THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI)  
ON PROJECT OUTCOMES

Literature Review

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Abstract

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the concept that benefits arise from awareness of emotions in social interactions and personal decision making. Project Management is a field which requires communication and coordination of human resources to ensure successful outcomes. This literature review identifies a selected group of works which provide further insight to the effectiveness of EI in Project Management environments to produce positive outcomes.

Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a terminology used to describe the psychological theory that by being aware of emotions, one can achieve a greater outcome, particularly in social situations (Coleman, 2008; Goleman, 1995). Project Management in the Information Technology (IT) sector presents challenges of complexity compounded by communication, organizational commitment, and complexity of technologies (Trejo, 2014). The following literature review was compiled to explore further the topic of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and to seek evidence which proves that Emotional Intelligence produces an effect on project outcomes. The focus of the research was based upon the following research question: Projects managed by Project Managers who are trained in Emotional Intelligence are more successful than Projects managed without Emotional Intelligence, all things being equal. The following categorical relationships were covered concerning this topic:

1. Broad Overview of EI Meaning, Key Competencies, and Educational Environments
2. EI and its Relationship to Project Management and Leadership
3. Multi-cultural Perspectives Regarding the Effectiveness of EI
4. Effectiveness of EI in IT Environments

Literature Review

*(1) Broad Overview of EI Meaning, Key Competencies, and Educational Environments*

Goleman (1995) presents Emotional Intelligence (EI) as an alternate view point into the way we humans think, decide, and perceive. Goleman presents the role of emotions as an often-overlooked part of critical thinking and decision making within the lens of how we live. Goleman contrasts modern life with primal life to display how emotions have played an equally important role to higher level reasoning in our ability to be successful throughout evolution. Goleman identifies the relationship between emotion and the biological signatures with which we humans adopt as a response to the situations of life, regardless of cultural diversity. These signatures and responses correlate; anger and fear prepare the body to defend itself, whereas the opposite, love and happiness prepare the body for cooperation and readiness to provide. Goleman argues that the ability to react to, perceive, and be aware of one’s own emotions and the emotions of those around them provides more value and insight than the abilities provided by high level critical thinking as a standalone component.

Goleman summarizes the traits of emotional intelligence as the ability to maintain self-control, to be persistent, and to have zeal. Goleman argues that the popular Intelligence Quotient (IQ) testing does little to paint a complete picture of one’s ability to be successful in life. Goleman argues that the abilities provided by emotional intelligence have much more weight on an individual’s success, where decision making, and critical thinking combine to tackle modern life’s complex challenges. Goleman identifies emotional reaction as a determinant factor of success in tackling life’s curveballs, arguing that intelligence and higher-level thinking are only so effective in practical decision-making capability. Emotional Intelligence by Goleman provides a view point into the basis of how Emotional Intelligence can improve the success of an individual in life, rather than specifically applying the concept to a field, like Project Management. However, much of the insights shared do coincide with what may be an important part of what makes a project successful or not, where decision making should be performed with the awareness of an emotional component.

Srikanth and Sonawat (2014) presents Emotional Intelligence as a measure called the Emotional Quotient (EQ) which impacts ones’ life, wellbeing, and the management of self and relationships through emotional awareness. Srikanth et al. provides an overview of EI, introducing the concept, various models, skills which exemplify the meaning of EI, and how EI contributes to quality of life. Srikanth et al. suggests that Emotional Intelligence is a way of life, where the self diagnosis of one’s own emotions allows for a more balanced and healthy life style. By monitoring behavior and deciding to enforce corrective action to cope with and manage negative emotions, behavior can change to garner positive outcomes.

Srikanth et al. suggests that this type of thinking and level of awareness is a critical element in leadership. In discussing the models of EI proposed, Srikanth et al. cites Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) who defined the competencies of EI into four areas, “…self-awareness, self-management, awareness of others & empathy and management of social relationships.” Srikanth et al. develop on the presented models by suggesting key skills utilized in EI. Srikanth et al. classifies Emotional literacy as the ability to identify emotions from the broad spectrum of emotions displayed through physical and vocal expression. Emotional Self-awareness is classified as the ability to perceive and perfect one’s own emotional response to situations and people. Skills in Managing Emotions is classified as the ability to establish self-destiny by recognizing negative emotions and implementing actions to correct to positive emotions. Self-motivation is classified as the ability to understand that emotions can determine one’s ability to achieve and set goals. Optimism is classified as the ability to persevere through trough periods of emotional states, developing mindfulness of a higher plane of reasoning, where planning and execution of actions overcomes hurdles along the journey of a goal. Empathy, Empathic Listening, and Skills in Relationship Management are identified as social skills in which active listening, the understanding of others expressed emotions, and the ability to influence emotions of others contributes to leadership and management skills.

Srikanth et al. concludes by emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership, organizational change, the performance of management, and the balance between occupational stress and life satisfaction. Citing Lord, Kliminski, & Kanfer (2002), “…it is not uncommon to use emotions and emotion related thoughts and behavior as the ingredients in an institutionalized recipe of emotional culture.”

Connolly and Reinicke (2017) present a study performed in a small classroom environment with undergraduate students, aimed at identifying facilitation techniques for Emotional Intelligence (EI) focused learning. Connolly et al. identify the importance of EI in the Information Technology (IT) sector by stating that the communication of project managers is a critical element in the success of IT projects. Connolly et al. applied active learning to teach soft skills, claiming that these skillsets are difficult to learn unless encountered through hands on experience.

*(2) EI and its Relationship to Project Management and Leadership*

Gale (2006) presents a brief article which shares the findings of Richard Boyatzis, Ph.D., professor of Psychology at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, OH. The article identifies traits common to high performing managers which include Self-awareness, Social awareness, Self-management, and Relationship management. Dr. Boyatzis states that because emotional reactions proceed critical decision making, emotions play a key role in determining what we think and how we react. Dr. Boyatzis sums the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership and management by stating, “When a leader’s emotional response isn’t appropriate for the situation followers lose confidence” (pp. 26).

Clarke (2010) presents the results of a study which compares the areas of Emotional Intelligence (EI) with those of Project Management competencies (PM) and Transformational Leadership (TL) performed in The United Kingdom. The findings characterize, and attribute specific behaviors, skills, and traits associated with EI which have shown significant correlation to the success of a project. Clarke presents 5 hypotheses for study which predict positive association between emotional intelligence ability and key areas of management competence, which include teamwork, communication, attentiveness, conflict management & resolution, and transformational leadership. The result of the 67-participant study concluded that teamwork had partial correlation with EI. Communication showed little significance among participants as having correlation with EI. Partial support for conflict management & resolution was found to be associated with EI. Hypothesis 5, regarding transformational leadership, were found to have partial significance among study participants. These results identify a correlation between specific project management competencies and the use of EI. Most notably is the use of transformational leadership. Clarke concludes stating that empathy was found to be a more significant contributor to success in a project than cognitive ability, providing evidence of EI’s worth in project management environments.

Jain and Duggal (2016) presents the result of a study which aims to analyze the influence of Transformational Leadership (TL) and Emotional Intelligence (EI) tactics by project managers and their respective impacts on Organizational Commitment (OC) and the performance of an organization. Jain et al. cites multiple studies which conclude that a correlation between OC and TL exist and that OC is a key element in project success. Jain et al. hypothesized that a positive and significant relationship exists between OC and EI. The study was performed on 100 professionals all of which had at least 5 years of experience in an Information Technology (IT) environment in India. Identified areas of project management competencies include idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. The study concluded that among all identified areas of project management competencies there was positive correlation to organizational commitment. The most prevalent competency as it related to organizational commitment was found to be relationship management. Jain et al. acknowledges that the study results have limitations in cultural coverage, variability in workplace differences, and sector coverage outside of the IT environment. Jain et al. concludes that the study presents the importance of the use of EI project management competencies has a positive correlation to the commitment of employees to an organization, influencing the success of organizational outcomes.

*(3) Multi-cultural Perspectives Regarding the Effectiveness of EI*

Godse and Thingujam (2010) performed a study involving 81 Information Technology (IT) professionals in India. Their study aimed to identify the relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution styles utilized in management. Godse et al. states that the correlation provides unique meaning to the skillsets which make up EI, involving the identification of, the use of, the understanding of, and the regulation of one’s own emotions as a project manager.

Godse et al. proposed five hypotheses for study which encompass correlations of varying methods of managing people in conflict scenarios. These methods include integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising. The first hypothesis proposes the integrating style of conflict resolution positively correlates with EI. The second hypothesis proposes that a dominating style of conflict resolution positively correlates with EI. The third hypothesis proposes that an obliging style of conflict resolution is not correlated with EI. The fourth hypothesis proposes that an avoiding style of conflict resolution is negatively correlated with EI. The fifth hypothesis proposes that a compromising style of conflict resolution is not correlated with EI. The results of the study conclude that integrating style of conflict resolution is often used by emotionally intelligent employees, because of its focus on the high concern of self and others. However, the second hypothesis that dominating was found to have no supporting evidence of emotional intelligence.

Godse et al. states that this hypothesis may have been impacted by cultural differences, because India culture involves collectivism and lower levels of individualism. The third and fifth hypothesis were supported, with low confidence, that obliging and compromising have little correlation with emotional intelligence tactics. The fourth hypothesis was accepted, concluding that avoiding style of conflict resolution is negatively correlated with EI. Godse et al. states that “it is understandable in this case that where a person is not able to deal with the situation emotionally, he tries to avoid the situation.” This embraces the relationship between conflict management and EI capability. Godse et al. concludes stating that a correlation between EI and conflict resolution exists within the IT community. Godse et al. concludes that it would be beneficial to recruit and train employees to be more emotionally intelligent as to improve productivity, particularly in managing sensitive conflicts within an organization.

Trejo (2016) presents a study which identifies a relationship between the use of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and project outcomes among 88 Hispanic employees in The United States within the technology sector. The proposed research question specifically targets the use of EI and its effectiveness in producing statistically significant positive project outcomes. Specific predictor variables were used to identify EI competencies including Emotional Self Awareness, Emotional Self-Management, Emotional Awareness of Others, and Emotional Management of Others. Project outcomes were determined based upon Project Timeliness, Budget, and Scope. Trejo utilized a survey based study to identify experienced correlations between EI and project outcomes. Trejo concludes the study by stating that a moderate relationship between EI competencies exists among Time and Budget concerns, whereas Scope had a weak positive relationship with EI competencies. Overall, a statistically significant positive relationship was displayed between EI competencies and the project outcome variables. Trejo recommends that high technology arena organizations utilize an employee training program designed to increase emotional intelligence. Trejo mentions the growing minority of Hispanic workers in the U.S. and exclaims that despite the surveys focus on the Hispanic working community, the benefits of EI reach beyond cultural differences.

Rezvani et al. (2016) present the results of a field study aimed to identify how Emotional Intelligence (EI) contributes to project outcomes within the Australian defense industry, citing the results of 373 participants. The study asked participants to answer self-ranked questions based upon their level of perceived EI. Correlations in the answers would provide evidence of the effectiveness of EI in project outcomes as a positive contributor to project success, job satisfaction, and trust factors. Rezvani et al. concluded that the study produced positive correlations among EI and project success, job satisfaction, and trust factors. Despite the survey conclusion, Rezvani et al. proposed that the chosen areas of impact only present a slice of the impact created by employing EI in project management. Concluding remarks state that the primary insight gleaned from the survey was that positivity in the face of stressful work environments by leadership had a significant positive effect on followers’ success, therefore impacting project outcomes to be a success as well. Rezvani et al. acknowledges limitations caused by industry, cultural differences, and a sample set comprised of management personnel.

*(4) Effectiveness of EI in IT Environments*

Hendon, Powell, & Wimmer (2017) present a study which identifies correlations between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Communication Aptitude (CA) skills as a self-reported indicator among 111 United States based Information Technology (IT) professionals. Hendon et al. begin their study by making broad claims regarding the aptitude of most IT professionals, claiming that most are introverted, and therefore are lacking in interpersonal skills. This claim is not supported by any cited evidence. In the literature review, Hendon et al. cites Spath, Bauer, and Praeg (2010) which states the need for communicative IT professionals, quoting a Senior IT manager, “I would rather hire someone who may not be as technically strong but can work and communicate with our clients effectively.” Hendon et al. outlined the purpose of their research by asking, “Will a relationship between an IT professional’s level of [EI] and level of [CA] be found?” (pp. 167). The methodology used to measure correlation between EI and CA involves two separate tests provided as a singular online survey. Interspersed questions regarding EI and CA capability were asked of the participants to identify self-reported skillsets. The results of the study found a significant positive correlation between EI and CA tests. Hendon et al. states that limitations of the study include bias of self-reported skillsets of the individuals at the time of the test. Hendon et al. concludes by stating that soft skills play in an important role in project success and are therefore increasingly in demand.

Concluding Remarks

Emotional Intelligence (EI) provides a wide range of possibility for study due to its application across life, work, school, and various organizational structure where communication occurs to achieve a shared purpose. When people unite at the direction of a leader or manager, progress occurs when cohesive and healthy relationships exist. The studies presented in this literature review identify the ways in which EI can impact the future of project outcomes. Early education, cultural differences, workplace differences, leadership tactics, and a wide spectrum of variability inherent with the chaos of life are what make EI difficult to measure as affecting positive change on situations encountered. EI is difficult to measure and quantify because of the subjectivity of every emotionally impacted situation. Despite this, there appears to be significant evidence that being mindful of the effects which emotions play in accomplishing goals and involving people has a very real and positive impact on our perception of how we can improve our ability to control and be mindful of emotions.

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