



## **APPLYING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TO PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

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### Stakeholder Relationships

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The concept of emotional intelligence is not new. The challenge exists in its application to the management and successful delivery of projects.

Project management is fundamentally about achieving a result through effective collaboration with others. As project manager, our success is through others – through teams. A great acronym rings true – TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More.

Emotional Intelligence supports you as a project or program manager in the following ways;

- a) Development of Stakeholder Relationships
- b) Better manage teams – at an individual and group level
- c) Improved decision making
- d) Effective communications at all levels
- e) Development of and sustaining a high performing team
- f) Better management of self

This article will focus on the first aspect – Stakeholder Relationships

a) Development of Stakeholder Relationships: Relationships are key to your success as a project or program manager. Stakeholders range from your sponsor, your team, your peers and even yourself. The management of relationships on a project is much like a money box. Your intention needs to be such that you have a buffer to support you in difficult situations. Strong relationships also allow the project to operate at a genuine level, obtain more complete information and assist you to make better decisions.

Ways to Improve Stakeholder Relationships

1. Identify and Prioritise Stakeholders – Once you have identified your stakeholders, sub-divide the list into groups being

- Key Players
- Important
- Affected
- Other

To do this, consider both their influence on the project as well as their interest in the project. Chart them on a grid if need be. A visual representation can be most useful. Categorisation and charting of key stakeholders holds the key to targeting the right stakeholders at the right time in the life of the project and providing them with the right level of engagement, information and communication.

2. Get to know your Stakeholders – Take time to understand your stakeholders at a more personal level. Find out about them, their interests, passions, memberships etc. Take time to remember something about them from your conversations. Most importantly, be genuine in your approach. Make an emotional connection. By this, we mean understand the topics, objectives and common interests that are likely to connect you to the stakeholder and build your goodwill bank. Connections can equally be on a personal as well as professional level.

3. Understand Stakeholder Communication Styles – What is your preferred way of communicating is not necessarily how others like to communicate. Do they prefer email, phone or face to face? How often do they want to engage. Understanding, respecting and applying this will not only demonstrate your flexibility



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as a project manager but will send a message that you have paid attention and have responded in a way that matches with another in which case they will be more open to responding and supporting you.

4. Take Action – The function of developing stakeholder relationships is important throughout the entire lifecycle of the project and even beyond. As a project or program manager, this is a key skill of your role. Some are more natural at building relationships than others. Where you find this to be difficult, consider what is holding you back. At times, it may be cultural or an experience or even a belief we have about ourselves. It is important to note that emotional intelligence can be developed and improved. Changing our behaviour will not only benefit the project but providing us personally with a greater level of fulfilment and job satisfaction.

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