively, and burnout impacted EI and job-satisfaction negatively. Employees equipped to check emotions also develop relationships in their respective industry effectively (Alfonso et al., 2016).

Conversely, college students today live and work in a highly technological knowledge work society (Sansone et al., 2020). Community college graduates pursuing careers as knowledge workers must be aware of emotional intelligence before entering the workforce (see Lee et al., 2018). Chinyere and Afeez (2019) regarded an academic setting as a place where college students gain knowledge, skills, and other experiences preparing them to function in the workplace. Following traditional qualitative methods, Jones (2016) conducted a focus group conversation with students attending Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) who felt challenged in the classroom. Some participants expressed that MCTC instructors forced them to think critically about issues and encouraged them to work out problems via dialogue and group exercises. Working out issues help strengthen people relationship management skills, which is a vital component of the Goleman's (1995) EI theory.

Information covered in the conceptual framework section supported why I chose Goleman's (1995) EI theory to guide my research project. Although Salovey and Mayer

(1990) introduced the concept of EI originally, Goleman's theory offered a business side that aligned with my project's problem and research questions. The four domains – self-awareness, social-awareness, self-regulation, and relationship management – connected to Goleman's theory must be taught in community colleges since each play an intricate role in a person's career advancement (see Martin, 2019). Knowledge work roles also require individuals to be emotionally competent (Field & Chan, 2018). In my research project, I addressed the problem related to newly community college students lacking EI skills after graduation. I reviewed articles for the proceeding sections that shed light on the research problem in my research study.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

Employers hold job fairs at local community and technical colleges in the region to recruit recent graduates to fill various roles aligned with knowledge work. Coined by Drucker (1959), the original concept of knowledge workers described employees who job responsibilities involved handling intangible resources (Swiercz, 2018). The idea shifted from 'knowledge workers' to 'knowledge work' as industries in the 1950s changed from physical workers and manual workers to an economy driven by creativity and intellect (Jakubik, 2020). As the IT profession grew in the 1990s, Drucker modified his thoughts about 'knowledge work' to include this since this group outnumbered other knowledge work professional and they did not exist in the original definition (Švarc, 2016; Swiercz, 2018). Swiercz (2018) stated that Drucker's final explanation of knowledge workers involved those "who apply theoretical and analytical knowledge, acquired through formal education, to develop new products or services" (p. 5). Expanding on Drucker's idea,

Brinkley (2006), Correia de Sousa and van Dierendonck (2010), and Davenport (2006) provided different perspective on which employees perform knowledge work roles.

Knowledge work, as noted by Correia de Sousa and van Dierendonck's (2010), involves three fundamental components (a) treating work as a vocation, (b) networking with other knowledge worker professionals in various industries, and (c) having a high-level of autonomy in the workplace reveal the blend of skills required for this type of work. Davenport (2006), as cited by Surawski (2019), considered job roles requiring a high-degree of professional training, education, and experience as knowledge work. Any position involving creativity, transferring and applying knowledge, among other crucial tasks also align with knowledge work (Surawski, 2019).

Many of the universal skills and competencies coinciding with the workforce readiness and soft skills, including creativity, critical thinking, innovativeness, cultural awareness, and teamwork (Surawski, 2019). Brinkley's (2006) knowledge work concept included three categories identified in the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) standard. The first group of knowledge workers, according to Brinkley, consists of those serving in managerial, associate professional, and technical roles. High-level and skilled employees who earned a degree or other qualified credentials (e.g., allied health certificates) hold second-class knowledge work positions (Brinkley, 2006; Surawski, 2019). The final group perform knowledge-based tasks that require people to use hard skills like intelligence or physical abilities and soft skills such as critical thinking and emotional intelligence.

While it is no overarching definition, the concept of knowledge workers has been studied in various capacities since Drucker (1959) introduced the term (Peters & Reveley, 2014; Surawski, 2019; Swiercz, 2018). Scholars have linked knowledge work to different professions today. For example, Sørensen and Holman's (2014) mixed-methods study connected knowledge work to academicians, accountants, and IT engineers. Scholars have also provided intricate details about knowledge work and other IT roles (see Alberts, 2013; Kucharska & Erickson, 2019; Lewis, Agarwal, & Sambamurthy, 2003; Wagle, 2016). Knowledge work studies has also been tied to human resource management (see Block, 2017; Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Franks, 2016). More importantly, research has shed light on the relationship between knowledge work and employees' overall health and job satisfaction, including stress and burnout (Hsiao et al., 2013; Lee, 2016). Studies have also examined different generation's idea of knowledge-based work (see Ac sente, 2010; Calabrese, 2010; Fenwick, 2012; Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2018). Although there is a plethora of knowledge work roles, community college graduates seeking these positions must be emotionally competent to handle job. The next section highlights careers traditionally associated with knowledge work since participants in my research project hired community college graduates for these roles.

### ***Careers Associated with Knowledge Work***

Knowledge-based work is essential today (Annett, 2018; Field & Chan, 2018; Kach et al., 2015). Rønningstad (2018) hinted that knowledge workers involve autonomy, self-efficacy, and EI rather than physical capabilities. In agreement, Petterson (2019) implied that knowledge workers typically excel in roles that allow them to use cognitive

processes to acquire, dissect, interpret, and synthesize data to solve issues in the workplace. Knowledge workers also perform well when they are responsible for creating new programs and services benefiting society or sharing new ideas (Pettersen, 2019). Some knowledge workers also serve as consultants who provide services that cannot easily be stored in a database (Pettersen, 2019).

Moore and Morton (2017) and Wolff and Booth (2017) also provided a different perspective about employable EI skills. However, equipping students with employable skills should be a top priority for colleges and universities (Moore & Morton, 2017; Wolff & Booth, 2017). A community college in an urban southeastern state offers a variety of degree programs such as accounting, business management, and informational technology that contribute to the advancement of their regional communities (Gauthier, 2019; Mann, 2017). Employers have noted some higher learning institutions fail to equip students with essential workforce-readiness skills like EI needed on the job (Moore & Morton, 2017; Tokke, 2017).

Notwithstanding, Andreas (2018) stated that employers expect college graduates to be ready to work entering the workforce. However, hiring managers reported college graduates lacked real challenges in the workplace (Hart Research Associates, 2015). More than half (58%) of organizational leaders in Hart Research Associates (2015) recommended students develop workforce-readiness skills before graduating from college. At least 88% of those polled also urged colleges to equip students with knowledge skills to excel in the workplace (Hart Research Associates, 2015). This basic qualitative project intends to employ qualitative means to understand Southeastern hiring

managers' perceptions of the EI skills of community college graduates working in knowledge-based positions.

### ***Professional Readiness of Community College Graduates***

Today's ever-changing workforce requires employees, including those new to the knowledge worker industry, to perform multifaceted roles (Hora et al., 2018; Ritter et al., 2018). Hora et al. (2018) maintained that employers charge community colleges to equip graduates with vital workforce-readiness skills and competencies, including EI and soft-skills, needed to be effective team players. Additionally, Hora et al. encouraged community colleges to implement student-centered programs affording graduates experiential learning opportunities to build social and cultural skills relevant to the workforce. Appleby et al. (2019) also encouraged college leaders to incorporate essential workforce-readiness skills into existing curricula to produce positive outcomes for all stakeholders in the learning communities.

Because the business and academic communities do not always use the same terminology, it is important to look for concepts in the interview data. Campbell and Kresyman (2015) conducted interviews with 14 employers, 14 college administrators, and 14 faculty members to understand their perception of four key skills required to succeed in the workplace. Each interview consisted of eight questions focusing on respondent's perception of skills such as critical thinking, information literacy, oral, written, and interpersonal communication (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015). At least one theme also emerged from each interview question. For example, the first inquiry regarding the perception of critical thinking soft-skills produced three themes, including



the terms *analysis*, *considering all sides*, and *thinking outside the box* (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015). Being mindful of terminology is essential when conducting interviews with individuals in other disciplines.

The second interview questions related to integrating critical skills in the classroom and the workplace (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015). Four levels of skills emerged, some ranking students as ‘good’ and ‘really good’ or on the other end of the spectrum: ‘bad’ and ‘really bad’ emerged during the analysis of the second question (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015). At least 45% of participants communicated positive thoughts (40% reported good thoughts and 5% really good thoughts) about integrating the critical thinking aspect of soft-skills and technological advances in both the classroom and on the job (Campbell & Kresyman, 2015). In contrast, Campbell and Kresyman (2015) discovered that 33% of the respondents expressed negative concerns with integrating critical thinking and modern technology.

Other skills, such as communication, creativity, and teamwork, also receive a lot of attention from researchers conducting studies related to college students’ workforce-readiness skills (Dean & East, 2018; Ritter et al., 2018; Stewart et al., 2016). Unlike those skills related to intelligence, Ritter et al. (2018) explained EI skills give employees a ‘competitive’ advantage in terms of job performance or productivity in the workplace. Stewart et al. (2016) found that employers consider these skills just as crucial as traditional hard skills in today’s workforce. Additionally, Dean and East (2018) asserted that most employers prefer to hire employees who confident in their soft-skills abilities rather than hard-skills, including a person’s technical skills alone.

## **Implications**

Healthcare businesses today rely on individuals who can solve complex problems in a fast-paced work environment aligning with typical knowledge workers' responsibilities (Annett, 2019; Block, 2017). This basic qualitative research study aimed to explore and understand hiring managers' perceptions of the EI skills of recent community college graduates entering the knowledge work industry. Following traditional qualitative data collection and analysis methods, I interviewed eight hiring managers to understand their thoughts about knowledge worker graduates' EI skills. I transcribed each participant interview verbatim, then verified participant statements through a member-checking process (Birt et al., 2016). Next, I followed the three traditional qualitative coding steps— open coding, axial-coding, and selective coding to identify patterns to identify essential themes from the hiring managers' responses. After identifying themes from analyzing the qualitative data, I constructed “rich” and “thick” descriptions based solely on my interpretation as the researcher of the personal accounts shared by local hiring managers during the interviews (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Lawrence, 2018).

As a result of my data collection, I developed a 3-day online project for local community college administrators and hiring managers based on the purpose of this basic qualitative research project, problem background, and the results (see Appendices). The online project also integrated hiring managers' perceptions about the preparation of community college students for knowledge work role. Although results generated in this project benefits all stakeholders, community college administrators will be informed that

the results cannot be generalized due to the sample size (Lawrence, 2018). In other words, the study's findings represented the perceptions a small portion of hiring managers rather than the entire population of hiring managers in the local area (Boddy, 2016). The results presented in the project would also help colleges equip graduates with the EI skills needed to solve complex problems and challenges in knowledge work positions (Hurrell, 2016).

### **Summary**

This section introduced the problem, purpose, and significance of this basic qualitative research project. Furthermore, it also defined the concept of knowledge workers and EI. Many industries employ knowledge workers, including academicians, accountants, and IT engineers (Field & Chan, 2018; Kach et al., 2015; Sørensen & Holman, 2014; Surawski, 2019). A southeastern community college system served as the central context for this basic qualitative investigation as knowledge workers are expected to have emotional control skills. However, leaders of some organizations express concern about the gap between what students learned in college and what they are expected to know on the job (Bennett, 2017; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Moore & Morton, 2017). My investigation was conducted at a local metropolitan hospital where local community college students are recruited as employees after graduation.

## Section 2: The Methodology

The problem addressed in this project was the EI skill gaps of knowledge workers who graduated from an urban community college system. Exploring how well community colleges in an urban Southeastern state prepare knowledge workers for EI skills could help community college administrators and faculty prepare knowledge workers for dynamic real-world professional settings. The purpose of this basic qualitative investigation was to explore and understand the perceptions of local hiring managers in a large metropolitan hospital about EI skills of community college knowledge worker graduates. Understanding the perceptions of local hiring managers could help administrators develop curricula that prepare knowledge worker graduates with key skills to perform their jobs.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative inquiry has a long-standing history of influencing and reforming educational practices and policies (Gallo et al., 2018; Gill, 2020; Javadian et al., 2020). In qualitative studies, researchers tend to investigate people's opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about their experiences in a natural setting rather than examine quantitative data (Percy et al., 2015; Teherani et al., 2015). A basic qualitative research design was appropriate for my investigation since I developed research questions aimed to understand local hiring managers' perception of the EI skills of new community college graduates entering the knowledge work industry. My choice of a qualitative approach was more suited to address my study's purpose than quantitative methods because these techniques require researchers to administer questionnaires and surveys to evaluate frequency or prevalence

of a phenomena (Zahle, 2018). A basic qualitative research design may provide an in-depth understanding of a small group of hiring managers' interpretation of community college graduates' EI skills that could result in actionable insights. Qualitative methods are not bounded by the requirements of the traditional quantitative methods needed to generalize results to a larger population (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Gallo et al. (2018) and Percy et al. (2015) acknowledged that that qualitative research relies mostly on descriptions and interpretations of theories related to social interaction and individual experience. Unlike a quantitative study that relies on statistical data, a basic qualitative inquiry worked for this project since it could generate enough information to explain what hiring managers think about hiring recent knowledge worker graduates (see Zahle, 2018). Basic qualitative studies tend to start from a different fundamental set of beliefs than quantitative studies when it comes to collecting and analyzing data (Teherani et al., 2015). Quantitative investigations result in the enumeration of impacted individuals in the data collection and analysis phases (Eyisi, 2016). As I was less concerned with the frequency of the phenomena and more on the lived experience of participants, qualitative data collection and analysis methods involve in-depth interviews and field notes for rich narratives about the phenomena under study (see Eyisi, 2016). Qualitative researchers also decode and construct experience as it is described by individuals experiencing the phenomena (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

Qualitative studies typically feature one of five designs: case study, ethnography, grounded-theory, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology (Javadian et al., 2020). Single-case studies play a vital role in social science research (Snodgrass et al., 2018). A single-

case study investigation is known to produce elaborate details that researchers evaluate to understand human behavior (Snodgrass et al., 2018). I did not choose an ethnography because techniques associated with this method is characterized by close engagement with participants over time (see Hamilton & Finley, 2020). A grounded theory is traditionally developed after a researcher generalizes findings generated from theoretical sampling (Jamali, 2018; Shaw et al., 2019). I did not intend to develop a theory from results produced in this qualitative study, so the grounded-theory design was rejected. A narrative or phenomenological study may perhaps produce data that shed light on human perception (Abrams et al., 2020; Jamali, 2018). However, I selected a basic qualitative design since I recruited participants from one specific organization instead of multiple location.

### **Population**

Participants in this basic qualitative project were selected from CHS – a medical facility who typically hires knowledge worker graduates of a local community college system. CHS employs over 1,430 employees in four division ranging from nursing residency to support service and professionals. Professionals hired by CHS perform multiple different tasks aligned with knowledge work (Kach et al., 2015; Mueller & Gopalakrishna, 2016), including clerical and administrative roles, information technology professionals, leadership, and management. CHS also employs accountants, financial planners, HR personnel, and a host of other knowledge workers. CHS featured a sufficient pool of diverse knowledge worker participants who met the criteria for this basic qualitative project. Understanding the perception of hiring managers, who have

hired at least one graduate for a knowledge work role since 2015-2016 academic year, can inform community college administrators on what is needed to ensure students understand the concept of EI.

### **Participants**

Employers across the nation have reported that recent community college graduates lack crucial skills, including EI, problem solving, and interpersonal communication skills (Rao, 2015; Stewart et al., 2016; Suleman, 2018). Organizational leaders aim to hire competent and productive employees for the workplace (Michael et al., 2016). My goal was to reveal the perceptions of hiring managers of the EI skills of new knowledge worker graduates from a local urban community college. The southeastern region of the United States houses facilities for many major corporations and medical facilities within its borders. Participants in this study was selected from CHS, a local hospital outside a metropolitan area that employs over 1,430 staff members. Many employees graduated from the local community college system, and some perform tasks associated with Drucker's (1959) concept of traditional knowledge work.

### **Sampling and Sample Size**

I used purposive sampling to recruit local hiring managers responsible for hiring knowledge workers after graduation from a local community college. Purposive (or judgmental) sampling represents a nonrandom method used to deliberately identify local hiring managers who can answer the research question in this basic qualitative project (Etikan et al, 2016; Farrugia, 2019). Unlike other sampling techniques, purposive sampling grants me the opportunity to intentionally select participants who meet specific

characteristics (Etikan et al., 2016). To be included in the study, research participants had to meet the eligibility criteria for inclusion as a hiring manager at CHS who has hired knowledge worker graduates from the local community college system since the 2015-2016 academic year. Those selected for this research project provided in-depth, yet graphic details that shed light on the necessary skills knowledge workers need to be successful entering the workforce after college.

Hiring managers who employed graduates from a local community college system for knowledge work roles was selected for the project. As an active member of Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), I had access to the listserv of local hiring managers who hire knowledge workers in various roles, including accounting, business management, IT, and corporate training. I identified a local hospital administrator who would be able to provide me a list of 10 managers who oversee the system and support department at the research site. The public contact information of the human resource, finance and marketing department may also assist me as I attempt to be sure that participants fit the criteria for this investigation. A questionnaire was sent to CHS hiring managers to determine their eligibility for participation (Appendix C).

Qualitative studies typically have a smaller sample size (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Farrugia, 2019; Wu et al., 2016). However, the sample size in basic qualitative research studies must be large enough to produce rich and meaningful data for the analysis (Farrugia, 2019; Palinkas et al., 2015). The primary goal of qualitative research is to reach data saturation, which occurs when no new themes or ideas are generated in a thematic analysis (Patton, 2015). I interviewed eight hiring managers to understand their



perception of the EI skills of knowledge workers who recently graduated from a community college. Eight to 12 individuals have been known to produce sufficient data to comprehensively explain common experiences shared by a studied population (Turner & Bowker, 2018).

### **Participants Confidentiality**

I protected participants' identities by ensuring that the all data, digital or in hard copy format, generated in the study are consistently stored in a password-protected environment. Once a participant who met the selection criteria was identified, I sent them the informed consent form. The informed consent form notified participants of confidentiality measures used in the project. The identity of each potential participants was replaced with an alphanumeric code or pseudonym such as P1, P2, and P3both during the data collection and during data analysis process. The unique pseudonym was used to ensure that none of information or documents related to the study would reveal their identity. I was the only person to handle the information throughout the data collection and analysis processes. I shared transcripts with members of my committee, but I stored them on a password protected device. Furthermore, data obtained throughout the project will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home for 7 years after the study has published. The information will be destroyed after the 7-year storage period passes.

### **Data Collection**

I conducted and recorded in-depth interviews with between eight hiring managers to understand their perception of EI skills and workforce-readiness. Antwi and Hamza (2015) stated that qualitative researchers immerse themselves in the culture of individuals

they are studying to gain a better understanding of people's experiences. Yates and Leggett (2016) maintained that qualitative data collection tools typically involve in-depth interviews, observational notes, and self-reflection. I used SHRM and advisory board members who are hiring managers to see if they, or someone they know, hired a community college knowledge worker graduate since the 2015-2016 academic year. I conducted and recorded each semistructured interview with participants.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher typically serves as the primary instrument during the data collection phase of qualitative studies (Johnson et al., 2020). Qualitative researchers also immerse data collected via participant interviews and field observations, but monitor preconceived assumptions, bias, and subjectivities during the study (Collins & Cooper, 2014). To ensure that data collection is consistent across all participant interactions, I followed an interview protocol to guide the interviewing process and to ensure that all participant interviews are similar and consistent (Appendix B). The interview questions were developed from a bank of questions used in previous qualitative studies related to hiring managers' perceptions of EI skills to be asked during semistructured participant interviews (Gray-Nicholas, 2017; Smith, 2015). The interview questions address the first research question in this qualitative study relates hiring managers' perception of knowledge workers' EI. While interviewing each participant, I also kept a field journal to monitor facial expressions, long pauses, or elevation in tone. Notes I collected during participant interviews helped me monitor my biases and subjectivities throughout the research project.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

I conducted and recorded in-depth interviews with between eight hiring managers to understand their perception of EI skills and workforce-readiness. Interviews was conducted through videoconferencing systems (e.g., Zoom, FaceTime) or via phone. Eligible participants were asked to digitally sign, via email, an informed consent document before the interview takes place. Each participant interview was roughly 60 minutes long and semistructured, which gave participants the freedom to express their feelings about certain phenomena (see Li et al., 2019). Each participant received an invitation to the project (Appendix D). Once participants completed the questionnaire and indicated their willingness to be interviewed, I emailed them a letter of consent. To ensure participants' eligibility, I verified with my person of contact at CHS appointed by the healthcare facility's CEO that they (a) are a hiring manager or hiring manager, and (b) they have hired a recent community college knowledge worker since the 2015-2016 academic year to make sure they qualify through a questionnaire (Appendix C).

### **Data Analysis**

Following traditional data analysis specific to qualitative methods, I first recorded each interview using a handheld audio recorder. After I have the interview recordings, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and check all transcripts while listening to the audio file recoding to make sure they are identical. I transcribed the data collected during the interview process using Zoom and Otter software. Following my preliminary check for transcript accuracy, the transcript was sent to each participant to inquire about the responses that I collected and to provide the participant with an opportunity to clarify any

area of the interview transcript within 1 week. Following the interview and participants' review of the transcript, I reviewed each of them to connect with the literature review and conceptual framework before analyzing it thoroughly for common words and phrases categorized into themes. Concepts guiding the coding are aligned to the conceptual framework of EI (Appendix E).

### **Coding Strategies**

Coding represents a vital component of the qualitative data analysis process since it involves identifying and grouping concepts accordingly (Peesker et al., 2019; Turner-Bowker et al., 2018). Qualitative researchers typically follow three levels of coding, including open-coding, axial-coding, and selective coding (Wei et al., 2018). The open-coding process started immediately after I transcribed the first participant interview. During the open-coding or first level coding phase, I took notes while reading the information from participant interviews to connect with the data. I dissected each participant interview separately, then analyzed the information altogether to gain more insight into possible connections. Furthermore, I used a multicolored coding system to isolate similar words and phrases that I identified while reviewing each participant's response before moving to axial or second-level coding (see Williams & Moser, 2019).

After pinpointing the open-codes, I reexamined the initial open codes during the axial-coding stage of the qualitative data analysis process (see Wei et al., 2018; Williams & Moser, 2019). Throughout the axial-coding phase, I reviewed the transcribed data thoroughly a few more times to establish, refine, align, and categorize repetitive patterns or themes (see Wei et al., 2018; Williams & Moser, 2019). Selective coding involves

distinguishing emerging themes to saturate or finalize the qualitative data collection process (Saunders et al., 2018). Using EI as a conceptual lens, I constructed rich and descriptive interpretations of participants' accounts with information discussed in the literature review. I generated codes by on EI concepts identified in the literature (see Appendix E).

In this qualitative study, I also considered discrepant (contradictory) statements to gain more insight into the inconsistent information or to strengthen an idea (see Campbell, 2015). My goal was to triangulate the findings using rich and thick descriptions based on participants' statements, information extracted from the literature, and notes kept in a reflective journal to form an audit trail to ensure trustworthiness or credibility of the data. The reflective journal helped me monitor biases and subjectivities throughout the study so that they did not interfere with the credibility or trustworthiness of the findings (see Guetterman, 2015; Mohajan, 2018). Like other qualitative studies, this study addressed trustworthiness in terms of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (see Astroth & Chung, 2018; Forero et al., 2018).

### **Credibility Strategies**

Credibility, like internal validity in quantitative studies, refers to the truthfulness of the data (Astroth & Chung, 2018). To ensure the information is credible, I used member checking and therefore sent each participant an electronic transcribed copy of the information he or she shared during the initial and follow-up interviews. Member checking validates the interpretation and adequacy of the data, and ensure credibility (Heath et al., 2018). I also constructed rich and thick descriptions based solely on the

account of hiring managers' perceptions of knowledge workers' workforce-readiness and soft skills (Gallo et al., 2018). Furthermore, a peer reviewer agreed to review my findings; this individual is an EI expert with multiple publications at Walden University. Peer reviewer involvement also strengthens the credibility of the data (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Connelly, 2016).

### **Dependability Strategies**

Dependability occurs when researchers track the steps and decisions made during a qualitative investigation (Baillie, 2015). People may disclose similar stories about a phenomenon from time to time (Connelly, 2016). To guarantee dependability, I kept an audit trail in a reflective journal to remain transparent throughout the study (Baillie, 2015; Connelly, 2016). An audit of the research process ensures that the study's findings are consistent and can be replicated in future research projects (Astroth & Chung, 2018). The audit trail features my notes related to all activities that happened in this study and the discussions about the decisions I made during the investigation (see Connelly, 2016). All information collected throughout the project will be kept in a secure safe with a passcode protection. I am the only person is privy to the password to access the information.

### **Confirmability Strategies**

Confirmability extends confidence that others could produce the same results (Forero et al., 2018; Mohajan, 2018). The confirmability process also involves using multiple sources to illustrate the information-rich data generated in qualitative studies (Astroth & Chung, 2018). The audit trail can also support confirmability in this project. I member-checked the transcribed data with each participant to verify the accuracy of the

statements (Connelly, 2016). I monitored bias and subjectivities in a reflective journal and consult with the study's committee members to prevent one-sided results (Connelly, 2016). The notes kept in the reflective journal also allowed me to gain an insightful understanding of hiring managers' perceptions of knowledge workers' EI skills (Astroth & Chung, 2018).

### **Transferability Strategies**

Transferability determines whether the results produced in this study can be apply to different circumstances, contexts, or situations (Mojahan, 2018). To ensure the study's findings are transferable, I intend to build rich, thick, and detailed descriptions of the hiring managers' accounts discussed during the in-depth interviews. The information-rich data provides cultural and social contexts commonly used in basic qualitative research methodology (Baillie, 2015). Additionally, interpretative descriptions depict an accurate portrayal of participants' perceptions of recent community college graduates' EI skills entering the knowledge work industry (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016).

### **Limitations**

This basic qualitative research project has several limitations set by the researcher. The most obvious limitation is the basic qualitative research approach that guided the project. A case study design would have allowed for the review of academic transcripts, analysis of course curricula, and other related artifacts. The basic qualitative design focuses on experiences shared by local hiring managers who have experience with hiring new Community College graduates as knowledge workers. All qualitative researchers limit the number of participants who generally provide descriptive statements

interpreted by the researcher (Hamilton, 2020). As the researcher, I have selected the interview questions, which must generate enough data to answer the questions that guide the research in alignment to published best practices (Eyisi, 2016; Yates & Leggett, 2016). A different researcher may have selected other questions that would have unearthed other elements of the phenomena. I identified and interview individual hiring managers in the Southeastern region of the US only, which also limits the participants to those available through my sampling method. I hope to identify eight to 12 CHS hiring managers willing to participate in the interviews.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The primary purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine hiring managers' perceptions of the EI skills of new community college graduates hired for knowledge work roles. The problem for the study related to the EI skill gaps of knowledge workers who graduated from an urban community college system. Two research questions guided the research investigation. First, I wanted to better understand what EI skills hiring managers consider essential for professional success in knowledge work. Next, I wanted to know if local hiring managers recognized the emotional EI skill gaps of community college graduates they have employed as knowledge workers. By understanding which of the skills associated with EI was essential and which of the skills the new knowledge worker graduates had lacked, I hoped to better support community college instructors to integrate EI lessons and exercises into the curricular offerings that students are provided in their knowledge work academic preparation.



My data was collected at a study site that hires many new community college knowledge workers. This allowed me to engage with hiring managers who had directly witnessed new hires and their actions and activities in a professional setting. I felt the hiring managers were in the best place to speak to the demonstrable EI skills that the community college graduates used at work. The following sections describe the data collection and analysis techniques implemented during the basic qualitative research study. As I describe the analysis, I demonstrated how essential themes emerged from the data leading to the project deliverables based on the outcome of the study's findings.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers can use multiple methods to collect data for a research study, including participant interviews (Irani, 2019; McGrath et al., 2016). Irani maintained that participant interviews afford opportunities to gather information about a phenomenon that cannot be observed directly. McGrath et al., (2016) reported that qualitative researchers carry out interviews to explore matters unique to participants' perception(s) about certain experiences. In alignment with traditional qualitative data collection practices, findings generated in this basic qualitative research project were based on participant interviews. Once I obtained permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I emailed hiring managers on the list provided by the executive services associate at (CHS). After the IRB officials approved the project (03-22-21-0647969), 10 hiring managers expressed interest and scheduled interviews initially, and eight hiring managers interviewed voluntarily.

Each hiring manager consented to a recorded interview via Zoom – a collaborative videoconferencing platform used to conduct online meetings. Archibald et al. (2019) found that qualitative researchers considered Zoom acceptable to conduct interviews since it helps build a rapport with participants, its convenience, simplicity and user-friendliness nature. Before each participant interview via Zoom, I repeated the informed consent document explaining the study’s background, purpose, and research questions. I also shared the participant’s rights to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. In my interview script, I told each hiring manager that their personal information was not used on any documents throughout the study. Instead, I replaced identifiable information (e.g., names) with comic-book superheroes (i.e., pseudonyms) since the hiring manager participants in this basic qualitative research project served in essential roles as ‘front-line’ healthcare professionals during the recent global pandemic.

On average, each participant interview lasted about 45 minutes. Zoom’s settings allowed me to record and transcribe each conversation automatically. I also used the Otter.ai to transcribe voice conversations. Otter.ai, like Zoom, provided a detailed transcription of participants’ words from the interview. Questions asked during the interview aligned with the project’s two research questions. Five interview questions were connected to RQ1, six related to RQ2, and one probing inquiry answered both. Although Zoom and Otter.ai transcribed all participant interviews, I read each transcript separately while listening to the audio recordings to ensure participants’ statements were captured verbatim.

The next step involved emailing all eight hiring managers their respective statements to verify its accuracy – this process is known as transcript-checking (Birt et al., 2016; Heath et al., 2018). While waiting on the hiring managers' responses, I compiled all eight interviews into one Microsoft Word document before uploading the collected qualitative data into NVivo for further analysis. All eight hiring manager participants returned their statement promptly; each person felt comfortable with the sentiments he or she disclosed during the interviewing process, and no transcript had to be adjusted as a result of my transcript checking process.

Data collected from the Zoom and Otter.ai (including transcribed information) recordings is stored in a secured, password-protected safe in a home office. The external flash drive holding transcribed data is also stored in the password-protected safe. Throughout the research process, I kept a reflective journal documenting my experiences. Qualitative scholars use reflective logs or journals to monitor, address, and prevent biases from interfering with the results generated in the study (Connelly; 2016; Mohajan, 2018). I also wrote down my thoughts and feelings after each participant's interview in the reflective journal. Furthermore, I utilized the reflective journal to record suggestions from the research committee and kept notes in it during the data analysis process. Reflective journaling also afforded me opportunities to reflect on and sharpen my knowledge about the research topic and the basic qualitative study method I had used to collect my data.

### **Data Analysis**

A total of eight CHS hiring managers interviewed for this basic qualitative research project. Both Zoom and Otter.ai provided a transcription of the interviews

immediately following my conversation with participants. I read and reread each participant's transcribed statements several times while listening to an audio recording of his or her interview. Replaying each interview allowed me to correct inaudible information not picked up by Otter.ai or Zoom. After confirming that the transcribed data and audio recording were verbatim, I emailed participants an electronic copy of their personal statements to ensure its accuracy. Each hiring manager verified his or her sentiments within a reasonable timeframe with no further corrections. Although I began searching for patterns in the transcribed data immediately after interviewing each participant, I created tentative open codes (e.g., awareness, relationship management, EI gaps) directly related to all eight participants' responses.

Furthermore, I uploaded the transcription of each interview to NVivo separately before adding a document featuring conversations of all eight participants. I then proceeded to code the data a second time after entering it into NVivo. NVivo not only served as a data management and storage tool, but it also allowed me to group the collected data according to its connection to the project's two research questions. I created 37 nodes (i.e., qualitative codes) in NVivo while analyzing and identifying trends in the data leading to five essential themes. More importantly, I examined the nodes based on the traditional qualitative coding system (i.e., open, axial, and selective codes). The open-codes that I identified before entering the data into NVivo served as the first set of nodes.

After analyzing nodes a few times in NVivo, I developed secondary codes. The secondary or axial-codes (the second level of nodes) aligned with the CHS hiring

managers' identification of the essential EI skills of RQ1 included: *self-awareness, people interactions/interpersonal skills, communication, critical thinking/problem-solving, relationship management, social awareness, coaching, feedback, self-management, teamwork, generational differences, essential skills*, and other unimportant miscellaneous information. Majority of RQ2 codes related to the specific EI skill gaps that the eight hiring managers perceived to be missing between what students learn in class and what they need to know entering the workforce. The list of codes for RQ2 inquiring about EI gaps featured the following words: *self-awareness, social awareness, self-regulation, relationship management, critical thinking, generational gaps, interpersonal communication, miscellaneous, coaching, and understanding of teamwork*.

The final round or selective-coding process led to the themes that emerged to answer the project's research questions. I considered all eight CHS hiring managers' responses, both the interview and research questions, and a theoretical coding process aligned with Goleman's (1995) concept of EI during this round of coding. Five essential themes surfaced as a result of the final round of coding – three for RQ1 and two for RQ2. In sum, the analysis process was rewarding because it allowed me to immerse qualitative data to gain an insightful understanding of the eight CHS managers' perceptions about their experience(s) employing community college graduates in knowledge work roles. The next section discusses the quality of the data generated in this basic qualitative research project. More specifically, I clarify how the data is trustworthy in terms of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

### **Quality Assurance and Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers typically follow four key methods (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) to ensure collected data is credible or trustworthy (Forero et al., 2018; Mohajan, 2018). Credibility resembles internal validity found in quantitative studies (Astroth & Chung, 2018). To strengthen the credibility of this basic qualitative project's results, I read each hiring manager's interview multiple times while listening to each audio recording to verify participant's statements were verbatim. I also emailed each participant a transcribed copy of his or her individual statements electronically to check its accuracy after verifying the collected data. Additionally, I conducted a peer-review briefing each week with a committee member while analyzing data and developing essential themes answering the research questions. The member-checking process and peer-review briefings both support the credibility of the qualitative results produced in this project (Astroth & Chung, 2018).

Transferability demonstrates that qualitative findings can be applied to other contexts (Amankwaa, 2016; Mohajan, 2018). Results generated in the basic qualitative project featured 'rich' and 'thick' descriptions based on the eight participants' experience with hiring knowledge work community college graduates. Although the project's findings are transferable, readers must determine whether the information can be applied to another setting (Astroth & Chung, 2018). I provided extensive details about the research setting, participants involved, data collection, and data analysis. While conducting the basic qualitative project, my primary goal was to produce rich data to illustrate hiring manager's perceptions about hiring community college graduates to

perform knowledge work roles. Throughout the study, I sought to remain transparent by keeping a reflective journal to recognize and report biases. The reflective journal also serves as an audit trail to ensure the results are transferable (Amankwaa, 2016).

The third area of trustworthiness relates to dependability (Forero et al., 2018). Astroth and Chung (2018) maintained that dependability in qualitative studies is equivalent to reliability in quantitative studies. To address dependability in this project, I kept an audit trail in a reflective journal. The audit trail served as a research log and documentation of notes taken throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Furthermore, I constructed detailed descriptions of the eight CHS participants' accounts about hiring community college graduates for knowledge work role in a healthcare setting (e.g., clinical laboratory, human resources, information technology, pharmacy, radiology, rehabilitation, and support services) to validate dependability. The final method used to produce trustworthy results in qualitative studies is confirmability (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Forero et al., 2018; Mohajan, 2018).

Confirmability verifies that results generated in qualitative studies are objective and free of biases (Amankwaa, 2016; Astroth & Chung, 2018). It also extends confidence that the results generated in this project can be repeated by other researchers (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Forero et al., 2018; Mohajan, 2018). For confirmability in this project, I documented all decisions step-by-step and performed member-checks to validate participants' statements after the interviews. I also explained why the basic qualitative design represented the best approach to collect data answering the research questions rather than other techniques. The audit trail and reflexivity processes also helped assure

confirmability was accomplished in this basic qualitative project. Dodgson (2019) implied that reflexivity increases the credibility of the study's results and deepens the researcher's understanding of the topic. Reflexivity involved turning the researcher's lens back to me by recognizing my own assumptions and biases preventing them from interfering with the research findings (Dodgson, 2019).

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age Range	Gender	Education	Unit	Years Served as Hiring Manager
Charles Xavier	41 – 59	Man	Doctorate	Pharmacy	5 years
Jean Grey	41 – 59	Woman	Master	Human Resources	15 years
Storm (Ororo Munroe)	25 – 40	Woman	Bachelor	Clinical Laboratory	5 years
Iron Man (Tony Starks)	60 – 75	Man	Bachelor	Human Resources	14 years
Wonder Woman (Diana Prince)	41 - 59	Woman	Master	Rehabilitation	15 years
Rogue (Anna Marie LeBeau)	25 - 40	Woman	Bachelor	Support Services	3 years
Luke Cage	60 – 75	Man	Bachelor	Radiology	18 years
Superwoman (Kristin Wells)	41 – 59	Woman	Doctorate	Information Technology	7 years



## **Demographics of Participants**

Eight hiring managers (i.e., five women and three men) connected to CHS, a healthcare facility located outside of a Metropolitan area, shared elaborate details about hiring graduates of local community colleges for knowledge work positions. Although race and ethnicity did not factor into the participant selection process, four individuals identified as African American, three as European-American, and one was biracial. Of the eight participants, four were born between 1965 and 1980. Two people were born between 1946 and 1964 and two were born between 1981 and 1995. All eight CHS hiring managers completed at least a four-year degree: four held a bachelor's degree (two working towards a master), two earned a master's degree, and two obtained doctorates. Additionally, participants in the basic qualitative research project served over 80 years combined as CHS hiring managers (see Table 1).

## **Findings**

The overarching problem in this basic qualitative research study related to EI skills gaps of knowledge workers who graduated from an urban community college system. My goal in this project was to gain more insight into local hiring managers' perspectives about vital EI skills that administrations could integrate into academic curricula designed to prepare potential community college graduates for knowledge work roles. Results generated from the data primarily derived from interviews with eight CHS hiring managers. All eight CHS hiring managers shared thorough information about hiring local community college graduates in knowledge work positions in their respective department. While analyzing the data, it was evident around the sixth interview that

participants' statements were repetitive leading to data saturation. Saunders et al. (2018) implied that data saturation occurs when no new information (i.e., codes or themes) emerges from collected data. Notwithstanding, two research questions guided this basic qualitative research project:

**RQ1:** What are the EI skills hiring managers consider essential for professional success in knowledge work?

**RQ2:** What are local hiring managers perceptions of EI skill gaps of community college graduates they have employed as knowledge workers?

### **Themes Generated from the Findings**

Overall, a total of five themes surfaced from the data collected from participant interviews (i.e., three for RQ1 and two for RQ2). The three themes linked to RQ1 included: awareness is key, importance of communication in relationship management, and assertiveness is necessary in knowledge work roles. Bridging the gap between generational understanding of EI and coaching EI skills for professional success depicted the two themes generated for RQ2. The proceeding sections explain the origin of the essential themes emerging from my analysis of the collected data. Furthermore, I also provided evidence on how the research findings generated in this project relate to EI-related literature.

***RQ1: What are the EI skills hiring managers consider essential for professional success in knowledge work?***

Awareness is key, importance of communication in relationship management, and assertiveness is necessary in knowledge work roles accounted for the first three emerging

themes produced from the data analysis to answer RQ1. At least six out of the eight participants in this basic qualitative research project considered awareness (e.g., self-awareness or social awareness) a vital EI skill needed in knowledge work positions. More than half of the participants referred to communication, conflict resolution, and relationship management as other fundamental EI skills required in the healthcare sector leading to the second theme – importance of communication in relationship management. Furthermore, the third theme associated with RQ1 – assertiveness is necessary in knowledge work roles – originated from statements describing confidence, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills.

**Theme 1: Awareness is key.** The first five interview questions led to the first theme – awareness is key – since all eight participants mentioned that ‘awareness’ plays a pivotal role in the healthcare knowledge work industry. For instance, I asked each CHS manager to name EI skills that he or she deemed essential when hiring employees entering the medical profession to perform knowledge work roles. Ororo replied, “I would say self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills.” She also asserted that self-awareness “is important because [people] must be aware of how... [they] are engaging with [their] peers, with patients, and others in the workplace.” Like Ororo, Luke ranked self-awareness as “number one” on his list of essential EI skills that new community college graduates must acquire before applying for knowledge work positions in the healthcare industry. In his words, he clarified:

Self-awareness [deals with what] the person...[knowing] who they are, and how their emotions affect their decisions. Therefore, I would have to rank self-

awareness as number one. [New knowledge workers must] understand [their] strengths and [their] weaknesses in order to perform a job.

Luke explained further:

...social awareness [requires] you to have to interact on [the] job...it requires [emotional] intelligence... [new knowledge workers] have to communicate and work [well] with other individuals, so [they] can't isolate [themselves]...they also have to be able to...communicate and express how [they] feel...and build relationships, [which] is huge.

Like Ororo and Luke, Anna Marie considered self-awareness an essential EI skill needed to perform healthcare knowledge work roles efficiently.

Anna Marie stated animatedly, “well, yeah, the first and foremost is going to be self-awareness, right?” She elaborated that knowledge workers in the healthcare field “need to understand how [they] fit into [CHS’s] dynamic and how [the organization’s] dynamic fits into [them].” During his interview, Charles talked about the importance of awareness in knowledge work roles in the healthcare industry. He maintained that knowledge workers must “be self-aware of what [they] learn and how [they] work with others.” Community college graduates applying for healthcare knowledge work jobs should also understand self-awareness because it helps people identify “what makes [them] tick” and how to work well with others (Charles). Furthermore, Charles acknowledged that CHS’s “biggest challenge is getting people to work.” Unlike her peers, Diana found it difficult to pinpoint one valuable EI skill. She answered confidently,

I feel like all [EI skills] are pretty essential, but the most [critical] is self-awareness, specifically for being able to receive feedback without being defensive. That [is] key in potential [knowledge workers] coming into the [healthcare] workforce. Especially giving them feedback in a new role in [the industry]. All [EI skills] are very important, but [self-awareness] was very key for potential [knowledge work] employees.

Conversely, I requested each hiring manager to describe a situation in which a new knowledge worker excelled in the workplace and when someone performed poorly.

Jean discussed a community college graduate with “years of experience” in customer service, but new to a knowledge work role in the healthcare industry. This new employee, according to Jean, “lacked self-awareness, ...[was] difficult to work with... [and] often clash[ed] with other team members.” Additionally, the person was “never aware of the impact of her tone and what it has on others” (Jean). Tony also communicated that “there is a lack of self-awareness in a lot of cases.” On a positive note, Kristin acknowledged a new knowledge worker graduate whom she hired not long ago. She stated,

I can recall one new hire that immediately upon her start I was impressed with. As a knowledge worker, right out the gate she formed special relationships with our nursing staff and other patient-oriented [employees] to ensure information was always managed and stored properly. She also always kept her goals in mind and was able to accept feedback without internalizing it in a way that reflected

negatively on her outward emotions. That type of self-awareness and level of understanding will take you far in any company, no matter the field.

Based on sentiments all eight participants shared in this basic qualitative project, it was obvious that they considered awareness was a key skill needed to be successful in knowledge work roles in the healthcare industry. The second theme associated with RQ1 – importance of interpersonal communication – emerged from statements alluding to interpersonal relationships (i.e., social and emotional connection between two or more individuals) and relationship management in the workplace.

**Theme 2: Importance of Communication in Relationship Management.**

Combined participant statements from the first five interview questions led to RQ1's third essential theme – importance of communication in relationship management. Of eight participants, five discussed why relationship management represented a crucial EI skill required before community college graduates accept a knowledge work role in healthcare. Four CHS hiring managers used the word “communication” at least once to describe the relationship management component of EI. As an example, Jean said that knowledge workers new to the medical profession must “communicate clearly using both oral and written communication...as well as [understand] relationship management.” Relationship management, according to Jean, “requires in depth knowledge of how to deal with people and how people perceive you...which is why I think that self-management and...relationship management [are] key.”

During our conversation, Charles emphasized that relationship management “would be probably number one...then...self-awareness.” Charles hired a community

college graduate in the pharmacy department recently who “demonstrated the ability to be a team player.” This individual, as Charles explained, “[understood] when there [was] a concern that she needed to raise, she knew how to ...escalate [it].” Charles also said that this person interjected when she noticed something was off with a patient. He elaborated on this situation:

There was a concern about the wrong medication put into the IV room. [The newly hired knowledge worker graduate] said no this is not the right one. [She] was confident when [she was] talking to [other] employees... [who supposedly] understood that this [situation] was...vital, of course. [There was] a little...probably a three-pound [infant’s life at stake]. So...it [was] just critical that we [do] double balloting, verify, and double check ourselves. So, I think [this knowledge worker community college graduate] really understood [protocol], and she [made it known] that...she was the kind who [took initiative] and paid attention to details.

Similarly, Diana also considered relationship management as a vital EI skill.

Knowledge workers must learn to “develop...relationships with [people] in order...to [care for] ...patients” effectively (Diana). In healthcare roles, Diana explained: Relationship management [is crucial] because [new community college graduates] are working with [people]...they have to develop...relationships with [clients] in order to get those [patients] to participate, and to progress with their growth. [New community college graduates] must learn to work with [the general

public], so they [must build] those relationships with [CHS clientele] so, I think that is also important for [new knowledge work] staff.

In her interview, Ororo revealed that “communication and self-regulation...kind of connect.” She thought about this statement before recanting it with, “actually, I think [it is a] toss-up between social and self-regulation.”

Social skills and communication skills, according to Ororo, are “always key in my opinion.” For instance, Ororo stated,

Communication is always important on the job. [New knowledge worker graduates] must be able to...communicate with others [effectively], whether it is verbally or electronically. I know a lot of people struggle [with communication], especially the younger group of [knowledge workers] ...because they like to use little slang words and things like that to communicate. Obviously, you cannot do that with everybody because [some people] do not know what ‘wyd’ means...so having...social skills and communication is highly important.

Ororo also shared a story about newly hired knowledge worker graduates who “excelled in college” and “actually communicate[d] very well.”

Ororo’s department “work with nurses [and] physicians.” During our dialogue, Ororo expressed that she hired a clinical laboratory tech graduate of a local community college not long ago who displayed great communication skills. This person, according to Ororo,

“...comes in... [during] stressful times when it seems like [it is] so busy, or tense. She has no problems with communication and [how] she handles herself [on



the job]. This person...actually communicate[d] very well with peers, patients, and [managers]. ...I think she has been the best [knowledge worker graduate] that we hired [not long ago] ...and it was actually her first job too, so that said a lot.

During our conversation, I asked each participant to share stories about one or more instances in which a knowledge worker did not perform well.

Out of all eight hiring managers, Jean was the only one to reference interpersonal skills. Jean said that she hired someone who graduated from a local community college recently who “lacked interpersonal skills.” This individual, according to Jean, had “many years of experience, [but] her weakness [was] oral communication.” Anna Marie also hired a community college graduate recently for a support services technician role. However, she terminated this knowledge worker after “six months forcing [her] to rehire... and pay an additional] \$20,000 or more” to fill the vacancy (Anna Marie). When asked to describe which essential EI skills new knowledge workers need to acclimate to a professional setting, Anna Marie replied, they must learn “how to communicate with others, and [perceive] how [others] communicate with [them].”

**Theme 3: Assertiveness is Necessary in Knowledge Work Roles.** The third theme connected to RQ1 formed as a result of the hiring managers’ thoughts about new hires’ critical thinking abilities, confidence, and decisiveness. At least four participants alluded to some form of confidence or assertive measure when rounding out their preferred EI skills. In her interview, Anna Marie implied that assertiveness could help catapult a new knowledge worker’s career in the healthcare field. Community college graduates interested in knowledge work careers in healthcare must “be confident enough

to ask questions when [they] don't understand what's going on...and [also]...be able to listen and relate to the people around [them]" (Anna Marie). In contrast, Kristin contended that graduates of local community colleges "lack of confidence and assertiveness [is] off-putting."

Kristin talked about a new knowledge worker who "often times did not make eye-contact." She said that this person always "looked at the nearest wall or floor" while engaged in conversations. This new knowledge worker also "lacked confidence when speaking about [workplace] matters." Like Kristin, Diana talked about a new knowledge worker community college graduate she hired in the CHS rehabilitation center who exuded too much confidence but struggled with interpersonal communication. Diana mentioned that the newly hired knowledge worker was "very confident in his skills as a new grad, which kind of was off putting to the seasoned therapists." He also did not understand the importance of "body language... [or] how to perceive...clear communication" in the workplace (Diana).

In her words, Diana explained, "communication is so hard...whether the [knowledge worker is] a new grad, or a seasoned employee...I try to be as clear with my communication." She also asserted,

So, I [hired] a fairly new grad who was talking about intelligence and being a team player during his interview... [both are] important because [we are] in healthcare. [We are] all about working together, and this person signed up for a shift and decided he was going to cancel [it] at the last minute. You just [cannot]

do that. Well, he did...and it was very short notice, which was against [our department's] policy.

Diana held a meeting with the new knowledge worker about calling out at the last minute before the shift started. She said,

I gave him feedback [during the meeting]. He replied that he had an opportunity to do a travel assignment. I said, [it is] wonderful that you have this great opportunity...but giving such a short notice...goes against the policy of time and attendance. I also informed him that it put the other team members in [a] critical staffing [situation]. He got quite defensive, and I got the cold shoulder for the next two weeks, like it was my fault.

Similarly, Kristin implied that it is vital for knowledge workers new to the healthcare industry to recognize body language and nonverbal communication skills.

Kristin stated firmly that “body language matters, eye contact matters, tone matters, and [how] the tone is [delivered] matters.” More specifically, Kristin stressed how she had “to trust that a new hire is responsible for securing information and remaining objective in sometimes less than ideal scenarios.” Kristin also said:

Once [community college graduate] new hire[s]...grasp...key components [of EI], they can set realistic goals for themselves based [on their] emotional levels, and they will know how to properly deal with [constructive] feedback and think critically about how to deal with others in the workplace.

During her interview, Jean contended, community college graduates must “use exceptional critical thinking skills to be able to communicate” effectively to perform well in a knowledge work role in the medical profession. Jean also stated,

I have a mix of [employees] who [exhibited] ...excellent relationship management.” I [also] have those [individuals] who have taken the same route...they [have] all [attended] school to get this skill set, but they lacked those core [EI] skills...that I need for them to be successful in this [fast-paced medical] environment.

Tony believed some community college graduates lacked listening skills that “will help any new [knowledge work] employee within a large organization.” Contradicting this previous statement, Tony admitted that some “[knowledge] workers are not afraid of work, and they have an appreciation for what they have achieved on their own...possibly, with the help of a mentor, somewhere in his or her past.”

***RQ2: What are local hiring managers perceptions of EI skill gaps of community college graduates they have employed as knowledge workers?***

Two essential themes emerged from the data collected from participant interviews answering RQ2: building the generational gaps in understanding EI and coaching EI skills for professional success. Seven individuals (i.e., everyone except Diana) in this basic qualitative research project referenced “self-awareness” or “social-awareness” during their respective interview while discussing the EI skills gaps of community college graduates hired for knowledge work jobs. For example, Tony’s statement was very straightforward. He expressed that there is a “a lack of awareness that all [well-

versed knowledge workers] learn something [new] every day of their lives to [complete] a job.” Six other CHS hiring managers also described generational differences during their interview leading to theme four, the first related to the RQ2, building generational gaps in understanding EI.

**Theme 4: Building Generational Gaps in Understanding EI.** In total, seven CHS hiring managers used keywords and phrases like “young”, “mature”, “new” or “seasoned” when referring to knowledge worker employees in their respective units. I asked each person to describe EI skill gaps that they thought newly hired knowledge worker graduates were missing in the workplace. Kristin stated, “I am finding that the new wave of graduates [have] definitely missed skills regarding self-awareness and social-awareness, which inevitably impacts relationship management skills.” Anna Marie also said during her interview that there is a gap in the self-awareness aspect of new knowledge worker graduates’ EI. In her words, she continued confidently:

I really do not count it against [new knowledge worker graduates] ...well, I am not [going to] lie, I do count it against them...but...EI...it is one thing to be self-aware... [knowledge workers must] be able to be aware of the people around [them] in the greater community...and [understand] how [they] are connected to those things. I think that is what is missing. When you are young, you have not had an opportunity to have to take care of someone else or rely on [people]... [or] ...a team so much.

Like Ororo and Kristin, Charles also revealed a gap of new knowledge worker community college graduates’ self-awareness. His statements seemed a little problematic

for hiring managers in terms of how he described newly hired knowledge worker graduates' EI. In his words, Charles indicated:

There are some gaps in terms of how [new knowledge workers are] ...just not working, and other... [experienced] technicians are working... I can bring up a couple of situations [that new knowledge workers] might do during [their] downtime. They might be sitting, while the other [veteran] technician[s] ...are not necessarily doing something at that time...I have [witnessed] other technicians say, okay well, there is always something to do, let me go ahead and put some medications back into the Taylst [data management system], [or] let me put some returns back into the inventory.

Although some of her concerns also aligned with self-awareness, Kristin believed that there is a generational gap in newly hired knowledge worker community college graduates' awareness of interpersonal communication and relationship management skills.

Diana provided a distinctive example about gaps in knowledge worker community college graduates' EI skills. During the interview, Diana expressed in a puzzling tone:

[New knowledge workers] struggle the most [with]...interpersonal [communication] skills... [and] relationship [management] skills...I will give you a great example because I was like I cannot believe that just happened. [One] summer season, some fairly new grads...seem[ed] to be getting along well...but, then they kind of cross the line... [when] somebody called [another person] ...a

bitch, I was like what?? I could not believe it... [the new knowledge worker graduate] was like, oh no, I did not call him that... [the grad] said his hands look like a bitch. [The person] was like oh... we were just kidding. I said... there is no reason for any of that behavior nor that talk in a work setting.

Diana communicated furthered:

I do not care if [they were] kidding or not, that is unacceptable. I was floored. But the employee thought it was okay. She had the audacity to say it was because she was from a different country. I [was] like...I do not care what country you are from...I just, could not believe it...I think the relationship [management] and relationships were probably the hardest thing that [knowledge worker community college] adjust to. Through team building, they can develop relationships and [interpersonal] communication skills...coming into a new facility. Even if the [newly hired knowledge workers are] seasoned or new grads, they all [experience] challenges with these areas.

Conversely, Jean's thoughts about the new community college graduates' EI skills gaps differed from others in this basic qualitative research project slightly because she "really have not seen a trend or one certain thing that [she] look for...as a hiring manager."

EI, according to Jean, "is based on [the] individual." She explained, "because I am not a micromanager... self-awareness and self-management... [are] key to me." I asked if she could elaborate on this statement, Jean responded:

I hired [new knowledge worker community college graduates] because I expect [them] to do the job...I am not going to Hoover over [them] for [them] to do [it].

So, it is important to me that [they are] self-directed, and when [they] have been given a directive, [they] can do it...or it will get [them] out-of-the-door fast with me.

Like Jean, Luke maintained that some newly hired knowledge worker graduates “do not have patience to be strong and...successful in the workplace.” Luke also revealed in his interview that community college graduates new to knowledge work positions in healthcare “want [things done] right now this second.” He elaborated on this statement:

Young [knowledge workers] take a few shortcuts that they do not need to take trying to get where they want to be in a split second [rather than] growing and learning a little bit slower. Every now and then we have what we call shortages [in the industry] ...we do not have the [technology] to hire because a lot of the employees, like the new grads [were flagged] somewhere... [for] getting fired...and they become a do not rehire, so it is hard for them to get past the recruiter.

As a follow up question, I asked what can be done to prevent new knowledge workers from being fired within their first few years of working in the industry? Luke replied, “well, if [new knowledge worker community college graduates] are not aware of themselves and know their strengths and weaknesses...they are not going to be successful.”

Notwithstanding, Ororo stated that hiring managers in her department find that the EI skills of new knowledge workers hired from local community colleges recently are “lacking big time.” In her words, Ororo stressed, “I don't know...if maybe [the new



knowledge worker graduates] are not just getting that extra critical thinking, training, and they're just really getting the technical side of things.” Other participants also used terms like *coaching*, *training*, or *development* in their respective interview to describe the EI skills gaps of community college graduates hired not long ago for knowledge work positions. Together, these terms led to the final theme – and second – for RQ2: coaching EI skills for professional success.

**Theme 5: Coaching EI Skills for Professional Success.** Jean was the only person to use the word “coaching” to describe the EI skills gaps of community college graduates she hired not long ago. In her words, Jean stated, “I have [hired] people who struggle with [EI] skills, but I do all that I can [to put my] best foot forward [as a leading manager] with coaching and showing them...ways...to be successful.” Jean also “documented [her] coaching and...done all that [she could] do as a practice manager. If [CHS] is not the right environment for [a knowledge worker], then [it is] time for [them] to move on.” At least four others mentioned additional ‘training’ or ‘development’ when describing the EI gaps of knowledge worker community college graduates. For example, Kristin said that the “development of key EI skills factors highly into every aspect of our organization’s success,” noting:

EI is so important... to our organization because...the healthcare industry [overall] is rooted in helping people. You cannot help people if you lack [basic] emotional [intelligence] skills to understand patient’s needs... [knowledge worker community college graduates] have to be able to make informed decisions [regarding a patient’s] care and whatever circumstances facing that [patient].

Additionally, Kristin revealed a situation in which she had to step in to give a new knowledge worker constructive feedback. She disclosed in a direct tone:

I actually...ran into this issue with a new tech hire. After taking time to observe some of his...strengths and...weaknesses. We went over them during an evaluation period. During that meeting, the new hire had great difficulty accepting that feedback. Ultimately, he became really, really defensive.

Furthermore, Kristin continued:

Because that employee lacked efficient EI skills, I believe that is why it was so hard for [the person] to absorb that feedback. And I still have noted a struggle in [the individual's] performance areas [management] have discussed with [the person]. So inevitably, [a lack of EI] will hold this employee back in the future.

Conversely, Tony indicated that he “[was] really disappointed in the lack of maturity and respect” from a knowledge worker graduate he hired not long ago.

In Tony’s position, he is able to “spend as much as two and a half or three days” with new knowledge worker graduates hired at CHS. He continued, “we [get] a pretty good look into their personalities, their openness, conversational abilities.” Some new knowledge worker graduates, according to Tony, “[do] not display... [or] understand obligation[s] between employer and employee.” In agreement, Anna Marie expressed the new knowledge worker graduates “who enter [her department’s] Cooperative Education [training and development program] tend to be highly intelligent, but they lack common [EI] skills.” CHS “wants [newly hired knowledge workers] to know about their specific job but understand, or better yet recognize that being a great team player involves going

over and beyond sometimes” (Anna Marie). Anna Marie expanded on the previous statement:

A lot of [new knowledge worker graduates] just do not make the cut when it comes to [EI]. ...again, that goes back to good training... [and] being able to be confident in [themselves]... being able to advocate for [themselves]...and understanding where [they] fit on this particular team.

In her interview, Diana acknowledged that she “noticed that a couple of the new grads [training] varied.” Some new knowledge worker graduates “further [their] education... [and] they are extremely concrete, [but] have very little critical thinking skills. Thus, it is vital that “we train [them] how to do [a task properly], [and] the [knowledge worker graduates will] not have to go through that retraining again (Diana).

### **Connecting the Findings to Literature on EI**

Data collected via participant interviews led to the findings generated in this basic qualitative research project. Based on traditional qualitative coding methods, five essential themes surfaced from the data: awareness is key, importance of communication in relationship management, assertiveness is necessary in knowledge work roles, building the generational gaps in understanding EI, and coaching EI skills for professional success. Every participant in this basic qualitative research project disclosed EI skills that they consider essential for knowledge workers to possess entering the field after graduating from local community colleges. Some EI skills that the hiring managers described in this project aligned with other scholars’ thoughts about EI competencies.

As an example, Coaty et al. (2019) found that managers in the accounting industry deemed (a) *emotional self-awareness*, (b) *communication* (both oral and written), *empathy*, and *self-confidence* as crucial EI skills that new knowledge worker graduates must possess to be successful. In a different study, Turnipseed (2018) found that employees who exercise different aspects of EI are more likely to be attuned to other people's (i.e., customers, coworkers, and leadership) emotions in the workplace. This project's results also suggested that hiring managers prefer to employ individuals who work well with others and understand their surroundings without being explicitly instructed or directly supervised in the EI skill described.

The findings generated in this project also confirmed Miao et al.'s (2017) findings. Miao et al. revealed that high-demanding jobs require employees to rely on EI to check their emotions when dealing with others. All eight CHS hiring managers in this basic qualitative project stressed the importance for college graduates to understand different aspects of EI before applying for a job in the healthcare knowledge work industry. More than six participants acknowledged that self-awareness is a vital skill that knowledge worker graduates must recognize in the healthcare industry. At least five hiring managers in this basic qualitative research project recommended new knowledge workers seek additional training on EI. Only one person talked about coaching or mentoring new graduates so that they can gain the EI skills needed to succeed in knowledge work roles in the healthcare industry. Mattingly and Kraiger (2019) determined that training classes have a moderate impact on people's understanding and application of EI skills, confirming this project's results.

### ***Discrepant Cases***

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) maintained that discrepant cases do not fit to the majority of collected data. However, discrepant cases add to the credibility of the study's results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). At least two participants' statements were vague in terms of the way they answered the interview questions. Although the two discrepant cases in question were short-answered compared by rich content provided others in this project, they were considered to help fill-in gaps to the study's problem and research questions.

### **Project Deliverable**

Results generated in this basic qualitative research project supports the design and execution of a 3-day online professional development training seminar for administrators and potential employers (including the eight hiring managers connected to this project). The online meeting is necessary since hiring managers in the healthcare industry expect community college graduates to understand basic EI competencies prior to joining the workforce. The 3-day event will be based on the five essential themes generated in this basic qualitative project. The professional development affords administrators and other professionals in community colleges to meet with potential employers (including the eight CHS hiring manager who contributed to the results in this study) to discuss innovative ways to integrate EI activities into academic curriculum designed to prepare potential college graduates to the workforce. Some of the sessions over the 3 days will also include workshop directly related to peer-review interactions that guided this basic qualitative research project.

## Summary

This section provided an overview of the data collection and data analysis methods, along with the results generated in this project. CHS, a healthcare facility outside of the Metropolitan area where the community college system is located, served as the research site. Permission was obtained from Walden University's IRB and the Chief Operating Officer (COO) at CHS to conduct the research project. Using the purposive sampling technique, I contacted 10 hiring managers at the healthcare facility. Eight individuals consented to participant interviews. I collected the data, and it was analyzed using the three traditional coding methods: open, axial, and selective coding. I also used NVivo to process, store, and organize the collected data. Results generated in this project were based on the interview data that hiring manager participants shared regarding their perception of the EI skills of community college knowledge workers they had hired recently. Five themes surfaced from data collected from participant interviews: awareness is key, communication in relationship management, assertiveness is necessary in knowledge work roles, bridging the gap between generational of understanding EI, and coaching EI skills for professional success. This section explained how the results generated in this study. Furthermore, I explained how the project's findings will be delivered via a 3-day online training seminar.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

The primary purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine hiring managers' perceptions of the EI skills of new community college graduates hired for knowledge work roles. The problem for the study related to the EI skill gaps of knowledge workers who graduated from an urban community college system. Two qualitative questions guided the research investigation. First, I wanted to better understand what EI skills hiring managers consider essential for professional success in knowledge work. Next, I wanted to know if local hiring managers recognized the EI skill gaps of community college graduates they have employed as knowledge workers. Goleman's (1995) EI theory served as the conceptual framework for this basic qualitative research project. Data collected from participant interviews was analyzed via qualitative methods (i.e., open, axial, and selective coding) lead to five essential themes: (a) awareness is key, (b) importance of communication in relationship management, (c) assertiveness is necessary in knowledge work roles, (d) bridging the gap between generational understanding of EI, and (e) coaching EI skills for professional success.

### **Recap of the Basic Qualitative Project's Essential Themes**

The first theme, awareness is key, originated from dialogue about the EI skills that all eight hiring managers thought were crucial for new community college graduates applying for knowledge work positions. Most participants in this project implied that new knowledge workers must understand the importance of awareness in the workplace. Notwithstanding, three (Charles, Jean, and Diana) indicated that they hired at least one

community college graduate recently for a knowledge work role who lacked awareness of the organization. Based on the project's findings, nonexistent self-awareness and social awareness EI skills could hinder the success of new community college graduates entering the knowledge work industry.

All eight participants in this basic qualitative project hinted that knowledge work roles in healthcare required employees to interact with others. Five CHS hiring managers (Charles, Jean, Diana, Luke, & Kristin) discussed how vital it is for new community college graduates to grasp the concept of relationship management in the healthcare industry. Four participants (Charles, Jean, Ororo, & Luke) suggested that new community college graduates must also possess basic communication skills to form relationships with CHS constituents (i.e., patients, employees, and the leadership team) leading to the second theme – importance of communication in relationship management. Furthermore, three CHS hiring managers (Jean, Ororo, & Anna Marie) employed knowledge workers from local community colleges who lacked oral and written communication (electronic included) skills. It is crucial that new community college graduates understand the important role communication (verbally and nonverbally) plays in building relationships with others before applying for a knowledge work job in healthcare.

The third theme – assertiveness is necessary in knowledge work roles – originated from keywords and phrases referencing confidence, critical thinking, decision-making, and listening skills. Four CHS hiring managers (Diana, Anna Marie, Luke, & Kristin) insinuated that potential knowledge worker candidates must be confident in their ability to perform at a high level in the healthcare industry. Although four participants alluded to



confidence during our conversation, Diana and Kristin implied that some new knowledge workers demonstrated repulsive behaviors (i.e., too much or not enough confidence). Overconfident employees new to the knowledge work industry can be perceived as arrogant or off-putting to seasoned healthcare professionals (Diana). In contrast, unassertiveness is unattractive in the workplace causing recent community college graduates to drown before their knowledge work career start (Kristin).

Unlike RQ1, only two themes emerged from the data analysis to answer RQ2. The first (and fourth overall) theme surfaced because of seven hiring managers (all except Tony) in this project referencing terms like “young” or “mature” to describe community college graduates’ EI skills gaps. Self-awareness and relationship management represented two significant gaps that majority of the participants shared in this project. Other EI skills gaps included social awareness (in relationship management), critical thinking, and interpersonal communication. Conversely, Jean was the only person who talked about “coaching” new knowledge workers as they enter the healthcare industry. Others alluded to “training” and “development” while describing what can be done to improve the EI skills of community college graduates leading to the final emerging theme (and second for RQ2) generated in this basic qualitative research study.

Collectively, all eight participants suggested that new community college graduates needed additional training on EI skills. Four people in the project (Charles, Ororo, Diana, & Anna Marie) refer to the word “training” and three (Ororo, Tony & Kristin) said “development” during our conversation. Together, all eight hiring managers implied that community college graduates could benefit from academic curricula

designed to strengthen their understanding of key concepts of EI. The 3-day online professional development seminar associated with this basic qualitative research project targets administrators and other personnel (i.e., faculty and staff members) responsible for assuring new community college graduates are trained properly on EI before they enter the knowledge work profession. Furthermore, CHS leaders (including all eight participants) will be invited to the online EI training seminar.

### **Goals of the Project**

The project consists of a 3-day online professional development seminar for administrators and other professionals to discuss ideas about implementing EI activities into curricula designed to prepare graduates for the knowledge work industry. Information presented during the seminar is based on the five essential themes originating primarily from data collected from my conversations with eight CHS hiring managers. I prepared 3 full days of online activities during the EI training seminar to evoke dialogue between community colleges and potential hiring managers to improve students' (i.e., potential graduates) EI skills. The 3-day online event will be conducted via Canvas (an online learning management system [LMS]). On the first day, participants are expected to attend the welcome assembly and at least two small breakout sessions in Canvas. The subsequent days include at least two to three online breakout sessions aligned to the five essential themes and literature produced in this basic qualitative project. Additionally, each meeting will be led by an expert familiar with different EI practices. The online event will also consist of two general presentations about integrating EI into community colleges' academic curricula (see Appendix A).

### **Project Outcomes**

The project's 3-day professional development seminar is designed to attract administrators, faculty, and staff members to the event. I will also extend an invitation to CHS's executive leadership team and the eight hiring managers who contributed to the project's results. Individuals in attendance will gain insightful resources that could help them design and integrate EI activities in academic curricula to sharpen community college students' understanding of the concept – especially those applying for knowledge work roles in healthcare after graduation. The expected outcomes of the 3-day online EI professional development seminar (i.e., the final project) connects to the five themes emerging from my analysis of data collected via participant interviews. The five essential themes revealed in this basic qualitative project include: awareness is key, importance of communication in relationship management, assertiveness is necessary in knowledge work roles, bridging generational understanding of EI, and coaching EI skills for professional success. Content presented throughout the 3-day online EI seminar will also provide administrators and other attendees a general overview of the concept of EI. Individuals in attendance will also be informed of the results generated in this basic qualitative research project supporting the need to integrate EI-related activities into community colleges' academic curricula.

### **Rationale of the Project**

The primary issue prompting this basic qualitative research project was the fact that hiring managers suggested some community college graduates lacked basic EI skills. Results generated in this project not only uncovered essential skills that hiring managers

deemed crucial in knowledge work roles, but also highlighted participants' perception of the EI skills gaps of community college graduates. All content covered during the 3-day online professional development seminar was based on this project's results. This information will be presented to community college administrators in the surrounding metropolitan area since they are in charge of ensuring graduates meet the skills required in today's multifaceted workplace. In contrast, CHS's hiring managers also benefit from results generated in this basic qualitative research project. CHS's leadership team is also encouraged to attend the 3-day EI professional development event.

### **Review of Literature**

Literature discussed in the following section reinforces why administrators, faculty, staff, and knowledge work employers involved with local community colleges should attend the 3-day online EI professional development event. Articles presented in this review of literature was published between 2016 and 2021. More importantly, all peer-reviewed publications mentioned below connect the five emerging themes – awareness is key, importance of communication in relationship management, bridging generational gaps of understanding of EI, and coaching EI skills for professional success – to the 3-day online EI seminar. Different phrases, such as *college graduates' EI skills*, *EI skills in healthcare preparation programs*, and *healthcare administrators' perception of EI* led to the literature referenced below.

Although only eight hiring managers contributed to the project's results, the CHS entire leadership team (i.e., CEO, directors, managers, and lead supervisors) are encouraged to attend the 3-day EI seminar. Asiamah (2017) maintained that some

medical professionals do not value the role EI plays in delivering services to patients effectively. Information presented in the EI professional development seminar benefit both administrators leading healthcare facilities and those presiding over community colleges (Asiamah, 2017; Parks et al., 2019; Roth et al., 2019; Shakir et al., 2017). This project's findings suggested that new community college graduates needed EI training before taking on a knowledge work role. Other scholars (e.g., Cherry, 2021; Patton, 2020; Shahid & Adams, 2020; Shakir et al., 2017) also revealed that employers rather hire knowledge worker graduates competent and well-equipped to apply EI in fast-paced healthcare jobs than those unfamiliar with the concept.

For example, Patton (2020) found that colleagues of medical imaging professionals who lacked EI skills considered these individuals “unprofessional” and unempathetic to coworkers and patients (p. 150). More than half of the participants in my basic qualitative project told stories about incompetent or unskilled knowledge workers hired recently who did not grasp or apply EI concepts in the workplace. Using quantitative means, Cherry (2021) polled over 170 medical directors across the United States to understand their perception of EI competencies as leaders in the healthcare industry. Self-awareness and relationship management topped Cherry's participants list of vital EI skills confirming the results generated in my research study. The eight hiring managers connected to this project insinuated that awareness (i.e., self-and-social-awareness), assertiveness, communication, and relationship management are vital EI skills needed to perform healthcare knowledge work roles. The following section highlights basic EI competencies required in healthcare-related positions.

### **Applying Basic EI Skills in Knowledge Work Roles in Healthcare**

Several scholars (e.g., Crowe et al., 2017; Grunberg et al., 2020; Foster & McCloughen, 2020; Leonard, 2017) connected EI competencies to the healthcare industry. Grunberg et al. (2020) maintained that healthcare professionals must acquire extensive knowledge to encourage healthy behaviors (i.e., cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional). Healthcare workers must also apply knowledge to develop methods to treat and prevent clients' injuries. Hiring managers, according to Grunberg et al., expect new healthcare professionals to optimize their interactions with patients and their families, team members, and others connected to the organization, which helped verify the findings of my project. Community college graduates entering the healthcare industry must also be cognizant of EI since this profession can be fast-paced and take an emotional toll on workers at times (Crowe et al., 2017).

Stami et al. (2018) polled 205 radiology therapists at 15 Australian cancer-care centers to determine demographic predictors of EI amongst healthcare professionals. The study featured primarily women (66%) between 20-to 39-years old with a minimum of 6months of experience (Stami et al., 2018). Results suggested that the healthcare participants reported higher overall well-being, self-control, emotional stability, and social interactions than expected (Stami et al., 2018). Another outcome was that younger (i.e., ages 20-29) professionals generated higher EI scores than older radiology therapists (Stami et al., 2018). This finding also helps me confirm results produced in this basic qualitative project. Other studies implied that many healthcare jobs lead to burnout from increased stress, reduced job performance, and low morale forcing people to leave the

industry (Davies, 2019; Stami et al., 2018). However, healthcare knowledge workers can conquer these circumstances with a basic understanding of EI concepts (Davies, 2019).

Following quantitative methods, Vandewaa et al. (2016) surveyed 137 leading nurses employed at a southeastern acute-care medical facility in the United States to investigate the relationship between this group's EI and workplace behaviors. Vandewaa et al.'s findings suggested that EI skills motivated the lead nurses to maintain social relationships. However, other EI competencies had no significant impact on their actions (Vandewaa et al., 2016). Distinct from Vandewaa et al.'s quantitative results, Crowe et al. (2017) found that EI training programs improved healthcare professionals' awareness and practice of EI concepts. Healthcare workers with strong EI skills achieve goals, establish relationships, and perform at higher level than those with little to no knowledge about EI competencies (Stami et al., 2017). Based on this finding, it is vital that community colleges provide potential graduates learning opportunities (i.e., inside and outside the classroom) to strengthen their awareness of EI.

### ***Community College Healthcare Students' EI***

Collectively, participants in this basic qualitative project acknowledged that awareness played a crucial role in healthcare knowledge work positions. At least four CHS hiring managers expect new community college graduates to demonstrate self-awareness within the workplace. Other studies (Cheshire et al., 2020; Maxwell, 2016; Menon & Nakhut, 2020) confirmed that college graduates applying for knowledge work roles in healthcare must have a strong sense of awareness to perform at a high level. For example, Maxwell et al. introduced a co-curriculum pilot program that linked key EI

competencies listed on the Birkman Method questionnaire (i.e., self-awareness and social awareness) to pharmacy students enrolled at three large universities in South Carolina. The study's outcome suggested that students' self-awareness and self-perception increased significantly after receiving supplementary coaching on EI competencies (Maxwell et al., 2016). However, potential college graduates cannot master 'high-level' EI skills by attending only one two-hour training course (Maxwell et al., 2016).

Following quantitative methods, Cheshire et al. (2020) determined that students' EI knowledge decreased over time due to a rigorous academic schedule. Cheshire et al. surveyed over 110 nursing students attending a public four-year university in the United States. The goal was to find out if pre-nursing students' knowledge of EI concepts changed from their entrance into the nursing program until graduation (Cheshire et al., 2020). Results showed that nursing students experience unwarranted stress because of high-stake test required to gain entrance into a competitive healthcare program (Cheshire et al., 2020). In contrast, Menon and Nakhat (2020) surveyed 100 college students to understand their perception of EI skills. Quantitative findings produced in the study suggested that many college students understood self-awareness and were quite cognizant of their decision-making abilities (Menon & Nakhat, 2020).

The aforementioned quantitative studies supported this project's results. For example, Maxwell et al. (2016) revealed that new knowledge workers who were self-aware and confident in their ability outperformed their peers who did not know about EI competencies. Cheshire et al.'s (2017) quantitative study suggested that potential college graduates' EI skillsets were based on their ability to manage emotions. One way that



potential community college graduates gain awareness is through reflective journaling (McCloughen & Foster, 2017). Conversely, local community colleges offer a variety of academic programs and services supporting the region's economic development (Gauthier, 2019). People enroll in community college courses to gain skills needed to perform effectively in today's ever-changing job market (DiBenedetto & Myers, 2016; Suleman, 2018). However, hiring managers expressed concern for community colleges' preparation of students with basic EI skills needed in the workplace (Cherry, 2021; Maxwell et al., 2016; Roth et al., 2019). Findings produced in this basic qualitative project supports other scholars (Colter et al., 2017; Cox, 2018; Foster & McCloughen, 2020; Stami et al., 2017) effort to integrate EI competencies into college curricula.

### **Integrating EI Competencies into Community College's Academic Curricula**

Five themes emerged from the analysis of data collected from participant interviews: awareness is key, importance of communication in relationship management, assertiveness is necessary in knowledge work roles, bridging generational gaps of understanding EI, and coaching EI skills for professional development. Each theme plays an integral role in how EI competencies can be incorporated into community colleges' academic curricula. Collectively, researchers (Colter et al., 2017; Joyce & White, 2020; Lee et al., 2018; Maxwell et al., 2016) recommend community colleges to revamp pedagogical curriculum to ensure potential graduates understand fundamental EI skills. Based on results revealed in this basic qualitative project, hiring managers value potential job candidates' ability to forge relationships in the workplace. Lee et al. reported that

college graduates today lack communication, conflict resolution, leadership, and teamwork skills validating this project's findings.

Hiring managers expect college graduates to enter their respective profession "workforce-ready" (Joyce & White, 2020). They also require graduates to communicate effectively (Joyce & White, 2020). In response, some colleges and universities launched interprofessional education initiatives designed to enhance potential college graduates' ability to communicate with others and foster relationships throughout their careers efficiently (Lee et al., 2018). Additional training on EI competencies has been proven to help healthcare college students be more compassionate and empathetic in knowledge work positions (Maxwell et al., 2016; Raffoul et al., 2019). Extra EI-related lessons have also improved potential graduates' self-awareness, self-confidence, and relatability required for healthcare roles (Colter et al., 2017).

McCloughen and Foster (2017) recommended community college administrators to find innovative ways to incorporate basic EI competencies into existing curricula. Learning exercises proven to enhance students' knowledge of EI skills include conflict management scenarios, self-awareness, and team-building exercises (McCloughen & Foster, 2017). In a mixed method study, Jackson et al. (2016) determined that hiring managers' primary concern was the gap between skills students learn in school and skills needed for the workforce today. Jackson et al.'s results also suggested that hiring manager worry that college graduate lack basic EI skills necessary to complete complex tasks on the job. This outcome aligned with sentiments the eight CHS hiring managers in this project shared during our conversations.

Furthermore, Cox (2018) implied that individuals interested in pursuing a career in the healthcare industry must be able to communicate, collaborate, and consult (i.e., all aspects of relationship management) with others. Raffoul et al. (2019) found that understanding basic EI competencies does not forecast healthcare students' academic performance. In contrast, knowing about EI does predict students' ability to communicate and build relationships in the workplace (Raffoul et al., 2019). At least four participants in this project also expressed that communication plays a significant role in new community college graduates' advancement in a knowledge work role in healthcare. Community colleges must find innovative ways to integrate communication and other EI competencies into pedagogical curriculum (Kastberg et al., 2020). However, it is vital that those responsible for developing core curriculum understand that the multifaceted EI competencies do not necessarily develop simultaneously (Kastberg et al., 2020)

### **Recommendations for Creating Effective EI Training Programs**

Research suggested that EI training programs have a profound effect on knowledge workers in the medical profession (Crowe et al., 2017; Patton, 2020). Crowe et al. urged college leaders to expand curricula administered to healthcare students to reflect more EI components. In agreement, Joseph et al. (2019) mentioned that there is a growing need for EI training on both the undergraduate and graduate levels since most organizations value these skills. Nelis et al.'s (2009) assessment, as cited by Joseph et al., represents the most referenced EI training program in higher education. Nelis et al.'s EI course features four 2.5-hour sessions that allows students to engage with short lectures, role-playing exercises, group discussions, and reflective journaling (Joseph et al., 2019).

Notwithstanding, Foster and McCloughen (2020) interviewed 20 healthcare students enrolled in the final year of nursing and pharmacy programs to identify how they use EI to manage tough interpersonal encounters with patients and their families.

Foster and McCloughen's (2020) determined that students' awareness of EI competencies helped them manage tough situations effectively. The results also suggested that EI training courses were also effective in terms of how students applied EI skills to diagnose and respond to difficult circumstances accordingly (Foster & McCloughen, 2020). Rather than sitting and listening to lectures, EI training must include discussions about the construct of the theory and how to apply it effectively (Foster & McCloughen, 2020). Roth et al. (2019) recommended a few tips that college administrators could use to integrate EI concepts into community college's pedagogical curricula. Furthermore, I considered Roth et al.'s suggestions while developing the goals and outcomes of the 3-day professional development seminar developed from the findings generated in this basic qualitative research project.

For example, Roth et al. (2019) recommended to start with the "why" before designing an EI workshop. Starting with the "why" in mind helps identify how additional EI training will help attendees gain more insight into the theory (Roth et al., 2019). Content shared during EI training courses must also promote dialogue, enhance role-playing or interactive exercises, and facilitate the application of the theory (Roth et al., 2019). Like Roth et al., Foster and McCloughen (2020) also emphasized the importance of adding interactive activities to EI training courses to boost people's understanding of its competencies. Different activities (e.g., enquiry-based learning, self-assessments with

prompt feedback, and reflective exercises) have been found to be effective in improving students EI skills (Foster & McCloughen, 2020).

Another area to consider when designing EI training courses is to integrate self-awareness activities into the lesson plan (Roth et al., 2019). Confirming this project's results, many studies (Cheshire et al., 2017; Cherry, 2021; Menon, A., & Nakhat, 2020; Sinclair et al., 2017; Stami et al., 2018; Vandewaa et al., 2018) considered self-awareness the cornerstone of EI. Roth et al. recommended adding free online psychogeometric tests to EI training workshops to help participants gain or strengthen their sense of self-awareness. For instance, a few sites (e.g., [www.personalitymax.com](http://www.personalitymax.com) or [www.16personalities.com](http://www.16personalities.com)) follows the Meyers-Briggs personality inventory commonly used to provide people a snapshot of themselves (e.g., personality, working-style, and self-awareness). The overall goal of the EI professional development training attached to the final project is to provide a space that hiring managers, college administrators, and other professionals can come together to discuss ways to integrate EI competencies into community college's curricula.

### **Description**

The online professional development seminar will include three full days of EI activities on skills that the eight hiring managers in this project deemed vital in knowledge work roles (see Appendix A). On the first day, attendees will register between 8:00 am and 8:45 am. Between 9:00 am and 9:30 am, I will deliver the opening monologue explaining the purpose of the online EI professional development workshops. The morning and afternoon breakout sessions on each day will feature concurrent

meetings in which participants choose to attend one of the three EI-related sessions (see Appendix A). Each forum will be facilitated by one or more experts who volunteered to share research about EI (e.g., its foundation, expert’s perspective(s), etc.). The goal is to (re)introduce participants to the concept of EI skills in general.

On Day One, participants will break for 15 minutes before choosing one of three morning concurrent sessions (\*\*Note - Day Two and Day Three meetings start at 9:00 am – without a morning break). An optional “Recap Challenge” will take place between 11:15 am and 12:00 pm on the first day and 11:45 am to 12:00 pm on the next two days. The purpose of the daily Recap Challenge is to quiz participants’ knowledge on the morning breakout session of their choice. The group will have lunch between 12:00 pm and 1:00 pm. Upon returning from the lunch, guests must attend two breakout sessions opposite of the morning meeting. Each day ends with an exit key activity – each person will receive a short questionnaire to obtain feedback about the breakout sessions and their overall experiences after attending the conference.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The 3-day online EI professional development training seminar will be evaluated via formative and summative assessments. Individuals in attendance will be encouraged to complete a small questionnaire with at least three to five questions about each session. Medical programs (including training and development workshops) often use formative or summative measures to assess curriculum effectiveness or people’s understanding of material (Chertoff et al., 2016). For example, some schools require students to build formative or summative portfolios to evaluate their progression throughout a training

course. Formative assessments can also encompass a variety of activities in which facilitators at the online EI training could use to gauge people's knowledge or to provide feedback to help them learn more effectively (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Unlike formative measures, summative activities measure people's knowledge performances based on a final assessment (e.g., a survey measuring EI skills) assessing how much learning has occurred (Dixson & Worrell, 2016).

Everyone in attendance at the 3-day training event will be expected to complete an online preassessment on the first day. The preassessment will provide me data needed to assess participants' initial understanding of EI competencies. After each breakout session, each person will be provided a formative survey by the facilitator(s) as an exit-ticket marking the end of the meeting. The survey will ask them about the content shared during each breakout session and general meetings. It will also test their knowledge about EI competence discussed in the session. Together, these questions will help me determined if the EI breakout sessions were effective. On the final day, participants will complete a summative exit ticket. This exit ticket will showcase each meeting that attendees visited over the 3-day EI professional development event.

### **Project Implications**

The key findings generated in this basic qualitative research project suggested that hiring managers preferred to employ new community college graduates cognizant of EI. Five essential themes emerged from data collected via participant interviews – awareness is key, communication for relationship management, assertiveness in knowledge work, bridging generational gaps in understanding EI, and coaching EI skills for professional

success. Results also implied that most hiring managers thought community college graduates lacked awareness (i.e., self-awareness and social awareness), communication skills, and empathy. Healthcare knowledge work jobs require employees to be emotionally intelligent to build relationships with others – including co-workers, patients and their families, and those in leadership positions. Therefore, it is vital that community colleges train potential graduates on basic EI competencies needed to excel in healthcare knowledge work roles.



#### Section 4: Reflection and Conclusions

The primary purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine hiring manager perceptions of the EI skills of new community college graduates hired for knowledge work roles. The problem for the study related to the EI skill gaps of knowledge workers who graduated from an urban community college system. Two qualitative questions guided the research investigation:

RQ1: What are the EI skills hiring managers consider essential for professional success in knowledge work?

RQ2: What are local hiring managers perceptions of EI skill gaps of community college graduates they have employed as knowledge workers?

Goleman's (1995) EI theory served as the conceptual framework for this basic qualitative research project. The basic traditional qualitative research methods included participant interviews followed by three-rounds of coding open, axial, and selective coding. After the coding process, I developed five themes:

- Awareness is key,
- Communication for relationship management,
- Assertiveness in knowledge work,
- Bridging the gap between generational understanding of EI, and
- Coaching EI skills for professional success.

Based on the project's findings, I developed a 3-day EI online professional development seminar. Those in attendance will have ample opportunities to discuss and formulate ways to strengthen future community college graduates' understanding of EI

skills to prepare graduates for knowledge work roles in healthcare. Section 4 not only highlights my growth as a novice researcher, but it also examines the project's strengths and limitations. Furthermore, I will discuss a few alternative research methods that could provide a more in-depth insight into community college students' EI (particularly those entering various areas of healthcare potentially focusing more on frontline employees such as nurses or radiologists). This section also explains how results generated in this qualitative inquiry advance scholarship, project development, and leadership for positive social change. I will also reflect on the importance of the work, and address the implications, applications, and directions for future research before concluding the overall project.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The findings produced in this basic qualitative project represented one of the most significant strengths because it deepened my knowledge about hiring manager's perceptions of community college graduates' EI. Although EI has different concepts, this project followed Goleman's (1995) perspective since it primarily aligned with a business setting. My rationale initially consisted of examining employers' perceptions of community college graduates' workforce readiness and soft skills. However, the direction of the research changed as I read more about EI competencies. Collecting data from empirical research on Goleman's rendition of the theory allowed me to gain a knowledgeable insight into the concept of EI from the perspective of eight hiring managers connected to a healthcare facility. Five essential themes emerging from my analysis of the qualitative data led to the final project – the 3-day EI online professional

training seminar for community college administrators and hiring managers (i.e., employers) in the local area.

Researching EI also led me to find that most community colleges do not equip potential graduates with EI skills leading to the context of the problem, a gap in practice at the local study site. The gap in practice is what informed the construction of this project. Bradford (2020) and his colleagues found that EI represents the strongest predictor of performance. Most high performers tend to demonstrate high EI (Bradford, 2020). In contrast, Bradford revealed that around 20% of the bottom performers show signs of EI on the job. Many organizations want to hire employees who understand soft-skills – adaptability, critical thinking, EI, cultural awareness, oral and written communication, and teamwork (Sharma, 2018; Wolff & Booth, 2017). It is imperative that community colleges find ways to integrate EI competencies into its curricula to not only build their confidence, but also to help them achieve a successful career in knowledge work.

### **Limitations**

This project was limited in a few areas. First, face-to-face interactions would have been unsafe for participants and for me as a scholar due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of face-to-face interviews, all participant interviews took place via Zoom, and I used Otter.ai as a backup to capture participants' thoughts about the EI skills of community college graduates hired as knowledge workers in the healthcare industry. The pandemic also limited the availability of some healthcare hiring managers who expressed interest in the project. Another limitation in the project relates to the results cannot be

generalized to all CHS hiring managers since the eight contributors' thoughts do not reflect the entire organization. To mitigate this limitation, I plan to invite everyone on the CHS senior leadership team and those responsible for hiring knowledge workers to the 3-day online EI seminar created as the final project.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

Traditionally, qualitative scholars look to interpret or make sense of people's experiences to understand a social phenomenon (Abrams et al., 2020; Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative research methods also have the potential to generate sufficient data needed to gain insight into a person's preferences, attitudes, beliefs, and measure how these areas might shift over time (Gallo et al., 2018; Jamali, 2018). I followed a basic qualitative design for this project to focus primarily on hiring managers' perceptions of new community college graduates' EI skills.

All eight contributors endorsed hiring recent community college graduates for knowledge work roles in healthcare who know how to apply EI into the workplace. Based on data collected from participant interviews, I developed a 3-day online EI training seminar for college personnel (i.e., leadership, faculty, and staff) and hiring managers (i.e., CHS and other potential employers). A single-or-multiple case study or a phenomenology design represent alternative qualitative methods that could address the problem investigated in this project related to the EI skills gaps of community college students entering knowledge work roles.

A phenomenological study could examine the lived experiences of community college students as they learn about EI. Phenomenology, Mohajan (2018) explained,

works best when knowledge about a particular topic or concept is scarce. A case study design could provide more in-depth qualitative synopsis of a community college program. I could have looked specifically at an individual program such as business management, healthcare management, or nursing. Case study design involves examining one or more organizations that hire knowledge workers regularly (Mohajan, 2018). For example, a case study may focus on other hiring managers outside of healthcare to determine the essential EI skills recommended in their respective industries. Another study could also possibly address community college faculty member's perception of teaching students vital EI skills. Furthermore, a quantitative study can shed light on the relationship between college students' EI skills and their workforce readiness. Perhaps other scholars could also investigate how effective are community colleges' academic curricula in developing students' EI competencies.

### **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change**

Throughout this project, I gained a wealth of knowledge as a scholar and novice qualitative researcher. I was almost certain initially that it was best to study community college students' soft skills as they enter the knowledge work profession. However, I became fascinated with the concept of Goleman's (1995) idea of EI in the workplace. Literature about knowledge worker roles and community college helped me strengthen my understanding of how these two areas intersect. Scouring through articles also improved my researching abilities and my critical thinking skills. Furthermore, my analytical competency expanded by reading, dissecting, and synthesizing empirical evidence to formulate a robust literature review about EI, the knowledge work industry,

and community colleges. This experience has also reshaped my perception about research since I am now aware of how to (a) identify a local problem, (b) create research questions specific to the basic qualitative research design, (c) recruit others who could provide information needed to address the identified problem, (d) conduct online interviews and transcribed them verbatim, and (e) code qualitative data to develop essential themes leading to a final project – the 3-day online EI seminar.

### **Project Development**

Creating the 3-day EI professional development seminar as the final piece to this basic qualitative project resulted in another rewarding experience. My desire to learn more about EI is what propelled me to select this research topic. In the initial phase of the project, I reflected on a multitude of conversations with employers throughout my career as a regional director at a state agency and advisory board member of a local two-year technical community college. Reshaping my research focus to reflect EI was not a difficult choice since scholars (Alfonso et al., 2016; Lee, 2018; Lee et al., 2020) consider EI competencies nearly interchangeable with the soft skills. Conversely, I also thought about my conversations with the eight hiring managers contributing to the findings during the project's initial stages of development.

I must also give credit to an EI expert referred by a committee's member who graciously reviewed my initial data analysis results section and provided feedback to help the credibility of this study (see Appendix F). Some of his comments included to explain, "what does effective interpersonal communication (the domain) look like in terms of skills and how would a person go about teaching it?" The expert's feedback helped me

tremendously because he confirmed that I was on the right track in terms of producing a credible and reliable research project.

The second literature review was developed based on the concept of awareness since all eight participants mentioned it at some point during our conversation. I researched for empirical articles related to EI, self-awareness, and healthcare students to find out more about these topics. To my surprise, countless studies appeared in the search about the EI skills of healthcare professionals and college students interested in applying for roles in this industry after graduation. I also referred to my past experiences designing training material for adult learners enrolled in my business management courses. Additionally, I reflected on my past experiences attending professional conferences and workshops leading to the development of the 3-day EI seminar. A committee member suggested to offer the professional development training workshops online through Canvas – an online learning management system (LMS) accessible to educators – due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Educators are Social Change Agents**

My educational experiences at Walden University have shaped my views as a social change agent seeking to advance community college students' knowledge about EI. The program provided me an opportunity to strengthen my leadership skills and creativity so that I could develop a product in which people could work together to discuss ways to coach, mentor, or train new community college graduates entering knowledge work roles on EI competencies. More specifically, I gained a newfound

appreciation for academic research while sharpening my critical thinking skills as I planned the 3-day professional development conference.

Educators who remain aware of current trends also look for meaningful professional development opportunities to present their work at national and international conferences (Irby & O’Sullivan, 2018). The 3-day EI professional development seminar will not only create social change, but also serve as an academic interprofessional communication forum for college personnel including community college administrators, faculty, and staff to connect to and learn from local employers to develop strategies to ensure potential community college graduates’ grow personally and professionally as lifelong learners in the location they learned, supporting the community they are part of in a metropolitan area in the southeast..

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

This basic qualitative project addressed the problem related to the EI skill gaps of knowledge workers who graduated from an urban community college system. Throughout my professional career as a regional director of a state agency, I have had countless dialogues with employers who hire community college graduates. Many informed me that community colleges do not equip students with the crucial soft skills necessary to advance or sustain professional careers in today’s multifaceted workforce. Notwithstanding, I also spent years serving on a community college’s advisory board and facilitated business management courses. These instructional offerings are designed to train college students for the workplace. It seemed to be a disconnect between what my



students learned in our classroom and what they were able to apply in the workplace, which reshaped the foundation for my research focus.

While studying the concept of EI initially, I read the rendition that Goleman (1995) proposed for business settings. Several scholars (Hendon et al., 2017; Moore & Morton, 2017; Turnipseed, 2018) have since supported Goleman's framework of EI in business setting. The framework encourages individuals to learn how to manage their emotions and recognize the emotions of others in the workplace. I applied all the knowledge I learned in my courses at Walden University about qualitative research methods to create a long-lasting final project based on themes generated from my analysis of the data. This information helped me understand how to make a positive contribution to knowledge about potential community college knowledge worker graduates' transition into the workforce. I will continue researching the topic of college student EI because much more literature is needed to know about how soft skills can be practiced concurrently with academic curriculum in higher education since community college knowledge worker graduates represent society's future social change leaders.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The findings generated in this basic qualitative research project could benefit community colleges and local hiring managers. Data collected via participant interviews aligned with other research results on EI, knowledge work, and the need to prepare community college students for successful careers. Based on my findings, it is vital that future research examines the unique experiences of community college students interested in knowledge work roles in healthcare and other industries such as business

management and education. The project's results also revealed that EI represents a vital skill for employability in the healthcare industry. Perhaps a quantitative study could assist community college administrators to identify activities proven effective in integrating academic curricula designed to improve students' EI competencies. Data collected in a quantitative study could also be collected to determine whether or not the final EI professional development seminar created based on this project's findings is efficient. A quantitative study could also help pinpoint the EI needs of potential graduates or assist four-year colleges implement EI activities into their academic programming.

### **Conclusion**

My reflection and conclusions of the entire project is an overall rewarding learning experience. Using trends, I had observed from my work in community colleges and prior research on workforce readiness, I identified a local problem of a gap in practice in a community college in an urban metropolitan area that specialized in knowledge work academic development. To better understand the EI skills necessary to persist in a professional setting, I was able to formulate research questions that were aligned to my conceptual framework. EI theory informed the research and interview questions to address the gap in practice at the study site. The community college was not the appropriate setting to recruit and interview participants, and instead, I focused on the perceptions of hiring managers who had recently employed individuals who had graduated in knowledge work programs. Once the hiring managers were interviewed, I worked with my committee to establish key themes from the categories in the transcripts.

By listening to and rereading the transcripts, I analyzed the data, and pinpointed essential themes that would need to be incorporated in my project.

For the project study model to be fully developed, I conducted a second literature review to support learning objectives and activities for the 3-day EI professional development seminar for college personnel and potential hiring managers. The EI conference will serve as an opportunity for attendees to discuss ways to integrate EI workforce readiness skill development more organically in community college academic curricula. Academic skills are crucial to knowledge work yet graduates need the opportunity to practice and apply more EI competencies to prepare students for creative problem solving in the workforce. Along with an overall reflection, this section included the project's strengths and limitations. I described alternative methods that could also be used to address the project's research problem.

To understand my investigation, it is essential to understand how I selected the scholarship, developed components of the project, and addressed the educators and hiring managers as potential social change agents in fostering EI to support clinical patient outcomes and cost savings in healthcare settings. The most recent global pandemic has underscored the importance of EI in healthcare work. Given the historical importance of frontline workers and community college education, the implications for enhancing community college curricula assessments and applications, dynamic and multimodality directions for future research include exploring EI in law enforcement, social work, and mental health counselling community college programs.

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## Appendix A

### Janice Moore-English's EI Professional Development Seminar

The screenshot displays the Canvas LMS interface for a course titled "Emotional Intelligence Seminar". The browser address bar shows the URL: <https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/3022498>. The course status is "Unpublished".

**Course Content:**

- Day 1 (Part One) - Awareness is Key: Interpersonal and Interprofessional Communication**
  - Welcome to Janice Moore-English's Emotional Intelligence Professional Development Seminar - 9:00 AM to 9:30 AM
  - EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
  - DAY ONE (AM) BREAKOUT SESSION 9:45 AM to 11:00 AM
  - AWARENESS & EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE DISCUSSION BOARD
  - RECAP CHALLENGE - AWARENESS IS KEY!!! 11:15 AM to 12:00 PM
  - DAY ONE (PM) BREAKOUT SESSION 1 - 1:00 PM to 2:15 PM
  - DAY ONE (PM) BREAKOUT SESSION 2 - 2:30 PM to 3:45 PM
  - EXIT KEY: AWARENESS IS KEY!!! - 3:45 PM TO 4:00 PM
- DAY TWO: SELF-MANAGEMENT & RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT**
  - WELCOME TO DAY TWO PROFESSIONALS
  - DAY TWO (AM) BREAKOUT SESSION 9:00 AM to 10:15 AM
  - DAY TWO (AM) BREAKOUT SESSION 10:30 AM to 11:45 AM
  - RECAP CHALLENGE - SELF-MANAGEMENT & RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT 11:45 AM TO 12:00 PM
  - DAY TWO (PM) BREAKOUT SESSION 1:00 PM TO 2:15 PM
  - DAY TWO (PM) BREAKOUT SESSION 2:30 PM TO 3:45 PM
  - EXIT KEY: SELF-MANAGEMENT & RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT 3:45 PM TO 4:00 PM

**Course Status and Actions:**

- Unpublished (with Publish button)
- Import Existing Content
- Import from Commons
- Choose Home Page
- View Course Stream
- New Announcement
- New Analytics
- View Course Notifications

**Coming Up:** Nothing for the next week (with View Calendar link).

**Settings:** The bottom section shows the "Settings" page, which is currently empty.

☰ ▾ Day 3 (Part Three) - Honest and Helpful Feedback	⊙ + ☰
☰ WELCOME TO DAY THREE PROFESSIONALS	⊙ ☰
☰ 📄 CAN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE BE LEARNED?	⊙ ☰
☰ 📄 DAY THREE (AM) BREAKOUT SESSION 9:00 AM TO 10:15 AM	⊙ ☰
☰ 📄 DAY THREE (AM) BREAKOUT SESSION 10:30 AM TO 11:45 AM	⊙ ☰
☰ 📄 RECAP CHALLENGE - HONEST & HELPFUL FEEDBACK	⊙ ☰
☰ 📄 DAY THREE (PM) BREAKOUT SESSION 1:00 PM TO 2:15 PM	⊙ ☰
☰ 📄 DAY THREE (PM) BREAKOUT SESSION 2:30 PM TO 3:45 PM	⊙ ☰
☰ 🗨️ EXIT KEY: HONEST & HELPFUL FEEDBACK	⊙ ☰

### **Day One's Possible Breakout Session**

**Possible Concurrent Session One:** The Origination of EI

**Possible Concurrent Session Two:** Awareness is key!

**Possible Concurrent Session Three:** Empathy in the Workplace

### **Day Two's Possible Breakout Session**

**Possible Concurrent Session One:** Communication in Relationship Management

**Possible Concurrent Session Two:** Assertiveness is Necessary in Knowledge

Work Roles

**Possible Concurrent Session Three:** Thriving Instead of Surviving:

Understanding Basic EI Competencies in the Workplace

**Day Three's Possible Breakout Session**

**Possible Concurrent Session One:** Training and Developing: Future Knowledge  
Workers: Employers' Views of EI Skills

**Possible Concurrent Session Two:** Best Practices for Teamwork and  
Collaboration in Knowledge Work

**Possible Concurrent Session Three:** Gaps in Generational Understanding of EI

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol:

#### Interview Script and Interview Questions

##### Introductory Script:

*Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership and Management program at Walden University. I'm here to learn about the role of EI (EI) for recent knowledge worker graduates from the local community college. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. The purpose of this interview is to learn your perceptions of EI skills of new hires who completed their Associate degree in one of the local community colleges in the metropolitan area. There are no right or wrong answers, or desirable or undesirable answers. I want you to be comfortable saying what you really think and feel. With your permission, I would like to audio record our conversation to avoid having to write down each thought you express so that I can pay attention to my conversation with you today. Everything you say will be confidential, and only me and my doctoral committee members will be aware of your answers. Your information will be masked by a participant number, and all research materials will be stored in a password protected environment.*

**RQ1: What are the EI skills hiring managers consider essential for professional success in knowledge work?**

##### Interview Questions

1. Which EI skills do you think are essential for potential employees entering your industry's workforce? Please describe why these skills matter in your specific professional environment.
2. Can you share an example of a new community college graduate hire who performed well in their role as a knowledge worker at your company?
3. Can you share an example of a new community college graduate hire who did not perform well in their role as a knowledge worker at your company?
4. Based on your recent experience with community college hires, how would you describe the EI skills that recent graduates possess?
5. As a hiring manager, which EI skills help new knowledge workers acclimate to professional settings?



**RQ2: What are local hiring managers perceptions of EI skill gaps of community college graduates they have employed as knowledge workers?**

**Interview Questions**

1. As a hiring manager, what EI skills are missing in the new community college graduates that you have hired?
2. Please describe any EI skill gaps that you have observed in new community college students you have hired. How does an EI skill gap impact employment in the workforce?
3. Can you describe how an EI skill gap in a new employee could impact their ability to persist in knowledge work in a professional setting?
4. Please describe the EI skill gaps you have observed in a new community college graduate employed in your work environment.
5. What EI skills do you look for when interviewing a potential new employee?
6. Can you provide an example of a new hire with poor EI skills? How did the EI skill gap impact their performance?

Probing questions: Why is a specific EI skill [oral communication/critical thinking/comfort with ambiguity] so important to your organization?

**Interview Exit Script**

*Thank you so much for your time today, and that is all the questions that I have for you. Are there any final thoughts that you would like to share with me regarding EI skills, and new community college knowledge workers who you have hired? This has been very helpful to me in my study, and I will be sending you the transcript of our conversation by email within the next week. Thank you again for your time.*

## Appendix C

**Participant Inclusion Screening Questionnaire**

1. Do you play an active role in the hiring of new employees? (yes/no)  
If no, individual would be thanked for their response, and the individual would not be eligible to participate in the study.

If the participant answers yes, the questions below will be asked of the individual, and they will be invited to participate in the study.

2. What type of new employees have you hired since August 2015? (Open ended)

3. Who in your organization would you consider a knowledge worker? (Open ended)

4. How many employees in your organization perform knowledge-based work, such as accounting, business management, IT, education/training, finance, or human resources? (Range of 1-5, 5-10, 10-20, over 20 employees in these roles.)

## Appendix D

**Letter of Participation**

Hello,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am currently pursuing an Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership and Management, at Walden University. As part of my research, I am looking for local hiring managers or hiring manager to interview. You were identified from my questionnaire as an individual who would meet the criteria. The primary purpose of my study is to explore the perception of local hiring managers to understand how they perceive the EI of new community colleges graduates entering the knowledge work industry. Knowledge worker graduates are students who have majored in computer science, information technology, accounting, business management, human resource management or related professional fields. Would you be interested in participating?

The process will include completing a Consent Form (I will send to you) and allowing me to interview you by telephone or video conference for approximately 30 minutes. I will be sharing the transcript of our interview with you, as well as my final research results (via a private summary website) when the study is completed.

Please let me know if you would like to participate. You can contact me by email at if you have any questions.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you!

## Appendix E

Salovey and Mayer's (1990) Ability-based EI	Goleman's (1995) Trait- based EI	Bar-On's (2001) Mixed- based EI
Perceive emotion	Self-awareness	Self-perception
Using emotion to facilitate thought	Social-awareness	Self-expression
Understanding emotions	Relationship management	Interpersonal
Managing emotions	Self-management	Decision-making
		Stress management

## Appendix F

### EI Expert's Feedback

Hi Dr. Chairperson-

I am doing and feeling well, and hope you are too.

Thank you for sharing Student's data analysis. One thing I am noticing is that she is talking about themes in fairly general terms, and some of her themes are not really EI skills per se. Some are EI domains, and some are just general skills. Could make her data analysis more interesting and effective is for her to delve into the literature to present an EI perspective of what those domains and skills are. For example, what does effective interpersonal communication (the domain) look like in terms of skills and how would a person go about teaching it? I think that level of analysis would greatly improve this section of her paper. I've embedded a few comments along these lines that she may find helpful.

Please give student my best. Warmest personal regards.

### **EI Expert's comments in paper.**

1. I see four themes for RQ 1 and two for RQ2
2. While related in many ways, self-awareness and relationship management are separate EI competencies. Self-awareness is related to metacognition about self (how am I thinking right now; constructively or destructively)? Relationship management as to do with social awareness (how am I communicating right now; constructively or destructively)?
3. Defensive attitude: The need for anger management and anxiety management, both EI skills
4. Interpersonal communication is an EI domain. The three skills that comprise interpersonal communication include assertion, anxiety control/management, and anger control/management. Assertion is the direct, honest communication that respects self and others' feelings equally. Anxiety control/management, and anger control/management are also self-control skills that allow assertive communication to take place.
5. The emotional mind thinks critically automatically. The emotional skill involved is constructive thinking.
6. The EI skills is commitment ethic; an ethos of commitment to personal excellence.

7. Empathy is a personal leadership skill.

8. Social and situational awareness.

9. The act of communication is a two-way process. A sender sends a message but cannot be certain that the receiver accurately received the message unless there is feedback. When the receiver repeats back the message in their own words, then the sending can verify and either confirm accuracy or resend the message with different words to see if it is accurately received in another attempt. Without all these steps taking place during the process, communication has not occurred.

10. Drive strength (related to setting and achieving goals) and commitment ethic (related to the amount of work you will do to complete a task you have agreed to) are EI skills under the self-management domain.

11. Interesting: How can are generation gaps eliminated in EI?

High school graduates have to be taught how to study for and succeed in college. Likewise, college graduates have to be taught how to succeed in life. Organizational values that promote EI skills can help a lot. What image to you get when you think of a wise person? This person has had many life experiences and learned each of them. How do we mentor young employees to develop into wise people?

12. Coaching is the art of giving feedback in a way that is both honest and helpful. Feedback is constructive when it makes a positive change in future performance. Combining the skills of assertion and empathy (i.e., empathic assertion) is a very strong EI skill to facilitate effective coaching.

1. I see four themes for RQ 1 and two for RQ2

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