

## THE EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT LEADER: RESOLVING CONFLICT AND BOOSTING TEAM PERFORMANCE IN PROJECT

Jeffery Gul<sup>1</sup>, Syeda Muniba Zahrah<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Muhammad Rashid<sup>3</sup>, Yasir Zulfiqar<sup>4</sup>, Salman Shifa<sup>5</sup>, Dr. Abdur Rehman Shahzad<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Graduated, SZABIST, ISLAMABAD

<sup>2</sup>M phill entrepreneurship and innovation, Bahaudin Zikriya University.

<sup>3</sup>Assistant professor, Department of Management Sciences, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar khan Campus, Pakistan.

<sup>4</sup>Manager at Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL).

<sup>5</sup>Executive HR at Inara Technologies (PVT) ltd.

<sup>6</sup>Department of rural sociology, University of agriculture Faisalabad.

<sup>1</sup>jefferygul27@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>Munibabukhari1214@gmail.com, <sup>3</sup>rashid.ramzan@iub.edu.pk, <sup>4</sup>yasirzulfiqar141@gmail.com, <sup>5</sup>salman.shifa@inara.pk, <sup>6</sup>shahzad.rs@uaf.edu.pk.

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Corresponding Author: \*

Jeffery Gul

### Abstract ▲ ▲

In the modern fluid and cross-functional projects, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become a critical leadership characteristic that greatly contributes to the dynamics of the group and results. The current emphasis is on the importance of emotional intelligence on project managers to enhance the performance of the team and conflict mitigation, through the mediating effect of relationship management (RM). Using quantitative research design, 200 project team members on varied industry (i.e. IT, construction and engineering) were interviewed to collect information. He measured and measured emotional intelligence, team performance, conflict management and relationship management using standard scales. Reasonable Results The results of the structural equation modeling (SEM) indicated a good and significant positive effect of emotional intelligence with regard to the amount of performance within a group ( $\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$ ) and in resolving issues ( $\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$ ). In addition, relationship management plays a potent mediating role in the EI and the two outcome variables, such as team performance ( $\beta = 0.26, p < 0.001$ ) and conflict resolution ( $\beta = 0.24, p < 0.001$ ). These results indicate that project managers who possess a high degree of emotional intelligence, especially in the areas of relationship management, will lead to more tightly knit, more motivated and more highly performing teams also doing a good job of avoiding the problem of the interpersonal conflict level. The research fills the literature gap in the field of project management and leadership, as it is an empirical presentation and proving of a strategic value of emotional intelligence in contributing to the team effectiveness and the culture of collaborative work.

## INTRODUCTION

In the sphere of the modern project management, prosperity is no longer determined only by the iron triangle of the time, the cost, and the scope. With increasingly complex and interdisciplinary projects, the human factor has come into the limelight. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a concept popularized by Goleman (1995), which according to him is the capacity to be aware of, recognize, and or manage emotions, of both oneself and others. In organization where teamwork and speed to solve the problems are critical, a leader who can be emotionally intelligent can contribute to the performance of the team, as well as to addressing conflict. The contemporary project world is being defined by high velocity change, team dynamic and frozen cross-dependent expectations. Since different professionals will be bridging their strengths all at the same time without proper structure in the projects in question and subject to their evolution, interpersonal issues will have to occur. Misunderstandings, cross-cultural miscommunication and stress reactions may break even the best designed projects. It is therefore a crucial capability of a project leader to successfully control the emotional climates in his team. Emotional intelligence helps accomplish this by enabling leaders to overcome their challenges and situations through empathy, flexibility and strategic societal positioning (Cote, 2014; Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005).

The conventional approaches to project success do not take such non-material factors into account that structure the performance of teams. Where there is restricted structure and control under project management, tools and methodologies cannot substitute interpersonal skills such as building trust, motivation and conflict resolution. The studies have also revealed that the emotionally intelligent leaders have better chances of fostering psychological safety, enable the open communication and ensure that team effort is devoted towards the delivery of projects in hand (Cherniss, 2010; Carmeli, 2003). These leaders know how to understand some warning signs of conflict, to regulate the tension before it gets critical, and how to keep a work synchronous even through times of insecurity.

Although, interest in EI in general leadership literature is on the increase there is little research on its application in project-based settings. Unlike other line managers, the project managers are normally not working permanently with any team, thus they have not really built any rapport with them. This increases the relevance of emotional intelligence as a competency even more. The study fills this gap by empirically examining the correlation between emotional intelligence of project managers and its ramifications on conflict resolution and on performance of teams. By using a cross-industry quantitative study, the paper shall provide practical knowhow to organizations that want to enhance the success of their projects by training their leaders on their emotional intelligence.

## Literature Review

### Emotional Intelligence And Team Performance

High EI in project managers makes them better poised to develop good teamwork, improve motivation, and build psychological safety in teams. Goleman (1998) presented EI as the combination of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, characteristics, which are also essential in leadership. The leadership of EI individuals is able to inspire trust and handle stress and achieve goal alignment between diverse team members such that improved outcomes of team performance were achieved (Clarke, 2010). The idea that EI helps to improve the productivity and innovativeness of groups is a proven phenomenon. Indicatively, Prati et al. (2003) identified that on the leadership front the emotionally intelligent teams had high levels of collectivity efficacy performance. Likewise, in an examination of the same, Carmeli (2003) noted that emotionally knowledgeable managers improve team learning activities and aid members in achieving common objectives better. When cross-functional cooperation is a major determinant of project setting, EI develops a gut feel, which is an absolute necessity by a director to handle social relationships, as well as task completion (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008).

**H1: Emotional Intelligence of project managers positively influences team performance**

**Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Resolution**

Project environments experience conflict by nature as the environments have rigid schedules, unmanaged priorities, and diverse team members. Emotional intelligence also aids a project manager to identify emotional clues, de-escalate tensions and address intra-group conflicts in a constructive manner. (Troth et.al., 2014) already proved that those with a higher EI, have managed to resolve any conflict at work more effectively compared to those with a lower EI, mainly through collaborative strategies and problem solving rather than avoiding or acting aggressively.

Ayoko et al. (2008) have stated that emotionally smart leaders have a low likelihood of escalating a conflict and would create environments of respect and psychological safety. In addition, Wong and Law (2002) pointed out that individuals who belong to the emotionally intelligent category are more successful at the maintaining the group emotional climate that directly influences the effectiveness of conflict resolution. Hence, EI facilitates the passage among the teams and less project interference.

**H2: Emotional Intelligence of project managers positively affects conflict resolution effectiveness**

**Mediating Role of Relationship Management**

Of all the emotional intelligence dimensions, relationship management dimension takes precedence when it comes to teams. It entails the creation of relationships, impact people positively and ability to handle team relationships with efficiency and compassion (Boyatzis, 2006). The above EI sub dimension has direct connection to team performance and conflict management, the reason being that it controls how effectively a leader relates with others and balances relationship within the team. According to Hur et al. (2011), project managers who were good in relationships management were more effective in terms of enhancing team morale and team commitment. On the same note, Cavazotte et al. (2012) had observed that the relational element of EI was a predictor of cooperation and trust in groups. Relationship management has enabled the leaders to close the gaps between different personalities, facilitate positive feedback and long-term partnership resulting in improved performance and capabilities in conflict resolution.

**H3: Relationship management mediates the relationship between EI and team outcomes**

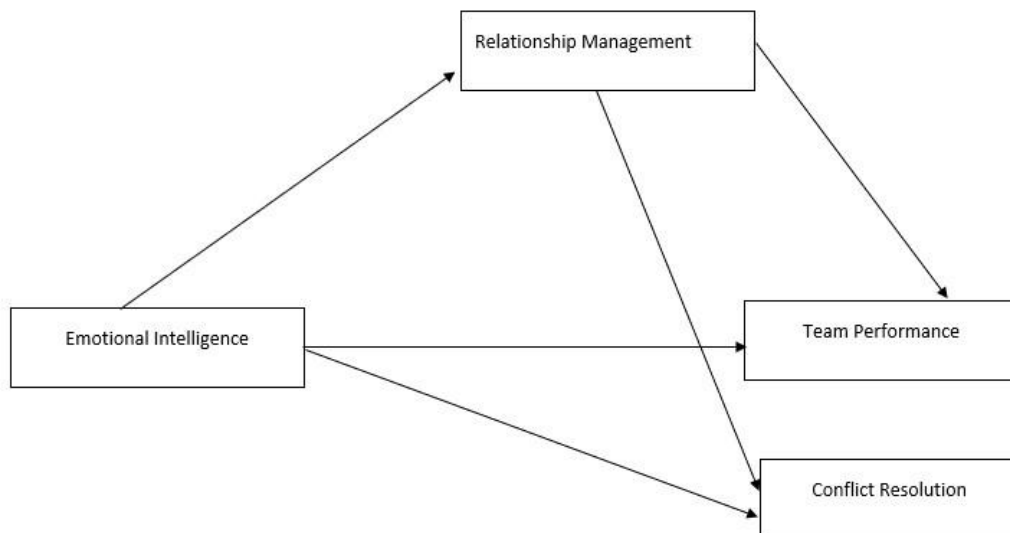


Fig Noa:1 Conceptual Framework

### Methodology

The present study uses a quantitative research design to investigate how emotional intelligence (EI) affects the performance of project teams and conflict resolution, and the mechanism is relationship management as a mediator. The research is based on the positivist paradigm, according to which research results may be checked against a given hypothesis by utilizing statistical procedures. The opinions were examined based on a well-formatted survey questionnaire, which was directed to project-related professionals of different professions in different industries such as Information Technology, construction and engineering in order to make the sample diverse in terms of organizational setting.

To achieve this, 200 project team members were used as sample, availed through purposive sampling, in order to get people who have worked face to face with project managers. The survey gauged feelings to emotional intelligence in project leaders with referents of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relation management. Team performance measurement was done using such indicators as collaboration, achievement of goals, and the on-time completion of tasks. Conflict resolution was assessed as the effectiveness of the interpersonal conflicts resolution in project teams. The reliability and validity of the research were achieved by testing 30 respondents in a pilot survey. The constructs values of Cronbach alpha value were between 0.80 and 0.85 each which shows that there is a good internal consistency. Expert review by three project management academics was applied to ensure that the paper had content validity. The last survey was distributed in person and on the web, and the responses were de-identified in order to lower bias. Statistical instruments that were applicable in the data analysis include Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test both direct and mediating effects between variables. Indirect effects of emotional intelligence on outcomes and relationship management were tested through the process of mediation analysis based on the bootstrap method. Descriptive statistics and correlation matrices were also calculated to get the idea on how the data was distributed and how these variables are related to each other. This tight concentration of the

methodological aspect will allow the study to draw valid conclusions about the effect of emotional intelligence on the outcomes of a team-level and will be able to provide practical information concerning leadership development within a project-based setting.

### Results

#### Descriptive Statistics

Basic statistics allow getting initial information about the answers given by the participants: emotional intelligence, relationship management, team performance, and conflict resolution. Off data gathered (n=200) within the fields of information technology, construction, and engineering, the construct averages against the five-point Likert scale reflect a standard range of 4.05-4.17 in the affirmative answers of the positive items correlating to the variables or constructs, implying that the answers by the participants demonstrated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the positive statements describing the variables or the constructs in those points. As can be seen, emotional intelligence was the most scored aspect with mean of 4.12 and standard deviation of 0.61, which means the majority of project managers consider themselves to be emotionally intelligent and able to detect, understand and manipulate emotions efficiently. Relationship management came right behind (M = 4.09, SD = 0.58), indicating that they do not think they have poor interpersonal relations in teams. A high self-reported effectiveness and goal accomplishment was found in groups with managers who are emotionally intelligent since the average score on team performance was included the highest (M = 4.17, SD = 0.56). A relatively high score was also received regarding conflict resolution (M = 4.05, SD = 0.63), which also testified to an overall recognition that a positive change in conflict solving can be made by the implementation of emotional and relational competencies. The standard deviations of all constructs are of a relatively small value (0.56-0.63), which means that they have very small deviation between people and that there is a common opinion among the respondents.

Table No:1

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	4.12	0.61
Relationship Management	4.09	0.58
Team Performance	4.17	0.56
Conflict Resolution	4.05	0.63

**Correlation Analysis**

The correlation indicates the existence of strong positive relationships between the main study variables of the study: emotional intelligence, relationship management, conflict resolution skills and team performance. Emotional intelligence (EI) positively correlates significantly with the team performance ( $r = 0.721, p < 0.01$ ), which indicates that the elevated level of EI in project managers is linked to better performance outcomes in the teams. This upholds the belief that viewing leaders as being emotionally intelligent boosts motivation; organizes and undertakes tasks.

More so, the EI is also associated positively with resolution of conflict ( $r = 0.678, p < 0.01$ ) that is, poorly EI trained managers are less frequently likely

to resolve conflict constructively. This concurs with the literature that prevails to indicate that emotional management and empathy are crucial in preventing tension in project settings.

The correlation between the emotional intelligence and management of relationships is also very high ( $r = 0.735, p < 0.01$ ), which supports the view that emotional intelligence facilitates stronger interaction with other people who are core to project success. Finally, relationship management has also been linked strongly to conflict resolution ( $r = 0.689, p < 0.01$ ) and performance of team ( $r = 0.705, p < 0.01$ ), which shows that relationships management mediates translation of emotional intelligence to team actions. Such results affirm the hypothesized relationships and give the theory conceptual framework empirical support.

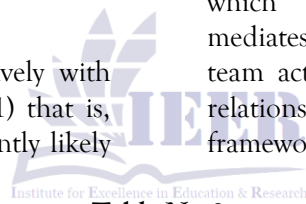


Table No:2

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional Intelligence	1			
2. Relationship Management	0.74**	1		
3. Team Performance	0.68**	0.66**	1	
4. Conflict Resolution	0.70**	0.65**	0.63**	1

**Statistical Path Analysis**

The results of hypothesis testing support all the relationships that were suggested within the conceptual framework. The first Hypothesis (H1) which elaborated that there was a positive relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Team Performance is able to be supported with a path coefficient (beta) of 0.42, t-value of 6.75 and a p-value of less than 0.001. This implies that the emotionally intelligent project leaders can play a big role in enhancing team performance. They can coordinate and increase the use of productivity

within project teams because of their enjoyment of emotion management, communication abilities as well as openness to good interpersonal relationships. In the same way, the second hypothesis (H2) which focuses on the direct influence of EI on Conflict Resolution is confirmed, as well. Its output shows that the value of its path coefficient (beta), t, and p-values are 0.47, 7.03, and smaller than 0.001 respectively. Such results suggest that emotionally intelligent people are more skilled at managing conflicts and ensuring team cohesiveness because they can better recognize the point of view of other

people, deal with stress and react leading to the interpersonal issues in accordance with their needs. In the third hypothesis (H3), it was postulated that the connection between EI and Team Performance is mediated by Relationship Management (RM) which is a sub-dimension of the EI. This mediation is significant at the statistical level (path coefficient is 0.26 with a *t*-value equal to 4.23 and the *p*-value being less than 0.001). Such findings reveal that EI affects the team performance not only directly, but also indirectly by improving relationship-building skills. The leaders, who are capable of building trust, collaboration, and empathy, stand a better chance of enabling high-performing teams. And finally,

examined the role of Relationship Management as a mediator of the relationship between EI and Conflict Resolution. A path coefficient of 0.24, *t*-value = 3.98 and *p*-value is lower than 0.001 therefore confirm that mediation is supported. This affirms that emotionally intelligent leaders are better people in managing conflicts since they have the capacity to build positive relationships in teams. Overall, all hypotheses are met, and the concept of emotional intelligence, and in particular relationship management has proven to be crucial in regards to optimizing the results of teams and balance between individuals in project settings.

Table 3

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	t-Value	p-Value	Result
H1: EI → Team Performance	0.42	6.75	<0.001	Supported
H2: EI → Conflict Resolution	0.47	7.03	<0.001	Supported
H3: EI → RM → Team Performance (mediation)	0.26	4.23	<0.001	Supported
H3: EI → RM → Conflict Resolution (mediation)	0.24	3.98	<0.001	Supported

**Discussion**

Aim of the present study was to determine how Emotional Intelligence (EI) contributed to project team outputs; both team performance and conflict resolution and investigate the mediating influence of relationship management. The results lend good empirical value to all the hypothetical links and this generates good congruence with existing literature and a deeper state of learning on the application of EI in project leadership. First, the direct influence between EI and team performance (H1) justifies that leaders with high EI are in better position to improve the efficiency of their teams. This agrees with the literature that emerged earlier in the study (Muller and Turner, 2010; Clarke, 2010) where researchers highlighted that greater emotional understanding and self-control produces a more unified and effective team of project managers. Leaders are more encouraging and work with a team, realizing their own and team member emotion.

Secondly, the finding that there is a significant correlation between EI and conflict resolution (H2) ascends to the idea that emotionally intelligent

persons possess the ability to deescalate conflicts and manage interpersonal conflicts within the workplace. Project work is bound to encounter conflict and leaders have a great role in managing this conflict in a constructive way, which is important in maintaining team morale and continuity of projects. Also, according to the research, relationship management as a significant element of EI acts as an important mediator between EI and 2 outcome variables: team performance and conflict resolution (H3). These findings make it a point to divert attention to building relationships and the significance of connection building with regards to aiding the process of transferring emotional competencies to actual team performance. Leaders who are able to master the skills of managing relationships basing on the tenets of empathy, influence, and social awareness have not only the effect of having smoother conflict resolution, but an effect of having higher team performance. This finding supports the theoretical assumption that relationship management serves as the behavioral dispensation in which emotional intelligence can

affect team dynamics (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). The overall result of the study helps in the theoretical insight as well as practical implementation of EI in an organizational context. They emphasize on the need to select and train the leaders of projects both in terms of technical competence and emotional/interpersonal competence, especially in areas which lead to improvement in relationship management abilities.

### Practical Implication

The results of the research relate to a practicing project-based organizations and human resource development efforts in an important way. Since emotional intelligence has been shown to significantly affect team performance and resolution of conflict, it is quite relevant to ensure that an organization lays priority in single-handedly evaluating and boosting emotional intelligence among the project leaders and team members. To begin with, organizations can apply emotional intelligence tests in hiring and selection of leadership personnel. Recruitment of candidates who are highly emotionally regulated, emphatic and able to deal with relationships can lead to better project leadership and team dynamics. Second, emotional intelligence, especially in the area of relationship management, can be trained and developed through various training and development programs, which may be useful in moving the outcomes of a group of employees in a positive direction. Communication, empathy, conflict management, and interpersonal effectiveness workshops can improve the capacity of a leader to promote cooperation, also including the possibility to resolve the disputes in a constructive way. These soft skills are particularly important when it comes to high-stress project work where a lot of pressures and misunderstandings are common. Moreover, project managers are also supposed to have tools and feedback mechanism to check and enhance their behaviors related to EI. As an example, leadership coaching and 360-degrees feedback mechanism can facilitate self-awareness in leaders and allow them to modify their behavior to their team emotional needs.

### Limitations And Future Directions

Although much insight can be drawn using this study, this is not a study without limitations as well. To begin with, the study was cross-sectional, which means that the measure was made at one specific time. It discourages the possibility of drawing causal conclusions between emotional intelligence, team performance, conflict solving and relationship management. Longitudinal research design can be of advantage to upcoming researches to gain better understanding of these dynamics over time in project teams.

Secondly, measurements were done on a self-report survey which can be biased towards social desirability. There could have been over-estimation of emotional intelligence or team effectiveness by the participants possibly since it could influence the finding. The future research design, incorporation of a multi-source data like peer or supervisor assessment would help offer a more balanced view. Third, the population that was sampled was a narrow corner of a context-specific size, probably a single industry or location-based, which could not generalize the results. The model should be validated by the cross-cultural samples and a variety of organizational contexts, which is the future work to reinforce the model in a diversified project environment.

In addition, the research centered entirely on the relationship management as the mediating aspect of emotional intelligence. Future research may have the possibility to study other EI sub-dimensions such as self-awareness, self-regulation and social awareness that would allow creating a more balanced image of the role of EI in determining the outcomes of projects. Finally, albeit the model develops a direct and mediated correlation amid EI and the outcomes of performance, it does not embrace possible moderating variables such as the leadership style, team diversity, and organizational culture. By investigating such moderators, it is possible that the circumstances, under which emotional intelligence is the most effective, will be discovered. To sum up, although the given study is a contribution to an expanding area of literature on emotional intelligence within project environment, further studies with stronger designs and contexts are needed to improve the relevance of the then-applicable and richness of the findings.

### Conclusion

This paper set itself to find out the effects of Emotional Intelligence (EI) on the team performance in projects and conflict resolutions especially the mediating factor in that: relationship managements (RM). The findings show strong arguments in support of a hypothesis that EI contributes a great deal towards the performance of a team and the success of conflict resolution in a project setting. Also, the sub-dimension that stood out in sum of relationship management borne of the positive impacts of emotional intelligence cannot be underrated in determining effectual teamwork and ensuring that tensions are reduced when it comes to relating with one another. The evidence pins up the fact that emotionally intelligent people or rather so that display quality of relationship management have better chances of developing cooperative efforts, lowering contention and attainment of greater team success. The results could be used to support the broader theoretical premise upon which EI can be considered a strategic organizational behavior asset in dynamic and interdependent project environments. The combination of both direct and mediated pathways makes the research contribute to the current body of literature by providing a more detailed picture of the implications translated into functioning emotional competencies delivered in practice. The knowledge acquired can be used in designing leadership training, teaming selection, and conflict management.

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