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Project Managers' Emotional Intelligence - A Ticket to Success

Vladimir Obradovic^{a,*}, Petar Jovanovic^b, Dejan Petrovic^a, Marko Mihic^a,
Zorica Mitrovic^a

^aUniversity of Belgrade, Faculty of Organizational Sciences, 154 Jove Ilica Street, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

^bProject Management College, 7 Krfska Street, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to introduce recent research on correlation between project managers' emotional intelligence and their professional success. The implications of this research are important to both project managers who wish to improve their performance and success rate and organizations in their human resource policy. Theoretical considerations discussed potential impact of emotional intelligence on project managers' success through review on concept and dimensions of emotional intelligence, findings of numbered empirical studies and leadership theories. Complementing these theoretical considerations with research study showed significant correlation between project managers' emotional intelligence and professional success. Research was conducted on representative sample consisted of 75 project managers from top 10 Serbian companies. Data collection instrument was questionnaire consisted of self-descriptive emotional intelligence test and data on respondent's position in organizational hierarchy and educational level. The empirical research reveals that there is a very high positive correlation between emotional intelligence and professional success and these findings should have a number of implications for project managers' practice. Firstly, project managers should be aware of the concept, their level and way of improving different dimensions of emotional intelligence. Further, the human resource management departments of project oriented organizations should consider concept of emotional intelligence when recruiting staff to the position of project managers but also when deciding on human resources development programs. In order to help good project managers to become excellent there is a need for further investigations on methods for development of emotional intelligence competencies.

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +381 63 493 180; fax: +381 63 493 180.

E-mail address: obradovicv@fon.bg.ac.rs.

1. Introduction

Professors Peter Salovey and John Mayer published the first definition of emotional intelligence in article “Emotional Intelligence” in 1990th and defined emotional intelligence as:

“...the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to differentiate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).”

This definition shows that emotions can be used to guide logical thinking and goal-oriented actions. In addition, it shows that emotions can actually enhance rationality.

“Thus, emotionally intelligent individuals accurately perceive their emotions and use integrated, sophisticated approaches to regulate them as they proceed toward important goals. People who have developed skills related to emotional intelligence understand and express their own emotions, recognize emotions in others, regulate affect, and use moods and emotions to motivate adaptive behaviors” (Salovey & Mayer, 2001).

The emergence of emotional intelligence concept in last decade of 20th century caused many controversies in the scientific community. This was due to the merger of two seemingly mutually exclusive psychological concepts - intelligence and emotions. Before this emotions were perceived as something that prevents rational thought and make quality work harder. Vast of studies showed that emotions, if properly managed, can even support rational thinking, enable proper decision making and direct individuals to appropriate behavior. Such findings caused great interest among management practitioners. Intensive changes in business environment in two last decades established need for managers with capability to make an emotional connection with team members and motivate them to continuously achieve higher goals. This kind of behavior and capabilities are based on the characteristics of emotional intelligence.

Literature review shows the great potential that emotional intelligence can provide in the field of management and leadership. It shows the importance and role of emotional intelligence in the long-term good interpersonal relationships within organizations which increase creativity, solving problems and helps influence the overall profitability and success of an organization. Analysis of emotional intelligence’s impact to overall success of manager indicates relevant facts and benefits that an organization can accomplish if recognize the importance of managers’ emotional intelligence and put its development through various trainings and workshops for one of its priority strategic objectives.

The main purpose of this paper is to complement the existing research on emotional intelligence and management with the research in a field of project management. Theoretical considerations discussed potential emotional intelligence’s impact of on project managers’ success through literature review on concept and dimensions of emotional intelligence, numbered empirical studies and leadership theories. Research on a field empirically supported these theoretical considerations. Research examines existence of positive correlation between project manager’s emotional intelligence and their business success and educational level through two hypotheses: first, there is a positive correlation between project managers’ emotional intelligence and their business success (position in organizational hierarchy) and second, there is a positive correlation between project managers’ emotional intelligence and their educational level. Methodology, findings and discussion of the research can be found in the fourth chapter of the paper.

2. Dimensions of project managers’ emotional intelligence

Theoretical considerations on correlation between emotional intelligence and managers’ success started with research on essential success factors by McClelland back in 1973. Complementing those acknowledgements, Goleman in 1998 in his article published by Harvard Business Review put spotlight on importance of emotional intelligence in business success. Based on research what skills have the

greatest impact on achieving the best results for 181 job positions within 121 different organizations, Goleman (1998) concluded that even 67% of the skills considered necessary for success in business are based on emotional skills. That same year McClelland conducted a study to identify characteristics that distinguishes top and average managers. Conducted test within 30 different companies showed that difference between best and average managers lies in the following characteristics: desire for accomplishment, development of other individuals, adaptability, influence, self-confidence and leadership. The only singled out cognitive characteristic was analytical thinking ability (McClelland, 1998). Similar research on achieving the excellence at work by Chen *et al.* (1998) came out with conclusion that emotional skills (with 53%) have proven to be twice more important for business performance than the intellect and technical skills (with 27%). The other studies also confirmed that emotionally competent employees have better business performances over employees with only high cognitive capacities (Seligman, 1990; Spencer & Spencer, 1993; McClelland, 1999).

Expanding Salvoley and Mayer's model of cognitive abilities from 1990's and summing up the former knowledge of so-called soft skills, Goleman (2001) has offered an integrated matrix concept with twenty emotional competencies. He classified them in four dimensions - self-awareness, self regulation, social self-consciousness and relationship management. These four dimensions can be divided in two main groups: personal competence (self management) and social competence (managing others). To fully understand the research presented in this paper it is essential to be aware of all four mentioned dimensions.

Self-awareness is related to emotional self-conscious which means that excellent project managers are aware of own strengths and weaknesses and understand their emotions. They are aware of emotions' influence on their perceptions and decision-making process, but also on other team members. Self-awareness of own emotions is prerequisite for guidance and control of project team. Excellent project managers have ability of precise self-assessments and high self-esteem that comes from self-respect that allows leaders to be real leaders.

Management of emotions in a way that does not prevent but rather makes easier performing tasks required self-management (self-regulation - the second dimension). Project managers with self-regulation ability show an emotional maturity reflected in high-capacity assessment and emotional control. They are highly flexible in dealing with changing situations or obstacles what is hardly rare case in project management especially in today's dynamic world. They are self-initiative, proactive and focused on success. Excellent project managers are aware of constant need for improvement and development. Modern business requires permanent change management. Managing changes involves open consistency, which refers to the value of emotions and behavior, and optimism - a positive view of the world, the future, everyday life etc.

Social self-awareness is important for making emotional contact with other people, as well as self-awareness is necessary for self-regulation. For project managers social self-awareness is important to be able to understand and guide the project team in order to achieve best results. Besides being empathic, project managers should be attentive. They must be capable of recognizing and satisfying team members and clients needs. Finally, they must be aware and be capable of recognizing political relations in organization.

Relationship management's emotional skills enable project managers to quickly earn respect and trust among team members. These emotional skills of relationship management are good communication skills, listening and reassurance ability. Relationship management is extremely important competency for project managers. One more aspect of efficient management refers to inspiring and guiding team members. In this way project managers help team members in their self-motivation and achievement of maximum efforts. It is very important for project managers to assist their team members in training. We have already mentioned the importance of good guidance and change management. John Kotter in his

book writes about change management and its extraordinary importance today (Kotter, 1996). "Emotionally intelligent managers successfully manage conflicts within the organization. They succeed to understand different opinions, emotions and affections of conflicting parties and finds common ground on which the conflicting parties are in agree. These managers direct the energy of the conflicting parties towards a common ideal. Managers capable of teamwork create flexible, friendly and collegial atmosphere. They elicit among employees preference for team work. Successfully promote the strengthening of close interpersonal relationships of employees."

In already mentioned McClelland's study (1998) which examined the characteristics that distinguish successful from average managers it is found that there are limits to emotional competencies, and exactly these limits make difference. By McClelland (1998) this limit is exceed when an individual overcomes at least six emotional skills. On the other hand, Boyatzis (1999) relying on Goleman and McClelland research found that emotional competencies that may impact the effectiveness of leadership, must extend through all four groups of emotional competence. Still, McClelland (1998) points out that the difference between average and successful managers becomes more pronounced with mastering the number of competencies above those limits. Goleman (2001) explains that this is a case when managers dispose competencies that will enable them to act in different situations in a way that will enable achievement of desired goals. However, Boyatzis (1999) claims that among all clusters self-management have the most profound effect on achieving good business results because of its impact on other clusters.

Empirical studies in various fields showed many examples that also suggest Goleman's concept. For example, researchers at Charles Sturt University studied the correlation between marketing-oriented relationships and emotional intelligence. Proposed hypothesis were: H1- Relationship managers' emotional intelligence is positively associated with their financial performance and H2 - Bank managers' emotional intelligence is positively associated with their branches financial performance. The results showed significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and managers' performances (Heffernan *et al.*, 2005).

PsyD Corporate Consulting Group also confirmed Goleman's concept in study "The Emotional Intelligence and Leadership" conducted in Johnson & Johnson. A study was conducted on 358 managers across the Johnson & Johnson Consumer & Personal Care Group (JJC&PC Group). The goal was to globally assess if there were specific leadership competencies that distinguish high performers from average performers (Cavallo, 2006). Results showed that the highest performing managers have significantly more "emotional competence" than other managers. Cavallo (2006) stressed that there was strong inter-rater agreement among Supervisors, Peers, and Subordinates and that competencies of Self-Confidence, Achievement Orientation, Initiative, Leadership, Influence and Change Catalyst differentiate superior performers. The high potential managers received higher scores in the emotional competencies by Peers and Supervisors, but not by Subordinates (Cavallo, 2006). Some gender difference was found, with Supervisors rating Females higher in Adaptability and Service Orientation, while Peers rated Females higher on Emotional Self-Awareness, Conscientiousness, Developing Others, Service Orientation, and Communication. Direct reports scored Males higher in Change Catalyst (Cavallo, 2006).

This chapter presented some theoretical considerations on correlation between emotional intelligence and business success. These theoretical considerations were also evidentiary supported through numbered studies. Having such a background makes the result of tested correlation between project managers' emotional intelligence and business and educational success even more interesting. The research is even more important if we consider the number of project oriented companies or companies intended to be project oriented. The chapter also presented dimensions of emotional intelligence making it easier to understand such correlation between emotional intelligence and professional success. However, before presenting the results of conducted research, it is important to have one more theoretical consideration about leadership and emotional intelligence. The assumption is that leadership skills distinguish excellent

from average project managers.

3. Leadership theory and emotional intelligence

Understanding project managers' success is deeply connected with leadership theory. New concept emerged in 1980's, suggested two types of leadership: transactional and transformational. Project manager as transactional leader is somehow classical, rational leader (Bass, 1990), focused on task execution as well as on achieving short-term goals, controlling, giving orders and prefer material motivation for its team members.

On the other hand, project manager as a transformational leader is emotional type (George, 2000; Humphrey, 2002), adapted to contemporary business conditions and focused on company vision which is achievable through mobilization and synchronization of emotional coworkers synergy in synergetic action of all team members.

Goleman *et al.* (2008) recognize similar differentiation between emotional and non-emotional type of leader in resonant and dissonant managers. The main thesis propagated by Goleman *et al.* (2008) is that "emotions are extremely important for management and emotionally intelligent leadership is most important dimension that largely determines whether manager efforts will succeed or fail" (Goleman *et al.*, 2008). If the leader with his/her own vision successfully transmits his/her enthusiasm and optimism to other members of the group and inspires the best capabilities and succeed to encourage positive emotions (security, hope and cheerful mood), we can recognize the resonant manager. This type of manager successfully comply own emotional vibrations with others', harmonize and make his group successful in tasks execution. If, however, manager is not the same "wavelength" with members of his team, if he causes destructive emotions such as fear, worry, apathy, hate and guilt, then he is dissonant manager whose group is inefficient and uncoordinated.

Resonant managers are emotionally intelligent leaders, which mean that their energy and passion can easily find emotional resonance in the team. These managers have a beneficial emotional effect on the group, they make all members to feel good, self-confident, emotionally connected to each other and to feel solidarity. They also support group decision making. Thanks to managers' empathy, its members feel secure, team affiliation, understanding and support what greatly help them to maintain optimism and self-confidence in situations of rapid changes and crisis.

Emotionally intelligent (resonant) project managers do not affect their team members only with good mood or ability to say the right thing, but with series of coordinated activities that constitute a particular management style. Most efficient project managers generally act in accordance with one of six different management styles. They skillfully fit into any of these styles depending on the situation. Four styles (visionary, coaching, affiliative, and democratic style) established resonance that encourages success in business while the other two (dictating tempo and imperious style) should be applied with caution, although in some specific situations can be very useful.

In addition to these theoretical considerations on leadership and project managers we could use the famous Harvard professor McClelland's article "Test competence, not intelligence," where he destroyed the myth about the critical importance of intelligence for performing tasks. Instead of starting from a dogma that pure, cognitive intelligence is most important for success in every business area, he developed empirical model of competence. This model was based on the systematic and careful study of most successful people, who are top experts in their jobs. Based on the results of this empirical analysis comparing the top and the average workers, McClelland found that the best experts have some specific competencies that the average has not. In addition to basic skills and a number of specific emotional competencies (ambition, initiative, ability for teamwork, leadership skills), the most successful managers have that others average don't and that enable them to lead their teams brilliantly (McClelland, 1973).

Due to specificity of concept of project management and the role that teams have in it this conclusion could be very easily transmitted from managers to project managers explaining the difference between average and excellent. Based on his research McClelland developed so called "Competency model" of leadership, which serves to identify, train and encourage those who might become extraordinary. One of the examples of companies that have implemented competency model is Siemens. The leaders were able to increase their efficiency and achieve significantly better profits, and the same year revenue growth increased more than double in the control groups that were not included in training (Goleman *et al.*, 2008).

Remains one last question "Can project managers become successful?" The literature shows that emotional intelligence is partly inherited but leadership skills based on emotional intelligence as any other skill could be learned, developed, maintained and strengthened by practicing. One of the main Goleman, McKee and Boyatzis' theses is that resonant, inspiring leadership based on emotional intelligence skills can be learned and developed, but it takes patience, knowledge, time, conscious effort and above all strong motivation and a genuine commitment (Goleman *et al.*, 2008). Basically acquisition and development of leadership skills is process of self-directed learning. This process involves systematic and planned development of specific capabilities or skills (Goleman *et al.*, 2008). Real leaders use their own emotional intelligence to expand to team and whole organization through identification of norms for a team and culture for organization, development of ideal vision, and detecting and filling the gaps between real and wanted one through change management.

Finally, to complement above presented research of numbered authors this paper presents research on correlation between project managers' professional success and emotional intelligence. This empirical supported consideration could be followed by changes in human resource policies, but also with self-directed learning of project managers who want to become excellent.

4. Research

Subject of empirical research was identification of correlation between project managers' emotional intelligence and educational and business success. Emotional intelligence, as a completely different type of intelligence from the academic one, considerably defines people's life path, so the main task was to prove that project managers' emotional intelligence has a great impact on its life prosperity through educational success or later business success. This research aims to identify positive correlation between respondents' emotional intelligence (EI) and their education level and position in organizational hierarchy.

Based on above presented research tasks, research is oriented on connecting respondents' emotional intelligence with educational level and business success. Research relies on two hypotheses:

H₁: "Respondents with average EI greater than 4 have better position in organizational hierarchy"

H₂: "Respondents with average EI greater than 4 have higher educational level"

4.1. Methodology

Data collection tool was questionnaire consisted of both independent and dependent variables. Independent variables were personal data of respondents: information about sex, age group, work experience, educational level and position in organizational hierarchy. Dependent variables were data related to emotional intelligence, obtained from the questionnaire consisted of 42 questions that offered answers evaluation of 1 (entirely incorrect) to 5 (entirely correct).

Representative sample consisted of 75 project managers from companies that were among top 10 in the 2010 list 100 most successful Serbian companies by Ministry of Finance. Respondents were project

managers of the projects of various complexities in term of size (total investment), communication complexity (the number of the people that are actively involved in the project, geographical/temporal distribution of the project activities and cultural distribution of the project team), project risks (low, medium or high), development methodology (based on lifecycle model) and their responsibilities and authorities dependent of position in organizational hierarchy.

Structure of respondent’s position in organizational hierarchy was following: 4% from top management level, 17% from executive management level, 31% from operational management level and 48% from middle management level (see Figure 1a). Further, the sample consisted of 55% bachelors, 21% masters, 17% high school diploma and finally 7% PH.D (see Figure 1b).

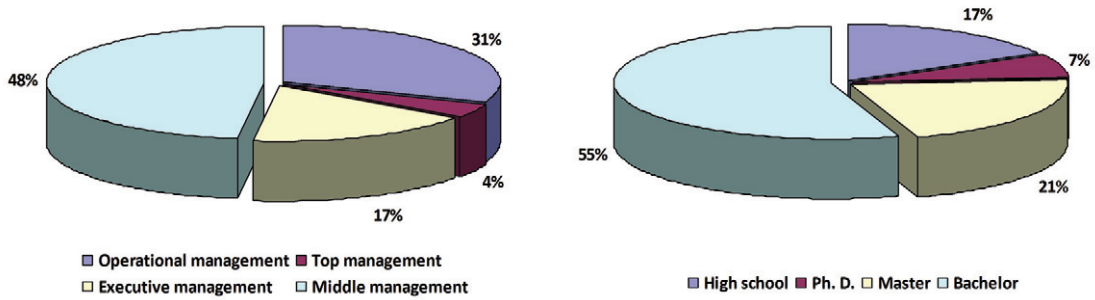


Fig. 1. a) Respondent’s position in organizational hierarchy; b) Respondent’s education level structure

The number of female respondents was 43 or 57% of total respondents, and the number of male respondents was 32 or 43% of total respondents. It is noticed better cooperation with female respondents. The research was partly on the field and partly via email. Data collection instrument was already mentioned questionnaire. Procedure for data processing is calculation of average (arithmetic mean) of dependent variable and their relation with specific independent variable.

4.2. Findings

Testing first hypothesis “Project managers with average emotional intelligence (EI) greater than 4 have better position in organizational hierarchy” showed high positive correlation (0.963). Project managers on top management level have an average EI of 4.33, on executive management level 4.09, on middle management level 3.68 and on operational management level 3.71 (see Figure 2).

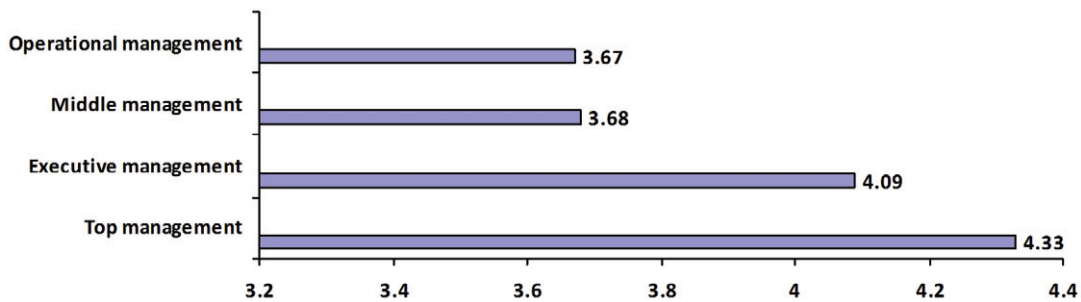


Fig. 2. Coefficient of EI in relation with position in organizational hierarchy

If we consider the fact that project managers with average EI above than 4 are positioned in top and executive management level, it can be noticed that 21% of project managers with the highest average EI are positioned on the highest levels of organizational hierarchy.

Testing the second hypothesis “Project managers with average emotional intelligence (EI) greater than 4 have higher educational level” also showed positive correlation (0.86). As it was expected the analysis showed that respondents with Ph. D. degree have significantly higher EI coefficient than other project managers. Consistently, project managers with master degree have also higher EI coefficient than the rest. But the problem is how to explain that project managers with high school diploma have almost same average EI as bachelors (see Figure 3.).

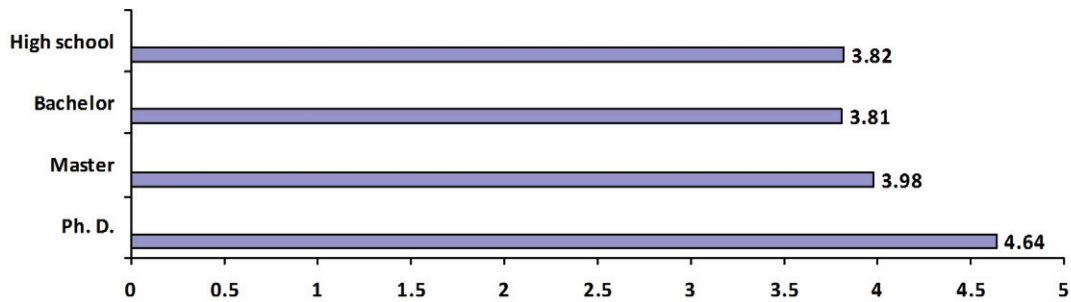


Fig. 3. Respondent's average EI coefficient in relation with education level

In addition there were some interesting results in relation with sex structure, age structure and professional experience and average EI coefficient. Comparing sex structure and average EI, female respondents with 3.91 average EI had significantly higher coefficient of EI than male respondents with 3.67 average EI. The distance is even 0.24 points. Furthermore, comparing age structure and professional experience and EI, there was positive correlation between EI and life years and years of professional experience. This indicates that with experience both life and professional project managers learn and improve their emotional intelligence. Considering that project managers who have high school diploma are mostly older people with long experience it could be explained their high average EI.

Finally, findings suggest that there is significant correlation between emotional intelligence and tested variables. Therefore, both hypotheses were confirmed considering that project managers on top and executive management level had EI higher than 4 and that respondents with EI higher than 4 have higher educational level.

4.3. Discussion

The main objective of this paper was to explore the link between emotional intelligence and project managers' professional success. Findings suggest that the higher the level of emotional intelligence a project manager possesses, the higher is their professional success. This higher professional success is assessed through educational level and managers' position in organizational hierarchy. Although, there is a vast of studies in the field of managers' emotional intelligence, the importance of emotional intelligence and project management is still not fully recognized. However, this research study adds to research into the area of emotional intelligence and project management.

Research findings presented in this paper have a number of implications for project management practice. Firstly, project managers should be aware of the concept of emotional intelligence and benefits that brings emotionally intelligent behavior. Further, project managers should be aware of their level of

emotional intelligence. Moreover, project managers should be aware how they could improve the various elements of emotional intelligence because an increase in emotional intelligence should result in enhanced project management capability and may in turn increase overall success. However, this overall success could be only achieved through increase in both individuals' and teams' emotional intelligence as it was suggested in previous theoretical considerations.

Further, human resource management departments of project oriented companies should consider emotional intelligence when recruiting staff for project manager position. Project managers with high emotional intelligence, and an awareness of its importance, should be better able to generate effective project management. In addition, human resource management departments when recruiting team members also should consider their emotional intelligence, because in project management more than in any other field teams play most important role in business success.

Whilst examining the impact of project manager's level of emotional intelligence on educational level was not the main agenda of this research, it was interesting to observe some correlation between these two variables. This finding suggests that emotional intelligence is only partly important ability for educational success. This is not surprising, as previous research in the field of management has highlighted the importance of different kind of intelligence for educational success. Consequently, further research is suggested in the area of emotional intelligence and project management to confirm or disprove these findings.

5. Conclusion

Project management is one of the most applied management concepts in companies all around the world. It is critical to most, if not all, organizations if they are going to be successful in today's dynamic world. Important skills in project management are ability of teamwork and the leadership ability. Consequently, person's ability to manage their emotions and the emotions of others would help in teamwork and leadership development process. However, the research linking emotional intelligence to project management is limited. This paper has modest findings but it is a significant step in highlighting the importance of emotional intelligence in the project management field. Findings suggest that the level of project managers' emotional intelligence is positively correlated to their professional success. Main limitations associated with this study were self-descriptive questionnaire and limited sample size (n=75). Consequently, there is a need for further research and requires greater commitment of both human resource departments and project managers.

However, recognition of emotional intelligence influence on project managers' success has important implications for the project management practitioners. Potential benefits from improvement of project managers' emotional intelligence could be significant for organization, project and team success. Theoretical considerations of emotional intelligence suggests that it could help project managers in team building process, successfully facilitating adoption of vision, goals and culture of the organization by team members. Emotional intelligent project managers identify problems, diagnose causes and select alternative solutions making decisions based on emotions with logical explanations but in a way that improves rather than neglect rational thinking and acting. Emotional intelligence is instrument for successfully motivating and guiding team members, it provides them a sense of security and influence on improving interpersonal relationships and communication within project teams and within whole organization.

Finally, selecting emotionally intelligent project managers and team members, introducing trainings to improve their emotional intelligence and creating emotionally intelligent teams and organizations should be one of the most important tasks of human resource departments. Furthermore, project managers in

order to become more successful and be real leaders have to individually and self-initiative constantly improve emotional intelligence capabilities.

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