



PROJECT MANAGERS OF DIFFERENT GENERATIONS: HOW TO DEAL WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ISSUES

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Abstract

The importance of projects is extremely increasing. There is number of literature addressing the relationship between project manager's competence and project success. Leadership is a crucial part of managing complex projects, affecting directly on successful project outcomes. Social competences become more and more crucial for project managers. Caruso and Salovey (2004) discussed that there is a potential relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and the performance of organisation members (Caruso and Salovey, 2004). Zhang et al (2013) pointed out that the emotional competences influence the PMs' level of effectiveness. Research shows that leadership success can be predicted based on emotional intelligence (EI) competences, as well as the proven influence of EI on leadership. EI competence enhances the relationship between leader and followers, leading to higher organizational performance (Ramanauskas, 2014). Thus we can say that project managers' emotional intelligence and the role of emotional intelligence in project management over the past decade have become a very relevant and widely discussed topic.

Emotional intelligence consists of different persons' abilities and qualities, so the generation to which the project manager belongs influences the expression of his emotional intelligence. It is important to understand this expression both for the project managers themselves and for the organizations they work for, as it reveals the project manager's strengths and areas for improvement. Currently we can meet employees representing four or five different generations in the workplace. Organizations that implement projects deal with different generations projects managers having different emotional intelligence.

The paper aims to analyse the expression of emotional intelligence by the project managers of different generations and to find emotional intelligence development strategies.

Based on the theoretical analysis of different generations and the concept of emotional intelligence, the model of emotional intelligence of project managers of different generations and its development strategies was developed.

Methods. Quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed. Research population was covered by project managers and project management experts of Lithuanian companies and organizations.

Keywords: *project manager, competence, emotional intelligence*

JEL code M10, M5, M540.

Introduction

Today, many organizations facing with practices where the organization's employees represent very different generations (Moss, 2017). Project management is no exception. Organizations' implementing more than one project faces a situation where the implementation of the projects is led by representatives of different generations. The representatives of each generation have a unique set of personal qualities, determined by their birth time, social environment and significant life events.

It is widely acknowledged, that emotional intelligence is a key that can help to collaborate different generations under one project. Researchers explore and confirm the importance of emotional intelligence for the project team collaboration, trust and satisfaction, conflicts management, project manager leadership style, as well as project results and success. Different



researchers' emotional intelligence present as a key and even mandatory competence for the project managers (Tran, 2015).

According to the scientists, emotional intelligence consists of different person's abilities and qualities, so the generation which project manager belongs to influences the expression of his emotional intelligence. It is important to understand emotional intelligence expression for the project managers and for the organizations where they work. The scientific literature is full of information about different generations and emotional intelligence, but the research that focuses on the expression of project leaders from different generations emotional intelligence is missed. To highlight this gap, the article aims to answer the question: how does emotional intelligence of different generation's project managers occurs and what are the strategies for its improvement?

Literature review

The importance of project managers' emotional intelligence

Increasingly both practitioners and the research community address the issue of importance of emotional intelligence for project managers. Goleman (2018) states that project managers spend a large part of their working time communicating with people, as that often occupies 60-80 per cent of their working time. Jakupov et al (2013) states that professional success of the person is related to knowledge, skills, erudition and thinking ability in general. Emotional intelligence (EI) broadly understood as person abilities to communicate effectively due to the ability to understand people emotions and ability to react to their emotional condition (Derevyanko, 2007). The high level of of emotional intelligence development allows to achieve professional and vital success as a whole (Meshcheryak, 2010). An attitude which is a part of emotional intelligence is extremely important for project management as well.

The importance of the emotional intelligence is directly related to the success of the project (Rezvani et al., 2016). Hobbs and Smyth (2012) highlighted that the empathy, transparent behaviour, self-confidence, leadership and ability to act significantly contribute to the project success. Lindebaum and Jordan (2012) discovered that emotional intelligence positively affects the ability of the project manager to organise and coordinate project activities, motivate the team and manage conflicts. Obradović et al (2013) confirmed that project managers with the higher education diploma are emotionally more intelligent. Mazur et al (2013) identified a direct link between the emotional intelligence of project managers and a successful management of different stakeholders. Vierimaa (2013) research findings showed that project manager emotional intelligence is one of the most important skill for team management and collaboration.

Obradovic et al (2013) states, that project manager ability to control emotions show their maturity. Therefore, for the project manager is extremely important to understand themselves, i.e. it's strengths and weaknesses; to be able to recognise the emotions of other people, understand their needs and manage interpersonal relations. Those skills enable project managers to inspire the team and lead it towards a common goal.

Research authors have been discussing whether emotional intelligence directly depends upon age, i.e. depends to different generations. Fariselli et al (2008), Mayer et al (2004), Bar-On (2006), Sengupta and Jha (2014) have agreed that the manifestation of emotional intelligence of representatives of different generations is different. However, there is a lack of scientific discussions how emotional intelligence of project managers of different generation occurs.



Emotional intelligence models

A number of different models can be found in research articles that also presents different components of emotional intellect. Some models are based on abilities, and some other models are more based on abilities and personal qualities. The models proposed by Mayer et al (2004) is based on abilities, and otherwise referred to as a four-branch model. The model offered by Mayer et al (2004) analyses four dimensions of emotional intelligence:

- Emotional perception and expression are related to non-verbal language and describes a person's ability to assess the facial expressions of other persons, also the voice, posture by recognising certain emotions.
- Emotions are used when a person creates a base of experiences and their relations to emotions, which allows determining how a person should behave in specific situations.
- Understanding of emotions and application of knowledge show an ability to analyse emotions, predict their development trends and potential consequences.
- Management of emotions is understood as an ability to regulate emotions for the purpose of pursuing personal objectives, social awareness and knowledge (Mayer et al., 2004). Positive emotions support creativity a negative emotions lead to appearance of mistakes (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012).

The Goleman model presents the following dimensions of abilities and personal qualities:

- Self-perception is assigned to personal competences and includes recognition of own emotions and their impact, clear assessment of personal strengths and weaknesses, self-confidence.
- Self-governance is another personal competence that includes emotional self-control, an integrity of values, emotions and actions, an ability to react and behave flexibly in an ever changing environment, efforts to further improve and seek objectives, as well as initiative.
- The motivation dimension includes enthusiasm, inspiration and emotions encouraging seeking higher targets. In this respect an important role is played by values.
- Social perception is understood as a social competence including abilities to understand the emotional condition of other persons, understand, recognise and realise the needs of customers.
- Relationship management is another social competence including an ability to inspire and manage people, and persuade them, promote and support, and develop abilities of other people, initiate changes and manage them, resolve conflicts, promote cooperation in pursuit of a common goal, promote cooperation and work in teams.

Bar-On (2006) model reflects holistic approach. The model distinguishes five components of emotional intelligence:

- Personal abilities are considered to include five factors: self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence and self-actualisation. According to the author emotional self-awareness is an ability to look into oneself, accurately understand, and accept oneself. Assertiveness, sometimes also referred to as polite perseverance is an ability to express one's feelings efficiently and constructively.



Bar-On referred to independence as people's ability to be independent emotionally from other people, and self-actualisation means an ability to define personal goals and seek to attain such goals by disclosing one's potential.

- Interpersonal communication includes empathy – a person's ability to understand and realise how others feel, and social responsibility as our ability to adapt to different social groups and the community by cooperating and contributing to common goals. Interpersonal relationship is establishing and maintaining mutually pleasant relationships.
- The adaptability component includes reality testing, i.e. our ability to objectively assess one's feelings and think realistically, flexibility is an ability to regulate one's feelings, thinking and behaviour and adapt to new situations and conditions; problem solving as our ability to resolve personal problems and those related to interpersonal relations.
- Stress management includes stress tolerance and impulse control. The first ability is associated with efficiently and constructively managed emotions, and the second one is related to an ability to resist instant temptations.
- A general mood component is treated as a trigger of emotionally intellectual behaviour and including optimism (an ability to maintain hope and a positive attitude toward life even in view of bad luck) and happiness (ability to be satisfied with oneself, others and life).

According to Goleman (2008) emotional intelligence competences are not programmed in human brains, but they can be acquired and improved by the growth of experience or exercising.

Emotional intelligence development strategies

Emotional intelligence development research focuses on the role of emotions mostly in psychological research area and pays a key role in expressing human success (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2007). In connection with psychological dimensions, emotional intelligence has been analysed in various environments such as academic, business, health, performance. Therefore, emotional intelligence analysis under different environments has emphasized different aspects of the emotional intelligence dimensions and its development possibilities. Dolev & Leshem (2017) conducted research on understanding possible mechanisms for promoting high-quality emotional intelligence professional development. Research results showed that emotional intelligence development is an essential determinant to the professional development which can be trained through individual coaching sessions and group workshop. Taking into account individual and group levels, emotional intelligence development could be implemented by adjusting three types of decision-making interactions (Bell et al., 1988). The first level is a descriptive level which aims to analyse meaningful information for the emotional intelligence development. It can be described by the analysis of *past effects and contradictions* ← taking into account today “*I with my*” features, conditions and environment → and looking forward for *Future development* possibilities. Predictive level is taking a look what has been already learned under the descriptive level. It can be used to dive deeper to the further emotional intelligence development steps and conditions. Prescriptive level helps to identify the best emotional intelligence alternatives and practices in *My* relations → with a group or team.



At the descriptive level, emotional intelligence could be presented as analysis of emotional knowledge (Salovey et al., 2003), and how to cope in different situations through non-cognitive skills (Bar-On et al., 2003). Based on the basic knowledge, Salovey et al. (2003) presents two layers for emotional intelligence development: understanding emotions and managing emotions. In order to understand emotions, the author suggests to decompose emotions into different combinations of different emotions. For the emotion management skills development Caruso et al. (2002) suggest to acknowledge self-management and social management skills. Moreover, Jung et al. (2016) states that emotional intelligence should be trained in common with a human's body. For this purpose, emotional intelligence development incorporates physical exercises as a body movement, relaxation, breathing and meditation. Following this direction, basic emotional intelligence development encompasses the ability to understand emotions and to manage it mentally and physically in appropriate way. Ramanauskas (2014:80) suggest a construct of trainings which provides knowledge and skills adequately and effectively address not only the challenges of life but also to act accordingly in everyday situations; technology trainings which helps to train your psychical and emotional activity; and trainings for development of self-regulating and emotional activity differentiation skills.

In predictive level, researches state that an emotional intelligence can be trained through the use of feelings to facilitate thought. Here, emotional intelligence could be trained through coaching sessions (Ramanauskas, 2014:80). Tschannen-Moran and Carter (2016) states that during coaching sessions, emotional intelligence could be trained through interpersonal and interpersonal composites in self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills subscales. The idea of coaching for emotional intelligence is to choose main purpose for the conversation and move forward along with different questions by focusing on the desired results. Those sessions could help to increase awareness, enhance empathy (Tschannen-Moran & Carter, 2016) and improve mind flow or listening skills.

In prescriptive level, emotional intelligence development takes care about creativity, effective and positive thinking (Ramanauskas, 2014). Creativity analyses the emotions that influence productivity. Effective thinking guides how to manage complexity by increasing efficiency of thinking. Positive thinking helps to develop good attitude algorithms working with a team or group of people.

As emotional intelligence development strategies become apparent, the emotional intelligence development strategies cover multidimensional characteristics and possibilities for development. Trying to find explanatory nature different generations projects managers emotional intelligence development, paper integrates key concepts of emotional intelligence and three types of emotional intelligence development strategies.

Research methodology

Sample and data collection

Since the aim of the research was to identify how emotional intelligence of different generation's project managers occurs and what are the strategies for its improvement, the exploratory empirical study was used. Therefore, there was developed different project managers' generations emotional intelligence model based on Goleman (2008) and Bar-On (2006) emotional intelligence models. The emotional intelligence model is made up of the following dimensions:



- Personal qualities and abilities: emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, emotional independence, self-actualisation, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence and initiative.
- Adaptability: understanding of real situation, problem solving, flexibility, service-orientation;
- Stress management: stress resistance, impulse control;
- Mood: happiness/wellness, optimism;
- Interpersonal communication abilities: empathy, interpersonal relations, social responsibility, political judgement, reliability;
- Relationship management: leadership, education of others, change initiation and management, influence, conflict management.

The category of the generations of project managers was defined on the basis of the generation periods proposed by Howe & Strauss (1991). The Baby Boom Generation refers to those born in 1943 - 1960, the Generation X born in 1961-1981, the Y Generation born in 1982-2004.

The complex survey was carried out for seven months. The survey was carried out in 2018. The first and the second part of the survey were carried out in January-May, and the third part of the survey was carried out in October.

With a view to assessing the significance of emotional intelligence model dimensions for the model of emotional intelligence of project managers of different generations, an expert survey was carried as part of this research exercise. The experts were selected having considered their project management or expert work expertise (completed and ongoing projects), positions held and their willingness to participate in the survey. The model was assessed by nine experts. For the purpose of determining the compatibility of expert opinions, the authors calculated the Kendall rank correlation coefficient, whose value set ranks from 0 to 1. The average emotional intelligence rank was computed on the basis of expert evaluations (*see Table 1*).

Table 1

Expert assessment of dimensions of emotional intelligence	
Dimensions of emotional intelligence	Average rank
Personal qualities and abilities	
Emotional self-awareness (identification of own emotions and their impact)	9.56.
Assertiveness (polite perseverance)	12.72.
Emotional independence (ability to be independent and be emotionally free from others)	14.06
Self-actualization (ability to identify personal objectives and seek to attain such objectives by disclosing own potential)	13.67
Accurate own assessment (knowledge of own strengths and shortcomings)	11.72
Self-confidence (strong own value and ability feeling)	11.33
Initiative (ability to take advantage of circumstances conducive for activities)	14.94
Adaptation	
Perception of an actual situation (ability to objectively assess the feelings and think realistically)	12.78
Problem solving (ability to efficiently cope with personal problems and those related to interpersonal relations).	16.33
Flexibility (ability to manage own feelings, thinking and behaviour and adapt to new situations and conditions)	18.61



Dimensions of emotional intelligence	Average rank
Service-orientation (ability to identify, recognize and satisfy the needs of another person).	7.17
Stress management	
Stress resistance (ability to efficiently and constructively manage emotions in stress situations)	16.83
Impulse control (an ability to resist a temptation to act)	5.06
Mood	
Happiness/wellness (ability to be satisfied by oneself, others and life)	8.22
Optimism (determination in pursuing an objective irrespective of obstacles and failures)	16.33
Interpersonal communication abilities	
Empathy (compassion for feelings, needs and concerns of others)	14.28
Interpersonal relations (ability to establish and maintain mutually pleasant relations with others)	16.56
Social responsibility (ability to communicate without concern for personal benefit)	9.72
Political judgement (perception of emotional flows and power relations in the group)	10.5
Reliability (compliance with morality and honor principles)	10.28
Relations management	
Leadership (inspiration of people and their groups, leading such groups)	18.67
Education of others (understanding of development needs of other persons and promotion of their abilities)	13.06
Initiation and management of changes	15.44
Influence (use of effective persuasion methods)	11.94
Conflict management (negotiations regarding conflicts and their resolution)	15.22

Source: Authors' construction

For the purpose of studying the key qualities and abilities of emotional intelligence 13 project managers were selected on the basis of the highest rank results. The qualities studied included emotional independence, self-expression, initiative, problem solving, flexibility, stress resistance, optimism, empathy, interpersonal relations, leadership, education of others, initiation and management of change, conflict management), the manifestation of which in relation to project managers of different generations was studied in a later stage of the survey.

The next step in the study sought to assess the expression of dimensions of emotional intelligence of project managers of different generations. Three statements were assigned for each quality and ability of the updated model; the statements were rated at a six-point Likert scale. This stage of the study was dedicated to a quality survey realised using an electronic survey tool. The questionnaire was circulated to targeted project managers of entities and organisations. The sample being studied was based on the “snowball principle”. That means that for the purpose of the study the initial sample was composed of 15 different age project managers working in entities and organisations. The sampled persons were contacted by e-mail and the social network LinkedIn, and were called to fill in the questionnaire, and share it with other project managers. Total 51 questionnaires were filled in and submitted. It is important to note that a sample selected following “a snowball” principle is considered not completely reliable and the survey results may not be extrapolated to the entire populations, i.e. transformed beyond the group being surveyed (Kardelis, 2016), therefore the survey completed is considered a pilot survey. The collected data was processed using the SPSS Statistics programme.



Reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using the Chronbah’s α coefficient. The Cronbach alfa of the questionnaire was equal to 0.836. As DeVellis (2003) claims that if Chronbah’s α coefficient exceeds 0.6 value the questionnaire is acceptable.

During the third stage of the survey based on the model of expression of the emotional intelligence of project managers of different generations, a survey of a focus group was carried out with a view to selecting the development strategies of emotional intelligence of the project managers belonging to different generations. A group of 10 different project managers was set up and the respondents were asked to answer the questions asked to them.

Research results

As a result of interviewing of project managers of different generations the survey produced a model generalising the emotional intelligence expression of the project managers. The model was constructed by computing the percentage values of the answers supporting the expression of emotional intelligence qualities and abilities.

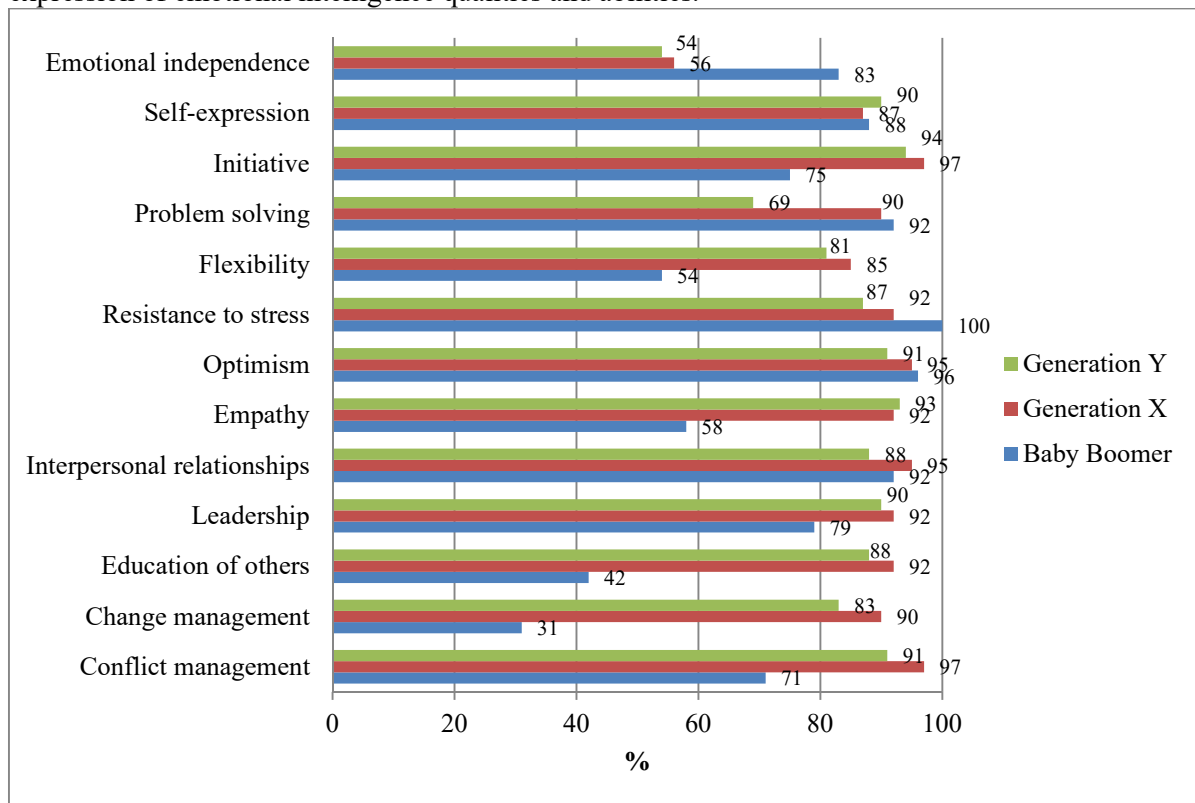


Fig. 1 Expression of emotional intelligence of project managers of different generations
 Source: Authors’ construction

The results of the survey led to a conclusion that there is no significant difference in the optimism, self-expression and the ability to manage interpersonal relations of project managers of different generations (Fig.1). The project managers of generation Baby boomers’ that participated in the survey demonstrated strongly expressed (more than 90 per cent) optimism, stress resistance and ability to deal with problems. The emotional independence and stress



resistance of the project managers belonging to generation Baby boomers' are more prominently manifested than those of the project managers of generations Y and X. Leadership and initiative qualities are less prominent in the project managers of generation baby boomers' than of the other generations. Conflict management, change initiation and management, education of others, empathy and flexibility are less prominently expressed than by the respondents of other generations.

The project managers of generation X that participated in the survey displayed a strongly expressed (more than 90 per cent) abilities such as conflict management, interpersonal relations and education of others, also leadership and conflict management. The emotional independence of generation Y project managers is less prominent than of the project managers representing the baby boom generation.

The project managers of generation Y that participated in the survey displayed a strongly expressed (more than 90 per cent) ability such as conflict management, empathy, optimism and initiative. The project managers of that generations displayed more prominent empathy and self-expression than the project managers of other generations. The emotional independence of generation Y project managers is less prominent than of the project managers representing the baby boom generation.

The survey was launched by asking question: "Do you think that project managers of different generations have differently developed emotional intelligence?" Most of the respondents answered the question positively. Members of the focus group replied that "*representatives of different generations have different educational background; therefore, their emotional intelligence development should be based on different strategies*". The replies can be interpreted as confirmation that project managers of different generations have differently develop emotional intelligence, because on the basis of a generalised model of expression of emotional intelligence of project managers of different generations display different emotional intelligence dimensions.

Further the survey included asking questions on the basis of the dimensions (conflict management, change initiation and management, education of others, leadership, interpersonal relations, empathy, optimism, stress resistance, flexibility, problem solving, initiative, self-expression, or emotional independence) of the generalised model of expression of emotional intelligence of project managers of different generations. An example of other questions was "*can the conflict management abilities be developed on an individual descriptive or predictive levels?*". Further questions were designed to clarify "*whether the conflict management abilities can be developed within the group at the prescriptive level?*"

During the organised discussions the focus group members agreed that change initiation and management and problem-solving abilities could be developed individually on the descriptive level. Such dimensions of project managers of different generations as leadership, interpersonal relations, empathy, optimism, stress resistance, flexibility, initiative, self-expression and emotional independence could be developed on the predictive level. Conflict management and education of other abilities could be developed on the prescriptive level. The focus group members were asked "*are emotional intelligence development strategies different depending on the generations of the project managers*". The received answers permitted a further and more detailed analysis of the emotional intelligence development strategies of project managers of different generations.

The members of the focus group agreed that "representatives of different generation can efficiently develop the emotional intelligence competences in entirely different methods". A



summary of the answers of the focus group allowed a conclusion that a selection of the emotional intelligence development strategies need to take into account the following:

- The Baby boomer generation is able to efficiently use information technologies, however, it to a smaller extent than other generations use social networks, therefore their learning strategies should be based on face-to-face and are classroom learning for soft skills. Baby boomers may efficiently combine a number of innovative learning methods with the conventional methods, such as classroom learning to develop such competences as conflict management, change management, education of others and leadership. In addition to classroom learning descriptive level methods can be used to develop empathy, flexibility and initiative.
- Generation X is distinguished for high computer literacy, its representatives are knowledge susceptible and most often select on-the-job learning. Prescriptive level may be an effective learning access for generation X project managers. On-the-job training efficiently integrates a perspective of group and team group training. Emotional independence is the weakest expressed emotional intelligence competence, and should be developed by applying integrated team training methods.
- Generation Y is in all cases prepared for learning and improving, able to efficiently operate technologies and seeks regular feedback. They favour learning whilst doing with regular coaching and feedback. Predictive level excellently realises learning based on coaching. Such strategies may be applied for developing problem solving, emotional independence and flexibility abilities.

Conclusions

An analysis of the research papers in the area produced additional confirmation that emotional intelligence plays extremely important role in managing projects. Best project management results are achieved when the project manager is at the same time also the leader and demonstrate the same well developed emotional intelligence competences. A daily work of the project manager is related to people, and team management, leading the team towards the objective. The success of project managers in managing their teams depends on their ability to resolve conflicts (Kerzner, 2017). Successful conflict management helps to hold positive work relationships, while collusions of different opinions enables the team to pass more creative decisions and increases productivity. Changes and problem solutions are possible at all and any project living cycle stages and the easiest way to tackle such issues is to anticipate them in advance. Project managers should not be afraid to talk about changes and be able to explain their team members their roles with respect to the changes. Emotional independence is also very important for project managers. A self-confident and emotionally independent manager is confident in performing his/her duties, is more at ease when taking the required decisions (especially when such decisions are unpopular with others) and is efficient in dealing with conflicts. According to Goleman (2008) education of others is related to the perception of the needs of other people, and the promotion of their abilities. Learning teams normally achieve better results. All managers must be leaders and be distinguished for ability to initiate and self-actualisation, and without such qualities it is not possible to form a team consistently seeking a common objective (Morgan, 2015). The interpersonal relations dimension is associated with sensitivity, and the ability to feel positively and comfortable when communicating with other



people (Bar-On, 2013). Empathy helps leaders to efficiently communicate, reduces the gap between the different team members, brings about motivation and helps all in their efforts to look for useful solutions (Bar-On, 2013). The optimism dimension is associated with the project manager's ability to communicate, address problems and ensure productivity, while stress resistance helps efficient and constructive governance (Bar-On, 2013). Flexibility is an important quality of a project manager, because each project is unique: even if project objectives completely coincide, their implementing circumstances are different (Andersen and Collins, 2015). Flexible project managers never think that an envisaged plan is final until it is not fully implemented.

The survey of the expression of emotional intelligence of project managers showed that empathy, flexibility, education of others, initiative and stress management are the least prominent competences of project managers of baby boomer generation; while problem solving abilities and stress management are least developed among generation Y project managers. A comparison of emotional intelligence of project managers of three generations showed that not a single competence was expressed less prominently than of the two other generations. Irrespective, project managers of all generations can further strengthen their emotional intelligence competences. With a view to ensuring the quality and efficiency of learning results, it is specifically important to select most suitable competence development strategy. When selecting emotional intelligence development strategies, the important factors to consider are the generation that the project manager belongs to and the competence intended to be developed.

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