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## Emotional Intelligence, Flourishing and Satisfaction with Life Among Government Employees in South Africa

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**Abstract:** Employees' subjective well-being should be a significant concern for organisations and must be prioritised to ascertain organisational efficiency. As such, emotional intelligence, flourishing and satisfaction with life within South African government organisations play a vital role in ensuring that employees perform efficaciously. This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence, flourishing, and satisfaction with life among government employees in the Sedibeng region of South Africa. The sample comprised male and female employees between the ages of 18 and 64 years. The study employed a quantitative research approach and a structured questionnaire comprising the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, the Flourishing Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale was distributed. The results revealed that the three dimensions of emotional intelligence —regulation of emotion, self-emotion appraisal and use of emotion— positively predicted flourishing and satisfaction with life. Predictive relationships were also found between flourishing and satisfaction with life. Recommendations and limitations are discussed.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence; flourishing; government employees; satisfaction with life

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### Introduction

Difficult working circumstances and conditions of employees in South African government organisations affect an employee's subjective well-being (Peral & Geldenhuys, 2016). It is essential to note that employees differ in their ability to perceive, comprehend, use and manage emotions, as these distinctions influence how an individual adjusts to different circumstances, including the individual's place of work (Haricharan, 2022). Individuals who are flourishing would have elevated mental health levels that are distinguished by happy feelings and constructive general functioning (Kleynhans, 2022). Flourishing employees would, then, contribute positively to an organisation's efficiency and success (Ramdas & Patrick, 2019). Consequently, the greater an organisation's ability to provide its

employees with basic requirements to perform specific job tasks, the greater the impact on employees' satisfaction with life (Meynhardt et al., 2018).

Individuals with an above-average emotional intelligence (EI) are more positive, self-assured and have a better understanding of others, assisting them to cope effectively with demands from the environment (Jiménez-Rodríguez et al., 2022). EI is crucial in explaining human behaviour, individual performance and personal well-being (Kabunga et al., 2020). Employees with high EI demonstrate social expertise and empathy and can easily gauge the emotional environment in which they work (Motlhanke & Naong, 2021). Cheema et al. (2021) posit that employees in government organisations who are emotionally intelligent are more likely to be engaged at work. Supramaniam and Singaravelloo (2021) assert that employees with a high EI are more efficient and perform at a much higher level than their peers with a low EI, who demonstrate high levels of work stress. Notably, organisations require healthy and motivated employees to flourish and persevere in the ever-changing world of work and difficult situations accompanying these adjustments (Kleynhans, 2022). Satisfied employees are more likely to be happy and deal efficiently with life and job challenges (Keyser et al., 2020).

Prior literature on employee well-being, satisfaction and workplace flourishing and their importance exists. However, against the transforming government employee landscape, modest attention is given to behavioural, sentimental, relational and socio-cultural dimensions, neglecting EI, workplace flourishing and satisfaction with workplace life within the government organisations (Dreer, 2024; Hassan et al., 2022; Okros & Virga, 2023). Furthermore, despite growing evidence ascertaining the significance of these factors in the working environments and their affirmative influence on business performance and employee well-being, it is evident that South African government departments and their human resource management (HRM) practices have been mainly controlled by dominant top-down, transactional governance approaches and leadership styles (Chilunjika et al., 2022). Furthermore, the HRM practices in the South African government organisations focus primarily on improving organisational performance, neglecting employee concerns such as well-being, workplace flourishing and satisfaction, often viewed and regarded as a subordinate consideration (Phaladi & Ngulube, 2022).

Moreover, the pervasiveness of a Western epistemic style, the noticeable dearth of literature on post-colonial employees of government organisations or observing public leadership and governance through the lens of African concepts like Ubuntu, is important. Ubuntu is a Southern African ideology derived from the expression "*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" ("A person is a person through other persons") and it underscores interconnectivity, empathy, compassion and communal welfare (Ayayia 2024, p. 33). This permits studies into other appropriate HRM well-being practices and paradigms (Phaladi & Ngulube, 2022). Accordingly, considerable research endeavours are necessary for reframing and understanding the South African employee landscape realities and investigating different models of organisational behaviour, government HRM, well-being, psychological capital, burnout and performance (Haricharan, 2023). Within South Africa, a few studies explored the well-being of employees (Kleynhans, 2022; Viljoen, 2022). Most of these studies concentrated on private and large organisations (Du Plessis, 2023; Kotzé, 2022; Utete et al., 2022). As such, there is a limitation in the number of studies exploring the influence of EI, flourishing and satisfaction with life on government employees.

It is apparent that there is a dearth of literature on the well-being of South African government employees, and the purpose of the present quantitative study was to explore the relationship between the multi-dimensional factors—EI, flourishing and satisfaction with life—among government employees, in a South African region of Sedibeng. This study also responds to civil society's growing demand worldwide for relational, considerate, capable and responsible government management, HRM, governance and leadership (Mosimege & Masiya, 2022). This study sought to explore the relationship between EI, flourishing and satisfaction with life among government employees and contributes to the HRM body of knowledge.

## **Implications for management regarding government employees**

The state of government employees' management demands thoughtful reorganising, reconceptualising, and psychological well-being awareness at all levels (Hassan et al., 2022). Kotzé (2022) posits that a significant change in HRM is required to effectively manage the dynamically composite and indeterminate workplace environment. In realising meaningful changes in management regarding government employees, various studies emphasise the critical necessity to transform government HRM arrangements, that is, structures, systems, decision-making, strategies, policies and processes to embrace the psychological well-being of these employees (Mosimege & Masiya, 2022). Still, government organisations are mostly ensuring remnants of the industrial machine era (Okros & Virga 2023) and transactional HRM practices, with the attendant intrinsic and archaic

deficiencies. Besides providing the regular employees' needs, such as compensation, training, and development, government employees and relevant stakeholders demand sound employee psychological well-being management. Thus, issues such as well-being, psychological capital, workplace flourishing, satisfaction, responsiveness, caring, inclusivity and HRM accountability must be adhered to by government organisations, and this leads to better organisational performance (Dreer, 2024).

In this background, government organisations and their leadership and management are anticipated to initiate essential organisational and individual changes. Thus, to embrace the employee's well-being and psychological capital, such as EI, workplace satisfaction and flourishing (Viljoen, 2022). Government leadership and management are expected to embrace new suitable values and competencies in managing their employees. These competencies include transformational leadership practices such as individual consideration, where the individual well-being of workers is considered (Samad et al., 2022). These changes permit the implementation of different and innovative government employee management models, such as employee-centric and psychological capital models, where employees are not viewed as production instruments but human capital assets (Goswami & Agrawal, 2023). In the quest for current, employee-centric and psychological capital models, previous studies have raised an alarm with the state of government employee management scholarship in understanding the complex, discrete and changing government employee environment (Kun & Gadanez, 2022).

Essential to the government's employee management transforming agenda is the dominant machine image of public organisations, where employees are viewed as tools (Goswami & Agrawal, 2023). The machine model has controlled government management and leadership's rationality through perceptions of standardisation, predictability and control despite these concepts' conflict with the prevailing employee management concept where well-being, psychological and mental health aspects are seriously considered (Garg et al., 2022). These earlier models have been implemented in the government employee management landscape, suitably defined by Kun and Gadanez (2022) figuratively as the machinery of government, levers of power, chain of command and cogs in the machine. Although the machine model with homogeneous products incorporating the model of labour division may have well-matched the era of industrialisation in a comparatively stable context (Garg et al., 2022), the volatile and dynamic business landscape, and particularly the worldwide calamity like the COVID-19 pandemic, have intensely demonstrated their inherent shortfalls in managing government employees.

In the wake of this machine symbol, many government organisations, institutions and departments, particularly those in South Africa, appear rigid, categorised, hierarchical and politically controlled, determined by certainty and efficiency regarding employee management (Viljoen, 2022). The basic challenge with this perception is that human physical and psychological well-being is often ignored (Goswami & Agrawal 2023). Most government employees are considered instruments, and extrinsic rewards, such as remuneration and compensation, are mostly employed as motivational factors. The ultimate outcome is the attrition of employee well-being, personal agency, psychological and social capital, where the human side is not considered in the name of cost minimisation and effectiveness (Kun & Gadanez, 2022). In steering a new culture of government employee management, Viljoen (2022) challenges government's HRM to consider employee well-being and psychological capital, suggesting a consolidative, integrative and reflective approach to embrace the human side of employees (Goswami & Agrawal, 2023). Such initiatives are projected to enhance the quality of government employee management and buttress their well-being. "Hence, organisations can bring a positive psychology mindset into the workplace, influencing mental health and making it more humane, with a positive bottom-line impact" (Sukdeo 2025, p. 270). Therefore, understanding that the employee is part of the organisational system that contributes to the organisation's success, yet emphasising that the employee is an individual with emotions, must be considered holistically, considering EI, flourishing and satisfaction with life.

## **Human resource management and employee well-being**

In the present era, with substantial transformations in the nature of work and organisational workplace environment, more attention to employee well-being is essential to productivity, satisfaction and the quality of work life (QWL); however, previous studies have shown restricted interest in employee well-being, concentrating primarily on performance (Samad et al., 2022). Goswami and Agrawal (2023) correspond that management studies view workers as instruments to the necessities of business performance, depicting the lack of utilitarian and economic standards, concentrating on effectiveness and success, with less attention to social, development and ethical aspects of employees. In doing so, management views employees as organisational instruments. The evidence silos of well-being studies within the government organisations and departments remain scarce,

notwithstanding the evidence presenting causation between positive job performance results and well-being at organisational and employee levels. The literature on well-being distinguishes two central concepts of well-being: hedonia (e.g., absence of distress, pleasure, comfort and enjoyment) and eudaimonia (e.g., meaning, excellence, growth and authenticity) (Lundqvist et al., 2023). Pancheva et al. (2021) identified four groups of eudaimonia, namely experiences (emotions, cognitive appraisals and subjective experiences), orientations (values, goals and motives), functioning (mental health, satisfaction, flourishing and positive psychological functioning), and behaviours (activity characteristics and behavioural content).

The primary contributor to well-being research, Pancheva et al. (2021) established six psychological well-being dimensions: autonomy, self-acceptance, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and environmental mastery. Positive psychological well-being relates to both mental and affective experiences of optimal functioning, well-being, workplace flourishing and satisfaction. However, it is still an underexplored study area in HRM research (Lundqvist et al., 2023). Linked to these dimensions of well-being and buoyed by workplace evidence, Su et al. (2020) suggest five distinctive sets of HRM practices: providing an attractive working environment, investing in employees, fostering positive social relations, offering organisational support and ensuring employee representation. These practices are associated with well-being aspects of EI, workplace flourishing, satisfaction and, subsequently, positive performance outcomes at the organisational and employee levels. Given these positive outcomes, recognising practices encouraging employee well-being is undoubtedly beneficial for human resource professionals and HRM, particularly in the government employee management setting (Yu et al., 2021). In these indeterminate and demanding times, the mental well-being of workers is severely affected and has an undesirable effect on performance outcomes and QWL (Prasada et al., 2020). Given that greater levels of well-being will be reflected in psychological health and social relations at work, arguably, this situation demands more effort in promoting workplace flourishing, EI and satisfaction (Yu et al., 2021). For example, mental and emotional well-being concerns functioning efficiently and involves experiencing a sense of well-being. Yet, this situation is compromised when undesirable feelings and emotions are prolonged, intense and inhibit the person's capacity to function and operate in daily life (Su et al., 2020).

### **Transforming the South African government employee management context**

Given the isolating, alienating and impersonal machine approach, the philosophy of the democratic South African constitution accommodates the re-forming of government organisational behaviours, values, HRM and the management of government leadership and employees (Farazmand, 2023). These values include investing in employee well-being, caring, workplace flourishing, accountability, satisfaction, belonging, accessibility, equality and responsibility regarding government employee management. Government employees perceive or experience state organisations through the emotional expressions and social interactions with government leadership and management (Elliott, 2020). To comprehend the constitutional outlooks, the National Development Plan (NDP) (Republic of South Africa, 2012) vision declares that forming a proficient developmental government labour force involves new and accomplished leadership, capabilities, attitudes, knowledge, behaviours and a paradigm shift – including the growth in general competence in the management of government employees. Reflecting on the transformation of the management of employees by the government of South Africa and the existing HRM challenges, two essential orthodox approaches of rhetoric that permeate government organisations' reform—conventional organisational theory and realpolitik—are particularly relevant (Elliott, 2020). The initial rhetoric concentrates on restructuring managerial procedures, frameworks and structures in search of effectiveness, efficiency, economy and control of the organisational administrative chain of command. The second rhetoric embodies the political struggle amongst competing interests within the government and externally, which pursue representation, access, policy benefits and control (Elliott, 2020).

A crucial goal of the South African democratic state's transformation policies was to authorise, dare and inspire senior government managers to become effective communicators, visionaries, leaders, decision-makers and initiators, skilled to respond proactively to the challenges of the HRM change process. Moreover, research has specified that South African public leadership and management do not have the suitable transformational competencies to manage their departments effectively and that employees have negative perceptions of their managers' leadership competence and behaviours (Kotzé, 2022). Similarly, Van der Zwan et al. (2018) confirm substantial variations in the EI scores between effective and ineffective South African government management and leadership and differences in positive EI capabilities at the managerial level. Furthermore, Haricharan (2022) notes significant and positive correlations between leadership performance and EI competence in all four EI constructs: self-management, self-awareness, relationship management and social awareness. Various

meta-studies and meta-analyses established the significance of EI in management and leadership performance (Haricharan, 2023). EI is fundamental then, to an organisation's "performance, successful leadership and effective interpersonal relationships" (Cunningham 2025, p. 85).

### **Emotional intelligence (EI), flourishing and satisfaction with life**

EI, a psychological term proposed 30 years ago, is a concept that covers abilities and self-perceptions related to emotion recognition, expression, comprehension and management (Nicolet-dit-Félix et al., 2023). EI refers to an individual's subjective assessment of their capacity to handle emotional situations; it includes evaluating whether they possess the resources necessary to manage potential emotional situations, most frequently those involving other people (Liu et al., 2022). The principles of Ubuntu strongly correspond with the fundamental elements of EI, including emotional awareness, empathy and social skills (Dimitrova & Tomova, 2025). Self-emotion appraisal refers to the degree to which individuals are aware of their feelings and ideas about those feelings (Di et al., 2022). Fundamentally, the ability to understand how others feel is the appraisal of others' emotions (Di et al., 2022). Within the framework of Ubuntu, empathy constitutes a fundamental principle of Ubuntu leadership (Chetty & Price, 2024). Individual differences in the perception, regulation, use of emotion and understanding of emotions are captured by EI (Lea et al., 2023). Chang (2020) postulates that emotion regulation is the process of observing, assessing and acting on one's feelings. Emotionally intelligent people tend to be happier, healthier and more productive, whether EI is viewed as a trait or an ability (Lea et al., 2023). Hence, EI will contribute positively to an individual's overall health and well-being (Kugbey et al., 2018).

Exploiting psychological and social well-being components is defined as flourishing (Yıldırım et al., 2022). Positive psychology and the idea that a person can change their own life, including focusing on positive aspects and less on unfavourable ones, are the nascent roots of the concept of flourishing (Kainulainen, 2020). Flourishing is an adaptable feature that allows people to navigate and adjust their work environments to advance their careers (Zhang et al., 2022). A wide range of positive outcomes, including joyful feelings, satisfaction with life, competence and autonomy, are associated with flourishing (Chen et al., 2022). Flourishing is vital because it encompasses positive well-being, pleasant life experiences, feeling well and the ability to operate effectively (Bee Seok et al., 2020). Flourishing individuals are crucial and contribute favourably to both the personal and social spheres (Martín-Carbonell et al., 2021). The limited perspective of flourishing within the Ubuntu philosophy is further reflected in a potentially discriminatory and exclusive conceptualisation of personhood, which narrowly defines the ideal human identity (Rusinga, 2024). According to Ajitoni (2024), Ubuntu's notion of community primarily concerns individuals connected through geographical proximity and relational ties. A key limitation in existing literature is the prevalence of culture-free or Western-centric conceptualisations of well-being, which often overlook contextual and indigenous cultural values (Tayali, 2025). For individuals to truly flourish, they must exhibit positive functioning and experience both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, encompassing subjective, emotional, psychological and social dimensions of well-being (Ngyah-Etchutambe et al., 2024).

Satisfaction with life is a function of happiness in other areas of life, such as one's job and leisure activities (Van der Zwan et al., 2018). People who are highly satisfied with their lives have good health, social skills and energy (Bee Seok et al., 2020). Satisfaction with life is related to how an individual adjusts to the circumstances in which they find themselves, which is associated with coping techniques (Almeida et al., 2021). Hartung et al. (2021) concur that satisfaction with life is regarded as a comprehensive evaluation of an individual's life as a whole and the conscious cognitive judging component of subjective well-being. One of the most important determinants of good health and effective life adaptation has been discovered to be satisfaction with life (Chilicka et al., 2020). Employees who are happier are more engaged in their jobs, have lower absenteeism and are more productive (Danish et al., 2019). One's feelings and attitudes about the accomplishments of one's life at a given period might be used to gauge one's level of contentment with life (Bernarto et al., 2020). Scholars further argue that the understanding and promotion of well-being are inherently shaped by cultural and social contexts, varying according to what individuals within different societies value most (Idemudia & Adedeji, 2023). Within African contexts, the relationship between life satisfaction and Ubuntu is deeply interconnected (Ajitoni, 2024). Ubuntu emphasises communal living, mutual respect, empathy, shared responsibility, and values that cultivate a social environment conducive to psychological well-being (Shadrach, 2025). When individuals feel respected, supported and connected within a community guided by Ubuntu principles, their levels of life satisfaction are likely to increase (Ajitoni, 2024). Moreover, Ubuntu encourages moral conduct, generosity and conflict resolution through dialogue, fostering harmonious social relationships, key predictors of life satisfaction

(Sipondo, 2025). The values inherent in Ubuntu significantly enhance individual well-being by promoting meaningful social connections and collective support, which are vital components of a fulfilling and satisfying life (Boboyi, 2024).

## **Hypotheses development**

The study aimed to examine the relationship between EI, flourishing, and satisfaction with life among government employees in the Sedibeng region of South Africa. EI emerges as one of the most applied individual difference positive psychology constructs in the workplace (Hunsaker & Ding, 2022). It enables the expansion of several adaptive inter- and intrapersonal qualities in various domains of life (Swancott & Davis, 2023), and these adaptive abilities can account for the positive relationship between greater workplace flourishing and EI. The distinct characteristic of EI is a valuable concept in workplace studies (Hunsaker & Ding, 2022). It defines and conceptualises adaptive expressive functioning. Understanding, perceiving and handling emotions effectively in oneself and others are considered essential skills in most conceptualisations of EI (Alwali & Alwali, 2022). These capabilities are essential in influencing both workplace flourishing and satisfaction (Winton, 2023). Advanced stages of EI are related to a diversity of positive workplace flourishing outcomes (Hunsaker & Ding, 2022).

These outcomes include better individual well-being measured through matrices such as positive life satisfaction, flourishing, and improved psychological health (Winton, 2023). Winton (2023) establishes that EI may be a podium for expanding workplace behaviours such as satisfaction with the working environment, which boost workplace flourishing. Better understanding, perception and management of emotions may also result in improved interpersonal work relationships and thus lead to more satisfaction and flourishing at the workplace (Swancott & Davis, 2023). The abilities can directly enable workplace flourishing and may indirectly influence it by fostering other qualities, such as workplace satisfaction and sense of empowerment. Du Plessis (2023) provides empirical evidence supporting the theoretical relationship between trait EI and flourishing. A predictive relationship between EI factors and flourishing has been reported by previous studies (Callea et al., 2019; Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2021; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2019; Nel, 2019). Furthermore, earlier research confirmed the predictive relationship between EI factors and life satisfaction (Blasco-Belled et al., 2020). It has been demonstrated that workplace flourishing can influence employee satisfaction within an organisation, including employees' innovation and creative attitude (Hunsaker & Ding, 2022; Swancott & Davis, 2023). Hence, Bee Seok et al., (2020) indicate that satisfaction with life is positively associated with flourishing.

In support, Winton (2023) confirms that workplace flourishing is positively associated with employee innovation because of improved positive emotions. Research has also revealed that satisfaction is an essential response to workplace flourishing and that contented employees are likelier to demonstrate allegiance (Swancott & Davis, 2023). Bakracheva (2025) suggests that satisfaction with life is positively related to flourishing. With reference to the growing importance of organisations to focus on employee well-being from a holistic point of view, the self-determination theory (SDT) proposes "that fostering workplace conditions where employees feel supported in their autonomy is not only an appropriate end in itself but will lead to more employee satisfaction and thriving, as well as collateral benefits for organisational effectiveness" (Deci et al., 2017, p.20). Fundamentally, the SDT's focus is on advancing well-being in different areas that will enable an individual to thrive (Deci et al., 2017). Given this discussion, the following hypotheses were developed.

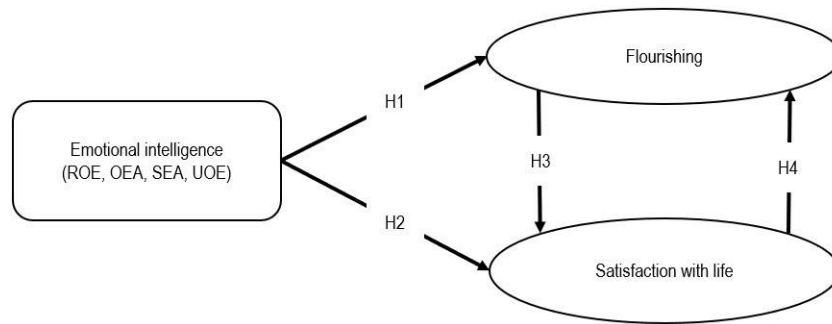
**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** EI (regulation of emotion – ROE, others' emotion appraisal – OEA, self-emotion appraisal – SEA, use of emotion – UOE) has a predictive relationship with flourishing among government employees in the Sedibeng region.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** EI (ROE, OEA, SEA, UOE) has a predictive relationship with satisfaction with life among government employees in the Sedibeng region.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** Flourishing has a predictive relationship with satisfaction with life among government employees in the Sedibeng region.

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** Satisfaction with life has a predictive relationship with flourishing among government employees in the Sedibeng region.

The above hypotheses are depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework.  
 (Source: Authors’ compilation).

**Methodology**

A purposive sample of 600 South African government employees from the Sedibeng region was used in the study. A sample size of 600 offers high statistical power, reducing the likelihood of Type II errors occurring when an actual effect is not detected (Kalnins & Praitis Hill, 2025). The historical research evidence method was applied to ascertain the sample size, including the guidelines of Mills and Gay (2016, as cited in Leedy & Ormrod, 2021). A purposive sampling method was particularly appropriate as it enabled the researchers to identify and include individuals who were most knowledgeable, accessible and relevant to the research problem. The Sedibeng region was specifically chosen, aligning with the study’s geographic focus and the researchers’ aim to explore subjective well-being within a specific socio-cultural context. One of the key motivations for selecting this region is the lack of existing research specifically focused on EI and flourishing within the Sedibeng context. Addressing this gap contributes locally grounded insights to broader national and global discourses on well-being. The Sedibeng region is a representative microcosm of the broader South African government employee population, owing to its demographic diversity, administrative structure and socio-economic characteristics (Pooe, 2024). Male participants comprised 48.1%, female participants 51.9%; 94.1% were black, and 54.6% were married. Most participants fell in the age range of 34–41 years (30.6%) and 42–49 years (30%). Sesotho-speaking participants were in the majority (27.6%). Regarding qualifications, 32% of the participants have a diploma. Regarding job categories in the government organisation, skilled workers comprised 43% of the sample. Table 1 reports on the participants’ characteristics.

**Table 1.** The Characteristics of Respondents.

Item	Categories	Frequencies	%
Gender	Male	260	48.1
	Female	280	51.9
Age	18–25 years	9	1.7
	26–33 years	76	14.1
	34–41 years	165	30.6
	42–49 years	162	30.0
	50–57 years	90	16.7
	57–64 years	38	7.0
Marital status	Single	183	33.9
	Married	295	54.6
	Divorced	44	8.1
	Widowed	18	3.3
Qualifications	Matric/Grade 12	65	12.0
	Diploma	173	32.0
	Bachelor’s degree	141	26.1
	Honours	30	5.6
	Masters	124	23.0
	Doctorate	7	1.3

(Continued)

**Table 1.** (Continued)

Item	Categories	Frequencies	%
Language	Sepedi	21	3.9
	Sesotho	149	27.6
	Setswana	114	21.1
	SiSwati	85	15.7
	IsiZulu	58	10.7
	Tshivenda	29	5.4
	Xitsonga	20	3.7
	IsiNdebele	19	3.5
	IsiXhosa	13	2.4
	English	28	5.2
	Afrikaans	4	0.7
	Ethnicity	Black	508
White		27	5.0
Coloured		2	0.4
Indian/Asian		3	0.6
Job category	Manager	25	4.6
	Professionals	95	17.6
	Technical and associate professionals	141	26.1
	Clerical support	47	8.7
	Skilled workers	232	43.0

(Source: Calculated from survey results)

The participants reported biographical information such as gender, age, marital status, qualifications, language, ethnicity, and job category.

The Wong and Law EI Scale (WLEIS) (Wong & Law, 2002) comprised 16 items measuring EI. The WLEIS is a multi-dimensional construct with four dimensions: regulation of emotion (ROE); others' emotions appraisal (OEA); self-emotions appraisal (SEA); and use of emotion (UOE). The dimensions comprise four items each. Item examples for each of the factors are as follows: "I have good control of my own emotions", "I am a good observer of others' emotions", "I really understand what I feel" and "I am a self-motivated person" (Wong & Law, 2002, pp. 270–271). A seven-point Likert-type scale is used to rate the items from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The reliability of the WLEIS for this sample was 0.854, and for each factor, respectively, 0.981 (ROE), 0.926 (OEA), 0.881 (SEA) and 0.877 (UOE). The Flourishing Scale (FS) (Diener et al., 2010) comprised eight items. An example of an item rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree is "I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me" (Diener et al., 2010, p. 154). The FS is a unidimensional construct and achieved a reliability of 0.843 for the sample. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener et al., 1985) comprised five items. An example of an item rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree is "The conditions of my life are excellent" (Diener et al., 1985, p. 72). The reliability score for the unidimensional construct SWLS for the sample in this study was 0.849. It should be noted that scales were permitted for non-commercial research purposes. Consequently, the developers of each of the scales were acknowledged in the distributed questionnaire. Furthermore, due to the nature of the self-report measuring instrument, potential biases regarding social desirability and response bias are discussed in the limitations and future study implications section.

Permission for the study was granted by a South African government organisation for the target population in the Sedibeng region. However, the government organisation requested to remain anonymous. This study is extracted from a master's dissertation. The Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the applicable university approved the study (Ethics Reference Number: FRECMS-20102021–094). Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research, their rights to participate in the study voluntarily and anonymously and to withdraw from participation in the study at any time without consequences. It was reiterated that the data would be used solely for academic purposes and that findings would be reported in aggregate form to prevent individual identification. To ascertain anonymity, no individual identifying information was collected. Hard copies of the questionnaires were hand-delivered to selected departments by the principal researcher, and completed questionnaires were returned via sealed boxes. Completed questionnaires were collected from the various collection points at the different departments within the government organisation by the principal researcher. By following these procedures, the study upheld ethical

standards, respected respondents' rights and safeguarded the integrity of the research process. Data collection was conducted in accordance with the university and government organisation's ethical standards.

Factor analysis was performed to confirm the factor structure of the WLEIS, FS and the SWLS. Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the associations between the constructs. Further, regression analysis was computed to ascertain whether the EI dimensions predict flourishing and satisfaction with life and if flourishing and satisfaction with life predict each other.

## Results

This section presents the statistical findings on EI, flourishing and satisfaction with life among government employees in South Africa. It first reports the factor analysis conducted on the WLEIS, FS and SWLS to confirm their dimensional structures, followed by descriptive statistics of the key variables. Correlations among EI dimensions, flourishing and satisfaction with life are then examined, and finally regression analysis are presented to test the predictive relationships between these constructs.

### Factor analysis

Table 2 reports on the factor analysis of the WLEIS, the FS and the SWLS. The communalities ranged from 0.539 to 0.965. Regarding the WLEIS, a result of 0.829 is reported for the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO) and a significant chi-square of 9122.730 (significance  $p < 0.000$ ,  $df = 120$ ) for the Bartlett's test of sphericity. Pertaining to the FS, a result of 0.874 is reported for the KMO and a significant chi-square of 1533.686 (significance  $p < 0.001$ ,  $df = 28$ ) for Bartlett's test of sphericity. Regarding the SWLS, a result of 0.873 was reported for the KMO and a significant chi-square of 1530.844 for the Bartlett's test of sphericity. The factor analysis confirmed the multidimensional structure of the WLEIS and the unidimensional structure of both the FS and the SWLS.

**Table 2.** Factor Analysis for the WLEIS, FS and SWLS.

Construct	Items	Communalities	Loadings	KMO Sampling adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Eigenvalue	Percentage variance explained
WLEIS Dimension 1 ROE	WLEIS 13	0.947	0.955	0.829	9122.730	3.793	23.704
	WLEIS 14	0.947	0.950				
	WLEIS 15	0.929	0.952				
	WLEIS 16	0.965	0.965				
WLEIS Dimension 2 OEA	WLEIS 5	0.899	0.922	0.874	1533.686	2.725	68.137
	WLEIS 6	0.892	0.913				
	WLEIS 7	0.675	0.782				
	WLEIS 8	0.892	0.929				
WLEIS Dimension 3 SEA	WLEIS 1	0.577	0.690	0.873	1530.844	3.481	69.619
	WLEIS 2	0.766	0.849				
	WLEIS 3	0.846	0.897				
	WLEIS 4	0.794	0.879				
WLEIS Dimension 4 UOE	WLEIS 9	0.666	0.791	0.873	1530.844	3.481	69.619
	WLEIS 10	0.660	0.756				
	WLEIS 11	0.808	0.877				
	WLEIS 12	0.801	0.882				
FS	FS 5	0.591	Only one component was extracted	0.874	1533.686	2.725	68.137
	FS 6	0.646					
	FS 7	0.779					
	FS 8	0.672					
SWLS	SWLS 1	0.539	Only one component was extracted	0.873	1530.844	3.481	69.619
	SWLS 2	0.646					
	SWLS 3	0.736					
	SWLS 4	0.772					
	SWLS 5	0.788					

ROE = Regulation of emotion; OEA = Others' emotion appraisal; SEA = Self emotion Appraisal; UOE = Use of emotion; WLEIS = Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale; FS = Flourishing Scale; SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale (Source: Calculated from survey results)

### Descriptive statistics

Table 3 comprises the descriptive statistics for the WLEIS [ROE (M = 5.08; SD = 1.75) OEA (M = 4.78; SD = 1.60) SEA (M = 6.19; SD = 0.64) UOE (M = 6.15; SD = 0.69)], FS (M = 6.19; SD = 0.65) and SWLS (M = 5.81; SD = 0.76). The government employees demonstrated moderate levels of EI, flourishing and satisfaction with life.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics for the WLEIS, FS and SWLS.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Variance
EI Dimension 1 ROE (WLEIS)	540	1.00	7	5.08	1.75	23.70
EI Dimension 2 OEA (WLEIS)	540	1.00	7	4.78	1.60	20.61
EI Dimension 3 SEA (WLEIS)	540	1.25	7	6.19	0.64	18.67
EI Dimension 4 UOE (WLEIS)	540	1.00	7	6.15	0.69	18.66
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Variance
FS	540	1.50	7.00	6.19	0.65	68.14
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Variance
SWLS	540	1.00	7.00	5.81	0.76	69.62

EI = Emotional intelligence; ROE = Regulation of emotion; OEA = Others' emotion appraisal; SEA = Self emotion Appraisal; UOE = Use of emotion; WLEIS = Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale; FS = Flourishing Scale; SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale  
 (Source: Calculated from survey results)

### Correlations

Table 4 reports positive associations between the EI dimensions ROE and flourishing ( $r = 0.150$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), OEA and flourishing ( $r = 0.073$ ;  $p = 0.090$ ), SEA and flourishing ( $r = 0.452$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and UOE and flourishing ( $r = 0.404$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Furthermore, positive associations were reported for the EI dimensions ROE and satisfaction with life ( $r = 0.180$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), OEA and satisfaction with life ( $r = 0.080$ ;  $p = 0.064$ ), SEA and satisfaction with life ( $r = 0.338$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and UOE and satisfaction with life ( $r = 0.380$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The employees would experience higher levels of flourishing and satisfaction with life as their EI strengthens. A positive association ( $r = 0.450$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) was reported between flourishing and satisfaction with life. Flourishing employees would be more satisfied with their lives, whereas employees experiencing satisfaction with life would experience higher levels of flourishing.

**Table 4.** Correlations between EI, Flourishing and Satisfaction with Life.

Pearson correlation	EI: ROE	EI: OEA	EI: SEA	EI: UOE	Flourishing	SWL
EI: ROE	1					
EI: OEA	0.377**	1				
EI: SEA	0.069	0.023	1			
EI: UOE	0.067	0.073	0.475**	1		
Flourishing	0.150**	0.073	0.452**	0.404**	1	
SWL	0.180**	0.080	0.338**	0.380**	0.450**	1

EI= Emotional Intelligence; ROE= Regulation of Emotion; OEA= Others' emotion Appraisal; SEA= Self emotion Appraisal; UOE= Use of Emotion; SWL= Satisfaction With Life; \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)  
 (Source: Calculated from survey results)

### Regression analysis

Table 5 shows the predictive relationships between the EI dimensions (ROE, OEA, SEA and UOE), flourishing and satisfaction with life. The EI dimensions, ROE ( $\beta = 0.040$ ,  $t = 2.682$ ,  $p = 0.008$ ), SEA ( $\beta = 0.332$ ,  $t = 7.809$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and UOE ( $\beta = 0.224$ ,  $t = 5.664$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) predicted flourishing. Hence, ROE, SEA and UOE are essential resources for flourishing. The EI dimension, OEA ( $\beta = 0.003$ ,  $t = 0.185$ ,  $p = 0.853$ ), did not predict flourishing. As a result, OEA is not a significant source of flourishing, and Hypothesis 1 is partially confirmed, considering that the EI dimensions, ROE, SEA and UOE predicted flourishing. The EI dimensions, ROE, SEA and UOE explained 25.7% of the variation in flourishing. Furthermore, the EI dimensions, ROE ( $\beta = 0.064$ ,  $t =$

3.529,  $p = 0.000$ ), SEA ( $\beta = 0.232$ ,  $t = 4.459$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and UOE ( $\beta = 0.304$ ,  $t = 6.275$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) predicted satisfaction with life and explained 19.2% of the variance in satisfaction with life. In this vein, ROE, SEA, and UOE are essential resources for achieving satisfaction with life. The EI dimension, OEA ( $\beta = 0.000$ ,  $t = -0.014$ ,  $p = 0.989$ ), did not predict satisfaction with life. As a result, OEA is not a significant source of satisfaction with life, and Hypothesis 2 is partially confirmed, considering that the EI dimensions, ROE, SEA and UOE predicted satisfaction with life. In addition, Table 5 indicates that flourishing ( $\beta = 0.527$ ,  $t = 11.678$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) predicted satisfaction with life and satisfaction with life ( $\beta = 0.384$ ,  $t = 11.678$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) predicted flourishing, explaining 20.1% of the variance in both constructs. Hypotheses 3 and 4 are supported by the findings in the study, confirming that flourishing and satisfaction have a predictive relationship with one another.

**Table 5.** Regression between EI, Flourishing and Satisfaction with Life.

Model 1: Dependent variable flourishing	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients			Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std. error	Beta	T	Sig	Tol	VIF
Independent variable EI: ROE	0.040	0.015	0.108	2.682	0.008	0.854	1.171
Independent variable EI: OEA	0.003	0.016	0.007	0.185	0.853	0.855	1.170
Independent variable EI: SEA	0.332	0.043	0.330	7.809	0.000	0.772	1.296
Independent variable EI: UOE	0.224	0.040	0.240	5.664	0.000	0.770	1.299
R <sup>2</sup> = 0.263; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.257 **Significant at $p < 0.05$							
Model 2: Dependent variable SWL	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients			Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std. error	Beta	T	Sig	Tol	VIF
Independent variable EI: ROE	0.064	0.018	0.148	3.529	0.000	0.854	1.171
Independent variable EI: OEA	0.000	0.020	-0.001	-0.014	0.989	0.855	1.170
Independent variable EI: SEA	0.232	0.052	0.197	4.459	0.000	0.772	1.296
Independent variable EI: UOE	0.304	0.048	0.277	6.275	0.000	0.770	1.299
R <sup>2</sup> = 0.198; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.192 **Significant at $p < 0.05$							
Model 3: Dependent variable SWL	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients			Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std. error	Beta	T	Sig	Tol	VIF
Independent variable flourishing	0.527	0.045	0.450	11.678	0.000	1.000	1.000
R <sup>2</sup> = 0.202; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.201 **Significant at $p < 0.05$							
Model 4: Dependent variable flourishing	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients			Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std. error	Beta	T	Sig	Tol	VIF
Independent variable SWL	0.384	0.033	0.450	11.678	0.000	1.000	1.000
R <sup>2</sup> = 0.202; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.201 **Significant at $p < 0.05$							

EI: Emotional Intelligence; ROE= Regulation of Emotion; OEA= Others' emotion Appraisal; SEA= Self emotion Appraisal.; UOE Use of Emotion.; SWL= Satisfaction with Life  
 (Source: Calculated from survey results)

## Discussion

The findings correspond with existing studies that affirm EI dimensions as predictors of flourishing (Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2021; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2019; Rey et al., 2019). The EI dimensions, ROE, SEA and UOE in this study predicted flourishing. This result is confirmed by Callea et al. (2019), who also report a predictive relationship between EI dimensions and flourishing. The EI dimensions, ROE, SEA, and UOE also predict satisfaction with life. This result is further supported by Extremera and Rey (2016), who report that EI dimensions predicted higher levels of satisfaction with life among undergraduate students from a southern university in Spain. According to Quintana-Orts et al. (2021), EI dimensions are the most important predictors of satisfaction with life. Notably, the WLEIS used in this study to measure EI has been reported to yield better outcomes in the prediction of satisfaction with life (Wong & Law, 2002). Emotionally intelligent people are highly aware of their emotions and thus capable of regulating them to improve their well-being. As a result, they have higher satisfaction levels with life (Rüteliöné et al., 2022). With reference to the EI dimension OEA, not predicting either flourishing nor satisfaction with life, it should be noted that flourishing and life satisfaction are fundamentally intrinsic psychological constructs that represent an individual's internal assessment of their overall well-being, sense of purpose and contentment with life (Pincus, 2024).

Within the context of government employees in the Sedibeng region, individuals may function in workplace environments where the ability to understand others' emotions and the reasoning thereof is not necessarily associated with their own flourishing or overall well-being (De Beer, 2025). Although OEA entails the recognition of others' emotions, it does not necessarily translate into the effective management or response to those emotions in ways that enhance one's own well-being (Ismail et al., 2025), emphasising that OEA will influence interpersonal relationships (Law et al., 2004). This being the case, to positively impact employees' flourishing and satisfaction with life, HRM practices should highlight the EI dimensions—ROE, SEA and UOE—that predict flourishing and satisfaction with life. Hence, HRM practices should prioritise the development of employees' skills to understand and regulate their own emotions (Juchnowicz et al., 2024). Law et al. (2004) deduce that an individual will be holistically more content in life when the individual is emotionally intelligent and then "should be able to recognise his or her emotions, to regulate those emotions and to use them to facilitate performance" (p. 485). The current study affirms that flourishing and satisfaction with life predict one another. It is important to recognise that flourishing and life satisfaction are separate concepts, and one does not inherently result in the other (Bakracheva, 2020). To this extent, an individual may flourish despite experiencing dissatisfaction with their life circumstances (Brydges et al., 2024). However, Zhai et al. (2017) assert that flourishing predicted SWL among employees working in organisations in the Guangdong province in China.

Bee Seok et al. (2020) stress that satisfaction with life is a predictor of flourishing components such as well-being, optimism and self-esteem. Bee Seok et al. (2020) also report a predictive relationship between SWL and flourishing among undergraduate students from one of the public universities in Kota Kinabalu in Sabah. Yildirim et al. (2022) affirm that flourishing predicts satisfaction with life amongst Iraqi immigrants. Yıldırım and Green (2023) corroborate that satisfaction with life is a significant predictor of flourishing. Theoretically, the reciprocal relationship between hedonic well-being, in this case satisfaction with life and eudaimonic well-being, referring to flourishing, indicates that these dimensions of subjective well-being are mutually reinforcing, rather than opposing or isolated constructs (Russo-Netzer & Bergman, 2020). Kummitha et al. (2025) concur that the mutual relationship between hedonic well-being and eudaimonic well-being illustrates that these constructs reinforce one another, indicating they are complementary rather than opposing or isolated. This confirms that flourishing, a broader indicator of eudaimonic well-being and satisfaction with life, and a cognitive component of subjective well-being, are interrelated constructs, rather than distinct or hierarchical in nature (Lomas et al., 2023). This makes it important for organisations and policymakers in practice to simultaneously promote both flourishing and life satisfaction to cultivate enduring and holistic well-being in the workplace (Lomas et al., 2023).

The study had limitations. First, the sample was limited to a single government organisation in the Sedibeng region in the Gauteng province in South Africa, implying that the results cannot be generalised to all government organisations. Future studies should use a comparative research strategy that compares public sector organisations across different regions and provinces. Moreover, future studies could compare public and private sector organisations. Cultural, economic and organisational dynamics in Sedibeng may differ substantially from other contexts. Furthermore, this study used a quantitative research approach, which limited the amount of information gathered through only utilising a questionnaire dependent on the participants' emotions at the time of completing the questionnaire. A longitudinal study that includes mixed methods would be necessary to address this matter in future research. Leedy and Ormrod (2021) deduce that "a mixed-methods version enables a researcher to determine the extent to which assessments conducted in any early phase correlate with assessments conducted at subsequent phases; thus, it also enables the researcher to find out how well variables assessed early on can predict the values of one or more variables assessed at a later time" (p. 297).

Mediating factors, such as motivation, coping strategies, positive affect, resilience and mindfulness, were not considered in the study and could have further strengthened the conceptual framework and hypotheses and increased the study's impact. Regarding the social desirability effect, an individual will respond to a questionnaire "in terms of characteristics and behaviours that he or she believes to be socially or culturally desirable, the test results may reveal not the person's actual personality, but rather an idealised portrait of how he or she would like to be perceived by others" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021, p. 128). Government employees may have felt compelled to present themselves in a socially desirable manner, particularly if they believed their responses could have influenced perceptions of their professionalism, emotional regulation, or job satisfaction (Kanti & Purnomo, 2024). Respondents might have reported higher levels of empathy or emotional regulation, key emotional intelligence traits, not necessarily because they possess them, but because they perceive such traits

as expected of a competent government employee (Conroy & Vogus, 2025). Furthermore, suppose employees perceive themselves positively in one domain (e.g., high EI). In that case, they may overestimate their levels of flourishing or satisfaction with life because of an overall positive self-image (Cabanas & González-Lamas, 2024). With reference to response bias, respondents could answer questions in ways they believe are socially acceptable or favourable, rather than providing truthful answers (Bursztyrn et al., 2025).

Given the inherently positive nature of constructs such as EI, flourishing and satisfaction with life, government employees could over-report their emotional competence or subjective well-being to align with professional or societal expectations (Galchik, 2024). Additionally, employees may tend to agree with statements regardless of their beliefs, particularly when using Likert-type scales (Lindner & Lindner, 2024). Cultural appropriateness should also be considered as a limitation. Future studies could translate the questionnaires into South Africa's most widely spoken languages to improve accessibility and cultural relevance. Although the survey utilised validated measurement scales, potential issues such as differences in language proficiency, item interpretation, and questionnaire fatigue may have introduced measurement error among respondents.

## Conclusions and practical implications

The study indicated that EI had an influence on flourishing and satisfaction with life. Emotionally intelligent employees who could regulate their emotions, appraise them, and know how to use them would flourish and experience satisfaction with life. Furthermore, employees who are satisfied with their lives flourish in the workplace. When individuals flourish in their respective jobs, it results in employees experiencing satisfaction with life. It is crucial, then, for organisations to be mindful of the role that EI plays in the subjective well-being of their employees, which would contribute to the organisation's efficiency. Lastly, the importance of Ubuntu in South African employees' subjective well-being must be reiterated. Ubuntu relates to EI dimensions by encouraging individuals to recognise and value the emotions of others, reflecting the EI component of understanding others (Galperin & Scheepers, 2025). Furthermore, Ubuntu fosters peace and reconciliation by emphasising emotional regulation and empathetic understanding in social interactions (Ajitoni, 2024). An Ubuntu-based mindset cultivates emotionally intelligent behaviours such as kindness, active listening and supportive communication (Blackwood, 2025). Additionally, Ubuntu contributes to flourishing by providing individuals with a strong sense of identity and purpose through their relationships with others (Nnodim & Okigbo, 2024). Ubuntu encourages individuals to thrive personally and collectively, fostering a flourishing society (Ncube, 2025). Moreover, Ubuntu ensures that individuals feel valued and connected to a greater whole, enhancing life satisfaction (Tayali, 2025).

Lastly, Ubuntu celebrates collective joy and resilience, improving individuals' perceptions of life quality (Farao et al., 2024). Hence, a human resource policy focusing on EI within South African government departments should be structured to promote EI, enhance subjective well-being, foster ethical and empathetic leadership and improve the quality of public service delivery (Alfarajat, 2025). This approach is consistent with the Batho Pele principles, which emphasise transparency, accountability and people-centred governance to deliver responsive and dignified public services (Molobela, 2024). Organisations should implement mindfulness and stress management workshops to promote emotional balance in high-pressure work environments (Paterson, 2024). Emotional Triggers Awareness Exercises can further assist employees in identifying their emotional triggers, for example, through journaling or scenario-based reflections, followed by applying strategies aimed at de-escalation (Ponndee, 2024). Cole (2025) concurs that organisations can enhance emotional awareness by integrating self-reflection activities. Consequently, organisations should implement in-depth EI training to assist employees in directing their emotions towards goal setting and productivity (Skiba, 2024). South African government departments should emphasise an Ubuntu-centred approach to enhancing EI, flourishing and satisfaction with life among their employees.

### Declarations

**Interdisciplinary Scope:** The foundation of interdisciplinarity is laid through the relationship between the variables EI, flourishing and satisfaction with life, drawn from a holistic point of view grounded in the subjective well-being of the government employee in South Africa.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualisation (Kumalo and van Zyl); literature review (Kumalo, van Zyl, Mafini and Langton); methodology (Kumalo, van Zyl and Mafini); analysis (Mafini);

investigation (Kumalo); drafting and preparation (Kumalo, van Zyl, Mafini and Langton); review and editing (Kumalo, van Zyl, Mafini and Langton)

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