

## **Emotional Intelligence and Project Success**

### **1. Purpose**

The purpose of this white paper is to introduce recent research on the correlation between a project manager's emotional Intelligence and successful projects and to outline the implications for existing and potential project managers who wish to improve their performance and success rate. This new research puts project managers where they deserve to be, at the heart and soul of projects. The only logical conclusion is that project managers, and their personal styles and competencies, are crucial to project success.

By deduction, project managers who wish to develop from journeyman to master must develop what the authors call their "emotional dimensions". Transactional leadership, or focus on methodology and process, may be sufficient for simple projects. However, this is not enough for the majority of projects that are of medium to high complexity. Here, it is transformational leadership, or focus on people and relationships, that is required for success.

The importance of our emotional dimensions in achieving business success has been suggested for some time. We commonly know this as Emotional Intelligence. There is a growing body of literature and research that suggests that there is a strong correlation between a person's level of emotional intelligence and business success. This white paper will introduce Emotional Intelligence, its main constructs, and how it can be used by project people to identify and develop the key emotional dimensions that are necessary for project success.

### **2. The Current Wisdom**

Traditional beliefs entrenched within the project management community are:

1. Project managers, their personal styles and competencies, do not contribute significantly to project success.
2. Project success depends solely on the appropriate application of appropriate project management tools and techniques.

The implications for project managers are grim. The project manager is viewed as an operator, as long as they pull the right levers and operate the correct tools and techniques correctly, the project will be automatically successful. Thus, the project manager is not seen as a crucial component and is undervalued.

Contrast this to research on general management which has consistently shown that a manager's style and competencies, or their levels of emotional intelligence, are key indicators for whether they are successful or otherwise in organisational roles.

The currently accepted wisdom within the project management is somewhat surprising given the nature of projects and the role of the project manager. What other management discipline is expected to manage something that is temporary, has not been done before, is loosely defined, is constantly changing, is laden with complexity risk and unrealistic expectations and is set within fixed constraints including resources, budget, time, process, organisation and culture?

### **3. Recent Research**

Given the arguments above, surely it is reasonable to assume that to manage in the very challenging and temporary environment that is a project, even more enhanced levels of emotional intelligence are required than for many other management domains?

Recent research is saying just this<sup>1</sup>. This research, sponsored by the Project Management Institute (PMI), found that project manager's style and competencies do influence project success. In particular, the research showed that success is correlated with emotional intelligence, particularly on projects that were described as complex. And as the level of complexity increased, the emotional intelligence of the project manager was found to be an increasingly important factor in success.

The research was based on a series of interviews and on a survey using a web-based questionnaire. The interviewees were made up of managers who were responsible for appointing project managers to projects. The web-based questionnaire was completed by professional project managers.

Among the conclusions were:

- Emotional intelligence is correlated to project success
- Emotional intelligence is a significant differentiator of performance on projects
- Organisations need to build development of the desired emotional intelligence dimensions into their training and development programmes
- In the majority of projects, and especially the more complex ones, emotional dimensions made the most significant contribution to project success
- As a project manager progresses through the project management ranks, from junior to senior, they particularly need to develop their emotional intelligence

### **4. A Brief Overview of Emotional Intelligence**

The first published definition of emotional intelligence (EI) was made by Salovey and Mayer (1990) who defined EI as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions."

The concept is summarised below:

- Emotionally intelligent people can marshal their emotional impulses better than those who are not so emotionally intelligent
- They possess the self-awareness to know what they are feeling
- They can think about and express those feelings
- They are attuned to the emotions of others and have empathy
- They are optimistic, happy with a positive outlook

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<sup>1</sup> Turner and Muller (2006)

- They strive to lead a meaningful and enjoyable life
- They can operate in difficult situations without being overwhelmed
- They can resist or delay an impulse that might cause them to act inappropriately
- They understand group dynamics and fit well into groups

So what does this mean for the corporate world? The evidence suggesting a correlation between high EQ and success in leadership and business is growing. For example, one piece of research claims that<sup>2</sup>:

- EQ alone explains 58% of a leader's job performance
- 90% of top performers are high in EQ
- Just 20% of low performers are high in EQ
- EQ is linked to job performance for employees at all levels, in virtually every industry

Dr. Stephen Covey, author of the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People has stated that:

“Research shows convincingly that Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) is more important than IQ in almost every role and many times more important in leadership roles. This finding is accentuated as we move from the control philosophy of the industrial age to an empowering release philosophy of the knowledge worker age.”

In a nutshell, emotionally intelligent people communicate effectively, form strong relationships and create powerful coping strategies. Emotionally unintelligent people struggle with these competencies, no matter how high their IQs. Emotional Intelligence can be measured reliably and unlike IQ, it can be substantially strengthened and developed. Thus, if project people become aware of their emotional intelligence profile, they can devise and implement development strategies to enhance those areas that have potential for enrichment.

#### **4.1 Models and Measurement of EI**

There are several models of EI which differ significantly from each other and are measured using different instruments:

1. Arguably, the most popularised view of EI is that of Dan Goleman. Goldman's EI is a framework that attempts to capture a person's potential for mastering a range of competencies that are described under the broad categories of Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness and Relationship Management. Goleman and his colleagues rely largely on a 360° instrument (the Emotional Competence Inventory-ECI) to evaluate a person's EI.
2. John Mayer and Peter Salovey (later joined by David Caruso) coined the term emotional intelligence. The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso ability model views EI as a unique intelligence comprised of measurable abilities in four areas of performance. These are the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, use emotions to facilitate thought, understand complex emotions and transitions between stages of emotions, and integrate data and emotions to devise effective problem solving strategies.
3. Prior to Goleman, a model was developed by Reuven Bar-On. Bar-On was interested in better understanding the psychological basis for well-being, and his model of EI is based on personal attributes that span five broad domains namely Intrapersonal Skills,

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.talentsmart.com/media/uploads/pdfs/The\\_Business\\_Case\\_For\\_EQ.pdf](https://www.talentsmart.com/media/uploads/pdfs/The_Business_Case_For_EQ.pdf).

Interpersonal Skills, Adaptability, Stress Management, and General Mood. Reuven Bar-On seeks to measure an Emotional Quotient or EQ with his EQ-i instrument.

## 5. The BarOn EQ-i<sup>®</sup> Measurement Instrument

Based on 20 years of research by Dr. Reuven Bar-On and tested on over 500,000 individuals worldwide, BarOn EQ-i<sup>®</sup> is the premier scientific measure of emotional intelligence. The BarOn EQ-i<sup>®</sup> instrument was developed using rigorous test-development procedures and it has been scientifically demonstrated to be both reliable and valid – the two criteria that all psychometric tests must meet in order to be considered worthwhile. To my knowledge, the EQ-i<sup>®</sup>, which accurately defines and assesses the 15 competencies that constitute emotional intelligence, is the only such instrument.

### 5.1 BarOn EQ-i<sup>®</sup> Scales and Sub-Scales

BarOn EQ-i<sup>®</sup> scales are made up as follows:

<b>EQ-i<sup>®</sup> Scales and Sub-Scales</b>	<b>Competencies Assessed Within Scales and Sub-Scales</b>
<b>Intrapersonal</b>	<b>Self-Awareness and Self-Expression</b>
Self-Regard	Ability to respect and accept oneself as basically good; accept positive and negative aspects and limitations; feelings of security; inner strength, self-assuredness, self-confidence, self-adequacy.
Emotional Self-Awareness	Ability to recognize one's feelings and emotions; to differentiate between them, to know what one is feeling and why, to realistically appraise what caused the feeling; involves understanding and expression.
Assertiveness	Ability to express feelings, accept and express anger, warmth, etc; express beliefs or thoughts openly, to voice opinions, disagree, take a stand; to stand up for personal rights without being aggressive or abusive.
Independence	Ability to be self-directed and self-controlled in thinking and actions; Self-reliant in planning and decision-making, but ability to consult with others; ability to function autonomously versus needing protection or support; inner strength and confidence.
Self-Actualisation	Ability to realize potential capabilities; trying to do one's best, improve self, involving self in pursuits that lead to rich, meaningful life; a sense of purpose.
<b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>Social awareness and Interpersonal Relationship</b>
Empathy	Ability to be aware of, understand, and appreciate feelings of others; being able to emotionally read other people and pick up on social cues; ability to care and show concern for others.
Social Responsibility	Ability to demonstrate oneself as a co-operative, contributing and constructive member of one's social group; acting responsibly, having social consciousness, concern for others; ability to do things for and with others, accepting others, upholding rules.
Interpersonal Relationship	Ability to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships; intimacy, giving and receiving affection; feel at ease in social relations; positive outlook toward social exchange.
<b>Stress Management</b>	<b>Emotional Management and Regulation</b>
Stress Tolerance	Ability to withstand adverse events and stressful situations without falling apart; the capacity to choose courses of actions for coping with stress; optimistic disposition toward overcoming problems; belief that one can control and influence the situation.

Impulse Control	Ability to resist or delay an impulse, drive, or temptation to act; being composed, controlling aggression, hostility and irresponsible behaviour.
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<b>Adaptability</b>	<b>Change Management</b>
Reality Testing	Ability to assess the correspondence between what's experienced and what objectively exists; search for objective evidence to confirm, justify, and support feelings, perceptions, and thoughts; "tuning in" to immediate situation; keep things in perspective .
Flexibility	Ability to adjust one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviour to changing situations and conditions; overall ability to adapt to unfamiliar, unpredictable, and dynamic circumstances; able to change minds when evidence suggests they are mistaken; open and tolerant to new ideas.
Problem-Solving	Ability to identify and define problems and generate and implement solutions; sensing problem, confident and motivated to tackle it; defining and formulating the problem, generating multiple solutions, making decision to implement. .
<b>General Mood</b>	<b>Self-Motivation</b>
Optimism	Ability to look at the brighter side of life and maintain a positive attitude, even in face of adversity; a measure of approach to daily living; opposite of pessimism .
Happiness	Ability to feel satisfied with one's life, to enjoy self, others and have fun; associated with general feelings of cheerfulness and enthusiasm; by-product and/or barometric indicator of one's overall degree of emotional intelligence and functioning.

## 5.2 BarOn EQ-i<sup>®</sup> as a Development Framework for Project People

It should be becoming clear why emotional intelligence is so important for project managers. However, this is of limited use unless:

- It is possible to measure the appropriate behavioural aspects.
- It is possible to develop and implement strategies to develop those behaviours that have potential for enhancement, and finally;
- It is possible to measure the impact of that implementation.

BarOn EQ-i<sup>®</sup> provides such a framework. It is clear that the scales and sub-scales above are key competencies for project management. Some may be more key than others but all have a part to play in dealing with the many challenges that exist in projects. A brief example of how the BarOn EQ-i<sup>®</sup> instrument can be used as a project coaching tool is outlined below for the 'Self-Regard' scale.

<b>Self-Regard Scale - Competencies, Relevance and Development Strategies</b>
<p><u>Description:</u> Ability to respect and accept oneself as basically good; accept positive and negative aspects and limitations; feelings of security; inner strength, self-assuredness, self-confidence, self-adequacy.</p>
<p><u>Relevance to Project Management</u> This attribute of emotional intelligence is associated with many of the key personal characteristics that are necessary for effective performance. If high, the project manager will be self assured, feel fulfilled and have high self esteem.</p> <p>There will be a good sense of and acceptance of self. Therefore, these project managers will know their strengths and weaknesses and will not be afraid to put up their hands and admit to being wrong. They also accept that they don't know all of the answers and will give latitude to the team.</p>

### Impacts of Being too High

However, there is a cost for being too high. This manifests itself in cockiness, arrogance and complacency. The project manager may be getting good information and solutions from the team but may do nothing with them. There may be a “my way or the highway” attitude. Potential for improvement is limited as accepting feedback is difficult and may be ignored and there will be no recognition of the need for growth.

### Impacts of Being too Low

At the lower end of the scale, project managers will be unsure of themselves and may feel personal inadequacy and have an inferiority complex. The team and wider stakeholder community will sense the situation and may lack that vital confidence factor in the ability of the project manager. Project managers will probably struggle, especially in complex projects where more enhanced EI competencies are necessary for high performance.

### Strategies for Development

- Set individual and team goals that are challenging but achievable. Make sure the goals are SMART or **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime bound. Work with your team to set goals and make sure that they buy-in and take ownership.
- Recognise project achievement and your part in it. Reflect on a daily basis on what has been achieved and reward yourself appropriately.
- Find another project manager with high self-regard and use them as a role model and/or ask them to be your mentor. Don't be shy as people generally love passing on their knowledge and skills and will be flattered by your asking.
- Get a project or an executive coach to coach you in emotional intelligence. Take the BarOn EQ-i<sup>®</sup> instrument and put a development plan in place
- Do some self-exploration exercises. List your strengths and areas for development. Use a trusted friend, work colleague or love to help you.

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Tom holds a Masters in Project Management from the University of Limerick, a B.Sc. in Information Technology from Dublin City University and a Diploma in Executive Coaching from the Irish Management Institute (IMI). In addition, Tom is a fully accredited and experienced Executive Coach and is certified in the use of the BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory EQ-i<sup>®</sup> instrument. In addition, he has been certified as a Project Management Professional (PMP) by the Project Management Institute (PMI) and as a Certified Training Professional (CTP) by the Irish Computer Society.

Tom is the founder and CEO of PM Edge and has applied his unique experience and insights to the design and delivery of practical and innovative training and coaching programmes that help organisations make their projects work.

PM Edge would be delighted to discuss ways we can work together to make your projects work. Please feel free to contact us at any time.

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