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Does emotional intelligence impact team performance in construction projects? Exploring the mediating role of trust and moderating role of work status

Ariba Abid · Aamer Hanif* · Amna Khan

Abstract Emotional intelligence (EI) is an essential part of the many types of intelligences an individual possesses. The outcome of interactions in personal life as well as within the organization depend upon how high or low the Emotional Quotient (EQ) is. Organizations, nowadays, specifically design tests for hiring people with higher EQ since the emotional intelligence of a team member leaves an impact on its performance. The major goal of this research is to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and team performance, as well as the impact of employee work status on these two. The research also examines the mediating role of trust among team members on team performance in projects. Responses from 346 participants working for construction projects have been used for analysis. The results showed that emotional intelligence is an important factor in construction projects as it affects team performance in projects while trust mediates the relationship between team emotional intelligence and team performance. Work status plays a moderating role for emotional intelligence and its outcome on project team performance. A limitation of this research is conducting analysis in construction industry only which future studies could be done in different occupational sectors considering various management positions. Additionally, interviews could be conducted for future studies with additional manpower such as daily wagers and contractual employees in the construction sector.

Keywords emotional intelligence, team performance, trust, work status, construction industry, projects

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1 Introduction

Emotional intelligence is basically the ability for sensing, evaluating, and controlling emotions by oneself. In organizational structures, higher levels of emotional intelligence are sought after as emotional stability helps ensures tactful decision making. Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been recognized as a major concept in the workplace because of its significant impact on performance and organization success (Goleman (1996)). While IQ ensures technical work is carried out properly, EI ensures that the work is carried out in a cohesive environment inter and intra team conflicts are resolved amicably leading the project to success. Further, it can be said that the emotional intelligent teams as well as individuals foster better relationship and increased level of trust leading to a boost in project team performance (Jamshed and Majeed 2018). This study focuses on these points by looking towards the multilevel examination which is derived from the relationship between emotional intelligence and team performance (Rezvani et al 2018).

The studies conducted previously have examined the impact of task independence with the EI and performance of the team in the IT sector (Aziz et al 2019) but impact of work status has not been studied as a mediating factor between emotional intelligence and team performance. While many studies done in the context of development projects in Pakistan have focused on factors like cost reduction, health and safety improvement, there is evidence that project failure is largely attributed to leadership issues and factors like lack of emotional intelligence in leaders (Fareed et al 2021). Construction industry is one of the leading industries in Pakistan but not many researches have been carried out on the effect of emotional intelligence on project management and its shortcomings in this industry which is a major disadvantage. Furthermore, researchers have analyzed the effect of emotional intelligence on the team performance which in turn impacts the project success (Black et al 2018). This research aims to contribute as empirical investigation by setting Work Status as a moderator variable for EI to team performance which is considered a significant contribution of this research as it fills a gap in literature. Work status indicates different level of employees and their inherent mindset within any organization. Fundamentally, the construction projects are vulnerable because of numerous work statuses that exist within the hierarchies of the organization as this industry fosters a large number of workforce that is contractual and on daily wages as compared to permanent roles in other industries such as software and technology companies. This kind of structure requires more conflict resolution and higher level of trust building measures (Wu et al 2017). This study will examine the impact of work status on EI and also investigate effect of work status on EI and project team performance within the construction industry in Pakistan.

1.1 Gap analysis and motivation for research

Although previous researchers have focused on emotional intelligence and mainly on the trust issues during the execution of the projects, these have not suffi-

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ciently explored factors combining trust and work status of employees in different industries including the factor emotional intelligence (Sadvyy et al 2021). As the leading industry in Pakistan, includes the construction sector, not many studies regarding emotional intelligence have been done in this field which is a major shortcoming. Furthermore, the researchers analyze the effect of emotional intelligence on performance which impacts the project success. The research will contribute as an empirical investigation by setting Work Status as a moderator variable EI to team performance. As work status indicates a different level of management and different mindset individuals in any organization. Fundamentally construction projects are considered by the vulnerability because of numerous variables that incorporate undertakings rebuilding, transformation and changes in the assets that are not accessible and moving of the business needs.

2 Literature review

The theoretical foundation of this research work is in the theory of emotional intelligence as it focuses on recognizing and using the emotional states of self and others for regulating behavior and solving problems in the larger context (Goleman 1996), thereby resulting in emotional and social competencies that have in influence on performance, behavior and relationships (Jie et al 2020).

2.1 Team EI and project team performance

Emotional Intelligence (EI) plays major role in the success of projects since it is about interpersonal relationships too and plays a significant role in resolution of conflicts and tackling issues among team members. Previously many studies showed the different dimensions and concepts of EI. Past observational researches illustrate that emotional intelligence has positive interface with execution in construction projects and boosts the project performance (Khosravi et al 2020). Construction industry of Pakistan is a huge industry. People working there come from diverse backgrounds when contrasted with the people working at any industry; requiring higher degree of collaboration and inter-team harmony (Zhang and Fan 2013). In Pakistan development industry, little importance is given to the capacity of a person's feelings and results have shown that psychological capital and EI has positive impact in managing the success of project team (Sarwar et al 2017).

Many studies conducted in work environments, other than the construction sector have also established a positive link between emotional intelligence and team performance (Zeidner and Matthews 2017; Van Rooy and Viswesvaran 2004; Pfeiffer 2001). As a result of these studies, many businesses and construction industries are recognizing the need of soft and interpersonal skills such as communication, teamwork, conflict resolution and management of team working on the projects. All of these abilities are the part of emotional intelligence and studies have shown that having a high level of emotional intelligence and

theses abilities leads to improved performance, success of the project and management in a variety of fields (Saini and Soni 2016). Regarding the performance, a "high performance" alludes to gathering of objective centered people with positive attitude and integral abilities who team up, develop and produce reliably predominant outcomes. Through shared objectives, shared administration, collaborative effort, open correspondence, clear assumptions, and gathered work guidelines, compromise and a strong sense of responsibility and trust, among the team members, the team members persevere in their pursuit of project execution (Aga et al 2016). After analyzing the previous studies, following hypothesis has been proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Team EI will have significant positive effect on project team performance (See Fig. 1).

2.2 Mediating role of trust on team EI and project team performance

Trust is important for an effective team performance and teams success in any project. It is basically defined as a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions and behavior of another (Rousseau et al 1998). Trust implies that a person relies on another person to make the best decision possible. Because it creates a sense of safety, trust is crucial for a compelling group. Team members that are more inclined to open, accept appropriate challenges, and accept mistakes when they feel safe with one another. Without trust there is less development and cooperation between the teams as well as less efficiency and people spend time securing their feelings rather than being helpful (Costa et al, 2001). Trust is basically the binding glue that compels team members to start working towards the desired goal (McEvily et al 2003; Maurer 2010; Pinjani and Palvia 2013). Additionally, it has been exhibited in numerous past examinations that EI is that key in a teams conduct and it addresses the fundamental capability for building trust among the colleagues in order to grow as a team (Barczak et al 2010; Christie et al 2015). Disagreements in a team result in disorientation of the project goals and gives rise to disharmony.

The concept of trust has been examined in project studies in a variety of contexts, including construction, multi-national disaster projects, product development etc. (McLaren and Loosemore 2019; Smyth et al 2010; Lighthart et al 2016; Shazi et al 2015). Emotional contracting has been advocated to build trust in project relationships and among team members, which is linked to the numerous partnering and task practices in the projects, resulting in improved team performance and a high project success rate (??). When trust among the team members is low, it increases the conflict between the team members and as well as it can ruin the relationship of a project manager with their team which results in team members redirecting their efforts towards other pursuits thus affecting the performance of a team in that particular project (Han and Harms 2010; Chiochio et al 2011). The undertaking of a fundamental project goal can

undergo damage if the trust issues emerge between the team and project manager. Lack of trust causes work related stress among team members and it has also been found that this stress can cause with the mental health issues. The deteriorating mental health caused by work stress can further decrease the trust between the team members (Yesufu 2020). Therefore, following hypothesis has been proposed:

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between team EI and project team performance will be mediated by trust (See Fig. 1).

2.3 Moderating role of work status on team EI and project team performance

In the project management literature, there have been very few studies on the nature of work status. The state that distinguishes one employee from another in their relationship with the company or the organization is known as the work status (Setyabudi et al 2021). Previous studies have indicated that part time workers are less invested in organization and its outcomes (Higgins et al 2000; Thorsteinson 2003; Barnett and Hall 2001). It has also been determined, that part time workers are less devoted than full time workers and hence have lower chances of professional advancement (Kropf 1998; McDonald et al 2009). Despite this fact, number of scholars have concluded the differences in the job attitude of the part-time and full-time employees. Organizational policies and behaviors discriminate between part time and full-time employees. Also, full-time workers have relatively substantial opportunities and satisfy the organization with better performances as they are more invested in performing their tasks as compare to the part-time employees (De Cuyper et al 2017; Isaksson et al 2010). The available studies regarding work status have evaluated the similarities and differences of the psychology of part time and full time employee in terms of their commitments and performance but lacks in the conceptual frameworks (Soto and Rojas 2019). In the construction sector, less studies have been conducted to examine the employees emotional intelligence as full-time or part-time employees.

There is lack of research that would depict the fundamental difference between the part time and full-time employees, particularly in terms of emotional intelligence and overall team performance. It has been identified that a full time employee is much more confident and better positioned to fulfil the job tasks as well as invested in ones own development eventually leading to better performance as a team to achieve the main goal (Isaksson et al 2010). Accordingly, it has been said that employees working full-time have a much positive impact on the teams performance as well as towards their job than those of the part time employees (Joung et al 2018). It has also been identified that the part time employees usually leave the organization regardless of whether they are satisfied with their jobs or even if they are effectively committed to the organization in order to get the full time employment (Joung et al 2018). So, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Work Status will moderate the relationship between team EI and project team performance (See Fig. 1).

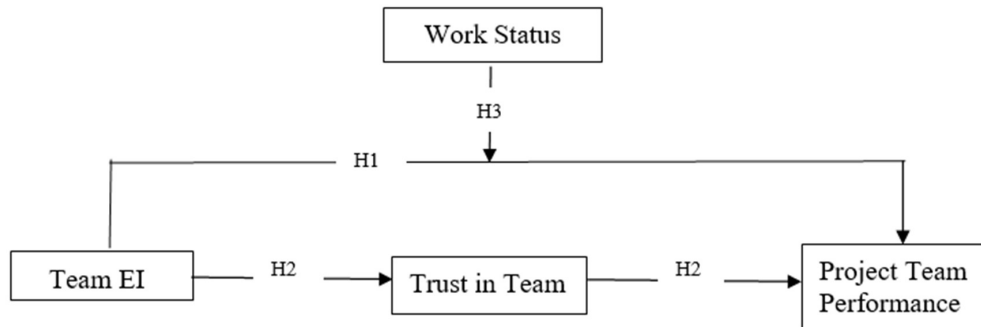


Fig. 1: Proposed research model

3 Overview of IPOs in Pakistan

3.1 Participants and sample

The current study has collected the data from the Pakistan's construction industry. All the respondents and participants in the study are of different managerial levels. All respondents were part of construction firms in Pakistan including companies from the private as well as the public sector. The study applied quantitative research method for the collection of the data and further experiments. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect research data. This method was selected since it was considered appropriate to choose elements for data collection according to judgement of the researcher which was to collect a representative sample using sound judgment when targeting suitably qualified employees from construction sector in order to save time and money (Black et al 2018). Around 400 questionnaires were sent via email to the construction industries managers and out of this 346 were submitted. The review of demographic characteristics of the sample suggests that about 66% employees were males and 34% were the females in the industry. From these employees 71% employees work status was fulltime and 29% were part-time workers. The workers were at different levels in management (top, middle and lower) with various years of experience.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Team Emotional Intelligence

This research adopted a four item scale to measure team emotional intelligence (Wong and Law 2017). Participants were required to rate the extent to which the need to be emotionally intelligent and attached to their team members to support and help them. A sample item is Spend a lot of time with every person whom I work with. Items were presented on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for this variable was 0.732.

3.2.2 Project Team Performance

Adopted 5-item scale to measure the performance of the project team (Lorsch et al 1987). Participants were asked to rate the performance of the team in a project. A sample item from the scale is The team accomplishes its task on time. Responses were scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha was measured to be 0.761.

3.2.3 Trust

For trust, 5-item scale was adopted (Cook and Wall 1980). Respondents were asked to respond on the rate of trust between them and their team members. A sample item from scale is I can trust my team I work with to lend me a hand if I needed it. Responses were scored at 5-point Likert-scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha measured for trust was 0.725.

3.2.4 Data analysis

SPSS software was used for data analysis and testing of the study hypotheses. To facilitate analysis, the quantitative data was first coded and entered into the SPSS software. The coded data allowed for a reduction in errors throughout the data analysis. The use of a Likert scale aided in the analysis. The Likert scale is a quantitative way to determining the relevance of two or more variables.

3.3 Research Results

3.3.1 Descriptive Statistics and correlation

Descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation of study variables is given in Table 1. The mean calculated for the team EI is 3.781. Further,

for the teams performance in the project the mean is calculated as 3.922. The mediator, trusts mean is calculated as 3.938. Same like the mean calculated for each variable, standard deviation has also been shown in the second column. Further, by analyzing the correlation between the variables, it is demonstrated that team EI has the positive significance relationship with all the variables in this study. No issues with multicollinearity were detected in the analysis.

Table 1: Mean, standard deviations and correlation of all variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	Cronbach Alpha
1. Team EI	3.782	0.6803	-			0.732
2. Team Performance	3.922	0.6453	.628**	-		0.761
3. Trust	3.938	0.6243	.643**	.725**	-	0.725

Note, N= 346. **p < .001

3.4 Trust as a mediator between team EI and project team performance

Table. 2 shows the mediation analysis results and its various components which have been obtained as a result of undertaking a series of regression analyses. Looking at the total effect, the results show that Team EI has a significant impact on team performance in projects as the coefficient was 0.595, SE = 0.0398, p<0.001.

Table 2: Indirect and Total Effects

Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	z	P
Indirect Component	Team_EI Trust.in.Team	0.335	0.0479	0.244	0.433	7	.001
	Team_EI Trust.in.Team	0.59	0.0501	0.488	0.681	11.78	<.001
	Trust.in.Team Team_Perform	0.567	0.0661	0.427	0.689	8.58	<.001
Direct Total	Team_EI Team_Perform	0.26	0.0678	0.131	0.398	3.84	<.001
	Team_EI Team_Perform	0.595	0.0398	0.517	0.673	14.97	<.001

95% confidence interval

Analyzing the indirect effects, the results indicate that Trust in Teams significantly mediates the relationship between Team EI and Team performance in projects, Estimate = 0.335, $z=7$, $p<0.001$, (95% CI = 0.244 to 0.433). The bias corrected confidence intervals were calculated based upon 2000 sampling iterations. Since the confidence interval does not contain zero, this is an evidence of a non-zero regression estimate indicating occurrence of mediation. The results also suggest that even after considering the mediating role of Trust in the model, Team EI has a significant positive impact on Team performance in projects ($B=0.628$, $z = 14.97$, $p<0.001$).

3.5 Work status as a moderator

Multiple regression analyses was performed to analyze evidence for moderation due to employee work status. The results are provided in Table 3. Individually, Team EI positively predicted Team performance in projects (Estimate = 0.5631, $Z=10.4$, $p<0.001$). However, work status served as a negative but nonsignificant predictor (Estimate = -0.0404, $SE=0.0602$, $p=0.053$). Looking at the moderating effect, it was observed that work status significantly moderated the relationship between Team EI and Team performance in projects (Estimate=0.2634, $SE=0.1053$, $p<0.05$). It is also evident from the bias corrected confidence intervals obtained after 2000 sampling iterations (95%CI = 0.0473 to 0.4671). Since the confidence interval does not include zero, there is evidence of moderation.

Table 3: Moderation Estimates

	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	Z	p
Team_EI	0.5631	0.0541	0.4509	0.6602	10.4	<.001
Work_S	-0.0404	0.0602	-0.1605	0.0833	-0.67	0.503
Team_EI x Work_S	0.2634	0.1053	0.0473	0.4671	2.501	0.012

95% confidence interval

The simple slopes analysis reveals moderating effects of work status for both full and part time employees. Table 4 provided the conditional effects of predictor variable (Team EI) on two levels of the moderating variable work status (full time and part time).

Table 4: Conditional Effects of Predictor at Levels of Work Status

	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	Z	p
Full Time	0.486	0.051	0.385	0.587	9.485	.001
Part Time	0.75	0.061	0.629	0.87	12.259	.001

95% confidence interval

As levels of Team EI increase, the relationship between Team EI and Team performance in projects starts to become stronger for part time employees. In other words, at lower levels of team EI, full time employees are likely to perform better in project teams but as team EI increases, part time employees become significantly better when performing in project teams. These effects are depicted in Figure 2.

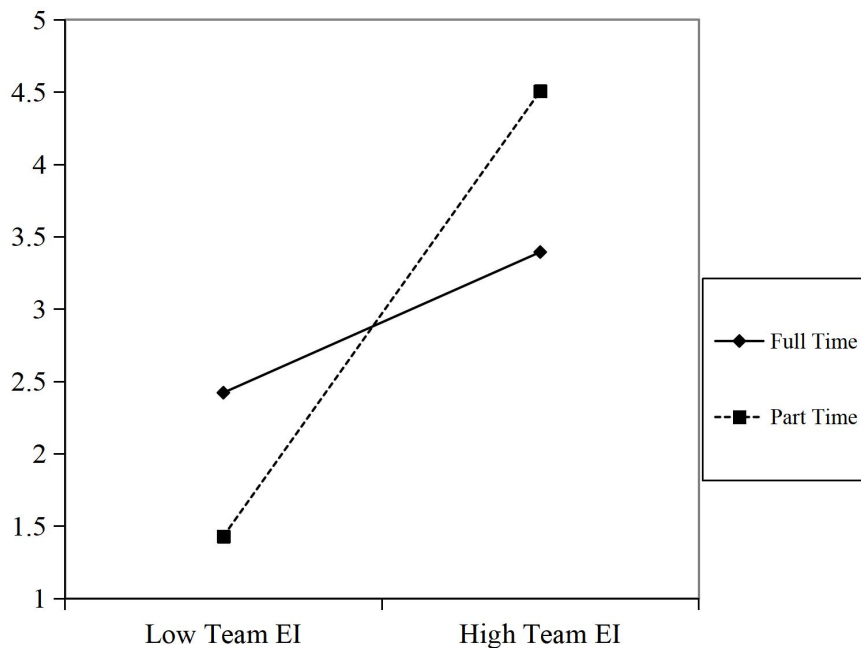


Fig. 2: Moderating effect of Work Status

shows the relationship of the team emotional intelligence and project team performance. It is evident that as Team EI increases, team performance of the employees also increases and the relationship is stronger for part time employees.

3.6 Discussion

This study demonstrates that the emotional intelligence has a favorable and significant impact on project team and performance at the team level and it supports our proposed hypothesis 1. The primary purpose of this research was to identify the effect of emotional intelligence on the team performance in Pakistan construction sector. The results are in agreement with previously published studies and indicate team emotional intelligence characteristics of project team

members impacting the performance in the construction industry projects. Previously many studies have been done regarding the impact of EI in different aspects and these studies have proven the effect of EI on team performance during the execution phase (Rezvani et al 2018). EI is required for innovation in an enterprise environment (Jie et al 2020). In another study, researchers investigated how ability and trait EI was positively related to work under pressure (Udayar et al 2020). Previous research also suggests that the EI of a team in a project adds to the collective performance of the team members (Aziz et al 2019). It has been said that the EI acts as a tool for understanding emotions, thoughts and the behavior of an individual (Rezvani et al 2018). This behavior and management of emotion can impact any individual working at any industry.

This finding supported hypothesis 2 and is also in agreement with previous published studies (Costa et al 2018; Jaakson et al 2018). However, it must be appreciated that trust is initially conceptualized by team members starting at an individual level and then it propagates across teams with the passage of time as members interact with each other towards achieving common goals. This is important in the construction industry where task interdependence is paramount and requires higher levels of trust among team members as each builds on the work and tasks initiated and planned by other team members.

Construction industry of Pakistan is a vast industry. However, in this industry not much value has been given to the emotional ability of a team although results from previous studies have shown that the EI has a significant effect on the performance of team (Mirzaei Daryani et al 2017; Arfara et al 2018). Our research has not only examined the positive link between EI and teams performance but also determined the effect of the work status on the performance for the projects in Pakistans construction industry. It has been established in the research that the work status influences the project performances in context of emotional intelligence. In evaluating the results, the findings show that the influence of less emotionally stable employee has a negative effect on the performance especially if employee is part time as compared to the full-time employees. Similar studies have been done regarding the psychological effect of employee types and supports the research results (Yesufu 2020). Furthermore, contrary to popular belief, part time employees have indicated greater influence on team performance at higher levels of team EI. This is in agreement with a previous research (Giannikis and Mihaïl 2011) where it was observed that part time employees were spending less time in organizations so they were less likely to indulge in unpleasant situations and feelings of dissatisfaction. Thus, they were more inclined to contribute to project work in a positive way.

It has also been found in this research that trust is a significant factor for team members and plays a mediating role when predicting team performance in projects.

4 Conclusion

From this research it has been concluded that many factors affect the performance of a team in a project. So, basically by the results and the summarized findings following conclusions have been made:

Firstly, that how important the emotional intelligence is at any level of the organization. In the context of Pakistans construction industry, if the emotional intelligence of an employee or any worker within project team is not very high meaning that the management of emotions is weak, then it could directly affect the employee in different aspects of their job and tasks given as well as the project team performance as a whole.

Secondly, trust is a very important factor in any industry. By studying the construction industry, it has been seen that while working in large-scale project, the employees mostly work in teams to achieve the main goal in a specific timeline. If there is no trust between the team members regarding any task or even if there are conflicts that could be personal or professional, that could have a drastic effect on the project. If the trust level is good and high between the team members the performance accordingly enhances and work is done efficiently and with cohesion. Projects managers need to develop trust between their team members for the better outcomes and performances.

Third, according to the results it has been identified that work status affects the performance. Results have shown that the part time employees perform well at higher levels of team emotional intelligence than that of full-time working employees. Since construction industry employs large number of part time workers, managers should invest in building stringer team relationships even for shorter times to enable better team performance in projects. Based on the key points of the study, these factors should be focused in order to improve the performance of the project team.

4.1 Practical implications and future directions

The data from this study reveals several practical implications for the future studies. Firstly, it would be valuable to give importance to the soft skills identified in this research when hiring employees for construction projects. The construction industry in Pakistan is one of the biggest industries which employes people from very diverse backgrounds so this study can be used to invest in trainings that boost and improve emotional and intellectual intelligence of managers in the construction industry and to make them more effective when solving issues. Future studies with reference to this study can choose different variables like task interdependence to augment the present research model accordingly. In addition to the practical implications and based on the findings of the study, the emotional intelligence is a factor in any project which is essential for better results and outcomes in any project. It is recommended to use interviews for future studies to get in depth measure of EI in the field. Other type of work statuses such as daily wagers and contractual can also be studied.

Additionally, further research could be done in different occupational sectors considering various ranks and job places.

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