

Emotional Intelligence and Project Management in ICT Industry in Latvia¹

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Abstract

Although emotional intelligence (EI) is recognized as a significant soft skill, among others, in project management, it still remains essentially underexplored in information and communications technologies (ICT) project management in Latvia. Hence, the aim of this paper is to examine the relevance of project manager's EI to improve project performance in the Latvian ICT industry.

To achieve the abovementioned goal, a questionnaire-based survey among top ICT project managers is employed to establish a link between project managers' EI and the performance of their ICT projects in order to determine the level of importance of EI skills for successful project execution in the ICT industry.

Research results show a significant relevance of EI factors in project performance in ICT projects; as well as, recognize that such soft skills as EI competencies are not only equally important to hard skills (management experience, leadership and technical skills) required for project management, but also if relevance of EI skills is overlooked, it could undermine the potential for fulfilling the criteria set for ICT project success under time and resource constraints.

Managerial implications of the results are twofold. Firstly, findings help formulating recommendations on selection of project managers for ICT project management based on EI competencies; secondly, it is of significant importance for project managers in recognizing the relevant EI competencies that are required for successful execution of ICT projects.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, ICT industry, Project manager, Project performance
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Introduction

Manifestations of increasing globalization (investment flows, labour force movement, increased consumption of good and services, changes in the structures of economies) and the changing entrepreneurship environment have substantially changed the requirements as to the skills of

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managers (leaders), resulting of growing importance of leadership in the 21st century across the globe, including in project management. It is suggested that project managers must have specific skills in project leadership and management (Galbreath & Rogers, 1999). Leadership that focuses on the project is a systematic application of management awareness and skills in each stage of the project life cycle (Kloppenborg et.al., 2003) and this concept in theory describes good practice management referable to project environment (Toth, 2011).

Today's organizations are faced with particularly complex circumstances, where versatility thrives forcing to give up stereotypes and truly comprehend individual differences, ways of thinking and learning (Maccoby, 2004; Mersino, 2007) and with a business environment of increasing complexity where such elements as changing technologies and globalization trends makes project performance an ever more challenging task (Smith, 2014). Therefore, in today's project management, it is topical to develop such project management competencies and skills, which would combine the classic management skills with project leaders' social skills.

Project management as an independent sector of management sciences has been brought to the forefront in the ICT sector in Latvia, which has been experiencing a stable development already for the second decade running. Currently, Latvian ICT companies play a significant role in the development of the economy of Latvia, by greatly contributing to the GDP of Latvia: according to the data of the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, the proportion of the value added of the ICT sector in the Latvian gross domestic product in 2013 amounted to 3.7 % in absolute prices, and the sector also offers vast employment opportunities. Provisional data of 2013 suggest that more than 5000 people were employed in the ICT sector on the whole. One of significant obstacles to a more rapid development of the ICT sector of Latvia and to engagement in global projects is the relatively low number of employed specialists and their insufficient knowledge in other sectors of the economy (Andersone, 2014). In a study of future strategically necessary skills in Latvia, it was found that over the period leading up to the year 2030, the demand will increase for highly qualified labour force having the skills to solve a complex range of problematic issues, along with fine managerial and social skills. Already in the nearest future, the demand will increase for such employee competencies as creativity, communication skills, ability to adapt to changes, self-organisation, self-training, systematic thinking (Kasalis et.al., 2013).

All of the aforementioned competencies are significant not only in the view of the future perspective, but also at this time. The need for well-developed social skills is increasing, as the level of complexity and scale of ICT projects is rising. Studies show that a considerable part of IT projects are not completed or the project outcome is delayed, by significantly exceeding the resources during the implementation (Flyvbjerg & Budzier, 2013) and human factors are recognised as the biggest obstacles to a successful project implementation (Jørgensen et.al., 2008; Smith, 2014). Likewise, it is concluded that only 20% of project success depends on the management methods employed in project management, whereas the project manager's social skills account for 80 % of project success (Reiter, 2003). Therefore studies suggest that the focus of project management should shift away from scheduling and management of resources only (Ahlemann, 2009). Achievements of a successful project manager are largely rooted in the emotional faculties, empathy, understanding people and in the developed team leadership skills (Stevenson & Starkweathe, 2010). The performed studies confirm that social skills and emotional intelligence promote leadership skills (Palmer et.al., 2001), efficiency of activity and professional

growth (Higgs & Aitken, 2003), enhance co-operation and relationships within a team (Schutte et.al., 2001) and are an important success factor of a project (Mersino, 2007).

The notion and concept of emotional intelligence

In academic writings, emotional intelligence (EI) as a significant aspect of a manager's social skills has been described relatively recently. For a long time, researchers believed that there is little connection between emotions and logical thinking, and that successful people rely more on logical judgments instead of feelings. Therefore, in the assessment of managers' success and in forecasting activity, the general intellect category — analytical intelligence (IQ) — was employed. The first studies attempting to grasp the essence of EI and its relation to other concepts of psychology were published in early 1990-ties. Salovey and Mayer were among the first to publish the definition of emotional intelligence and theoretically justify this concept, by claiming that emotional intelligence is the ability to adequately sense, perceive, understand, voice, and manage emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Significant development of the EI theory was started along with the publication of the book by the American psychologist in 1995 (Goleman, 2005). Goleman claimed that EI includes self-awareness and impulse control, perseverance, diligence and ability to motivate oneself, empathy, and social resourcefulness, moreover, EI is manifested in the character of an individual (Goleman, 2005).

In the development of the EI concept, the researchers recognised that IQ does not always guarantee work success (Goleman, 1996; Gardner, 2011) and claimed that individuals having the same IQ can react very differently to external circumstances (Mayer et.al., 2001). EI studies in a work environment confirmed that the importance of EI components can differ in various occupational sectors (Zeidner et.al., 2004).

Several theoretical EI models have been described in writings. The following are among the most important:

- Mayer and Salovey's model of ability, proposing an assumption that EI encompasses various abilities of an individual engaged in the adaptive processing of emotional information, and it is related to four types of abilities: (1) expressing emotions and the accuracy of assessing emotions both with respect to self and to other people; (2) cognitive assimilation of emotional experience; (3) recognising, understanding, and grasping emotions; (4) adaptive regulation of emotions of an individual and of other people (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).
- The emotionally social intelligence Bar-On mixed model is an EI model encompassing specific competencies, skills and stimuli with regard to the social and emotional aspect; it consists of five different but mutually interacting areas: (1) introspective or intrapersonal, (2) interactional or interpersonal, (3) ability to adapt, (4) ability to cope with stress, and (5) the overall sentiments or general mood. This model suggests that emotionally social intelligence is intrinsically linking stimuli, competencies and skills in the social and emotional respect (Bar-On, 2006).
- The mixed model as suggested by Goleman describes people who are generally successful in action. In the model, the author initially proposes five areas: self-awareness, self-management,

self-motivation, social awareness and social skills (Goleman, 2005), however later on, he revised the EI concept several times, by both expanding and narrowing it. Several years later, Goleman suggested that EI includes two types of competencies: (1) personal competencies, such as Self-awareness and Self-management; (2) social competencies, such as Social awareness and Relationship management (Goleman et.al., 2002).

Mersino was first to theorise that EI is positively affecting the project management process (Mersino, 2007). He believed that a project manager, who is better at understanding the emotions and needs of parties involved in a project, can better perform his/her role of a project leader. Mersino modified the Goleman model (see Fig. 1), by adapting it to the project management processes and defining the most important EI competencies for a project manager and proposing a framework of fourteen competencies categorized in five areas: (1) self-awareness; (2) self-management; (3) social awareness; (4) relationship management and (5) team leadership (Mersino, 2007). The importance of emotions within the context of project management has been studied also later on, because participation in project involves continuous involvement with a plethora of social situations (Clarke, 2010).

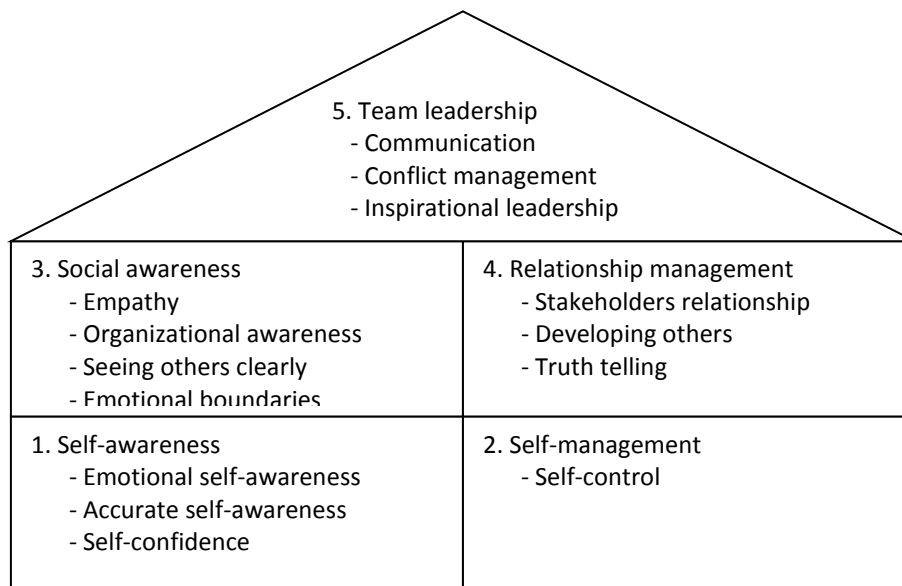


Fig. 1. EI framework for project managers

It is believed that EI is crucially important for project managers due to a number of reasons:

- No two projects are the same. Project managers must constantly adapt to different teams, stakeholders, sponsors as they finish one project and move on to the next;
- Projects are not a permanent venture, but instead they take place within a set time period, which means that the manager is hard-pressed to progress quickly, which hinders the formation of close ties;

- Usually project managers' power and authority are limited in terms of exercising it over the team members of the project. In order to achieve the necessary results, project managers must employ finer approaches (Mersino, 2007);
- Project managers using the right 'tone' with others, and helping others taking on challenging tasks, together with good control over their own feelings, are the attributes of successful leadership in these projects (Müller & Turner, 2010).

Emotional intelligence in ICT project management

Traditionally, ICT projects are regarded as technologically inclined projects, therefore the matters of project managers' efficiency are more considered from the viewpoint of managing resources (labour force, time, money). In the ever changing environment of today's world, an increasing number of scientists (Lent & Pinkowska, 2012; Stevenson & Starkweathe, 2010; Fisher, 2011) admit that an efficient ICT project manager must have:

- Technical skills ("hard" skills) — they must focus on mastering technical skills, predominantly in the areas of engineering, hardware and software and this includes technical proficiency and competency in methodologies and processes of development, as well as approaches used in IT system development (Keil et.al., 2013);
- Project management skills — proficiency in choosing the optimum tools and methods to lead and complete a project with a successful outcome (Brewer, Dittman, 2013), such as project planning and management of changes, time, budget, and quality management, management of risks and causal relationships, defining work tasks and control of work performance, setting the critical paths, managing non-conformities, information analysis, using project management software, among other things (Richman, 2012);
- Skills in interpersonal communication ("soft" skills) — less tangible and manifested as social and communicative skills — self-management, leadership, human resources, team, conflict and communication management process skills (Lent, & Pinkowska, 2012).

The more complex and bigger the projects to manage, the more of what are known as "soft" skills are needed to achieve a better result. Studies have unveiled that project managers having a high EI and fine communication skills have bigger advantages — they can easily sort out their priorities in terms of thoughts, adapt them to the changing emotions in the working environment (Bande, et al., 2015), they stand out among other project managers and will achieve more given the same team (Mersino, 2007).

Even though it is clear that project managers' EI is directly affecting the success of projects in the ICT sector, the development of this competency is still not postulated as a primary competency to achieve growth and development of project managers. As suggested by recent studies (van Blerk, 2013), managers of companies in the ICT sector assess EI as one of the most important project managers' skills, all the while the actual EI performance of project managers cannot be assessed as fully satisfactory. It is not surprising that several competence models, including the guidelines European e-Competence Framework 2.0, mainly address technical skills that are necessary for ICT specialists, failing to clearly acknowledge that EI is of importance. EI is not mentioned no evidence

is provided suggesting that these guidelines define EI as an integral element contributing to the performance of ICT specialists.

The only global guideline that makes a reference to EI is the PMBOK® Guide (PMBOK, 2013). It perceives EI as a competency of behavioural nature forming a part of interpersonal skills. However, PMBOK® Guide (2013) does not elaborate on the components of EI that are necessary in order to achieve effective project management (van Blerk, 2013). The authors admit that ICT organisations do not consider that certification is an essential element for success. The main recruitment criteria do not include such elements as certification or training qualifications, hence they do not influence the selection and subsequent performance. The aforementioned considerations clearly demonstrate that there is a global gap between the desirable and actual importance of EI for project managers in the ICT sector. In the face of the said gap, it is crucial to assess whether EI as a highly valued competence, which, nevertheless, is poorly implemented in the day-to-day practice, affects the success of project implementation.

Even though a positive correlation between EI and the work performance has been proven in studies, in most studies the forecasting validity of EI is different (Rozcenkova, 2011). There are few studies, where a sound manager (as a leader) is actually using the EI competency in the management process, and a gap still remains between the theory and practice in terms of emotional leadership (Bolden et.al., 2011). Goleman in his studies has found a direct link between EI and a measurable business outcome (Goleman, 1998).

In order to assess the EI role of ICT project managers in satisfying the project success criteria, a study was performed by surveying professional project managers working in the ICT sector in Latvia.

The study method

In January 2015, an expert survey of the sector was performed, by employing a self-selection method. The sample size was 60 respondents representing project management in the ICT sector. The survey includes 10 questions, with the help of which the importance of project success criteria is evaluated, self-assessment of project performance and of EI skills is performed. To assess the project managers' EI, the questionnaire developed by Mersino (Mersino, 2007) was used; it contains 20 questions. The results are divided into 3 EI index groups, where the lowest group (LG) comprises respondents, whose EI skills performance is 12 points out of 20 or lower, the medium group (MG) with 13 to 16 points, and the highest group (HG) with over 17 out of 20 points, according to the guidelines proposed by Mersino (Mersino, 2007). A questionnaire developed by the authors is used for assessing project results; the questionnaire consists of 7 criteria, evaluating the performance on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest assessment and 1 is the lowest.

To determine the relation between the project managers' EI parameters and the fulfilment of project success criteria, a comparative analysis of project results is performed according to the obtained EI results (LG, MG, and HG). To assess the consistency of correlations between EI and project performance results, a correlation analysis is performed (using the Pearson correlation coefficient) between the project managers' EI index and seven project success criteria, thereby allowing to determine the project manager's personal qualities that play the most important role in achieving

the criteria of successful project fulfilment and to which most attention should be paid when defining the guidelines for successful long-term project management.

Study results

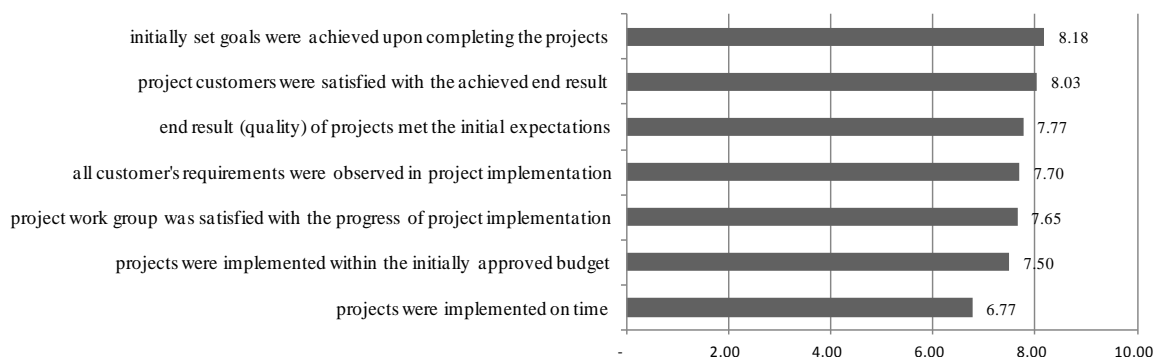
Within the study, 60 professional project managers (experts) representing the ICT sector were surveyed: 45 % women and 55 % men. 26 % of the respondents are younger than 30 y., 61 % of experts fall in the age group of 31 to 40 year olds, whereas 10 % of respondents are 41 to 50 y. o.; the remaining 3 % are in the age group of 51 to 65 y. 32 % of respondents are certified project managers.

According to the self-assessment results (Fig. 2), most experts assessed the results of projects performed in 2014 as corresponding to the initially set objectives (on average 8.18 points), and the wishes of clients commissioning the projects were met upon completing the projects (on average 8.03 points).

78 % of respondent experts believe that it is not difficult to communicate with people and it is not difficult to work together with people, whose experience is different or not equally extensive. 88 % of respondents claim that in difficult situations, they manage to preserve self-restraint. 50 % of respondents said that they tend to joke often, and 82 % of experts build relationships with the project group not only within the context of problems to be resolved.

According to the experts, one of the most crucial factors affecting the project outcome is the engaged human resources, namely, the team. 40 % of respondents mentioned the importance of a team as one of significant project success factors. Furthermore, expert responses point to that the project success depends also on:

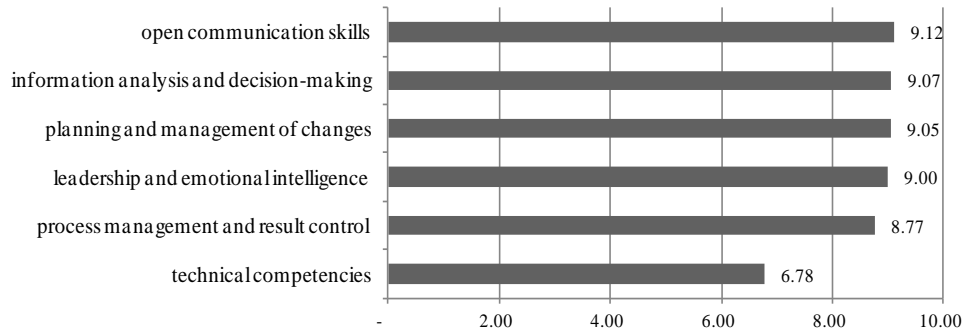
- the project manager's experience and qualification;
- understanding the project (objectives, tasks);
- mutual communication and involvement;
- understanding between the customer and contractors;
- planning and control of deadlines and tasks, as well as other factors.



Source: author's calculations based on survey data

Fig. 2. Bearing in mind your performance in 2014, please, assess the success of projects you have managed.

When asked to assess the skills that are necessary for a project manager in order to successfully implement projects, experts identify communication skills, information analysis and decision-making skills (Fig. 3) as the most important, alongside planning and change management, leadership and emotional intelligence.



Source: author's calculations based on survey data

Fig. 3. In your opinion, how significantly the listed project manager's skills influence a successful result of the project?

The importance of technical competences, however, is not regarded as decisive — respondents have assessed these skills on average with 6.78 points.

The results of the experts' self-assessment survey also elucidate the problem situations that project managers face:

- 18 % of the surveyed project managers admitted that they have often been surprised at how different the performance of others has been to what was expected;
- 18 % of the surveyed experts have been reprimanded for being rough and insensitive;
- 22 % of the surveyed project managers remarked that they had been surprised about the failure of the project team members to grasp the project objectives;
- 52 % of experts claim that they have experienced a situation when they have not been able to find common grounds with a project team member for a long time;
- during project implementation, 18 % of experts have been faced with conflicts that they have not been able to resolve.

Firstly, project success largely depends on the project manager's leadership — 57 % of project managers believe that it is necessary to consolidate their leader position, furthermore, 67 % say that sometimes more passion is necessary in resolving complicated matters.

Secondly, upon assessing the impact of emotional intelligence on the quality of project performance, the most significant differences are outlined in the self-assessment of project success (see Table 1), according to the emotional intelligence index of the project manager, by dividing it into three groups (standard error shown in brackets)

Table 1: Comparison of self-assessment of project success criteria depending on the emotional intelligence parameter performance

EI index group	LG	MG	HG
Projects were implemented within the initially approved budget	6.33 (0.7)*	6.48 (0.4)	7.59 (0.3)
Projects were implemented on time	6.75 (0.7)	7.48 (0.3)	8.06 (0.3)
Project work group was satisfied with the project implementation progress	7.08 (0.5)	7.39 (0.2)	8.53 (0.2)
End result (quality) of projects met the initial expectations	6.92 (0.5)	7.71 (0.3)	8.47 (0.3)
Initially set goals were achieved upon completing the projects	7.75 (0.4)	8.00 (0.3)	8.82 (0.2)
Project customers were satisfied with the achieved end result	7.58 (0.5)	7.77 (0.3)	8.82 (0.2)
All customer's requirements were observed in project implementation	7.33 (0.6)	7.32 (0.4)	8.65 (0.2)
Average indicator	7.11 (0.5)	7.45 (0.2)	8.42 (0.2)

Source: author's calculations based on survey data

*Standard errors are reported in parentheses

The results show that there are significant changes in the project success criteria performance, depending on the project manager's EI parameters. The highest group achieves a result that is on average by 1.3 points higher than the lower group, which suggests that the project manager's EI is one of the factors fostering better achievement of project goals. Project managers, who have assessed their EI index with 17 or more points (the highest group), during the project implementation, have been able to achieve the initially defined goals, to deliver the expected end result to the customer and to meet the customer's requirements significantly better than others. The parameter that received the lowest assessment in all three groups was keeping with the initially approved budget, nevertheless, even though significant differences are observed between the performance of the lowest and highest EI group, there are no grounds to claim that the comparatively low assessment should be directly attributable to the project manager's personal qualities.

Thirdly, to assess the correlation between the EI parameters and the performance of specific project success criteria, a correlation analysis is performed to assess the consistency of correlations between the project manager's "soft skills" and the project performance parameters, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation of self-assessment of project success criteria with the project manager's emotional intelligence index

Emotional intelligence index	Correlation coefficient
Projects were implemented within the initially approved budget	0.390
Projects were implemented on time	0.415
Project work group was satisfied with the project implementation progress	0.515
End result (quality) of projects met the initial expectations	0.451
Initially set goals were achieved upon completing the projects	0.371
Project customers were satisfied with the achieved end result	0.344
All customer's requirements were observed in project implementation	0.355

Source: author's calculations based on survey data

The correlation analysis results show a moderately consistent positive correlation between the project manager's emotional intelligence index and the performance of project success criteria (the consistency of correlations from $r=0.344$ to $r=0.515$, $p<0.01$), which implies that the project manager's personal traits are important in fostering the achievement of project goals on the whole.

Upon considering project success criteria individually, the highest consistency of correlations is observed between the project manager's emotional intelligence and the level of satisfaction of the work group with the progress of the project ($r=0.515$, $p<0.01$), which plays an important role in achieving project goals in a long term, because, as it has been mentioned before, project managers have stated that the project team is the most important factor in facilitating project success, and that, for its part, means that project managers with higher emotional intelligence are able to motivate the team — the important success factor — to co-operate productively in a long-term.

A medium consistent correlation is observed also between the “soft skills” of the project manager and the correspondence of the end result of the project to what was planned ($r=0.451$, $p<0.01$) and meeting the deadlines ($r=0.415$, $p<0.01$), which also points to the project manager's personal traits as a factor facilitating a successful team work and achievement of project goals.

Conclusions

Based on academic writings and the performed empirical assessment of project management in the ICT sector in Latvia, the authors conclude that:

1. There is a growing tendency of diminishing the role of technical skills in the project management process, instead focusing on the project manager's social skills, which ensure a more effective way of overcoming challenges, complicated situations and to handle the impact of external factors, which arise in an uncertain business environment.
2. Emotional intelligence is a vitally important competency for project managers due to several reasons: each project is unique and the project manager's ability to adapt to new circumstances is important, projects are subject to time constraints, and the project manager is granted a limited time for establishing co-operation with the team, moreover, project managers usually have only a limited power and authority with regard to the members of the project team; therefore, it is important to employ more complex methods and strategies to achieve the result.
3. Overall, research results in the ICT sector of Latvia show that:
 - 3.1. Project managers in the ICT sector of Latvia consider emotional intelligence of project managers as one of the important components in achieving a successful project outcome.
 - 3.2. Significant differences are noted in the achievement of assessed project success criteria according to the self-assessment of the project manager's emotional intelligence parameters.
 - 3.3. There is a moderately strong positive correlation between the self-assessment of a project manager's personal traits and the performance of project success criteria,

especially the degree of satisfaction of the project work group with the project implementation, which, for its part, in the assessment of project managers is one of the critical factors for successful project implementation and as a result serves as a pre-condition for a successful long-term co-operation among the project work group.

4. Implications of the results indicate that, firstly, the findings help defining recommendations on the selection of project managers for ICT project management based on EI competencies; secondly, it is crucial for project managers to recognize the relevant EI competencies that are required for successful execution of ICT projects.
5. As the study results confirm the correlation between project managers' social skills and successful achievement of project performance criteria, in future studies, it is necessary to determine the role of emotional intelligence in the implementation of various projects depending on their level of complexity, by setting forth a hypothesis that complicated projects require better social skills of the project manager, as well as to conduct in-depth studies of the co-operation dynamics within the framework of a project work group in order to accurately define the instruments for motivating the work group in a long-term, fostering the achievement of project goals and ensuring added value to businesses.

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