

Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers **The People Skills You Need to Achieve Outstanding Results**

By Anthony Mersino, PMP
(A book review by R. Max Wideman)

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Introduction

For us, the idea that there might be a new angle to project management and its environment is attractive. Perhaps there is still something new to be learned, something that can help us improve our personal performance, especially with people. Certainly, author Anthony Mersino, seems to think so in his book *Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers*. But first, Anthony starts out with a bold but humble confession:

"Writing a book was a lot more work than I had imagined, and it is not something that I could have done on my own. I am extremely grateful to all those people who graciously invested their time and energy to help me with my personal growth and with this book."¹

It seems to us that this is pretty representative of any warm-blooded project manager's project!

And, it appears that Anthony also received valuable advice, for he adds:

"Rajesh Setty was instrumental in pointing out that I was better off to begin writing than to continue planning to write."²

Well, there is a time and place for everything and we agree that planning can be overdone, especially if it becomes an excuse for not actually starting. We have had correspondents who have solicited our support in developing a plan for a book and each year over several years have sent us an ever more elaborate plan. But in the end, that is as far as it got – nothing every surfaced. Still, the right amount of planning is essential if unnecessary rework and wheel spinning is to be avoided.

What is "emotional intelligence" you may ask? It is one of those woolly concepts that is based on the notion that the ability of managers to understand their own emotions, and those of the people they work with, is the key to better business performance.³ There are other definitions but this seems the most relevant to this introduction. So what triggered Anthony's interest in this topic was, as he says:

"On some level I recognized that the way I approached work wasn't always effective. Hard work did not always make the difference in the outcomes of the projects I managed. I wondered how others seemed to succeed with less effort."⁴

That seems to fly in the face of the beliefs of the older generation who were taught that success flows from practice and hard work.

However, as for many of us, Anthony's revelation came as a result of something of a personal crisis. He reports:

"I began to see a connection between my lack of emotional awareness and my limited success in project management. Up to that point, my project management career had been a bumpy road. While not quite a dead end street, my career path hadn't exactly taken a superhighway either. Lately that road didn't seem to be taking me anywhere. I had recently been passed over for a key promotion at Unisys. My career ladder had literally run out of rungs. Perhaps I had been promoted to my level of incompetence and was therefore living proof of the Peter Principle."⁵

Anthony goes on to explain:

"[I learned that] was largely the result of my project management style as a task master. I was all business. Unfortunately, I placed a higher value on tasks, productivity, and outcomes than on relationships. I lacked empathy."⁶

However,

"After spending most of the last five years working on my emotional intelligence, I am happy to report that my career has benefitted significantly."⁷

What follows is a description of how Anthony set about personal change, and the immediate benefits he experienced in how to motivate his project team and, as a result, his increasing responsibilities with even larger and more critical projects.

Book Structure

This book is essentially arranged in four parts containing nine chapters in all. The intent of the chapter titles is to build a structure suited to project management, as we'll see later. These are followed by eleven Appendices that provide useful tools and references for those who decide to pursue the subject further.

The book structure is as follows:

Acknowledgements

Part One – An introduction to Emotional Intelligence

1. My Growth in Emotional Intelligence
2. A Brief Primer on Emotional Intelligence

Part Two – Project Management Begins with Self-Management

3. Self-Awareness
4. Self-Management

Part Three – Building Project Stakeholder Relationships

5. Social Awareness
6. Relationship Management

Part Four – Using EQ to Lead Project Teams

7. Project Team Leadership
8. Creating a Positive Team Environment
9. Leveraging Emotional Intelligence on Large and Complex Projects

Epilogue

Appendixes

- A) Emotional Tally Sheet
- B) Emotional Intelligence Assessment Checklist
- C) Stakeholder Management Tool
- D) Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RAM)
- E) Emotional Intelligence Movie and Scenes
- F) Magazines and Journals on Emotional Intelligence
- G) Books on Emotional Intelligence
- H) Training Sources for Emotional Intelligence
- I) Emotional Intelligence Web Sites
- J) Emotional Intelligence Assessment Instruments
- K) Results of the 2005 Survey of Emotional Intelligence in PMs

What we liked

To get readers going, Author Anthony Mersino provides an Emotional Intelligence Mini-Assessment self-test. This is a table of twenty questions to which you answer 'Yes' or 'No'. To get your personal evaluation, you sum only your 'No' answers and read of the findings in a second table that puts you into one of four categories, effectively: 'You're OK'; 'Not bad'; 'Not good'; and 'You really need to work on it'. Of course you want to know where we landed? – Squarely into the one that says: "Could use some improvement in a few key areas." If only we had known sooner . . .

But in Chapter 1, Anthony states frankly:

"It wasn't until I decided to include emotional intelligence as part of the curriculum for the project management course I taught at Northwestern University that I began to read the published materials on the topic."⁸

That leads us to believe in an apparently common practice: *Teach first and learn afterwards*. How prescient! We know of teachers (not even project managers) who follow in the same path in project management and that makes us worry about the competence of the next generation of project managers.

Advisedly, Anthony spends some time in discussing and defining what Emotional Intelligence is. He suggests that there are three variants:

1. "The ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action."⁹
2. "The abilities to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and in others."¹⁰
3. "Knowing and managing our own emotions and those of others for improved performance."¹¹

The last variant is Anthony's own interpretation in so far as it applies to project management as well as to life in general. In fact, he suggests that Emotional Intelligence is vital to Project Managers for three reasons because:¹²

1. Each project is unique. As PMs move from project to project, [they] constantly experience a change of teams, sponsors, and other stakeholders
2. Projects are temporary, they have a beginning and end, putting pressure on PMs to move quickly leaving little time to develop strong relationships
3. PMs typically have limited power and authority over project team members. PMs need to use more sophisticated strategies to achieve desired outcomes.

Accordingly, Anthony has built his own model framework of Emotional Intelligence for project management as shown in Figure 1.

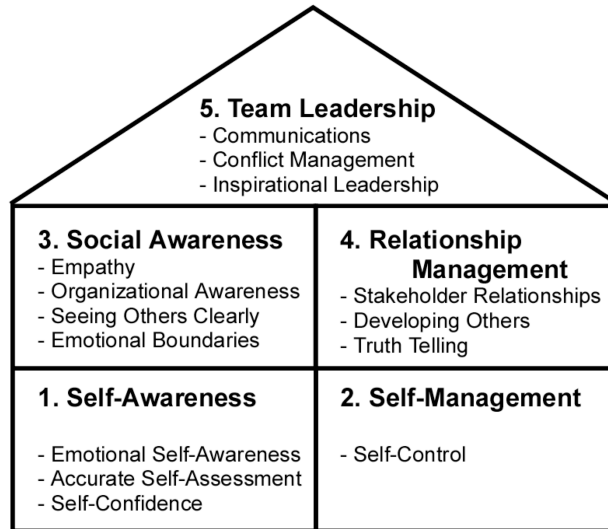


Figure 1: Emotional Intelligence Framework for Project Management¹³

Based on this framework, and like building a house from the ground up, Anthony develops his ideas in the remaining chapters. His material covers a lot of familiar territory especially on the topics of emotions, relationships, leadership and so on. However, the difference is his attempt to show how these apply when it comes to managing the people working on a project.

Perhaps the most interesting for us was Item 5, Team Leadership. For example, under the heading *Methods of Project Communications*, Anthony provides a table of typical means of office communication and against each is *Tips for Maximizing Effectiveness*.¹⁴ In the case of Email, he suggests: "When in doubt, let an Email sit over night or get a friend to read". Either way is like reading the original draft as an incoming message, with a new pair of eyes. That is valuable advice and people should do that far more often.

Chapter 8, Creating a Positive Team Environment also provides valuable insights. In a section titled: *How PMs Set the Tone and Direction for the Project* he lists:¹⁵

- Establish team values
- Enforce the rules
- Stand up to management
- Hold others accountable
- Recognize individuals

These are elaborated in the sections that follow. They are all familiar topics, of course, but nevertheless it is useful to be reminded of them.

Conversely, what characteristics make a project great for the team members? Participants of past projects have suggested:¹⁶

- Interdependence among team members
- Diversity of team members
- Mutual respect
- Challenging work
- Shared common goals
- Everyone committed

- High performance of all members
- Synergy amongst the team

Downside

In a further description of Emotional Intelligence, Anthony Mersino explains that:

"We briefly introduced emotional intelligence in Chapter 1 and provided some definitions used by various researchers. Emotional intelligence is sometimes called emotional quotient, or EQ, to show the relationship to IQ or intelligence quotient. Some researchers use emotional intelligence, EI, and EQ interchangeably. For the remainder of this book, we will use the term EQ to mean emotional intelligence."¹⁷

Notwithstanding this bold statement, the author seems to have remained resolutely with the short form "EI".

As noted earlier, Figure 1 shows Anthony's emotional intelligence framework for project management in which the starting point for emotional intelligence is "Self-Awareness". Earlier, as part of definitions, we were introduced to the "SASHET" family of emotions, namely: "Scared, Angry, Sad, Happy, Excited, Tender"¹⁸ and, we are told, these are the feelings of which we need to be self-aware at any given moment.¹⁹ However, these also crop up in subsequent chapters and that left us a little confused as to which mapping we were on and exactly how the Framework and SASHET family relate.

Next, the Figure 1 framework shows,

"Project Team Leadership is the over-arching aspect of the emotional intelligence framework for project managers. It is about getting the right people on your team, successfully communicating with them and motivating them, and clearing conflicts and other road blocks so that they perform and achieve the project objectives."²⁰

That's all well and good, but what can or should the project manager do when he or she does not have the luxury of choosing the members of their team. The composition of the team based on who happens to be available at the time seems to be the norm rather than the exception. And what if the conflicts and roadblocks are the result of conditions higher up the corporate ladder or the result of interdepartmental political feuds? True, the project manager must be instrumental in seeking resolution, but that's not as simple as just clearing them.

Evidently, Anthony is much impressed with author Daniel Goleman's work on relationship management and this forms the basis of much of his book. However, he perceives an evolution in Goleman's thinking on the matter of Leadership, transforming from "Visionary Leadership" in 2001 to "Inspirational Leadership" in 2002.²¹ So, in Anthony's view and as shown in Figure 1, Inspirational Leadership is the third and final competency of team leadership. He defines Inspirational Leadership as:

"The ability to inspire others by casting a vision for the individual and the team"²²

This may be a minor point of semantics, but we think that it is up to senior management to establish its vision, consistent with which projects are formulated and selected for execution. It is then up to the individual project managers to convey that vision to their respective teams – rather than be "casting" it in the first place.

In the final chapter Anthony asks:

"Are you ready to lead large and complex projects? Many project managers see career

progression as taking on larger and more complex projects. PMs who want to succeed with these projects must have high emotional intelligence. It is possible to get by on small or even medium-sized projects with low emotional intelligence, but there is very little room for error on a large and complex project."²³

And later:

"It's lonely at the top. The bigger the team that the PM is managing, the more likely it is for the PM to feel isolated and alone. With a small team of three or four members, it is likely for the project manager to feel like part of the group. However, when a project manager is managing seventy or more members, it is easy to feel isolated."²⁴

Too right! "Seventy or more members" in a project team is way beyond anyone's capable span of control and anyone in this position is already headed for project disaster. Smart people should avoid such a team like the plague – which no doubt would account for the feeling of loneliness at the top.

Summary

In his Epilogue, and assuming that you have read the book, Author Anthony Mersino concludes with these remarks:

"You have learned about why emotional intelligence is important to project managers, and how to apply it to become a better project manager. You have also learned in Chapters 1 through 9 about a set of tools and techniques that you can use to improve your level of emotional intelligence and your project success. Each chapter includes techniques and mini-exercises for improving your level of emotional intelligence. If you skipped over any techniques or exercises, I recommend that you go back to those that hold the most potential for your improvement. Try the techniques and exercises, even those that seem silly, and see if you can improve your competency in each area.

We can always improve in the area of our people skills. And the great news is this, no matter what our starting point is, we all have the ability to improve our level of emotional intelligence. I still find myself learning and growing in the area of emotional intelligence."

Our own research shows that for the most part, project management people are made up of four Myers Briggs typology groups, namely: Explorer/entrepreneurs; Coordinator/facilitators; Drivers; and Administrators.²⁵ We think that the first two of these four groups will empathize and benefit from the contents of this book, but we are not so certain about the attitudes of the last two.

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¹ Mersino, A., *Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers*, AMACOM, NY, 2007, p vii

² Ibid.

³ Learning Center: Glossary of Management Terms, <http://catalystconsultingpartners.com/glossary.html> accessed 11/11/09

⁴ Mersino, p3

⁵ Ibid, p4. The *Peter Principle* states that: "In a Hierarchy Every Employee Tends to Rise to His Level of

Incompetence." It was formulated by Dr. Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull in their 1969 book *The Peter Principle*, a humorous treatise.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, p5

⁹ Attributed to Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer

¹⁰ Attributed to Daniel Goleman and Gary Cherniss

¹¹ Mersino, p8

¹² Ibid, abstracted from p16

¹³ Ibid, p25

¹⁴ Ibid, pp164-165

¹⁵ Ibid, 191

¹⁶ Ibid, p189

¹⁷ Ibid, p22

¹⁸ Ibid, p21

¹⁹ Ibid, p34

²⁰ Ibid, p157

²¹ Ibid, p114

²² Ibid, p174

²³ Ibid, p205

²⁴ Ibid, p207

²⁵ See <http://www.maxwideman.com/papers/personality/findings.htm>