

# Project Manager's Competence in Emotional Intelligence

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## ***The Focus on Technical Competences***

We still see frequent talk about projects and the "triple constraint". In 1994, a project manager mentioned four constraints - cost, schedule, performance, and people. He considered the human factor to be as important as the other three, but project managers may often overlook people as a critical part of their projects. Project management literature gives little or no attention to how people contribute to the success of projects.

Availability of people to staff a project is important, but more important is how the staff is managed to get the best performance possible. Tapping the potential and motivating individuals and teams to work toward a common goal is a job for the project manager. More often than not, the project manager is more qualified to manage the technical progress of the project than to lead the team to deliver the best product in the most efficient manner.

In the 1980s, William H. Taft, IV, then Deputy Secretary of Defense, made the statement "we spend 50 percent of our money on people, but only spend 10 percent of our time managing them." Still, the human factor in the work environment, and especially in projects, gets little attention in how to tap the human potential for the most efficient and effective workforce. This is but another example of the lack of attention given to people in the work environment.

There is a need for better leadership in projects to obtain the best from the project team. It is essential that a person serving as the project leader be able to manage his or her personal and social attributes before being considered fully competent to lead others. Criticism, such as the following, identifies the weaknesses of leaders, but does not define the strengths.

- He or she fails to meet the miserably low standards that they sets for themselves.
- No one would follow them except out of idle curiosity.
- They set a good example of what not to be.
- His or her name is "Max," short for maximum speed but no direction.
- He or she is not a wannabe, but is a never will be.

While humorous, cutting criticism defines the problem, there is little attention given to correcting weaknesses in personal behavior. It is irrelevant whether the individual is aware of the shortcomings and does not care, or whether the individual believes he or she is doing the right things. The fact is that project managers must be competent in managing the human side of projects as well as the technical components.

## ***Emotional Intelligence in Project Environments***

Sometime we work for others because we are told that is our job and other times we work for others purely because we want to be associated with that person. Those who we would rather not work for often give offense through their personal management style.

Those we want to work for treat us well and are consistently fair in their dealings with us. Perhaps, the difference could be called possessing emotional intelligence competence.

Doing a job that is worthwhile and being led by a person who always seems to be in control of himself or herself is a comfortable environment although the tasks may be difficult and the workdays long. This environment is created by people working together as a team toward a common goal.

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One may not know the precise mix of personal attributes of their leader, but there is a feeling of confidence and self-satisfaction in being a part of the team. This results from emotional intelligence being practiced by project managers and members of the project team.

Daniel Goleman was one of the first authors to use the term *emotional intelligence* to define those competences in self-management. Goleman defines emotional intelligence competence in two categories – *Personal Competence* and *Social Competence*. Personal competence is how we manage ourselves and social competence is how we handle relationships.

### **Personal Competence**

Personal competence in emotional intelligence consists of those attributes that a person exhibits in managing himself or herself in the conduct of business, and especially how one controls his or her actions. Personal competence lays the foundations for interactions with others, both in a business and social environment. Those possessing personal competence are often referred to as having *presence*.

To be considered competent in a personal sense, one must be aware of his or her emotions and how they play a role in contacts with others. Recognizing one's feeling and ensuring they do not negatively impact others is an important part of managing emotions in such a manner that they contribute to the situation. Negative feelings toward others detract from the conduct of professional business.

Conducting a personal assessment of one's self to identify strengths and weaknesses is a good way to start the process of evaluating overall personal competence. Then it is possible to capitalize on one's strengths and improve on the weaknesses. The assessment should give a means to measure improvements and to determine whether personal competence is being achieved.

Self-confidence is a personal attribute that develops through an understanding of the situation and knowing the right path to follow. It is not arrogance or bluffing, but a presence that gives other confidence in one's ability to do the right thing. One part of self-confidence is exhibiting decisiveness and making the sound decisions under uncertainty.

Self-regulation is demonstrating one's actions in a manner acceptable to the people with whom there is contact. This entails some control over what is done and when it is done to build confidence by others that a person is trustworthy and conscientious in dealing with others.

Honesty, consistency, and commitment by a person develop positive relationships. Self-motivation and a positive attitude are essential forces in elements of emotional intelligence.

### **Social Competence**

Social competence, or how we deal with relationships, is the second part of emotional intelligence. Empathy is the understanding of others and how they feel in different circumstances so that we may deal with them in the proper context. Sensing others' feelings by being attentive to emotional cues and listening can contribute to early resolution of issues.

Social skills, or the "personal tools" used to achieve effective leadership results, includes communication, conflict management, negotiation, team development, The influence that one exhibits through a combination of skills can have a positive effect on others, to include teams, that leads to the desired results. Poor or improper use of social skills can lead to less than satisfactory results.

The sum of personal and social competence may be viewed as leadership – rather than being a manager. continued

Managers may exhibit many of the elements of personal and social skills, but the leader must have them to be considered competent.

***Emotional Intelligence for the Project Manager.***

The International Project Management Association (IPMA) has defined 46 elements for assessing the competence of project participants – project directors, senior project managers, project managers, and project practitioners.

Of the 46 elements, 15 deal with the behavioral attributes of competent project participants. Nearly one-third deal with human qualities while the remaining 31 address 20 technical elements of project management and 11 address the context in which project management is implemented.

These 15 behavioral attributes are compatible with Goleman's model of emotional intelligence and reflect the IPMA concentration on the human resource in projects. The 15 elements are:

1. Leadership
2. Engagement and Motivation
3. Self-Control
4. Assertiveness
5. Relaxation
6. Openness
7. Creativity
8. Results Orientation
9. Efficiency
10. Consultation
11. Negotiation
12. Conflict and Crisis
13. Reliability
14. Values Appreciation
15. Ethics

If we agree that the human element of projects is important and that better management leads to better project results, we can agree that emotional intelligence is important for a project manager. IPMA believes that the human behavioral attributes are important and devoted more than 30 percent of its competence elements to

measuring human factors. So, what does an emotional intelligence competent project manager look like?

Emotional intelligence is not a born trait, but a learned trait that is developed over a lifetime of learning and emulation of successful people. It is acquired by observing role models function in difficult situations and by being mentored as to the most appropriate actions in different situations. Emotional intelligence is doing the best thing in the situation – but not necessarily the action deemed the most appropriate by others. With emotional intelligence, a project manager has self-confidence that the decisions made are the best at that time.

Project managers must build trust with others through actions that demonstrate honesty and integrity. Honesty and integrity are vital traits to build upon through consistently holding to the truth. One lie can destroy future trust. Do not be like the fellow who was known to bend the truth most of the time. When he told the truth once, it was considered an "honest mistake."

Project managers must be committed to achieving the project's goals and must motivate others while practicing self-motivation. Commitment to the project's goals comprises completing the project as planned or getting relief from the requirements. One boss defined commitment as "deliver," "obtain forgiveness," or "send your death certificate."

Project managers must effectively communicate with different levels of workers and managers. A good communicator knows when to speak and when to listen. Being assertive in arguments and using the proper tone to emphasize items is essential to convey the message.

Listening to others and understanding the context as well as the meaning of what is being said is important to ensure effective communication.

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Negotiation skills are important to achieve project goals. Negotiation is a planned activity that attempts to obtain a win-win situation where both sides gain and there are no losers. The best outcome is when all parties are pleased with the agreement reached.

### ***Role Model or Mentor***

One of the best means of achieving emotional intelligence competence is to identify a role model – someone you admire and admire what he or she has achieved. Pattern your activities after a successful person whose character and traits are those you wish to possess. One suggested means of pattern your life after a successful person is to prominently post a picture of him/her and start each day by saying “I want to be like him or her.”

It is not necessary that the role model be a project manager. Any person with the traits and characteristics that you hope to achieve will serve the purpose. The role model may be a church leader, a public servant, a military person, or other visible person. In one instance, a person wanted to pattern his activities after Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was an inventor, author, printer, statesman as well as having other talents.

A mentor, different from a role model, takes an active interest in developing a person through coaching, guiding, and shaping a person's actions. This mentoring is typically conducted based on a wealth of experience and may involve both personal and professional conduct. Mentoring is not making decisions for a person, but involves setting forth a path from which the individual can benefit while avoiding risks to his or her career.

### ***Rules to Live by***

As previously stated, emotional intelligence competence does not just happen to most people, it is a planned set of actions. Often, a person develops by himself or herself a set of rules that

cover many situations to direct one's actions. One rule might be “don't take a risk that you don't have to.” There is no gain in taking unnecessary risk – only losses.

Colin L. Powell, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of State, touches on some points that are guides for good emotional intelligence competence. Selected points that show mature judgment are paraphrased:

- Avoid having your ego so close to your position that when your position falls, your ego goes with it.
- Don't let adverse facts defeat good decisions.
- You can't make someone else's choices. You shouldn't let someone else make yours.
- Remain calm under pressure. Be kind to people.
- Have a vision for your work. Be demanding of others and yourself.
- Don't take counsel of your fears or negative people.

Successful people considered to be professionally competent develop their rules and consistently apply those rules to daily situations. Successful project managers might have a list of rules that entail the following ideas.

- Establish and maintain communications with all project stakeholders.
- Bad news doesn't get better over time, so handle it soon.
- Plan your work and adjust the plan only as required by facts
- Always remember who the customer is
- Take time for yourself – relax and rest at specific times
- Avoid decisions without facts
- Take time to know your team members
- Integrity above expediency; be honest in your dealings
- Treat people fairly and better than you would like to be treated

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### ***In Summary***

Emotional intelligence is a guide to successful personal conduct and relationships with people. Achieving competence is when a person can efficiently and effectively develop an interpersonal style that supports his or her ability to accomplish work. In projects, the project manager is the most visible person with or without emotional intelligence competence.

Project managers can improve on their emotional intelligence competence through study, but perhaps more quickly in identifying and following a role model. Having a mentor is another means of assimilating the experience and good judgment of a successful senior person. Capitalizing on personal strengths and improving on weaknesses should be a goal for any project manager.

Emotional intelligence is an asset that the project manager must possess and constantly improve upon to be the best that he or she can be. Taking an inventory of the personal and social attributes can lead to using the strengths while improving the weaknesses. This requires a self-assessment of each of the skills to determine where improvement can be made.

One method of improving is to establish rules for personal conduct and live by those rules. These self-imposed rules guide a project manager in his or her daily performance on the job and provide for consistent behavior. Creating rules to live by can be beneficial to emotional intelligence competence.

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Lew Ireland is an Executive Project Management Consultant based in Tennessee, serving US and International clients. He works with clients to establish their project management systems to ensure they are supportive of the organizations' respective goals. He is experienced in all aspects of project management, including planning, scheduling, project office implementation, project maturity modeling, and project assessment.

Lew has authored or co-authored project management books and articles for professional journals. He is a frequent contributor to the *American Society for the Advancement of Project Management* by writing short articles for our website. He was recently appointed a Consulting Editor to McGraw-Hill Publishing Companies for a project management series of books.

Lew has a history of serving for nearly 25 years in volunteer positions to advance project management. He is past President and Chair of the Project Management Institute and has served in various positions within that organization. He has been elected a Fellow of the Institute.

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