



Reflective Portfolio Task:

Critical Analysis of My Doctoral Research Journey

Student Number:	1818519
Student Name:	Pricilla Moses
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Module Lecturer:	Dr. Caroline Jawad
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Executive Summary

At the very beginning, my main research focus was to study how emotional intelligence (EI) shaped the identity of sales leaders in the Sri Lankan general insurance sector. This study specifically aimed to examine the recurrent target pressure that sales leaders manage with their teams. I assumed this was an unspoken concern among sales leaders, yet one that critically affects their personal lives and the business industry as well. While conducting the initial exploration of empirical studies, I noticed that the majority had been researched through a positivist approach, where EI is measured as a performance determinant. Based on these findings, I assumed that EI was something to be objectively examined. However, when I began the doctoral journey in Part 1, I gradually realised how the interpretivist approach aligns with this research focus by exploring the lived experience of EI among sales leaders and how it shapes their identity through their own meaning-making.

This portfolio exercise discusses the evolution of my academic, professional and research specification throughout the Part 1 doctoral journey, integrating all learning outcomes from modules LCD7007, LCD7008, LCD7010, LCD7011 and LCD7009, culminating in the reflexive portfolio required in LCD7012. At the very beginning, when I entered the programme, my initial worldview had been based on my nineteen years of professional experience as a senior sales leader in the Sri Lankan general insurance sector. It had been shaped by practitioner experience of sales team management at a national level. However, the active and practical engagement of Part 1 of my doctoral journey became a milestone in my personal life, transforming me from a professional insurance practitioner into a researcher through the understanding of paradigmatic lenses, knowledge gained from seminal scholars in philosophy and research principles, research theories, methods and critical reflection. Each section briefly discusses who I was before starting the doctoral journey in Part 1; how the learning outcome theories improved my knowledge and reshaped the assumptions I previously held about my research focus; how my paradigmatic lens evolved; how my positionality impacts research relationships; the ethical tensions associated with my research; and the areas I must improve as a researcher before commencing the Part 2 doctoral journey.

This reflexive portfolio genuinely demonstrates how positionality, reflection and reflexivity have influenced each module, reshaping my assumptions and helping me develop into an ethically responsible IPA researcher. Finally, the portfolio study emphasises how my subjective research focus on EI in sales leadership will be explored by addressing the following research questions coherently and rigorously: How do sales leaders in the Sri Lankan general insurance sector experience and make sense of their own emotions during recurring month-end sales target pressure? How do sales leaders in the Sri Lankan general insurance sector experience and make sense of noticing, interpreting and responding to perceived emotional signs among their team members during recurring month-end sales target pressure? How do sales leaders in the Sri Lankan general insurance sector make sense of the interplay between managing their own emotions and responding to their team members' perceived emotions, and how does this experience shape their understanding of themselves as leaders?

1. Introduction

The purpose of this reflective portfolio is to critically analyse my doctoral journey in Part 1, which was shaped by my professional identity, and which was influenced, debated, and criticised for a better version of knowledge to drive my Part 2 journey. Long prior to commencing my academic journey as a doctoral researcher, my professional career had been shaped by a strong professional identity with nineteen years as a general insurance practitioner in the Sri Lankan General Insurance (SLGI) sector. This long period of time, emerging as a branch underwriter in 2005, navigated my journey to become an Assistant General Manager in National Sales, allowing me to become a member of senior management with more than seven years of lived experience in sales leadership at national level. This journey had been diversified with deep knowledge of technicality in underwriting and growing as a successful award-winning sales leader, playing an extensive role in heading various sales teams affiliated to various sales channels, including national-level retail and corporate partnerships. Therefore, my professional experience, shaped by different organisational cultures and leadership environments in every operational functionality, formed my assumptions to further study the realities in this context with a passion for contributing my knowledge, values, and skills to the development of my industry. Therefore, my doctoral journey is not beginning with a clueless vacuum, but with great meaning and hope.

2. Who was I

My doctoral journey originates with a set of deeply rooted assumptions, those have been shaped not by academia but with nearly two decades of professional experience archived from my professional career as a practitioner in SLGI sector. My knowledge about my-world has been created by my personal encounters in life both personal and professional, qualifications and accolades achieved in life, the blessed opportunities in life offered by management, opportunities in various organisational cultures and leadership roles with required training and rewards, have moulded my whole professional career which is the seed of my doctoral journey going to be germinated.

Prior to Part 1, my knowledge was basically associated with my employment. Generally, in the GI operation, career credibility is earned by relevant career qualifications, academic qualifications, the experience earned by a number of human interactions, and the exposure to the subject area. Accordingly, my career value had been appreciated by CII (UK) qualifications and other management-affiliated qualifications such as MBA (UWTSD-UK), and the employment opportunities gained to work under several veteran leaderships. The period I worked as an underwriter has given me the technical knowledge of insurance phenomena and how it is operated with other stakeholders such as regulators, reinsurers, co-insurers, business partners, and customers, while the sales leadership has groomed me to realise the reality of interacting with human beings with practical-driven knowledge. Therefore, my career credibility has collectively shaped my professional identity as a senior industry practitioner.

The most embracing career experience I gained personally was working under various organisational cultures. There, my knowledge and competencies transformed into mentorship, the ability to strategize crisis management, resilience, negotiation skills, and my exceptional team dynamics. Ever since, the reality of my world became number-oriented, performance-driven, and challenging with team handling. During this stage, I assumed that research is only to determine objective values of the phenomena related to insurance, and I never believed that it has a subjective aspect as well, to feel and interpret the human experience, which would also contribute to the industry with a massive academic contribution and also help revisit organisational strategies.

These preconceptions have been disrupted during the Part 1 curriculum. When engaging with the module exercises in a methodical flow, I learned that industry is subject to a deeper study in several aspects, refining all my previous assumptions into something new and improved. Furthermore, Part 1 distilled the knowledge of evidence, and I learned that knowledge is not always measurable or perceptible (Nielsen, 2026), but it is also meaning-making and narrative with human experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). When I learned the beauty of interpretivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), it blended with my natural personal qualities and devoted me to focus my study through phenomenology (Husserl, 1970) and an interpretivist approach. Through the Part 1 journey, I acquired the understanding that research is not merely confirming my assumptions but questioning and debating them in order to reveal and investigate the blind spot of the covered truth. This process changed my perception of research, and I realised it is not secondary to professional experience and acquired knowledge but a salient instrument to be used in terms of uncovering complexities and realities in the world. Part 1 strengthened my practitioner identity by grounding my competencies in emotional intelligence, team dynamics, and lived encounters into reasonable understanding on strong theoretical foundations in a paradigm (Kuhn, 1962; 1970) which had never been articulated before.

The understanding of fundamentals of a paradigm (Crotty, 1998) was crucial. The academic terminology in the philosophical lens was unfamiliar. However, the in-class exercises and the taught modules in Part 1 permitted me to learn the fundamentals of a paradigm (Kuhn, 1962; 1970). According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), a researcher's philosophical position is incorporated with ontological (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), epistemological (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108), axiological (Heron & Reason, 1997) and methodological (Crotty, 1998) stance, which underpinned the entire research process. This determines by the metaphor which showcases how the choreographer is creating a dance act. The worldview of the researcher is similar to the artistic view of the act resembling the ontology of the paradigm; this artistic-view is basically dependent on the dance techniques used in the act which resembles the epistemology of the research; these techniques are gradually design into a beautiful choreography which resembles the methodological stance as the final act is mesmerises the audience with a mesmerising performance which resembles the axiology of the research. The professionalism in the dance act resembles the coherence of the research which demonstrates the trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 289–331) in credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296–316), transferability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 316–318), dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 318–327) and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 327–331). This

philosophical understanding groomed me towards my central research topic in Part 2: exploring the lived experience of emotional intelligence of sales leaders' identity in the SLGI sector.

3. The Relationship with Theory and Literature

3.1 LCD7007 - Research Principles and Philosophies

In this very first module in Part 1, and qualitative approach in the doctoral journey, the module shaped my interpretivist knowledge to explore the lived experience and cultural influences that shape public confidence in the SLGI sector. This study has been aided by sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) as substantive theories and supported by other theories such as trust theory (Mayer, et al., 1995), cultural theory of risk (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982), and the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, et al., 1985). In this module, I was permitted to adhere to the phenomenology approach in interpretivism for the first time, and I learned how trust is perceived as a lived experience (Möllering, 2001) in my industrial context. This module allowed me to understand that beyond the financial gaining on premiums, insurance phenomena carry a value in depth as a social phenomenon where trust is socially constructed, recognising cultural, religious, and community narratives as determinants of insurance uptake. I learned how data collection and analysis are processed to form a realistic outcome by conducting interviews, coding, developing themes, and interpreting them in a hermeneutic approach (Heidegger, 1962). Finally, this module became the foundation of my interpretivist identity.

3.2 LCD7008 - Visions for the future: Theoretical Perspectives on Management

This module focused on exhibiting critical analysis, synthesis, and application skills to address a live management issue through research-informed approaches. Based on the learning outcome of this module, I managed to conduct a comparative study analysing the differences and similarities between conventional risk management systems and contemporary risk management practices and their impact on resilience-building strategies in the context of the SLGI industry. In this, I expanded my knowledge from people-centric phenomena to system-centric, where my underwriting knowledge and skills were advantageous. The research has related various fundamental theories such as contingency theory (Fiedler, 1967), agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), and system theory (Bertalanffy, 1968), advocating insurance risk management in various aspects, which also shapes the impact of resilience building, and two substantive theories most related to risk management practices in the Sri Lankan context: ERM theory (Nocco & Stulz, 1981) and resilience theory (Holling, 1973). In the findings and discussion section, I have thoroughly detailed the characteristics of each mechanism and their impacts on underwriting, organisational management, and regulatory reforms. This module allowed me to enhance my knowledge of how management practices are influenced and changed in alignment with organisational behaviour while strengthening my analytical abilities.

3.3 LCD7010 - Converting Research into Practice (the Pilot study)

This is my most preferred module of the Part 1 doctoral journey, and it intensified my knowledge about interpretivism applied in the concept of managerial sensemaking of digital transformation (Vial, 2019). This qualitative pilot study explores how managers interpret DT within their operational scope, allowing me to learn the whole process of qualitative research with practical learnings. The pilot study has been established on the theoretical context of sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) and dynamic capability theory (Teece & Pisano, 1997) as substantive theories and supported by the Technological-Organisational-Environmental (TOE) framework (Tornatzky & Fleischer, 1990), and the data has been analysed using Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The most important part of this module is the knowledge I gained on how to be aligned with university research protocols and obtain ethical approval (PG2-2026-046) from the UWTSD research committee by establishing and justifying every ethical tension related to the scope of the study. Additionally, I learned how to obtain participant consent for the research and how to manage the practical challenges raised on data protection acts, time-difference challenges, and the stress of missing participants during the interview process due to various personal reasons. I learned to do purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) and justify the most suitable profiles for the benefit of my study. Since I am an inside researcher, I was careful not to be biased in the participants' interpretations. I gained thorough knowledge of creating codes, identifying themes, and interpreting them according to RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which sharpened my interpretivist knowledge progressively.

3.4 LCD7011 - Quantitative Research Methods

The primary objective of this module is to become familiarised with the positivist research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) with the use of statistical data analysis by using SPSS tools while identifying the most appropriate testing tool. This industry-specific quantitative research has provided me with invaluable academic and practical learning experiences by evaluating the impact of driving experience and previous accident history on the motor insurance premium. It allowed me to engage with a beneficial practice of SPSS software by using various data analysis tools, statistical data interpretations, and positivist research methodology related to the motor insurance market. Throughout the study, I had the opportunity to gain several insights related to quantitative research methods (Crotty, 1998), the discipline of positivism, and the academic and practical challenges of conducting a quantitative study while maintaining the DBA (Level 8) standard. In this module, I studied risk theory (Lundberg, 1903) and experience pricing theory (Bühlmann, 1967), and these theories discussed the logical aspect of risk evaluation and premium determination at a deeper level. The learning of these two theories sharpened my risk evaluation skills and delivered to me explicit knowledge of the determinants of premium calculation.

3.5 LCD7009 - Critical Literature Review for Doctoral Research

This module directed my vision into a different dimension. I never realised the importance of secondary data and the strength of information. I learned about different types of literature review approaches (Rocco &

Plakhotnik, 2009) and how salient a literature review is for research. The knowledge contribution to the research by previous empirical papers and how we analyse this information critically aligns with the research area. This module inspired me to understand how potential the systematic literature review (Kitchenham, 2004) is in terms of a data collection tool, and I explored the role of insurance mechanisms in managing and mitigating financial losses from climate-related catastrophes at the level of reinsurance. My professional experience of being a national-level coordinator for a famous international reinsurance broker allowed me to study this research area in depth. The theories such as risk transfer theory (Knight, 1921) and climate-risk resilience theory (Holling, 1973) sharpened my knowledge span with real breadth, and simultaneously this study allowed me to explore nearly fifty theories that we may possibly refer to in gaining knowledge of this area. Every theory and research area allowed me to learn numerous aspects of insurance mechanisms and the resilience strategies practised in managing financial losses in different global contexts. Personally, for me, this module is a library.

Finally, the emotional characteristics resonated from sensemaking, navigating me to think of another aspect of interpretivism where I am moving forward to Part 2 for researching the lived experience of emotional intelligence in SLGI Sales Leadership. Based on my previous professional experiences as a national-level sales leader, there was a deeply touched emotional struggle that sales leaders, including me, encounter with the recurrent target pressure. The key concepts of sensemaking (Weick, 1995); identity, retrospection, enacting, social, ongoing, extract cues, and plausibility over accuracy laid the foundation for my Part 2 journey.

4. Evolution of My Research Focus

At the beginning of Part 1 in the doctoral program, my research question was not clearly articulated, but there was valid intuition based on my nineteen years of career experience. My professional identity has been shaped by several aspects such as competencies in underwriting, sales leadership, national-level sales coordination, reporting to top management, and handling recurrent channel target pressure. The resilience forged within me was based on these attributes, where I deeply sensed the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) rooted in sales leadership (Churchill et al., 1977). When mingling with industry peers, I sensed that emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) is central, and it creates certain identities that are recognised and positioned in the market. Although this intuition was something I was unable to conceptualise academically at the beginning of Part 1, the doctoral journey throughout Part 1 moulded me into an interpretivist researcher by allowing space to interrogate and debate within myself about my assumptions, and finally into a coherent and salient research focus which is value-laden for the industry and academia as well.

Based on my professional experience, I had witnessed that sales leadership is not only the soft skills or managerial skills driving the leader for a successful channel performance but something inherited in emotional realities and lived experiences. When engaging with the interpretivist literature review, it allowed me to conduct unbiased scholarly inquiry to understand the reality of EI (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and sales leadership identity formation (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). This study allowed me to understand that leadership identity is not merely a brand identity, not an organisational hierarchy or performance matrix, but something co-constructed by

meaning-making, cultural influences, personal encounters, and beliefs. Based on these realisations, it made me sense that EI is not only a measurable competency but a phenomenon to be understood by lived experiences.

Based on my professional experience, I had witnessed that sales leadership is operated only under performance demand and that performance is shaped by leadership behaviour. Recurrent monthly target pressure was the one unique characteristic encountered by every peer sales leader in the industry. As I progressed in Part 1, especially during the module LCD7007 Research Principles and Philosophies, it changed my thinking for the first time and made me understand that the continuous cycle of monthly target pressure is leading to an emotional drain. This reframed perception navigated me to question and research the deeper reality of: how do sales leaders in the SLGI sector experience and make sense of their own emotions during recurring month-end sales target pressure? And how do sales leaders in the SLGI sector experience and make sense of noticing, interpreting, and responding to perceived emotional signs among their team members during recurring month-end sales target pressure? And how do sales leaders in the SLGI sector make sense of the interplay between managing their own emotions and responding to their team members' perceived emotions, and how does this experience shape their understanding of themselves as leaders? These questions emerged from the blend of reality and the theoretical knowledge of Part 1.

The module LCD7010 – Pilot Study was the basic skeleton for my main research focus, with a valuable practical exercise. This is the module I found most engaging and intellectually rewarding. The learning outcome of this module I have discussed in Section 2.3. Although I learned qualitative inquiry following Braun and Clarke's RTA, my central research focus on EI of sales leaders, focusing on recurrent target pressure, directed me to follow IPA to explore one particular lived experience at a deeper level. The pilot study engagement and my emic identity as an industry member navigated me to line up my philosophical assumptions to explore the undiscovered aspects of emotional cues and leadership struggles that I have lived through. My preliminary search of literature emphasised to me that the majority of empirical studies in the same area have been conducted using a quantitative approach to measure EI and its correlation with channel performance, but not the deeper study of recurrent target-pressure experiences.

Simultaneously, the knowledge gained from theories and literature reviews in the LCD7009, LCD7008, and LCD7011 modules improved my understanding of resilience, vulnerability, and risk-evaluation concepts specific to the industry. I learned that these concepts do impact sales leadership when leading the team toward a common organisational goal. Accordingly, my personal experience in sales leadership made me sensitive to emotional labour, my professional experience made me aware of recurrent target pressure, and the learning outcome of Part 1 guided me to focus on rigorous methodological research designed to explore the lived experience of sales leaders in the SLGI sector and how this shapes their leadership identity following the interpretivist IPA approach.

5. Positionality, Power and Research Relationships

My positionality (Rose, 1997) as a senior sales leader with nineteen years of industry experience in the SLGI sector literally determines the level of relationship I have formed with my research participants; basically, they will be my industry peers and will also allow me to feel their worldview. My entry to the doctoral research is an emic approach (Pike, 1967); having the experience of the same recurrent target pressure, organisational and cultural expectations, and emotional demands, I have lived the same experience my participants encounter. Therefore, as I am privileged to easily access my participants based on professional network relationships, that also creates power dynamics which has a direct impact on research ethical considerations.

The senior management role I played reflects (Schön, 1983) a degree of authority, experience, and credibility in the perspective of potential participants. Therefore, most of the participants may read me as a former senior sales leader and respected industry peer and would expect me to follow in their shoes, and that would allow them to be comfortable and open with me and share their true experience; on the other hand, they may feel they are compelled to share things favourable to my view. Further, as they know me as a continuous target achiever, they may be reluctant to share the negative feedback of their true experience, considering that would be judgemental. Therefore, my exercise with the participants should be reflexive (Finlay, 2002), transparent, and human.

According to Hofstede's country comparison tool, Sri Lanka is scored 80 for the index of power dynamics (The Culture Factor Group, 2026), which resembles the respect for seniority as one classic element in Sri Lankan corporate culture. Therefore, even if I am a current doctoral researcher, they might be hesitant to share their true emotional distress beyond a certain degree, fearing reputational risk. Since I am hoping to conduct the interviews in the language they would be comfortable with, either English or Sinhala, I hope they would be comfortable with me to reveal and express their emotional struggle in their own words.

My positionality also would have a direct impact on my data interpretation. As I would follow the double hermeneutic approach (Giddens, 1976, pp. 79–81), I will have the privilege of understanding and being successful in interpreting their narratives and certain vocabulary specified for the industry that may possibly be missed by an etic researcher. At the same time, there is a risk of projecting my interpretation if I mirror my participants' experiences with my own experience. Hence, the interference of reflexivity is essential to avoid the risk of my emotional memory acting on participants' lived realities. Therefore, I would remain a more cautious, unbiased, ethical, and analytically rigorous IPA researcher (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 79–108) by following the steps below.

Firstly, acknowledging my dual identity in insider positionality and as an industry peer, I would refrain from inserting, adding, and completing narratives, but allow them to express their true emotion and experience (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 64–68). As an insider, I have a responsibility to manage the power distance carefully. Therefore, I would assure the confidentiality and non-judgemental stance of the sharing. Adhering to my

methodological discipline as an IPA researcher, I would maintain a reflexive journal (Schön, 1983) to document every movement throughout the interview (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 64–68), and this journal would assist me in careful and unbiased data interpretation. I would make sure to slow down the hermeneutic process by taking time to interpret line-by-line narratives, as there is a risk of being familiar with the content and the interpretation (Smith et al., 2009, pp. 95–99) being rushed, challenging the trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the work. Strategic member checking is essential to assure whether the data interpretation is accurate. I will not search for confirmation of my assumptions in my participants' experience, and in order to protect myself and the participant, I will maintain ethical distance, only paying attention to deep listening. Ultimately, I would treat every familiar narrative as data, not as truth, just because it confirms my own experience.

6. Ethical Tensions in My Study

6.1 The tension of being insider for participants' accessibility and influence

I have basically lived my last nineteen years in the sector, and many potential participants know me personally and professionally. As it creates privileged access for my participants, conversely the same familiarity creates an ethical tension too. The leaders would be free to speak up their true emotions because they trust me and feel comfortable sharing cultural norms and every in-and-out of their emotional reality; in contrast, they would assume that I would be judgemental and may hinder sharing the true reality of organisational failures or understated emotional distresses because they see me as a former peer competitive leader in the industry. There will be a reasonable assumption in their mind that if they open up to share true experiences with me for research purposes, I would still maintain professional relationships with organisational management, creating an information leakage. In such circumstances, I would explicitly assure them that I would not be judgemental at all or evaluate any performance by explaining my research purpose and the rights they have as participants. I will emphasise to them the ethical considerations in academic research to maintain confidentiality, anonymity, and the separation of my previous professional role from my current academic researcher role. I will allow them to share their own experience in their own words, allowing freedom to use their own language or adding prompts. I will elaborate and ask them to explain every definition they make for the moods, emotions, and experiences they describe. However, I will not be able to one hundred percent assure the separation of my previous organisational authority from influencing participants, and this ethical tension (Tracy, 2010) will be monitored continuously through reflexive journaling (Schön, 1983).

6.2 The tension between emotional disclosure and safety

My research focus on exploring the lived experience of EI under recurrent target pressure may carry the realities of psychological taxing, hidden organisational expectations, and emotionally sensitive content. When the sales leaders openly reveal their experiences of burnout, anxiety, conflicts, or emotional strain, they may expect that I would understand them. This creates an ethical tension, as the interview may elicit distress, vulnerability, or a degree of emotional exposure that participants did not anticipate. In order to mitigate this ethical tension, I would create a safe interview environment by clarifying every right they have as participants

and their freedom to pause or skip questions and withdraw at any time from being a participant. I will make sure that I do not probe in a therapeutic or intrusive manner, and at the same time, I will be cautious about my spontaneous emotional reactions, which may feel empathetic in ways that cross professional boundaries.

The challenge of this exercise is that while IPA expects the exploration of the deeper meaning of the experience (Smith et al., 2022, pp. 141–150), ethical practice requires emotional distance and certain professional boundaries. Therefore, I would request all participants to forward their duly signed participant consent forms to ensure that they participate one hundred percent voluntarily. Further, I would not be able to predict how emotionally intense the interviews would be, as it depends on the personalities of the leaders, but I will remain ethically responsible as much as possible.

6.3 The tension between organisational reputation, loyalty and research integrity

My long-term presence in the SLGI industry for nineteen years has implanted an insuperable loyalty to the industry, its practices, norms, cultural values, and community. Participants may reveal their own organisational practices that are ethically questionable, debatable regarding unrealistic targets, regulatory compliances, emotional manipulation, abuses of power and authority, and leadership conflicts on personal grounds. As an emic researcher, I may feel hesitant or uncomfortable to academically announce these revelations, and this would create an ethical tension. In this case, I would be mindful, responsible, and committed to the researcher's role to represent the participants' true experiences faithfully. I would represent participants through anonymous coding so that organisations and individuals are not traceable. I will make sure not to sanitise or soften findings to safeguard the industry but to remain one hundred percent loyal to research integrity. I would strictly adhere to the reflexive journaling process to mitigate this ethical tension (Tracy, 2010).

7. Me as a Developing Researcher

In this section, I would emphasise the three areas in which my reflexive doctoral journey remains incomplete and requires further development before moving to Part 2. I am still improving how to manage the influence of my insider positionality on the interpretivist instinct and avoid projecting my emotional memory onto participants' narratives. In relation to this, it will be necessary to adhere to the discipline of reflexive journaling (Schön, 1983) in audit trailing, supervisory dialogues and guidance, and a commitment to rectifying my own disputes for the benefit of my own self and to establish the quality of my IPA analysis.

In addition to the above, one area that remains incomplete before moving into Part 2 is handling emotional disclosure ethically and systematically. Because of my positionality stance, participants may be open to revealing their realities, but the information still needs to be considered within ethical boundaries. I believe that I should still improve this area by learning to set appropriate boundaries with participants.

As my main research methodology follows the IPA approach, it demands a deeper level of idiographic (Smith et al., 2022, pp. 141–150) attention, double-hermeneutic sensitivity, and interpretivist rigour. Therefore,

I must improve my line-by-line interpretation skills and meaning-making, and for me to conclude a quality and trustworthy research outcome, I should refine my knowledge through further empirical reading, conducting interviews, and critical engagement with IPA exemplars.

8. Conclusion

My Part 1 doctoral journey has refined me from an experienced sales leader into a developing interpretivist researcher who is capable of interpreting the emotions and organisational realities I once experienced in life. Entering the programme, my intuitions, knowledge, and lived experience of leadership were not properly articulated with my research objectives. However, the journey of Part 1 allowed me to successfully engage with relevant theories, methodological practices, and an understanding of my limits and boundaries as a researcher, and to reposition my role as a scholar. The entire Part 1 doctoral journey gradually evolved my knowledge and capabilities as an emerging researcher; every learning outcome of each module is invaluable. While my insider positionality drives me with a passion to complete Part 1 and move on to Part 2 with a central research focus to explore the lived experience of EI among sales leaders in the SLGI sector that shapes their identity in how they manage recurrent channel target pressure through the IPA approach, the ethical integrity I have gained has groomed me to adhere to my due boundaries as an ethical researcher.

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