



The Impact of Emotional Intelligence on Transformational Leadership Among Project Managers

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Abstract: The aim of the study was to fill the gap in the previous literature by investigating the impact of emotional intelligence among project managers employed in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational design and a purposive sampling technique to collect data from project managers of Pakistani ethnicity, aged at least 23 years, with a minimum of one year of experience as project managers, and who possessed at least a bachelor's degree. The study comprised two questionnaires, i.e., the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale and 20 items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (used to measure transformational leadership only). It was hypothesized that emotional intelligence would significantly and positively correlate with transformational leadership among project managers. It was also hypothesized that the impact of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership would be significant and positive. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 26. The Pearson product-moment correlation indicated a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership among project managers. Furthermore, regression analysis revealed that emotional intelligence significantly predicted transformational leadership. The study concluded with comprehensive implications for project managers, emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence in enhancing transformational leadership.

Key Words: Emotional Intelligence, Transformational Leadership, Project Managers

Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI), also known as emotional quotient (EQ), refers to the ability to perceive, use, manage, and handle emotions (Li et al., 2025; Mora et al., 2024; Solih et al., 2024). Past and recent studies have shown that emotional intelligence correlates with transformational leadership. Transformational leadership can be defined as a leadership style in which followers are influenced by their leader's behavior. It serves as a source of inspiration for employees or subordinates to perform beyond their usual capabilities and skills (Deng et al., 2023; Purwanto, 2022; Qalati et al., 2022).

There have been many transformational leaders who inspired their followers through motivation, encouragement, and shared values. Famous examples of historical transformational leaders include Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. They possessed transformational leadership qualities due to their high emotional intelligence. They understood the needs and emotions of their followers and worked toward collective objectives beyond the limits of authority (Kumar, 2014). However, a previous study using a multi-rater design with 227 participants found no relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership. The study emphasized the need for further research on these variables (Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2010).

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Emotional intelligence awareness and intervention have shown a positive influence on enhancing transformational leadership style. A previous study conducted in the United States found that emotional intelligence intervention improved transformational leadership traits among 267 respondents (Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021). Similarly, another study conducted on 80 elected officials in the United States reported that emotional intelligence was significantly correlated with their transformational leadership, as rated by others (Barbuto & Burbach, 2006).

Project management refers to a collection of techniques for planning, implementing, managing, and assessing a project while aligning stakeholders with its objectives. It comprises tools, skills, knowledge, and techniques used to handle a wide range of activities to meet the specific requirements of a project (Lientz & Rea, 2007; Edkins et al., 2013; Schwalbe, 2009). Project managers play a crucial role in initiating, processing, and managing teams, as well as handling both internal and external stakeholders according to their requirements and the project charter. In a nutshell, a company's success largely depends on the project manager's ability to ensure the timely delivery of project outcomes (Bredillet et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2005; Fisher, 2011). A previous quantitative study on 578 project management professionals aligned with the results of this study, reporting a significant effect of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership, accounting for 44% of the variance (Tessema, 2010). Thus, for a good project manager, it is important to have high emotional intelligence to handle stress effectively and to understand both self and others' emotions, which ultimately enhances transformational leadership qualities essential for inspiring, motivating, and encouraging the team to achieve specific objectives. However, studies on these variables among project managers are very limited, indicating a gap that needs to be filled.

Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 2015)

According to transformational leadership theory, the transformational leader has the capacity to inspire his or her followers by presenting a shared vision, enhancing their growth through inspirational motivation, conflict resolution, intellectual stimulation, and aligning followers to achieve a certain vision. Emotional intelligence fosters this transformational leadership behavior by allowing the leader to connect with followers, manage stress effectively, and adapt leadership style to the needs of the team. The theory is relevant in the context of project managers because project management requires managing resources, budgets, time, and providing guidelines to the project team to align them with the project outcomes and closure as per the charter. Project managers with higher emotional intelligence are likely to motivate their team members, encourage them, and provide personalized support, which results in timely productivity as per the requirements. Additionally, project managers with higher emotional quotient can foster better communication within the team, resolve conflicts more effectively, and sustain motivation and encouragement throughout the project lifecycle. Emotional intelligence and transformational leadership may result in enhanced collaboration, commitment, and overall project success.

Rationale

There is substantial literature regarding the impact of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership; however, studies focusing on project managers are very rare across the globe. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the impact of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership among Pakistani project managers working in various industries in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. The study aims not only to address the gap in the current literature but also to provide effective implications for project managers.

Research Questions

1. Is there relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership among project managers?
2. Is there impact of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership among project managers?

Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship of emotional intelligence with transformational leadership among project managers.
2. To evaluate the impact of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership among project managers.



Hypotheses

1. There is likely to be a positive and significant relationship of emotional intelligence with transformational leadership among project managers.
2. There is likely to be a significant and direct impact of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership among project managers.

Methodology

The study adopted cross sectional correlational study design and purposive sampling technique to collect data from Pakistani project managers working in various industries in Pakistan and United Arab Emirates with at least age of 23, at least education of bachelor, and at least one year experience in industry.

Instruments

The study comprised two standardized instruments for data collection i.e. Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10) to measure emotional intelligence, and Multifactor leadership questionnaire's subscale to measure emotional intelligence only.

Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10) is a team item scale that measure emotional intelligence, its likert ranges from 1-5, the higher score on this scale depicts higher emotional intelligence (Davies et al., 2010). Its internal consistency is 0.73 to 0.84 according to some updated studies (Ashouri et al., 2019; Durosini et al., 2021; Rizzo et al., 2019). The internal consistency in this study is 0.76 which is satisfactory.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire comprised 45 items, 20 items are used in this study to measure transformational leadership, its Likert ranges from 0 to 4 the higher score depicts higher transformational leadership. The Cronbach's alpha for the transformational leadership subscale has been reported to range between .88 and .94 in previous research, indicating high internal consistency (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The reliability of the scale in this study is 0.93 which is excellent.

The study adhered to APA 7 ethical standard, i.e. participants confidentiality was maintained, before the data collection i.e. filling if questionnaire by participants the consent form was signed by them in written form, which clearly mentioned that their participation is voluntarily and they may withdraw at any juncture without facing any adverse consequences. The participants approximately took approximately 15 minutes to fill the questionnaire; the participation was acknowledged. Subsequently, the data was entered to IBM SPSS version 26 for analysis purpose.

Results

Table I

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Age			36.31	11.07
Gender				
Men	91	63.2		
Women	53	36.8		
Education				
Bachelor	45	31.3		
Master	58	40.3		
Ph.D.	41	28.5		
Years of Experience				
1-5 Years	57	39.6		
6-10 Years	29	20.1		
11-15 Years	31	21.5		
More than 15 Years	27	18.8		



	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Types of Industries				
Information Technology	23	16		
Construction and Engineering	16	11.1		
Telecommunications	13	9		
Banking/Finance	13	9		
Education	20	13.9		
Healthcare	26	18.1		
Manufacturing	33	22.9		

Note. N = 144, SD = Standard Deviation

The sample consisted of 144 employees with a mean age of 36.31 years ($SD = 11.07$). Of these, 63.2% were men ($n = 91$) and 36.8% were women ($n = 53$). Regarding education, 31.3% held a bachelor's degree ($n = 45$), 40.3% had a master's degree ($n = 58$), and 28.5% possessed a Ph.D. ($n = 41$). In terms of work experience, 39.6% of participants had 1–5 years of experience ($n = 57$), 20.1% had 6–10 years ($n = 29$), 21.5% had 11–15 years ($n = 31$), and 18.8% had more than 15 years ($n = 27$). Participants represented various industries including manufacturing (22.9%, $n = 33$), healthcare (18.1%, $n = 26$), information technology (16%, $n = 23$), education (13.9%, $n = 20$), construction and engineering (11.1%, $n = 16$), banking/finance (9%, $n = 13$), and telecommunications (9%, $n = 13$).

Table 2

Correlational Analysis between Study Variables

Variables	1	2
1. Emotional Intelligence	-	.91**
2. Transformational Leadership		-

Note. N = 144, ** $p < .01$

A significant positive correlation was found between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership ($r = .91$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of emotional intelligence are associated with higher levels of transformational leadership among employees ($N = 144$).

Table 3

Regression Analysis: Predicting Transformational Leadership from Emotional Intelligence

Variables	B	SE	β	P	95% CI	
					LL	UL
Constant	-32.35***	2.84		<.001	-37.98	-26.73
Emotional Intelligence	2.28***	.08	.91	<.001	2.11	2.45

Note. N = 144, $R^2 = .83$, $F = 723.44$, *** $p < .001$

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether emotional intelligence predicted transformational leadership. The results indicated that emotional intelligence was a significant positive predictor of transformational leadership ($B = 2.28$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = .91$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.11, 2.45]). The overall model was significant, $F(1, 142) = 723.44$, $p < .001$, explaining 83% of the variance in transformational leadership ($R^2 = .83$).

Discussion

There is substantial literature regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership; however, when it comes specifically to project managers, the literature is limited. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the impact of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership among project managers working in various

industries in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates. The goal of the study is to address this gap in the literature and provide effective implications

The first hypothesis of the study stated that emotional intelligence would likely be significantly related to transformational leadership among project managers. The Pearson product correlation affirmed the first hypothesis, as the relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership is significantly positive. A previous study conducted in Taiwan aligns with the results of this study, which reported that data gathered from 51 managers from 23 textile mills showed that emotional intelligence positively and significantly associates with transformational leadership (Wang & Huang, 2009). The reason behind the significant and positive relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership could be the effective management of emotions by project managers and their understanding of the emotions of the project team. The ability to manage emotional intelligence enhances communication, encouragement, motivation, empathy, trust, and collaboration within a diverse project team. Project managers who possess emotional intelligence know how to inspire their teams, resolve conflicts, and manage employees effectively to achieve successful project outcomes.

The second hypothesis of the study stated that there would likely be a significant positive impact of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership among project managers. The simple linear regression affirmed the second hypothesis, as emotional intelligence significantly and positively predicts transformational leadership. A previous quantitative study on 578 project management professionals aligns with the results of this study, reporting a significant effect of emotional intelligence on transformational leadership that accounts for 44% of the variance (Tessema, 2010). The reason for the significant prediction of transformational leadership from emotional intelligence among project managers working in various industries in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) could be due to their ability to understand not only their own emotions but also those of their team members, and to manage those emotions effectively. Maintaining high emotional intelligence enables project managers to encourage, motivate, and inspire their teams while enhancing trust within a cohesive group. In diverse and challenging projects, where conflicts are likely to occur, such leaders effectively resolve these conflicts and create a highly productive environment. Leadership effectiveness is therefore enhanced, and teams work cohesively toward the successful completion of projects.

Limitations and Recommendations

The study comprised a small sample size, i.e., 144; the sample size needs to be larger in future studies for generalizability purposes. The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational study design that only examines the data one time; there could be variation with respect to time; therefore, a longitudinal study design is recommended in future studies. The study demographics are very limited; future studies need to include categories of project managers, i.e., junior, mid-level, and senior project managers. The study did not segregate the Pakistani project managers working in Pakistan and the UAE; future studies need to segregate and find the differences between these with respect to study variables. Future studies need to include updated versions of scales; the questionnaires used in this study are too old.

Implications

The results of the study depict that it has achieved its hallmark. Thus, there is a need to arrange training programs to emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence, as it impacts transformational leadership traits among project managers. Emotionally intelligent leaders in organizations possess the qualities and characteristics to inspire, encourage, motivate, and manage teams to achieve required objectives. Organizations need to include emotional intelligence psychometric tests when selecting project managers, as this will result in higher productivity and timely achievement of targets. Seminars, workshops, and webinars need to be arranged for project managers on emotional intelligence and its importance for building strong relationships with teams and achieving objectives on time.

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