



VILNIUS UNIVERSITY
BUSINESS SCHOOL

INTERNATIONAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Augustas Blažys

THE FINAL MASTER'S THESIS

LYDERIO EMOCINIS INTELEKTAS IR PROJEKTO SĖKMĖ PROFESINIŲ PASLAUGŲ SEKTORIJE	LEADER'S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND PROJECT SUCCESS IN THE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES INDUSTRY
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Supervisor Assoc. Prof. Andrius Valickas

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SUMMARY

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LEADER’S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND PROJECT SUCCESS IN THE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES INDUSTRY

Supervisor – Assoc. Prof. Andrius Valickas

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The FMT described in brief. Emotional intelligence has been a topic of growing interest in recent years, as businesses increasingly recognise that organisational success extends beyond traditional financial performance indicators and is now more than ever linked to human-centred approaches, such as employee engagement, well-being, and emotional connection, as critical drivers of performance. While EI has been widely researched across various industries, its specific applicability and importance within the professional services industry remains highly unexplored. This thesis seeks to address this knowledge gap by using qualitative methods to explore lived experiences and perspectives of leaders within various subsectors of both neo and classical PSFs, offering a deeper understanding of how EI relates to project success in client-centric, high-pressure environments.

Aim and objectives. Thesis aims to provide a clear understanding of the relationship, or lack thereof, between the leader’s emotional intelligence and project success in the professional services industry. To achieve, 5 research objectives were set. Firstly, to critically review existing academic research on professional service firms, emotional intelligence as well as their relation to

modern leadership theories and project success. Secondly, to understand the relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success within professional service firms through analysis of qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, providing insights based on practical experiences. Third, to distinguish which branches of the Bar-On's emotional-social intelligence framework, if any, serve as core elements in the relationship. Fourth, to develop a list of practical recommendations based on research findings, putting emphasis on emotional intelligence practices that leaders in professional services firms may adopt, aiming to improve project success. Lastly, to the existing body of knowledge on emotional intelligence, leadership, and project success, focusing on its specific impact within the professional services industry.

Research methods and results. The existing body of knowledge was systematically reviewed and critically assessed. For the research component of the study, a qualitative methodology was chosen, and a unique research instrument was developed. 9 interviewees were carefully selected based on predefined criteria, and research data was collected through semi-structured interviews. A hybrid thematic analysis method was then employed to analyse and interpret the research data. Research results were then later systemised, providing insights on EI related practices that leaders may adopt to improve project successes within their professional services firms.

Conclusions. In short, several main takeaways emerge from the results of this research. First, traditional project success metrics – such as scope, cost, time, and quality – are insufficient in the contexts of PSFs, instead leaders put greater emphasis on more subjective measures. Secondly, there is a strong positive relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success within professional services industry, with supporting evidence across all five branches of Bar-On's ESI model. Third, leader's emotional intelligence is of particular importance in successfully building and maintaining strong client relationships built on mutual trust and understanding, which are essential not only to project success in PSFs, but also for sustained growth and overall success of an organisation. Fourth, interviewees identified strong intrapersonal and interpersonal skills as especially critical factors of emotional intelligence that affect project success in PSFs. In conclusion, this thesis significantly contributes to understanding of complex and nuanced ways in which leader's emotional intelligence drives project success within professional services industry.

SANTRAUKA

VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO VERSLO MOKYKLA

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AUGUSTAS BLAŽYS

**LYDERIO EMOCINIS INTELEKTAS IR PROJEKTO SĖKMĖ PROFESINIŲ
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Trumpas magistro darbo aprašymas. Pastaraisiais metais emocinio intelekto tema vis labiau domimasi, nes įmonės vis dažniau pripažįsta, kad organizacijos sėkmė neapsiriboja vien tradiciniais finansiniais veiklos rodikliais ir dabar labiau nei bet kada yra susijusi su į darbuotoją orientuotais sprendimais, tokiais kaip darbuotojų įsitraukimo, gerovės ir emocinio stabilumo didinimas. Nors emocinio intelekto tema nėra nauja ir buvo plačiai tyrinėta įvairiose industrijose, tačiau EI pritaikomumas ir svarba profesinių paslaugų sektoriuje vis dar labai menkai ištirti. Šiuo tyrimu siekiama užpildyti šią spragą ir kokybinių metodų pagalba ištirti lyderių, dirbančių įvairiuose neo- ir klasikinėse paslaugų sektoriaus įmonėse, gyvenimiškas patirtis ir požiūrius, siekiant geriau suprasti, kaip lyderio EI yra susijęs su projekto sėkme į klientą orientuotoje, greitai besikeičiančioje aplinkoje.

Tikslas ir uždaviniai. Darbo tikslas - aiškiai suprasti ryšį tarp lyderio emocinio intelekto ir projektų sėkmės profesinių paslaugų sektoriuje. Tikslui pasiekti buvo iškelti 5 tyrimo uždaviniai. Pirma, kritiškai apžvelgti esamus mokslinius tyrimus apie profesinių paslaugų įmones, emocinį intelektą,

taip pat jų ryšį su šiuolaikinėmis lyderystės teorijomis ir projektų sėkme. Antra, išanalizavus kokybinius duomenis, surinktus pusiau struktūruotų interviu metu, suprasti vadovo emocinio intelekto ir projektų sėkmės ryšį profesinių paslaugų įmonėse, pateikiant praktinę patirtimi pagrįstas išvagas. Trečia, išskirti, kurios Bar-On emocinio-socialinio intelekto sistemos šakos, jei tokios yra, yra esminiai šio sąryšio elementai. Ketvirta, remiantis tyrimo rezultatais parengti praktinių rekomendacijų sąrašą, akcentuojant emocinio intelekto praktikas, kurias galėtų taikyti profesinių paslaugų įmonių lyderiai, siekdami padidinti projektų sėkmę. Galiausiai, papildyti esamą žinių apie emocinį intelektą, lyderystę ir projektų sėkmę visumą, sutelkiant dėmesį į konkretų poveikį profesinių paslaugų sektoriuje.

Tyrimo metodai ir rezultatai. Sistemingai apžvelgti ir kritiškai įvertinti esamų mokslinių tyrimų rezultatai. Tyrimo atlikti buvo pasirinkta kokybinė metodologija ir sukurtas unikalus tyrimo instrumentas. Pagal iš anksto nustatytus kriterijus buvo kruopščiai atrinkti 9 respondentai, o tyrimo duomenys buvo renkami pusiau struktūruotų interviu būdu. Tuomet tyrimo duomenys buvo analizuoti ir interpretuoti taikant mišrios teminės analizės metodą. Vėliau tyrimo rezultatai buvo susisteminti, pateikiant išvagas apie emocinio intelekto praktikas, kurias lyderiai gali taikyti siekdami pagerinti projektų sėkmę profesinių paslaugų įmonėse.

Išvados. Trumpai, apibendrinant šio tyrimo rezultatus, galima išskirti kelias pagrindines išvadas. Pirma, tradicinių projekto sėkmės rodiklių, tokių kaip aprėptis, biudžetas, laikas ir kokybė, profesinių paslaugų įmonių kontekste nepakanka, vietoj to vadovai daugiau dėmesio skiria subjektyvesniems rodikliams. Antra, egzistuoja stiprus teigiamas ryšys tarp vadovo emocinio intelekto ir projektų sėkmės profesinių paslaugų sektoriuje, o tai patvirtina visos penkios Bar-On ESI modelio šakos. Trečia, vadovo emocinis intelektas yra ypač svarbus sėkmingai kuriant ir palaikant tvirtus, abipusiu pasitikėjimu ir supratimu grįstus santykius su klientais, kurie yra labai svarbūs ne tik projektų sėkmei, bet ir tvariam profesinių paslaugų organizacijos augimui. Ketvirta, apklaustieji nurodė, kad stiprūs savęs ir kitų žmonių suvokimo įgūdžiai yra svarbiausi emocinio intelekto veiksniai, darantys įtaką projektų sėkmei profesinių paslaugų organizacijose. Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad šis darbas reikšmingai prisideda prie suvokimo kokiais kompleksiniais ir niuansuotais būdais vadovo emocinis intelektas lemia projektų sėkmę profesinių paslaugų sektoriuje.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EI – Emotional intelligence

ESI – Emotional social intelligence

PSF – Professional services firm

TFL – Transformational leadership theory

LIST OF DEFFINITIONS

Consulting firms – used as a synonym to professional services firms

Emotional intelligence – ability to recognise, understand, and manage your own emotions while also being able to recognise, understand, and influence the emotions of others.

Leadership – „the process of influencing followers to accomplish goals by providing direction and motivation (Humphrey, 2002).

Professional services industry (scope) – neo and classical PSFs, spanning Finance & Accounting, Legal & Tax Advisory, Human Resources, and Management Consulting.

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the topic

Emotional intelligence has been a topic of growing interest in recent years, as businesses increasingly recognise that organisational success extends beyond traditional financial performance indicators and is now more than ever before linked to human-centred approaches, such as employee engagement, well-being, and emotional connection, as critical drivers of performance. This is clearly evidenced by global industry leaders like Google, Microsoft, Zoom, and the like, which have already expanded their business strategies to also include employee-centred goals, reflecting their broader commitment to the creation of positive workplace environments and sustainable business growth.

While EI has been widely researched across various industries, its specific applicability and importance within the professional services industry remains highly unexplored. It is common knowledge that PSFs, in part, serve as drivers for market growth and innovation, helping client's businesses to increase performance by designing and implementing the latest industry practices. Given that PSFs operate in high-pressure, client-driven environments suggests that leaders must utilise their EI every day to effectively communicate with and manage the expectations of clients, contractors and team members. Frances Wright (2023), associate director at PwC South Africa – a global professional services firm – recently outlined the importance of EI in PSFs by suggesting that *‘emotional intelligence contributes to business success as measured through growth, sustainability, customer satisfaction, and net profit. In recognising emotional intelligence as a catalyst for positive business outcomes, it becomes imperative for business leaders to cultivate these skills to foster a thriving environment.’*

It is inevitable that with the rise of AI and automation, where human technical skills may face increased redundancy in certain industries, EI will further emerge as a core leadership competence in PSFs that will play a pivotal role in helping teams to achieve their goals, adapt to rapidly changing business environments of today, and foster collaborative, high-performing workplaces, ultimately driving long-term success of and sustainability of PSFs. This underscores the critical need to investigate the relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success within the professional services industry.

Novelty of the topic

Despite a growing body of research on emotional intelligence and its links to leadership, project success, and organisational outcomes, a significant gap remains regarding its application within the professional services industry. While numerous studies have examined the relationship in environments that share characteristics with PSFs – such as high intensity, client-driven demands, and complex, ambiguous challenges requiring innovative and individualised solutions – these investigations have mostly focused on specific subsectors of PSFs or been conducted outside the context of PSFs altogether, leaving little to no attention to PSFs as a whole.

Furthermore, much of the existing literature relies on quantitative methods, leaving a limited understanding of the nuanced ways in which leader's emotional intelligence relates to project outcomes. The lack of in-depth qualitative exploration on how emotionally intelligent leaders foster collaboration, resilience, and success within PSF projects highlights the need for further exploration of the topic. This thesis seeks to address this gap by utilising qualitative methods to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of leaders within various subsectors of both neo and classical PSFs, offering a nuanced and context-specific understanding of how EI relates to project success in client-centric, high-pressure environments.

Thesis problem

The research problem of this thesis aims to address the gap in the knowledge regarding the relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success in the professional services industry, more specifically neo and classical PSFs – spanning Finance & Accounting, Legal & Tax Advisory, Human Resources, and Management Consulting services.

Aim of the thesis

The thesis aims to provide a clear understanding of the relationship, or lack thereof, between the leader's emotional intelligence and project success in the professional services industry.

Objectives of the thesis

- 1) To review and critically assess existing academic research on professional service firms, emotional intelligence, as well as its connections with modern leadership theories and project success within the professional services industry, identifying knowledge gaps that will serve as the foundation for this research.
- 2) To understand the relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success within professional service firms through analysis of qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, providing insights based on practical experiences.
- 3) To distinguish which structural parts of the Bar-On's emotional intelligence framework, if any, serve as core elements in the relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success in PSFs.
- 4) To develop a list of practical recommendations based on research findings, putting emphasis on emotional intelligence practices that leaders in professional services firms may adopt, aiming to improve project success.
- 5) To contribute to the existing body of knowledge on emotional intelligence, leadership, and project success, focusing on its specific impact within the professional services industry.

Methods of the thesis

The existing body of knowledge was systematically reviewed and critically assessed. For the research component of the study, a qualitative methodology was chosen, and a unique research instrument was developed to capture relationships and dynamics intended by the author. 9 interviewees were carefully selected based on predefined criteria, and research data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, for the analysis and interpretation of findings, a structured approach – hybrid thematic analysis – was employed, ensuring reliability and exhaustiveness of findings.

Authors experience in the professional services industry

With over three years of work experience in management consulting – a subfield of the professional services sector – at a one-stop-shop PSF with over 200 employees, the author possesses extensive industry knowledge and a deep understanding of the complexities of

environments in which professional service firms operate. This will provide a strong basis for interpreting interview findings, allowing for more detailed and nuanced findings.

Structure and scope of the thesis

- 1) **Section 1 – Leader’s emotional intelligence in project management.** Provides a critical review of existing academic research on the topic, focusing on professional service firms, emotional intelligence as well as its connections with modern leadership theories and project success within the professional services industry where possible.
- 2) **Section 2 – Research methodology.** Outlines research design, sampling methodology, and author-developed qualitative research instrument along with short descriptions of selected interviewees and the methodologies used to analyse interview data.
- 3) **Section 3 – Research data analysis and discussion.** Provides research findings on the relationship between leader’s emotional intelligence and project success within the professional services industry. Despite a few smaller subsections, the results are organised in accordance with the five underlying branches of Bar-On’s ESI model – intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, stress management, adaptability, and general mood.
- 4) **Section 4 – Conclusions and recommendations.** Provides a summary of results along with theoretical and practical recommendations for future research.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The author has utilised various Artificial Intelligence tools throughout the research for the following purposes: 1) as a secondary source for identification of research articles and other relevant sources; 2) as a test subject when evaluating the validity of an author built research instrument before setting up actual interviews; 3) as a transcription tool to simplify the process of the transcription of interview recordings; 4) as a translation tool to simplify the process of the translation of interview recordings; 5) in some instances as a ‘dictionary’ to find better phrasing. However, at no point during the writing of this masters thesis has the AI been used to conduct and structure the research itself.

1. LEADER'S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Broadly defined as the ability to understand and manage emotions in oneself and others, emotional intelligence has been an area of growing interest in both academic and professional fields over the past several decades. The origins of interest in human emotions can be traced back to the late 19th century when Charles Darwin (1872) suggested that emotions are central to human survival and adaptation. Since then, the field of EI has evolved into a multidisciplinary area of study, providing insights to leaders and organisations on how to best navigate in fast-paced and increasingly complex business environments of today.

In a contemporary business environment where human interaction has become central to business success, emotional intelligence just might be one of the factors enabling organisations to gain a competitive advantage by utilising the full potential of their employees and operations.

In the context of project management within the professional services industry – an environment defined by project-based operations, high intensity, and significant shareholder complexity – leaders are uniquely positioned to leverage EI in pursuit of an increase in project success and client satisfaction. Leaders operating in professional service firms must find balance themselves and address the diverse needs of multiple stakeholders: clients (external stakeholders), internal stakeholders as well as project teams. Balancing these demands is key to sustained project success in the professional services industry. It heavily relies not only on a leader's ability to think strategically and seamlessly integrate multiple perspectives but also on core EI competencies, such as self-awareness, understanding emotions and influencing choices of others, adaptability to changing environments, empathy, and emotional regulation.

Despite the growing body of literature on emotional intelligence and its importance on project success and organisational performance across various industries, there remains a gap in research, specifically examining its impact on project management in the professional services industry. Given the reliance of this industry on efficient knowledge management, client-centric projects and interpersonal relationships, understanding the relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success is of utmost importance. This literature review critically evaluates existing research on emotional intelligence, leadership and project success within business

environments, connecting their relevance to the professional services industry where possible. The literature review is structured as follows:

- **Emotional intelligence: defining the concept.** Defines the most prominent theories of emotional intelligence, outlining their similarities and differences.
- **The professional services industry: context and characteristics.** Provides an overview of what the professional services industry is, outlines work environments and difficulties that PSFs currently face and identifies factors that influence project success in PSFs.
- **Leadership and organisational performance.** Defines relevant theories of leadership, identifying their connection to emotional intelligence and project success within the environments similar to those commonly found in PSFs.

By providing a thorough understanding of concepts outlined above, the section of literature review will provide a strong basis for the qualitative study that follows, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive understanding on how EI can be leveraged by leaders working in professional services industry to enhance project success in the sector.

1.1. Emotional intelligence: defining the concept

The concept of so-called social intelligence that later grew into the emotional intelligence that we know today dates to the late 19th century. Darwin (1872) suggested that emotions are central to human survival and adaptation. With further development of the topic there came new theories. Thorndike (1920) first introduced a concept stating that besides IQ there also exist non-cognitive forms of intelligence, which he calls social intelligence, referring to it as a person's ability to understand and manage other people and to engage in adaptive social interactions. This closely aligns with Wechsler's (1943) conclusion that non-cognitive factors are critical to success. Gardner (1983) proposed a theory of multiple intelligences outlining interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence as essential for understanding and managing emotion. But it is not until 1990s when psychologists Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer introduced a newly defined term Emotional Intelligence that later gained widespread recognition amongst the general public when Daniel Goleman popularised it in his 1995 publication. The novelty of the topic, coupled with advances in medical understanding of the human brain, led to a vast amount of research concerning the topic. Over time, this inevitably resulted in development of numerous definitions of emotional

intelligence, three of which have emerged as the most prominent and will be discussed and compared in the subsections that follow.

1.1.1. Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence

The ability model of emotional intelligence, initially developed by Mayer and Salovey in 1990 and later updated by Mayer, Caruso and Salovey in 2016 to better reflect current times, is one of the most influential and widely accepted frameworks of emotional intelligence. It defines EI as one's '*ability to reason validly with emotions and with emotion-related information, and to use emotions to enhance thought*' (Mayer et al., 2016). Unlike broader conceptualisations, this model frames EI as a measurable set of cognitive abilities, similar to IQ. The model characterises EI into four interconnected branches, that when combined, are believed to constitute a unified construct of emotional intelligence (Mayer et al., 2004). The four branches can be described as follows:

- **Accurate perception of emotions.** Ability to accurately perceive emotions in oneself and others based on facial expressions, vocal cues and behaviours. It is a foundational part of emotional intelligence and is crucial for successful social interactions.
- **Use of emotions to facilitate thinking.** Ability to employ the perceived emotions in a way so they enhance cognitive abilities, such as problem-solving and decision-making.
- **Understanding emotional meanings.** Emotions convey information, thus ability to comprehend the meaning of emotional language and relationships between different emotions is central.
- **Managing emotions.** Ability to regulate own emotions and those of other individuals, promoting emotional well-being and intellectual growth.

Thus, the ability model of emotional intelligence provides a robust foundation to understanding the framework as a measurable set of cognitive abilities that contribute to personal and interpersonal effectiveness.

1.1.2. Mixed Model of Emotional Intelligence

In 2005 Daniel Goleman expanded the concept of emotional intelligence proposed by the Mayer, Caruso and Salovey, to what is now known as the Mixed model of emotional intelligence. The EI is no longer perceived as a purely cognitive ability but instead as a combination of

emotional competences, social skills, personality traits as well as motivational factors (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2019). It goes beyond simple cognitive abilities and instead includes a broader spectrum of characteristics, such as interpersonal competencies, that influence persons performance at work and its level of leadership effectiveness. Goleman (2005) identifies 5 main competences that belong to Emotional intelligence:

- **Self-awareness.** Ability to recognise and understand own emotions and their effects on others.
- **Self-regulation.** Capacity to control own emotions by redirecting disruptive emotions and impulses even in stressful situations.
- **Self-motivation.** One's passion for work that is above a simple need for financial safety and entitlement, characterised by energy and persistence.
- **Empathy.** Ability to understand the emotions of others, effectively reacting to them so that others feel understood and supported.
- **Social skills.** Ability to facilitate effective communication, successfully manage relationships with others and build networks.

Because of its versatility of including both abilities, such as empathy and self-regulation, and personality traits, such as motivation and social skills, Goleman's mixed model of emotional intelligence has become central in leadership training and organisational development (Lopes et al., 2002). Especially in environments where emotional intelligence is viewed as a key determinant of one's ability to successfully manage teams and drive performance.

1.1.3. Emotional-Social Intelligence Model

Following this in 1997 Reuven Bar-On proposed an even broader definition of emotional intelligence that those suggested by Mayer and Salovey in 1990 and later Goleman in 1995, calling it Emotional-Social Intelligence (ESI) and defining as a '*cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands*' (Bar-On, 2006). Similarly to the Goleman's mixed model of emotional intelligence, Bar-On's ESI framework integrates both emotional and social competencies, such as one's ability to maintain social relationships or manage stress (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2019). However, it extends beyond Goleman's workplace-centric approach by emphasising personal well-being and life functioning

(Bar-On, 2006). It encompasses unique components such as stress management, adaptability and general mood, providing a holistic understanding of how individuals navigate personal and interpersonal challenges. It also acknowledges that success in life is not just about managing one's own emotions, but also about understanding and relating effectively to those of others.

Bar-On's (2006) ESI model is centred around five key components, each of which comprises of a number of closely related competencies, skills and facilitators:

- **Intrapersonal skills.** Ability to understand and be aware of own emotions, strengths as well as weaknesses and understanding these, express emotions in a thoughtful non-destructive manner.
- **Interpersonal skills.** Awareness of other's feelings and needs combined with the ability to demonstrate empathy and develop and maintain mutually satisfying relationships.
- **Stress management.** Ability to cope with stress by controlling impulses coming from emotions.
- **Adaptability.** Ability to cope with personal and interpersonal change and adjust the course of action in accordance with changing circumstances.
- **General mood.** The feel of satisfaction regarding oneself, life and surroundings.

Thus, Bar-On's Emotional-Social Intelligence model provides a holistic framework that integrates emotional and social competencies, such as adaptability, stress management and personal well-being, emphasising them as essential components for success in personal as well as interpersonal environments.

1.1.4. Comparing the models of emotional intelligence

Following what's outlined above, it is clear that while the three main definitions of emotional intelligence differ in scope and focus, they share fundamental elements by accounting for one's ability to perceive emotions in oneself and others, understand these perceived emotions and utilise them to regulate behaviour of oneself and others as well as to facilitate decision making (O'Connor et. al., 2019). However, their differences in conceptualisation and application have led to ongoing debates in the field.

Joseph and Newman (2010) critique the inclusion of personality traits, social skills and emotional competencies in the mixed models of emotional intelligence (Goleman's and Bar-On's) and argue that this creates an ambiguity in what constitutes EI and creates confusion on whether

EI is a distinct construct or simply an aggregation of various personality traits. Moreover, it is argued that such models do not adequately differentiate between EI as an ability and EI as a trait, leading to conceptual inconsistencies (Mayer et al, 2008).

However, the ability model, as defined by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso is not without its flaws and has been criticised for being too narrow on its focus on cognitive abilities related to emotion, overlooking the broader social and contextual factors that influence EI (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Especially when having in mind that emotional responses can vary widely depending on situational factors, cultural norms and interpersonal dynamics (Matsumoto et al., 2008).

Despite these critiques, Goleman's and Bar-On's models, which, besides cognitive abilities, also consider social competencies and personality traits, have been widely applied in leadership and organisational settings (Miao et al., 2017). Findings have consistently demonstrated significant correlations between these models and various workplace outcomes, including job performance and leadership effectiveness (O'Boyle et al., 2010). Meanwhile, Salovey's ability model, with its focus on cognitive aspects of emotions and its measurable, scientific approach, has been commonly used in academic and psychological circles as a valid construct within the field of psychology (Brackett et al., 2006).

A detailed comparison of key aspects of the three models of emotional intelligence is presented in the Table 1 below, summarising their strengths, limitations and relevance in different contexts.

Table 1

Comparison of ability, mixed and emotional-social intelligence models of emotional intelligence

Aspect	Ability model	Mixed model	Emotional-Social Intelligence model
Scope	Narrow	Broad	Holistic
Core Focus	Cognitive abilities (reasoning with emotions)	Emotional and social competencies, personality traits	Emotional and social competencies, adaptability, stress management,

			emphasis on personal well-being
Key components	Perceiving, facilitating, understanding, managing emotions.	Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills.	Intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, general mood.
Application	Primarily in psychological assessments and research contexts.	Primarily leadership training and organisational development.	Applicable in both personal development and professional settings, emphasising well-being.
Business Relevance	Moderate, limited applicability to real-world contexts.	High, with focus on leadership and team dynamics.	Very High, especially in high-pressure and adaptive environments.
Measurement	Performance-based assessments	Self-report questionnaires assessing emotional competencies.	Self-report measures focusing on emotional and social competencies.
Limitations	Limited real-world applicability	Measurement challenges, self-report bias	Overlap with Mixed EI; subjective interpretation

Source: compiled by the author

1.1.5. Measurement of emotional intelligence

In terms of methodologies applied for measuring EI the categorisation was first proposed by Petrides and Furnham (2000) and comprised of two primary models: trait EI and ability EI. This two-model framework has been deemed as sufficient to classify a vast majority of EI tests (Perez et al., 2005). The distinction between the models lies in their measurement approach, more specifically on whether the measurement was based on a self-report questionnaire (trait EI) or a

text of maximum performance (ability EI) (Petrides & Furnham, 2000; Perez et al., 2005). Thus, the tests were applied for different purposes. Ability EI, measured through tests like the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), assess an individual's theoretical understanding of emotions and how they function, while in contrast, trait EI, evaluated through tests like the Bar-On ESI framework, focus on typical responses in emotion-related scenarios and self-perceived emotional competences. (O'Connor et al., 2019).

While by design ability EI measures are thought to seek an objective assessment, they face criticism for their reliance on correct and incorrect answers (Côté & Miners, 2006; Farh et al., 2012) and that measuring EI in a controlled testing environment may fail to fully capture the picture of how individuals apply EI in real-world situations (O'Connor et al., 2016). Moreover, ability-based measures have been found to provide valid, though weaker, predictions of outcomes such as job performance (O'Boyle et al., 2010) and job satisfaction (Miao et al., 2017). Conversely, trait EI measures, focusing on actual behaviours of individuals in a range of situations, have shown stronger predictive validity in practical settings (Petrides & Furnham, 2000) and have proven to be valid predictors of multiple emotion-related outcomes, such as job performance (O'Boyle et al., 2010) and job satisfaction (Miao et al., 2017). Nevertheless, trait EI models are not without limitations and have been found to be particularly susceptible to self-report biases, especially when people estimate their own abilities (Dunning et al. 2004; Brackett et al., 2006; Lievens et al., 2011).

The limitations in both types of quantitative approaches suggest the need for qualitative exploration to understand the nuanced relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success in complex and fast-paced environments of professional services. Interviews, if performed correctly, can provide insights into how leaders utilise EI in real-world project situations, addressing the gaps in the quantitative measurement tools (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022).

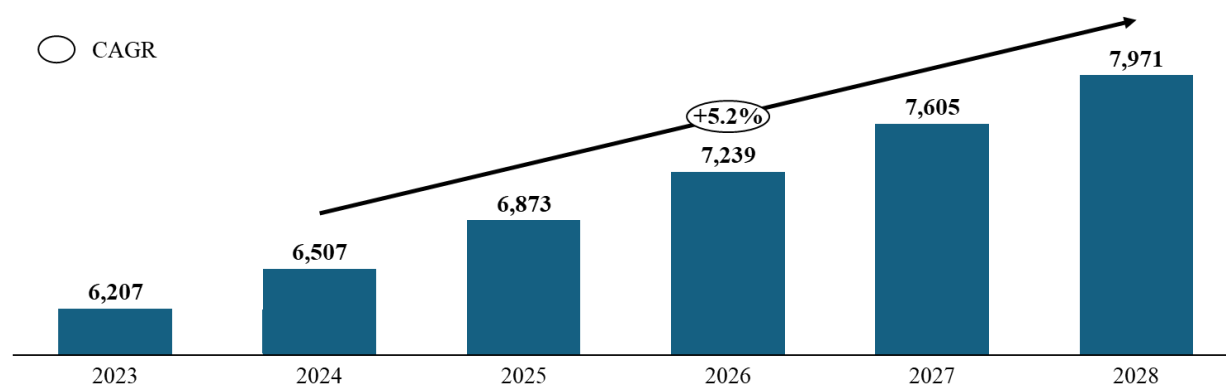
1.2. The professional services industry: context and characteristics

The intricacies of the professional services industry have been of interest to researchers ever since their more prominent emergence in the US right after the World War II as corporations and governments sought of best ways to rebuild and expand in a rapidly chaining world. This era marked the rise of the major professional service firms we know today, like McKinsey & Company and Boston Consulting Group, alongside many smaller consultancies. The faster development of

PSFs in the US, when compared to other regions, is often attributed to cultural and organisational differences. In the US, hiring consultants was viewed as a practical approach to addressing gaps in knowledge and experience. On the contrary, European management traditionally emphasised self-sufficiency, expecting managers to possess a broad set of competencies across various domains of the organisation, which led to the hiring of consultants being less accepted. However, nowadays as the economies globalised and expectations for firm managers shifted, consultancies adapted, expanding into new geographies. Today, leading PSFs, such as McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group, Bain, Deloitte and others, demonstrate a global presence, reflecting the interconnected nature of the industry. Figure 1 further emphasises on the importance of PSFs in global economies and demonstrates its enormous scale of business. It shows that the market size of PSFs reached 6 207 billion USD in 2023 and is projected to grow at an average annual rate of 5.2% over the next 5 years, reaching an impressive 7 971 billion USD by 2028.

Figure 1

Professional service industry market size, USD billions



Source: adapted by the author based on the research of The Business Research Company

While there are many definitions and generalisations of what professional services firms are, this research adopts the taxonomy of knowledge-intensive firms outlined by Von Nordenflycht (2010), which addresses the ambiguity surrounding the definition of PSFs. Building on Von Nordenflycht's classifications, this thesis puts emphasis on PSFs that specifically focus on serving business clients as their primary line of business. The focus is therefore on Classic PSFs, such as management consultancies, and Neo-PSFs, including law and accounting firms. Other entities

sometimes included in broader definitions of PSFs, denoted by Von Nordenflycht as technology developers (e.g. biotech and R&D labs) and professional campuses (e.g. hospitals), are excluded from this research due to their fundamentally different operating models and business focus.

Professional service firms are, so to say, ‘*highly efficient and effective assemblers and distributors of knowledge and information*’ (Christiansen, 1997) and can be characterised by three distinct characteristics – professional workforce, low capital intensity and knowledge intensity (Von Nordenflycht, 2010). Professional Service Firms operate on a project-by-project basis, providing their expertise to clients in various industries such as manufacturing, banking, healthcare, technology, etc. These firms help their clients address complex business challenges that may exceed the knowledge or capabilities of their internal teams. Engaging a consulting firm is often even the most cost-effective solution when compared to hiring additional FTEs, especially for very specialised or temporary needs. Projects themselves are often as varied as the client pool and often require consultants to adapt and come up with unique solutions that meet client-specific needs. A total of 4 key reasons can be identified of why professional service firms are of particular importance to the economy – reasons that based on the thesis author’s experience of working in a one-stop-shop PSF, remain relevant today:

- They help organisations to make the best-informed decisions promptly (Christiansen, 1997)
- To help to transform organisations and make them operate more efficiently (Christiansen, 1997; Empson et al., 2015)
- They hold knowledge on business environments and techniques across different companies and countries (Christiansen, 1997) and thus are perfectly positioned to (co-) produce and spread new innovative business practices, linking firms, sectors and countries as well as help integrate them in a global system (Bühlmann, 2023)
- They hire and train a large number of university undergraduates, many of these people leave PSFs and go work for other firms. Thus, consultancies are a trading ground for future managers (Christiansen, 1997; Buchanan & Badham, 2008)

In today’s fast-paced business environment, PSFs face increasing pressures from their clients to rapidly deliver tailored, client-specific solutions, placing PSFs in a delicate balancing act between speed, quality and cost. Achieving profitability, ensuring operational efficiency and

maintaining high client satisfaction at the same time are central to survival of these firms, making preparation of high-quality deliverables that meet client needs a top priority.

1.2.1. Work culture and conditions

PSFs are heavily reliant on human capital, making it essential for them to select and retain top talent in order to maximise their efficiency and performance (Malhotra & Morris, 2009). This dependence poses a significant challenge, as PSFs are finding it increasingly difficult to attract entry-level employees, while rapidly increasing complexity of business challenges faced by clients demand a broader range of advanced skills, simultaneously driving up staff training and development costs (Stumpf et al., 2002).

Working long hours has been associated with the professional services industry, particularly in roles like auditing, for many years now (Ladva & Andrew, 2014). Poor work-life balance of individuals engaged in PSF industry has been found to be harmful to both employees and organisations (Noury et al., 2017; Sasmaz, 2023), leading to a reduction of productivity (Pencavel, 2015) or even health-related issues such as very high stress (Cooper et al., 1978) and an increased risk of coronary heart disease (Virtanen et al., 2010). Thus, effective management and leadership styles play a crucial role in mitigating these challenges, helping PSF employees to feel valued, improving their job satisfaction and performance, and ultimately reducing employee turnover. Emotionally intelligent leaders, as previously discussed, are of critical importance as they are able to understand and effectively address emotional needs of their teams, fostering work environments where followers feel valued, understood and motivated to collaborate and contribute to project success even in the challenging environments that PSFs operate in. Moreover, Khavis and Krishnan (2020) discovered that career growth, management support and organisational culture have a higher impact on job satisfaction for audit employees than work-life balance. However, overworking employees – even highly satisfied ones – can lead to a decline in their quality of work (Khavis & Krishnan, 2020). However, this can be generalised to PSFs and businesses in other industries.

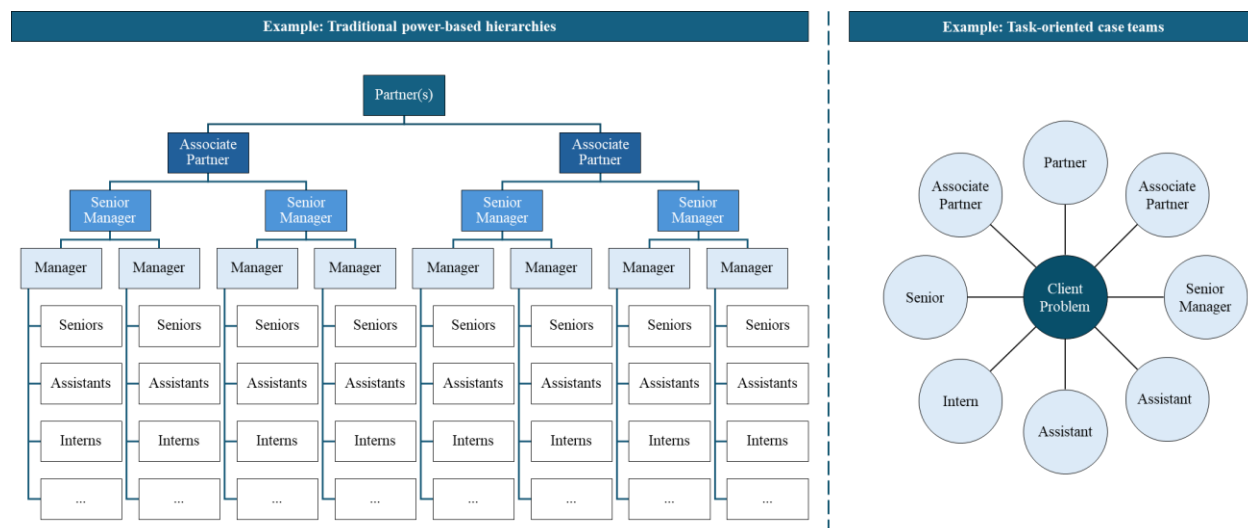
1.2.2. Operational model

PSFs distinguish themselves from other types of businesses due to their multidimensional nature, seamlessly and simultaneously operating as traditional power-based hierarchies, sets of

task-oriented case teams and networks of diverse interest groups with specialised knowledge across unique industries and functions (Christiansen, 1997). The multidimensional nature of professional services firms is presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Multidimensional nature of professional services firms



Source: adapted by the author based on Ernst & Young (traditional power-based hierarchies); compiled by the author (task-oriented case teams)

PSFs operate as a power-based hierarchies, where roles and responsibilities are assigned based on clearly defined positions. The positions and their corresponding responsibilities, as outlined by Ernst & Young – a one-stop-shop PSF offering legal, audit, accounting, management consulting and other services – are provided below. Moreover, by means of analysis, these roles have been confirmed by the author as representative in other larger PSFs such as Deloitte, McKinsey & Company, Bain, Boston Consulting Group and others. Since many of the smaller consultancies have been founded by alumni of the larger PSFs (Christiansen, 1997; Noury et al., 2013) – including the firm where the author of this thesis is working in – the models of organisational structures and roles in these firms have largely been adopted following these established models. Thus, the roles and their associated responsibilities within PSFs outlined below can be generalised to a significant degree for the whole PSF industry and are as follows:

- *Intern / Assistant Rank.* Entry-level specialists, usually fresh university graduates, who focus on gathering data / information under the guidance of senior colleagues
- *Senior Rank.* Usually responsible for a stream / functional area of the project. Independently guide and oversee the work of analysts.
- *Manager / Senior Manager Rank.* Tasked with planning, executing and delivering a project from start to finish. Responsible for guiding project teams, facilitating communication with clients as well as addressing any conflicts or challenges that may arise. Additionally, they often contribute to the firm's initiatives by hosting workshops and training sessions internally.
- *Associate Partner / Partner Rank.* Own the project delivery and are primarily expected to dedicate their time for engaging with clients and selling of new consulting assignments.

As for task-oriented teams, these are normally made from people of all hierarchical levels, and are project specific (Christiansen, 1997). Such setup creates a collaborative atmosphere and supports knowledge sharing, fostering an environment where everyone is welcome to share their ideas on problem solutions which is key when searching for customised solutions to knowledge-intensive tasks (Greenwood & Empson, 2003; Empson, 2019).

1.2.3. Project management practices

As no relevant research on project management practices of PSFs has been identified, the following insights will be based on author's extensive experience working in a one-stop-shop PSF. Based on this, project management practices in PSFs often employ a blend between a traditional waterfall and agile methodologies, reflecting a need to balance structure with flexibility.

Hybrid Agile-Waterfall methodologies, known for their versatility in different contexts, have been found to be suitable for organisations and projects of various sizes and complexities, often resulting in higher-quality end products when compared to other approaches (Gemino et al., 2020). Moreover, applying hybrid methodologies has been found to solve common software development challenges such as communication issues and risk management as by integrating Agile's iterative processes and Waterfall's detailed planning stages, leaders can select components from each method based on project demands (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2023). Although the evidence of the effectiveness of the hybrid approach outlined above is primarily observed in the IT sector, it can be argued that software development companies share similarities with PSFs in that both focus

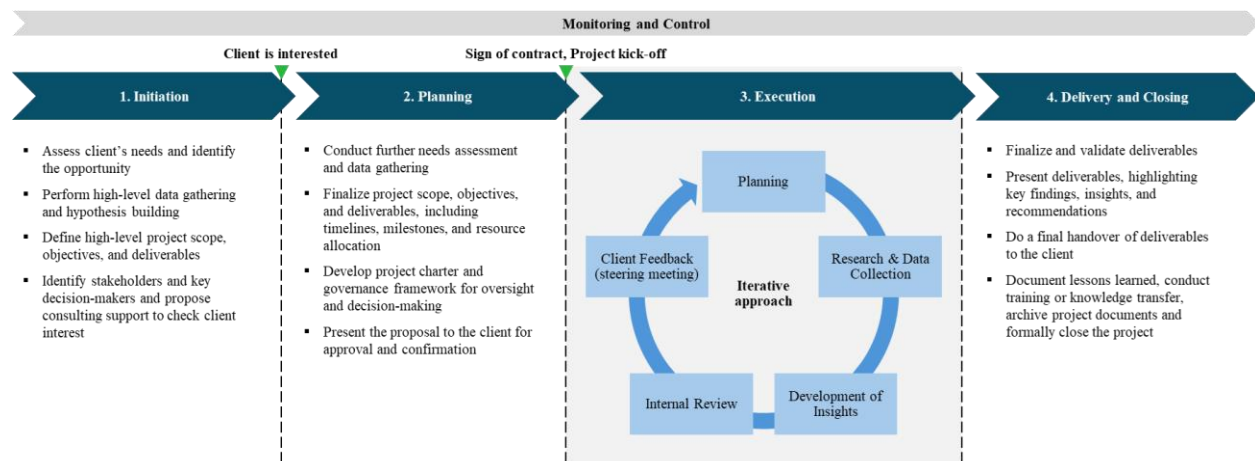
on client-centred work, collaborating closely with clients to deliver tailored project solutions, suggesting that a hybrid approach may be particularly well-suited for running projects in a PSF context.

In practice the waterfall part of the methodology is employed in the initial planning phase, helping to define clear project milestones and a preliminary timeline that is later confirmed by the client. This step helps manage complex demands of the clients. Agile principles are then applied at the execution phase, allowing teams to adjust and refine project elements in response to client feedback and emerging needs. This approach ensures that final deliverables meet client expectations while still allowing for flexibility.

The agile part is of particular importance to client relationship management as well, as it enables consultants to showcase their expertise and build trust by responding dynamically to client needs, all while delivering the best possible result – a win-win situation. The model of project management found in PSFs is presented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

Hybrid Agile-Waterfall project management methodology



Source: compiled by the author

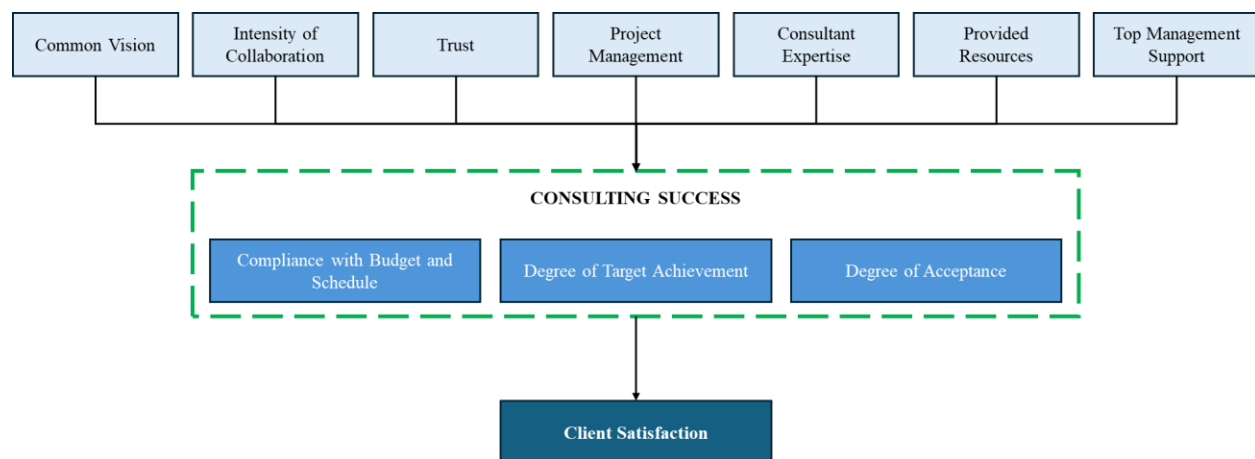
1.2.4. Project success

The concept of triple constraint or iron triangle has been well-known and widely applied in business settings ever since its introduction in the mid-20th century. Represented as a triangle with budget, scope and time as its sides and quality at its centre, it emphasises that any alteration

of one of these factors will inevitably affect others and thus collectively influence project outcomes (Atkinson, 1999). This view, albeit rather simplistic, effectively showcases the core challenge faced by managers in PSFs – operating in a highly competitive industry with external stakeholders, they must not only skilfully balance the constraints of time, scope and budget but also ensure very high quality, all while allowing for some inevitable scope creep and changes in project design due to findings along the way or unexpected changes in client’s needs. Nevertheless, the traditional success metrics of scope, cost, time, and quality are deemed insufficient and, hence, should incorporate more subjective metrics for a comprehensive view of project success (Atkinson, 1999). For example, success in professional services projects often involves intangible factors such as client satisfaction, relationship management, and reputation, which are not well-captured by conventional frameworks of project success and are essential in maintaining ongoing relationships with clients and unlocking potential for future collaboration. In the context of projects within PSFs, Bronnenmayer et al. (2014) state that while objective factors outlined by the iron triangle are not to be forgotten, subjective factors are of utmost importance, with high-quality outcomes being closely tied to multiple project success factors of subjective nature in management consulting. Figure 4 provides a representation of project success factors as outlined by Bronnenmayer et al. (2014).

Figure 4

Project success factors in management consulting firms



Source: adapted by the author from Bronnenmayer et al. (2014)

Bronnenmayer et al. (2014) state that the majority of project success can be highly attributed to 3 key factors such as consultant's expertise and understanding of the problem, the intensity of collaboration between client and consultant and the shared understanding and aligned goals between the consulting team and the client. While still statistically significant, other factors have been found to be comparatively less important. These external factors influencing project success are directly connected to internal factors within PSFs, which align closely with the principles outlined in the concept of triple constraint – budget, time, target achievement (i.e. scope) and client's degree of acceptance (i.e. quality).

Management consulting represents a substantial segment of PSFs, bringing in around 1 000 billion USD annually and accounting for ~17% of total PSF revenues in 2023 (Statista, 2024). Given the client-centred nature of projects across PSFs, insights from management consulting, such as those discussed by Bronnenmayer et al. (2014), may plausibly be generalised to other subsectors within PSFs. This proposition is partly informed by the author's professional experience of working in a one-stop-shop PSF (includes accounting, legal advisory, tax advisory, management consulting, and attorneys at law), which revealed similarities in project delivery practices among different subsectors of PSFs. However, no direct supporting research has been found by the author within the existing BOK to validate this generalisation.

1.3. Leadership approach, emotional intelligence and project success

Having reviewed the most common concepts of emotional intelligence, examined the specifics of professional services industry and outlined project success metrics, in this following section the focus shifts to leadership – leadership styles found to be effective in environments characterised by high-intensity, high-stress and high-complexity as commonly found in PSFs. While this relationship is explored in great detail in subsequent sections, it is important to provide initial generalised evidence of how emotionally intelligent leaders drive performance and foster organisational success.

Emotional intelligence is not only essential for fostering organisational success but also serves as a crucial factor in developing leadership skills that allow companies to achieve high performance by fostering an effective workplace. A positive work environment created by leaders with high emotional intelligence allows individuals to better understand one another, manage their emotions, constructively reduce stress, promote efficient and effective communication as well as

build and maintain healthy relationships within the organisation (Sivanjali, 2021). Sivanjali finds that leaders of high emotional intelligence are able to effectively inspire others, motivating them to enhance their performance. Similarly, Druskat and Wolff (2001) argue that teams with higher collective emotional intelligence perform better as the emotionally intelligent norms set in such groups enhance trust, group identity and efficiency – key elements for project and organisational success.

Empirical evidence provides evidence on the tangible impact of emotionally intelligent leadership on organisational outcomes. Goleman (2005) highlighted the broader importance of EI, stating that it *‘accounts for nearly 90 percent of what moves people up the ladder when IQ and technical skills are roughly similar.’* Coronado-Maldonado and Benítez-Márquez (2023) concluded that leaders of high emotional intelligence significantly contribute to improving team performance and overall business results. Boyatzis (2000) found that partners of a consulting firm with higher than median emotional intelligence on average delivered 1.4 times more profits when compared to their peers. Cherniss (2001) reported cases across industries – including insurance, manufacturing, sales and the like – where EI in leadership not only significantly boosted organisational performance but also contributed to creating a safe working environment in teams, leading to reduced employee turnover. Wilcox (2024) indicated that it is the emotional intelligence of a leader that allows one to inspire teams to go above and beyond of what they thought possible, delivering the best possible result.

Beyond leadership, multiple studies have shown that employees of high emotional intelligence generally possess higher job satisfaction and showcase better job performance across all organisational levels (Vratskikh et. al., 2016). The study suggests that EI of an employee, a leader or not, can improve both individual and organisational outcomes. Similarly, O’Boyle (2010) concluded that EI, whether ability-based or mixed model, is a stronger predictor of job performance beyond personality traits and cognitive ability. Importantly, their research also suggests that EI can be developed and, if proceeded, could yield improvements in both individual and organisational performance.

The above suggests that the emotional intelligence of leaders, particularly those responsible for managing others, is highly important, helping leaders to maintain high productivity and morale within their teams, especially in high-pressure environments like the professional services industry.

1.3.1. Leadership and the leader

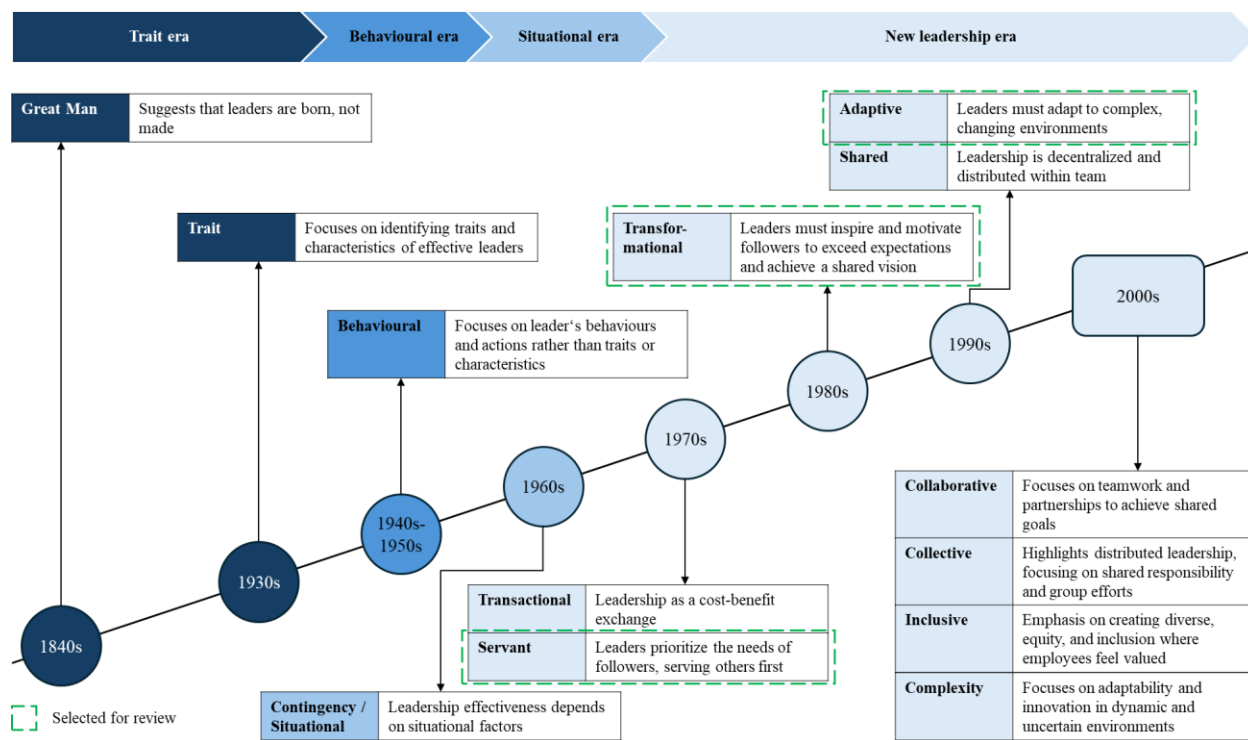
Leadership is an intricate, multi-dimensional concept that has been of great interest for decades, both in business and academic environments, underscoring its essential role in today's fast-paced and ever-changing landscape. Despite the extensive body of research already available, the inherent complexity of the subject continues to make it '*the most studied and least understood topic of any in the social sciences*' (Bennis, 2009 as cited in Benmira & Agboola, 2021) even today. This is closely tied to the environment itself, as the demands of modern business environments continue to shift, leadership styles are following suit by evolving and adapting to meet these dynamic and challenging needs.

Despite a vast body of research, there is no one definition of a particular leadership approach that is considered universal and fitting in any situation that one may face (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Following this, many definitions of leader have been developed. Northouse (2018) defines leadership as a process whereby an '*individual influence a group of people to achieve a common goal.*'. Similarly, Humphrey (2002) defines it as 'the process of influencing followers to accomplish goals by providing direction and motivation. Further, Kouzes and Posner (1995) defined leadership as '*the art of mobilising others to want to struggle for the shared aspirations.*' While theories have their certain distinctive elements, they inevitably share the fundamentals that leadership is about one's ability to influence and mobilise others.

The main leadership styles and their focus as outlined by Benmira and Agboola (2021) is presented in Figure 5 below. While the author acknowledges that there exist numerous definitions and distinct styles of leadership, exploring all of them exceeds the scope of this research. The author has thoroughly reviewed the current body of knowledge in research and identified supporting evidence of transformational, adaptive and servant leadership approaches being highly applicable in a high-stress, fast-paced and ever-changing environments often found in the professional services industry as a whole, as well as its various subsectors. However, little to no evidence has been found on the professional services industry exactly. Following this, three styles of leadership have been selected – transformational, adaptive and servant – and will be further discussed in this section, together with supporting evidence of their applicability in PSFs where possible.

Figure 5

Overview of the major leadership theories



Source: adapted by the author from Benmira and Agboola (2021)

1.3.2. Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership can be described as a process of engaging with others to create a connection that increases motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Such leaders are attentive to the needs and motives of their followers, seeking to help them reach their fullest potential by building their self-confidence, self-esteem and sense of value (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Additionally, transformational leaders inspire teams to exceed initial expectations and provide constructive criticism, thus positively influencing team members' identification, motivation and goal attainment (Šilingienė, 2012).

In their theory, Bass and Riggio (2006) distinguished four essential components of transformational leadership:

- **Idealised influence or charisma.** The emotional component of leadership highlights leaders who act as strong role models for followers through having a clear vision,

demonstrating confidence and having high standards of moral and ethical conduct. Such leaders inspire trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect in followers, providing them with a sense of mission and becoming a special figure, that followers aspire to and support in achieving their vision.

- **Inspirational motivation.** Transformational leaders inspire enthusiasm and motivation, encouraging followers to aim higher, trust in their abilities and recognise the significance of their work and its outcomes, thus enabling them to unlock their full potential. Such leaders are characterised by their ability to create a clear and convincing vision of the future, highlighting the team's role in it, all while benefiting all parties involved in the process – including themselves, followers, team dynamics and organisational performance.
- **Intellectual stimulation.** Leadership that stimulates creativity and innovation in followers, encouraging them to improve, explore, and develop a strong foundation of essential personal values. With strong emphasis on morality and ethics, such leaders carefully evaluate new ideas without criticism, seeking to fulfil an ultimate goal of encouraging broader thinking of followers.
- **Individual consideration.** Leaders create a supportive climate that respects differences and motivates followers by emphasising their contribution to achieving results. Such leaders always pay close attention to the individual needs of their followers, tailoring their approach accordingly and acting as coaches to help followers unlock their full potential.

Research unanimously agrees that a project manager's leadership style plays an important part in determining project success. Transformational leadership has gained significant attention for its strong association with the job satisfaction, motivation, effort and organisational commitment of the followers, leading to enhanced organisational performance (Wang et al., 2011). Aga et al. (2016) emphasised that transformational leadership is particularly impactful in fostering project success through its application of team building practices such as project goal setting, role clarification, interpersonal relationship building, and problem solving. These interventions help create cohesive, motivated teams capable of exceeding performance expectations and delivering high-quality results.

A vast body of research in leadership topics helped to uncover several mediating factors that explain how transformational leadership affects project success. Aga et al. (2016) highlight team-building efforts as a partial mediator between transformational leadership and project

success, suggesting that project managers who adopt a transformational leadership style are more likely to implement team-building practices that positively contribute to project outcomes. Emotional intelligence is a pivotal factor in this relationship as transformational leaders with high EI naturally engage in team-building practices, leveraging their ability to foster interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, and empathise with and motivate team members, making them very effective at building high-performing teams.

Another crucial mediator is trust. The cognitive and affective trust of a leader in their team members plays a significant role in influencing team psychological states (Schaubroeck et al., 2011). This trust promotes psychological empowerment, which serves as a comprehensive motivational mechanism, ultimately leading to improved employee job-related behaviours (Dust et al., 2013). Furthermore, the cognitive and affective trust of a leader enhances employee helping behaviours toward coworkers, which drives team performance (Zhu & Akhtar, 2014). Van Dierendonck et al. (2013) conclude that it is leadership effectiveness – defined as followers' perceptions of how competent and impactful a leader is within the organisation – of a transformational leader that improves employee organisational commitment.

Transformational leadership excels in environments with less rigid organisational structures, a greater level of employee autonomy, and a high degree of uncertainty (Dust et al., 2013). These characteristics closely align with the professional services industry, where solving unique and complex problems of clients from various industries is a primary focus. Research has shown that when followers interact with individuals (such as clients) who are ultimately affected by the outcomes of their work, their motivation to perform at their best improves significantly (Grant, 2012).

The relationship between EI and transformational leadership has also been of interest recently, with research results consistently demonstrating a strong positive relationship. In particular, Gardner and Stough (2002) reported a strong positive relationship between trait EI and transformational leadership, while no such relationship was observed with a more primitive transactional leadership style. Palmer et al. (2001) further emphasised that individual's ability to manage own emotions and the emotions of others is a key skill of TFL.

Recent empirical study by Görgens-Ekermans and Roux (2021) provided a more detailed understanding of the relationship between behavioural EI (e.g. Bar-On's ESI model) and the four essential components of transformational leadership, finding that EI significantly influenced three

of these components. Leaders with strong relationship management skills, who excel at positively affecting other's emotions and responses, demonstrated a pronounced impact on idealised influence component – the ability to inspire trust and admiration in followers. Additionally, strong self-management abilities, which reflect leader's capacity to regulate own emotions and maintain focus, strongly contributed to inspirational motivation behaviours, encouraging commitment to a shared vision and putting in of extra effort in subordinates. Lastly, strong effect of social awareness on individualised consideration was found, suggesting that transformational leaders are able to display empathy and a deep understanding of their followers' needs and feelings.

Transformational leaders promote organisational commitment, job satisfaction, motivation and higher organisational performance (Islam et al., 2020; Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). These leaders stand out through their initiative, ability to provide encouragement, and capacity to positively affect followers' awareness, helping them to achieve far more as a team than if they were working alone (Busari et al., 2019). By properly implementing transformational processes such as intellectual stimulation, individualised attention and inspirational motivation, transformational leaders can help employees to build a much greater sense of commitment to their organisation (Jiatong et al., 2022; Erkutlu, 2008).

The distinctive qualities of transformational leaders, such as their ability to foster interpersonal relationships, inspire a shared vision, and provide individualised support, enable them to earn the trust and respect of their teams. Moreover, such leaders create a supportive and psychologically safe working environment where followers can thrive and achieve their best. This leadership approach creates positive team dynamics where employees feel valued and aligned with the goals and values of the organisation, thus driving superior performance and ensuring long-term project and organisational success.

1.3.3. Adaptive leadership

Heifetz and Linsky (2002) define adaptive leadership as a practice that involves mobilising people to tackle adaptive challenges – issues that require learning and systemic changes rather than technical fixes. This approach emphasises on the leader's activities in optimising the work of followers in the contexts in which they find themselves. Simply stated, adaptive leaders prepare and encourage people to deal with change. Adaptive leadership style distinguishes between *technical* and *adaptive* work, focusing on the importance of addressing root causes instead of short-

term technical solutions and engaging stakeholders in the process (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010; Northouse, 2018; Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016).

The primary goal of adaptive leadership is to encourage people to change and to learn new ways of living so that they may effectively meet their challenges and grow in the process (Heifetz et al., 2009). Adaptive leaders help others do the work by mobilising, motivating, organising, orienting others instead focusing their attention on what is important (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Heifetz & Linsky (2002) identify six key behaviours that define an adaptive leader:

- **Get on the Balcony.** Adopt a broader perspective to understand the big picture without becoming entangled in personal biases. This allows leaders to thoughtfully assess complex situations and adjust strategies accordingly.
- **Identify Adaptive Challenges.** Distinguish between technical and adaptive challenges, focusing on collaborative solutions for problems that require systemic change (adaptive) rather than quick fixes (technical).
- **Regulate Distress.** Support others in recognising and embracing the need for change by fostering a safe environment for everyone to share their ideas, providing clear direction and guidance, managing conflicts effectively and regulating both personal and team distress to maintain a productive range.
- **Maintain Disciplined Attention.** Encourage teams to address critical challenges directly, fostering an open dialogue and reducing defensiveness, allowing for and effective confrontation of underlying problems.
- **Give the Work Back to the People.** Avoid micro-managing and empower followers to decide what to do in circumstances where they feel uncertain by expressing confidence in their problem-solving abilities and encouraging independent thought and decision-making instead of doing that thinking for them.
- **Protect Leadership Voices from Below.** Value feedback and thoughtfully consider ideas from those who hold opposing views independent of their level at the organisation, as this can help to uncover potential blind spots, drive innovation and enhance the adaptive capacity of an organisation.

While research on the applicability of adaptive leadership and its impact on project success through emotional intelligence in the professional services industry is lacking, the discussion that follows seeks to address this gap by examining research evidence from organisational

environments that closely resemble those commonly found in professional services industry – often characterised by fast pace, high stress, unpredictability and complexity of problems.

Yukl and Mahsud (2010) define adaptive leadership as characterised by situational flexibility and one's ability to balance task and relationship-oriented behaviours. This makes it particularly suitable for professional services industry, where client demands and expectations are growing and changing constantly. Adaptive leaders excel in addressing shifting client needs by fostering creativity and innovative thinking while also fostering operational efficiency (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016).

The importance of adaptive leadership in dynamic, high stress environments has been further demonstrated by multiple studies. For example, Useem (2010) provides evidence that adaptive leadership contributes to project success by fostering resilience and initiative within teams. By maintaining strategic intent and trusting team members to make decisions, adaptive leaders equip teams to respond well and in a timely manner. Cote (2022) emphasises the importance of flexibility in a leader, highlighting its criticality in successfully dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, a scenario akin to environments of high stress and uncertainty often faced by consultants. Similarly, Dinh et al. (2013) note that adaptive leadership thrives in dynamic industries by enabling high responsiveness, a characteristic closely aligned with the demands in professional services. Furthermore, Fernandes et al. (2023) discuss that adaptive leaders are skilled at balancing the need to address immediate operational tasks with providing relational support to others in the education sector. This skill can be argued to be equally relevant to the professional services industry, where leaders must ensure high-quality deliverables while at the same time addressing the needs of their teams.

Adaptive leadership and its foundational principles are deeply intertwined with the concept of emotional intelligence. In their conceptualisation of adaptive leadership, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) highlighted key elements such as regulating distress, demonstrating compassion, understanding the needs of the followers and maintaining emotional balance. These elements are closely aligned with Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence, particularly in areas of stress management and interpersonal skills. These connections showcase that it is of particular importance for a leader to be able to manage both their own emotions and those of others, fostering an environment of collaboration and resilience.

Empathy and self-awareness are central to the adaptive leader's ability to understand the challenges of followers and guide them towards solutions, reinforcing the relevance of EI. Kok and Heuvel (2018) discussed that leaders of high emotional intelligence can more accurately perceive situational demands and respond with flexible strategies, thus enhancing their adaptive leadership capabilities. Similarly, Yukl and Mahsud (2010), in their analysis of emotional ques, discovered that to be successful, adaptive leaders must be able to manage a diverse spectrum of within team emotions while successfully responding to real-time challenges, managing stress and fostering a collaborative environment in challenging situations, ultimately leading to project success.

The role of emotional intelligence in adaptive leadership becomes even more critical during times of crisis. Reeves and Deimler (2011) discovered that adaptive leaders often leverage EI when navigating organisational crises by effectively managing their own emotions and those of others, facilitating clear communication and collaboration and fostering resilience and adaptability among team members. Likewise, Useem (2010) emphasised interpersonal skills and empathy in connecting with teams on a personal level, as well as managing one's own stress and general mood in high-stress environments as essential factors for maintaining motivated, high-performing and resilient teams.

The concept of psychological safety, explored by Arena and Uhl-Bien (2016) and later Cote (2022), further illustrates the link between adaptive leadership and emotional intelligence. Authors describe the creation of so-called 'adaptive spaces' or 'holding environments', where stress is managed and collaboration prospers, leading to organisational (project) success.

Additionally, the mutual understanding between leaders and their teams, as discussed by Dinh et al. (2013), suggests that it is of high importance for leaders to balance their own emotions with team needs. This balancing act requires empathy, social responsibility, and the ability to adapt own actions to meet evolving demands – all of which are key underlying elements of emotional intelligence. Thus, leaders who possess high level of EI are better equipped to navigate the complexities of such interactions, enabling them to align team efforts with organisational objectives.

Although not directly focused on the professional services industry itself, the current research findings discussed above suggest that adaptive leadership, through its foundational connection to emotional intelligence, is fundamentally tied to project success in environments

similar to those often found in PSFs and characterised by high stress, rapid change and the need to innovative solutions to complex, ambiguous problems. Through its emphasis on having a helicopter view, resilience, flexibility and strong interpersonal skills, adaptive leadership provides a framework for addressing dynamic challenges and effectively guiding organisations and teams through periods of high uncertainty, helping to build resilience in the process.

1.3.4. Servant leadership

Servant leadership seeks to *‘involve others in decision making, is strongly based in ethical and caring behaviour, and enhances the growth of workers while improving the caring and quality of organisational life’* (Spears, 2010). Servant leaders have a natural instinct to put the needs of others above all and serve them first (Greenleaf, 1970). It is defined by a total of 10 characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building communities (Spears, 2002).

For many years, there has been an ongoing debate about the inevitable overlapping behaviours among various leadership styles, and with so many styles being present, servant leadership is no exception. Many of the servant leadership’s dimensions significantly conceptually overlap with those of transformational leadership (Anderson & Sun, 2015). More specifically, Liden et al. (2014) conducted empirical research showcasing that eight of the ten dimensions of servant leadership significantly correlated (>0.75) to those of transformational leadership, with a commitment to the growth of people and building communities being the exceptions.

Similarly to transformational leaders, servant leaders ‘encourage others to visualise the organisation’s future and are persuasive by offering compelling reasons to get others to do things’ (Barbuto & Wheeler, 2006, as cited in Anderson & Sun, 2015). Moreover, Conchie et al. (2012) found that both transformational and servant leaders influence affect-based trust rather than cognitive-based trust.

While servant leadership may not offer entirely unique benefits when compared to transformational leadership and thus will not be discussed in such detail, its emphasis on prioritising others over organisational goals makes it highly relevant in semi-agile and client-focused environments. In PSFs, where a strong client-centred approach is crucial, the servant leadership approach fosters a genuine commitment to the success of the client rather than focusing on just project outcomes from the PSF’s point of view. The client-first approach helps consultants

establish themselves as reliable partners who act in the client's best interest, fostering long-term relationships and client loyalty.

The connection between servant leadership and EI underscores its relevance even further. Liden et al. (2014) discuss that servant leaders who often possess higher EI are emphatic, listening and caring for others, positively impacting team collaboration and outcomes. Similarly, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) find EI as a mediating factor of the relationship between servant leadership and employee performance, enhancing effectiveness and contributing to better project results. Furthermore, Han and Zhang (2024) show how EI mediates the relationship between servant leadership and project success, reinforcing its role in creating supportive and high-performing teams.

Research also explores the broader implications of servant leadership to project success. Leaders who prioritise the needs of their team members have been found to foster a supportive environment that can lead to improved collaboration and project efficiency (Van Dierendonck, 2010; Hoch et al., 2016). Moreover, servant leaders have been found to positively influence team engagement and project success metrics in dynamic environments (Hoch et al., 2016). Fernandes et al. (2023) find that emotionally intelligent servant leaders balance task-oriented behaviours with relational support in high-stress environments, promoting team resilience and success.

In summary, while servant leadership certainly shares similarities with transformational leadership, its emphasis on empathy, interpersonal relationships, and prioritising others makes it a valuable approach in contexts requiring trust, collaboration, and adaptability, like those found in PSFs.

In conclusion, this literature review has highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership and its significant impact on fostering project success. A total of three key leadership styles – transformational, adaptive and servant – have been shown to thrive in high-stress, fast-paced and complex environments, making them highly relevant in the context of PSFs. Moreover, it has been showcased that leaders of high emotional intelligence contributed to creating collaborative, resilient and high performing teams by fostering trust, communication and motivation. This study aims to address the research gap by exploring, through qualitative interviews, the lived experiences and perspectives of leaders within various subsectors of neo and classical PSFs it aims to provide a deeper understanding of nuanced dynamics underpinning the relationship between leader's EI and project success within PSFs.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following chapter outlines the research methodology that will be used to investigate the primary objective of this study – the relationship between leader’s emotional intelligence and the success of projects within the professional services industry – an industry that places a strong emphasis on serving external clients. The study aims to provide valuable insights, helping leaders in this sector to identify and implement practices that enhance client satisfaction, thereby driving project success of the companies operating in the professional services industry. This section provides details on research design and instruments, the research sample, data collection methods and the analytical approach applied to analyse and interpret research data.

2.1. Research design

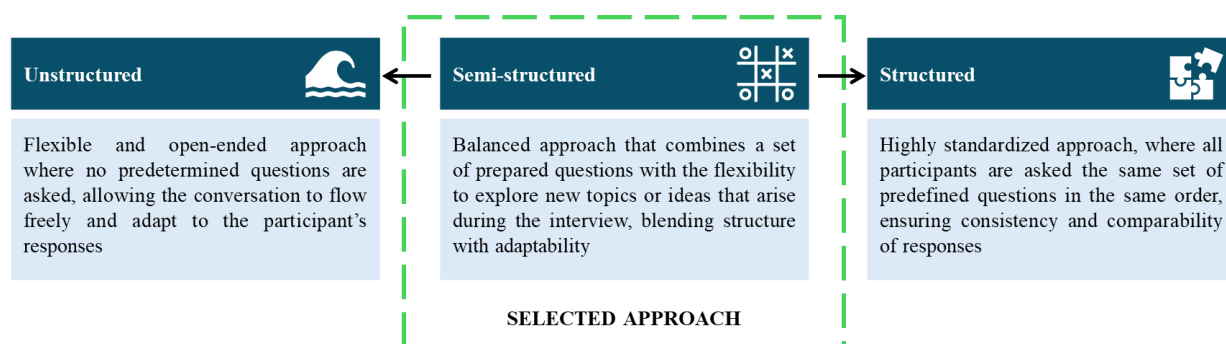
It is indeed true that both qualitative and quantitative research methods could potentially be applied to the research topic explored in this thesis. However, this study adopts a qualitative methodology, primarily due to concerns regarding the validity of quantitative approaches as discussed in Section 1 of this thesis. More specifically, multiple researchers have pointed that quantitative methodologies often lack real-world validity when it comes to addressing topics related to soft skills and human abilities, such as emotional intelligence and leadership approach (O’Connor et al., 2016; O’Boyle et al., 2011).

Qualitative interviews, in particular, allow researchers to delve deeply into the experiences, emotions and perspectives of the interviewees, providing deep, nuanced insights essential for understanding complex, human-centred phenomena like emotional intelligence and leadership. Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021) highlight that semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for this, as they strike a balance between the structured and unstructured formats, providing researchers with the freedom to explore emerging ideas that may come up in the course of an interview while maintaining the focus on the central topic.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews have been found to be well suited for investigating new or under-researched topics, as their flexible design enables interviewees to guide the conversation, which can lead to the discovery of unexpected insights and significantly contribute to the field of study (Taherdoost, 2022). A more detailed explanation of interview types is provided in the Figure 6 below.

Figure 6

Structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews



Source: adapted by the author from Valenzuela & Shrivastava (2008) as presented in Torkar et al. (2011)

Given the limited prior research on this subject regarding the professional services industry as a whole and the robust yet flexible nature of this approach, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method for this study. By applying the semi-structured interview methodology, this research aims to provide valuable insights, helping leaders understand the practices that shall be applied to achieve the highest level of client satisfaction and, thus, a project success for the companies operating in the professional services industry.

2.2. Research sample

Having chosen a suitable method for the research, the following step requires a formulation of a framework for the selection of interviewees. As highlighted in the Section 1 of this thesis, previous research on the professional services industry has mostly focused on management consulting and finance & accounting. These studies have primarily examined aspects like project types and structures, team structures and dynamics, employee satisfaction, organisational frameworks and operational principles. However, there has been a significant gap in exploring it from a more human-centred dimension – specifically analysing the actual lived experiences of leaders within the professional services sector as a whole and not just one of its subfields.

To ensure the validity of results and their applicability to the broader professional services industry a sample of professionals specialising in various subfields was selected. The selected areas of expertise included management consulting, legal advisory, tax advisory, human resources and

finance & accounting – major subparts of the professional services industry. Such diversity in the selection of leaders from the professional services industry was intended to provide a balanced and comprehensive perspective across the industry.

Building on this, the author opted for non-probability sampling approach, specifically utilising purposive sampling with a criterion-based strategy. Criterion sampling relies on a formation of a clear criteria and rationale for inclusion of interviewees before forming the sample and then selecting only those research candidates that adhere to the criteria set by the researcher (Palinkas et al., 2013). Applying such methodology allows the researcher to strategically select a sample that is most useful to the purposes of the research. As the thesis focuses on specific traits, namely, emotional intelligence in leadership roles within professional service industry, each interviewee must have fulfilled the following relevant criteria:

- **Relevant industry experience.** Must work in a neo or classic professional services firm, specifically in areas of management consulting, legal advisory, tax advisory, human resources, or finance & accounting.
- **Professional tenure and leadership role.** Must have at least 3 years of experience in a managerial role within the professional services industry and must currently (at the time of interview) hold a leadership or managerial position, such as associate partner, partner, or equivalent. Their responsibilities should include overseeing project execution, managing team performance as well as actively engaging in building and maintaining relationships with both new and existing clients.
- **Project-based experience.** Must have a proven track record of delivering client-facing, project-based services with a clear understanding of project success metrics, including managing and meeting client expectations, timelines and budgets, all while ensuring the high quality of deliverables.

In addition to the criteria listed above, gender diversity was also maintained by including a mixture of both male and female participants to ensure a broader perspective.

The optimal sample size was determined by applying a method of searching for a saturation point that states that one should stop collecting data once the analysed themes are saturated and gathering fresh data no longer provides new insights to previously collected information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As indicated by the moment when information began to repeat significantly, the final number of interviewees was 9.

The interviewees were initially approached either via LinkedIn, email or in person, depending on the most convenient method. All interviewees were informed during the initial approach that the interview would take up to one hour and that the questions would be shared beforehand. The author carefully evaluated the qualifications of all of the candidates beforehand to ensure they met the established selection criteria and their informed consent to participate in the study was obtained.

An extensive list of selected interviewees, along with brief descriptions of their key experiences is presented in the Table 2 below. To ensure anonymity, the names and any other information that could give out the identity of an interviewee were anonymised. Moreover, each interviewee was assigned a code name consisting of two letters, followed by a number for ordering purposes (e.g. IV-1 – where ‘IV’ stands for interviewee and ‘1’ denotes interviewee number).

Table 2

Contextual information on interviewees

Code name	Area of PSF	Current position	Professional services experience	Leadership experience in PSFs	Gender
IV-1	Finance & Accounting	Partner	20 years	20 years	Female
IV-2	Finance & Accounting	Senior Account Manager	12 years	6 years	Female
IV-3	Finance & Accounting	Senior Account Manager	10 years	5 years	Male
IV-4	Legal advisory	Associate Partner	10 years	7 years	Female
IV-5	Legal advisory	Associate Partner	15 years	5 years	Female

IV-6	Management Consulting	Partner	12 years	8 years	Male
IV-7	Management Consulting	Associate Partner	8 years	4 years	Male
IV-8	Management Consulting	Partner	30 years	24 years	Female
IV-9	Human Resources	Partner	7 years	7 years	Female

Source: compiled by the author

2.3. Interview process

The interviews were conducted through November – December of 2024, with the majority held in person (6 out of 9) or via MS Teams (2 out of 9) on a one-to-one basis. As planned, each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. Due to very busy schedules of some of the interviewees – IV-1 and IV-8 – were partly and fully completed in a written form respectively.

Due to the complexity and specificity of the topic, all interviews were conducted in Lithuanian language – the native language of the participants. This choice, made by the author, can be motivated by the desire to allow interviewees to express themselves more precisely and comprehensively, thus ensuring the reliability and maximum broadness of the answers.

Given the comprehensive nature of the topic and the busy schedules of participants, the author of this thesis has made a choice to share the questionnaires in advance to allow for thoughtful preparation. While the author acknowledges that this approach could potentially influence the authenticity of responses, the risk was considered minimal. The benefits of allowing participants time for reflection and self-assessment beforehand were deemed to outweigh any potential drawbacks, ultimately resulting in a higher-quality responses.

The interview process followed a structured flow to maximise clarity and ease for participants. Questions were presented on MS PowerPoint slides (one question per slide) and displayed on a TV for in-person interviews or shared via screen sharing during MS Teams meetings. This ensured that all participants could consistently see the questions, minimising the

risk of misinterpretation. At the start of the interview, a short introduction was made introducing the names, terms of confidentiality, research topic and asking for a permission to record. Then, if permitted, the recording was started (all the interviewees agreed to be recorded).

The interview then proceeded with the set of questions presented in Table 3, starting with introductory ones and progressing to those more targeted on the topic of interest. Moreover, to ensure that interviewees felt confident in their answers, they were encouraged to ask for clarification on any terminology or questions at any point during the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and suggested that if wanted they would be introduced with the findings of the thesis regarding their interview asking for a confirmation that the results were truthful and valid.

With the prior consent of the participants, all interviews were recorded via phone. The recordings were later transcribed with the help of the Transkriptor online tool. The tool, although capable in transcribing in Lithuanian language, is primarily designed for English, making it prone to occasional errors due to nonstandard pronunciations by the interviewees or the tool's technical limitations. To address this, the interviewer performed a thorough review of all transcripts in Lithuanian, cross-referencing them with the original recordings to correct any inaccuracies.

Before starting the interview process a few pilot testing rounds were conducted with the help of AI tools (ChatGPT) to make sure that the concept of the interview was robust, questions were precise and clear, and that they gave clear and well-targeted answers.

2.4. Research instrument

Table 3 below presents a comprehensive research instrument applied in this study. The instrument was thoughtfully designed by the author to align with the natural flow of human reasoning, guiding participants through a series of interconnected questions that progressively delve deeper into the topic, helping both the interviewee and the interviewer build a coherent and compelling narrative. The author chose to build own research instrument to increase its overall fit to the professional services industry and include viewpoints interesting to the author. The instrument is organised into four structured sections of questions:

- **Introduction.** Aims to familiarise the researcher with the interviewee's current role, serving as an icebreaker to establish connection and align on key definitions.

- **Leader's emotional intelligence.** Divided into 5 subsections, following the Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence, which included intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, stress management capabilities, adaptability and general mood. This section aims to uncover the importance of leader's EI across various settings often found in PSFs.
- **Client focus.** Tailored to address a critical aspect of professional services firms – dealing with external clients.
- **Closing.** Aims to summarise the discussion by uncovering the key aspect(s) of leader's EI that influence project success in PSFs as perceived by the interviewee.

Table 3

Qualitative research instrument of the thesis

Introduction
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you briefly describe your current role and responsibilities? 2. How long have you been working in the professional services industry? 3. How would you describe your approach to leading a project? What core values or principles guide your leadership? 4. How do you define project success in your role? What specific outcomes do you aim for in each project (e.g., client satisfaction, team performance, meeting timelines)?
EI, leadership and project success
Intrapersonal skills
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Can you describe a time when being aware of your own emotions helped you lead a project to success? How did this self-awareness impact your leadership approach? 6. How do you leverage your strengths or address your weaknesses when leading a team? Can you share an example where you felt that knowing your own limits made a difference in a project outcome? 7. When a project encounters complex, unexpected obstacles, how do you typically respond emotionally?

Interpersonal skills
<p>8. Describe a time during a project when you needed to address a team member's concerns or frustrations. How did it impact project outcomes?</p> <p>9. How do you ensure that team members feel supported and valued, especially when project demands are high? Can you describe a specific instance?</p> <p>10. Could you describe any strategies you use to promote a sense of responsibility and ownership within your team? Can you provide an example of how this contributed to the project outcome?</p> <p>11. When faced with tight deadlines or difficult client demands, how do you prioritise and approach decision-making? How does this impact the team? How does this impact project success?</p>
Stress management
<p>12. When the team is under pressure, what do you do to maintain your composure and positivity and help your team stay focused? Can you share a specific high-pressure scenario and how you led the team through it?</p> <p>13. What is your approach to managing client expectations during particularly demanding periods of a project? Describe a time when you had to communicate difficult news, adjust timelines or increase budget and how you maintained the client relationship.</p>
Adaptability
<p>14. Describe a situation where you had to change your leadership approach mid-project to accommodate unexpected shifts in team or client needs. How did you help the team to adapt and ensured high client satisfaction?</p> <p>15. When faced with a complex project obstacle, how do you approach finding a solution? Describe a situation where creative problem-solving made a difference in the project's success and how did you guide your team through these challenges?</p>
General mood

16. How do you maintain a positive mindset during demanding projects? Share an example where your mindset impacted team motivation and contributed to project success.
Client focus
17. How do you convey confidence and optimism to clients, especially in uncertain or difficult phases of the project? Can you describe an instance where your attitude helped maintain client trust?
18. Can you describe a situation where maintaining a strong client relationship led to positive project outcomes?
Wrap-up
19. What do you believe is the most significant impact of emotional intelligence on project success?

Source: compiled by the author

2.5. Analysis of research data

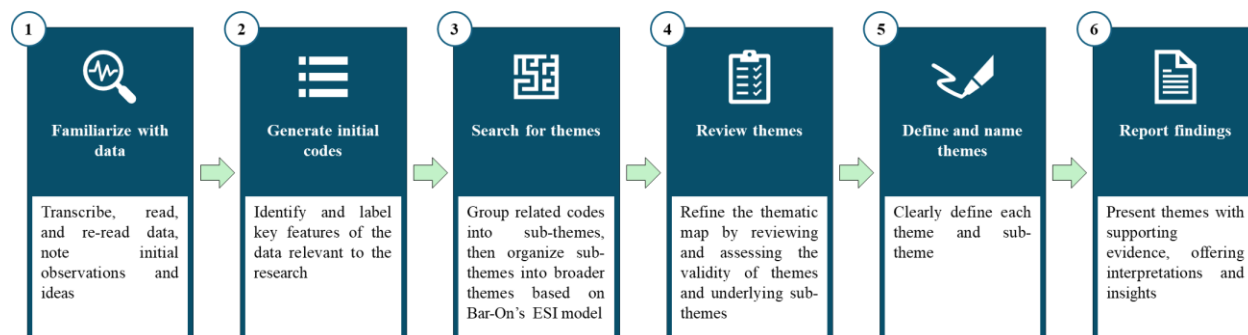
For the analysis of research data, the author employed the hybrid thematic analysis methodology. Thematic analysis can be described as ‘*a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006 as cited in Vaismoradi, 2013). It is highly centered around carefully studying the transcripts multiple times (Rice & Ezzy, 1999) and can be used to find answers to nearly any type of research question and due to its simple design allow to draw meaningful inferences even to those novice in research of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Given that the aspects of emotional intelligence, leadership and project success are well known in the literature, a hybrid approach was chosen, utilising a deductive (top-down) coding – where pre-existing codes or categories were applied to the data based on existing theories and hypotheses – was utilised as the primary approach, while the inductive (bottom-up) coding – where codes were developed from the data itself without predefined categories – was included as a secondary one to prevent a too narrow view towards the research topic and allowing for the coding structure to naturally develop based on the analysis findings.

The analysis process is clearly laid out in Figure 7 and closely follows that suggested for thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2013) with some adjustments. This allowed to contrast the interview transcripts and reveal patterns in them.

Figure 7

Hybrid-thematic analysis framework



Source: adapted by the author from Braun and Clarke (2013)

2.6. Research ethics

The author of the thesis strictly adhered to the ethical principles of academic research throughout the study. All interviewees were initially provided with a detailed explanation of the research purpose and procedures before agreeing to participate on a voluntary basis. They were also assured that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained at all times. Following this, all sensitive information that could potentially allow to identify an interviewee (e.g. names, surnames, or specific answers) was either coded or sanitised by the author. Additionally, the original materials at no point were shared with anyone except for the interviewer himself.

Before starting the interview, participants were informed that they had full control over the process, including the option to pause or even skip some of the questions they found uncomfortable. Moreover, the researcher sought to maintain objectivity and detained from asking leading questions or performing any actions that could influence the responses of an interviewee in any way.

For transparency and reference, a sanitised and anonymised transcript of the interview with IV-6 in English is included as an Annex.

3. RESEARCH DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following section outlines the systemised results of interview data analysis. The qualitative research instrument, as presented in the Research Methodology, has been developed by closely following the Bar-On's Emotional-Social Intelligence model. Following this, this section will remain consistent, maintaining the same structure. The section is separated into nine smaller subsections: 3.1. *Work environment in PSFs*; 3.2. *Project success in PSFs*, 3.3. *Intrapersonal skills*; 3.4. *Interpersonal skills*; 3.5 *Stress management*; 3.6. *Adaptability*; 3.7. *General mood*; 3.8. *Client focus*, and 3.9. *Leader's EI features that are key for project success in PSFs*. In addition, for convenience, at the end of this section, a summary of all findings is presented in Table 4.

Each subsection provides detailed insights into how interviewees perceive the role of emotional intelligence in driving project success within PSFs across a diverse set of scenarios and includes examples from interview transcripts to support these findings. In cases where similar ideas have been shared by multiple interviewees, only the quote that best represents the concept will be provided as evidence, only including additional quotes if they provide new insights or offer a fresh perspective on the matter.

It should be noted that as all of the interviews were conducted in Lithuanian, the relevant ideas from the finalised transcripts were translated into English using Google Translate and DeepL Translate, after which the author carefully reviewed the translations to ensure clarity and accuracy. In addition, all filler words such as 'mhm', 'ahm', 'žinai', 'ta prasme' and similar have been eliminated to enhance clarity.

3.1. Work environment in PSFs

Several of the interviewees have brought up the topic of the working environments associated with professional service firms. Their comments were greatly aligned with what was discussed by the existing literature, as indicated in Section 1 of this thesis. The IV-6 outlined the key building blocks of professional services, indicating that '*professional services consist not only of the type of service but also of the sales moment, the delivery moment and then the organisational running moment.*'

Moreover, interviewees outlined that new, changing and unexpected situations are an integral part of work in PSFs as clients continuously come with complex questions and problems that they no longer can solve in-house:

IV-4: *‘People come to us with questions and problems that they can no longer solve in-house and expect us to help them. (...) the result is that with, basically, every day there is some unforeseen obstacle or some news.’*

IV-3: *‘this line of services is probably where people have to be in the mood that things will change. (...) And if that doesn't suit you, you can go to work in-house, where you'll do exactly the same job, for years.’*

Several leaders also point out that working in a PSF requires adapting one's mindset and accepting that work is a part of your life and does not end after work hours:

IV-3: *‘in a service business, you have to understand that work is a part of your life, because (...) people are still involved in social life, for example, you can meet in the city, at sports (...) it's not like you close the door and suddenly everything disappears.’*

Thus, interview data suggests that professional service firms operate in highly complex and ever-changing environments, selling their know-how and helping client's businesses grow by providing new and innovative solutions to their highly ambiguous problems.

3.2. Project success in PSFs

Independent of the subsector of PSFs, a vast majority of interviewees (8 out of 9) unanimously agreed that project success is a complex formation and only focusing on delivering the project in scope, on time and in budget is no longer enough. Instead, interviewees put emphasis on more subjective factors for measuring project success such as client satisfactions and professional growth of team members.

IV-8: *‘successful project – a goal that meets the client's expectations, achieved on time and at a reasonable cost. And as one of the most important factors – the psychological*

environment of the team: how the team members felt during the project, how much they believed in the result, how they withstood the ups and downs of the project and how much they are motivated by the final result of the project.'

IV-6: *'The 3 goals must be balanced. The 1st thing is that the client must be happy and satisfied. (...) The 2nd pole is the team, which says that this project is the one to remember (...) the project was interesting, (...) we provided value to the client, the team felt that the person himself grew (...) And the 3rd is that the project was useful for the professional services organisation and the income received was greater than costs.'*

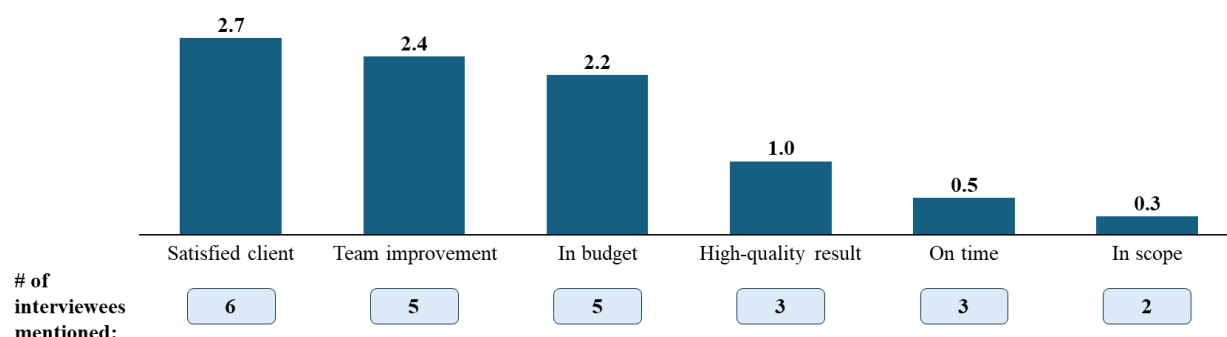
This view of project success not being measured purely by the traditional triple constraints model, putting emphasis on personal development is further emphasised by interviewees emphasising that learning opportunities gained during projects, even at the expense of immediate profitability, are considered and investment in long-term professional growth and building of expertise.

IV-5: *'If you get a question, from a paying client, that you have never seen, you understand that maybe you will spend more time or need to delve deeper, maybe that project won't be profitable, as it could be in your field, but they still pay for it. (...) We look at this as an opportunity to learn.'*

While one may think that delivering high-quality results automatically implies client satisfaction, the following sections reveal a more nuanced relationship, showing that this is not always the case. Thus, this research treats project quality and client satisfaction as partly distinct and not perfectly correlated measures of project success. A complete scoring of project success factors as identified by the interviewees is outlined in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8

Project success factors ranked by importance based on interviewee responses



Note on the scoring system. During the analysis assigned a total weight of 1, meaning that if a leader identified more than one factors of project success, their 1 point was equally distributed across all identified factors ($1 \text{ point} / X \text{ factors} = 1/X \text{ points / factor}$) and so on.

Source: compiled by the author

3.3. Intrapersonal skills

Leaders agree that understanding and managing own emotions is very important to managing projects and leading teams in the environments of PSFs as it helps the leader to adapt and successfully navigate various situations at work. Recognising and navigating one's emotions helps a leader to adapt in complex and dynamic environments often associated with PSFs. IV-6 observes that *'as people we all have different emotional skills, technical skills and expertise and so on. And there is probably no one successful thing here and everyone somehow finds their place under the sun, adjusts their management style and somehow uses it in various situations that we encounter at work.'* IV-8 reinforces this idea, stating that *'only by knowing yourself well, by being able to name your emotions, can you get to know other people.'* which is critical in successfully managing both teams and clients.

3.3.1. Understanding own strengths and weaknesses

Leader's self-awareness extends to recognising own strengths and weaknesses as well as not being afraid to share them openly with others. This transparency helps leaders to increase efficiency by encouraging team members to join forces and support each other – leader included – in difficult situations, leveraging their complementary abilities.

IV-2: *‘emotional intelligence, starts with understanding your own limits and (...) what you can and can't do. (...) what determines the success of a project is the right expectations for yourself and others. And when you have the right expectations (...) it's easier to follow them.’*

IV-3: *‘The way to leverage is probably that you try to share with others where you are strong and where you are weak. Those weaknesses always come from the fact that someone can cover them, because different people have different skills.’*

Leaders also recognised that knowing and understanding your strengths alone is not sufficient without knowing when and how to use them. IV-6 stated that: *‘Knowing and understanding those qualities of yours does not necessarily guarantee success. (...) controlling emotions at certain times and using them at certain times is key.’* Adding to this, IV-7 indicated that it is with time that one learns of when and how to leverage one’s strengths: *‘But this is what I would call a self-development thing. When you first encounter a situation, those emotions usually come up first. Over time, you just start to understand how to act in different situations and what has the best result. And then the next time, it's not that you have to deal with the same emotions, but they don't come up as much.’*

Leading by example emerged as another crucial aspect of intrapersonal skills as leader’s personal dynamics influenced team dynamics and expectations.

IV-9: *‘I'm just such a disciplined person and a person who keeps agreements, you know, so then you probably expect the same from others.’*

IV-8: *‘setting high standards for myself, but also for my team members, expecting them to achieve the same perfect result.’*

Adding to this IV-8 also shared an instance of how understanding own principles of working had impacted the leadership approach in certain situations, ultimately leading to project success:

IV-8: *‘I am also one of those who works quickly and efficiently, and sometimes it is easy to forget that not all team members can keep up (...) Therefore, I constantly remind myself*

to check how others are moving, whether they are still with me. Communication with team members, feeling the pulse leads to the success of the project.'

These insights showcase how self-awareness, if leveraged correctly, helps leaders to align their values with their leadership style, creating an environment of consistency and accountability.

3.3.2. Delegating work and recognising mistakes

Equally important is leader's ability to capture and mitigate own desire to get hands-on and do all the work himself. In these situations, the leader has to be able to step back and give the work back to people, delegating responsibilities. By doing so, leaders enable team members to grow and develop their leadership capabilities. As a leader, it is best to stay in that supporting role, so that the person feels safe, but also leave the person that autonomy. IV-1 emphasised on this with a story:

IV-1: 'I caught myself that I was harming and not saving, because I was covering up my personal things, but I was not helping the person to concentrate normally or to grow or, you know, to develop those leadership skills (...) But then there was that moment when I realised that it was wrong and I turned myself off like a light bulb (...) and shifted into a supervising role.'

Leaders should be able to accept mistakes as part of the learning process, helping themselves and their teams to focus on growth rather than being afraid of failure. IV-5 discussed this: *'we don't operate on hearts, and we don't save lives. (...) in our field it is natural and acceptable to make mistakes. From the point of view that we learn from mistakes, you understand that next time you will look somewhere more carefully (...) but (...) you can't beat yourself up for doing your job.'*

Thus, in conclusion, intrapersonal skills, encompassing aspects such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, adaptability, and resilience among others, are key to delivering successful projects in the professional services industry. Leaders who are good at understanding and managing their own emotions across different scenarios help create environments where they and their teams can thrive and work efficiently.

As a sidenote to what will be discussed further, the branches of Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence are highly interconnected. While managing stress certainly requires a leader

to have a strong understanding of their own emotions, handling decision-making in these situations is more considered as stress management, thus will be discussed in the further section.

3.4. Interpersonal skills

The second dimension of Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence – interpersonal skills – focuses on individual's awareness of other's feelings and needs combined with the ability to demonstrate empathy and develop and maintain mutually satisfying relationships. The following parts of this section will explore the critical role of leader's interpersonal skills in achieving project success within PSFs, touching upon the topics of effectively dealing with team member's frustrations, promoting a sense of ownership and understanding strengths and weaknesses of team members among others.

3.4.1. Dealing with team member's frustrations

All interviewees highlighted that a leader's key responsibility is to constantly monitor team's emotional state, especially during periods of high-intensity and stress, whether through simple observation techniques or informal conversations, which create a more open environment for team members to share their feelings. Effective leaders must foster strong bonds and mutual trust within the team, being emphatic and attentive to subtle emotional cues. Seeking to prevent any damage to the project itself, leaders must proactively initiate conversations when they sense that something is not right, as employees themselves may often hesitate to voice their concerns without prompting. The leader's failure to address emotional distress, as noted by IV-2 and IV-6, ultimately leads the project to be unstable, significantly increasing its likelihood of failure.

IV-8: 'In my experience, in such a case, the only way is to talk to the person, listen, not be afraid to hear unpleasant things, in no case "sweep the problem under the carpet", hoping that emotions will somehow calm down and everything will resolve itself. And when talking to a person, it is necessary to really hear what they are saying, and not to listen impulsively just to keep the project moving forward - people feel well how sincere the manager is. You need to give the conversation as much time as necessary, without rushing, without running to other meetings, without thinking that during the time we are

talking, we have already done much more important things. While talking and listening, gradually direct your thoughts to solving the problem.'

It is crucial for a leader in a PSF to recognise that *'every team member is different, and they feel the stress of the project at different moments'* (IV-6). Effective leadership requires a leader to truly listen to the employee's concerns, empathise with their situation, understand the underlying reasons for their emotions and respond appropriately, tailoring their approach based on the specific needs and circumstances of each individual.

IV-7: *'the key thing here is that you have to sort out those concerns and frustrations. (...) Because if you don't address them correctly, then there is already that impact on project outcomes.'*

IV-6: *'These stressful situations may be different for team members, and they need to be addressed in different ways, but the essential thing is to notice or to hear the team member's stress, at what point in time, and what is the stress there.'*

Informal conversations frequently facilitate problem-solving or, at the very least, alleviate tension, ultimately lessening the emotional burden for the person and thus improving productivity and overall team efficiency. Interviewees emphasised on 4 most common reasons of high stress in employees – high workload, complex projects, client-team member incompatibility, or personal – and indicated ways of how to effectively address them, ultimately benefiting all interested parties – the person himself, the client and the team:

- *Personal.* When team members are held down by problems in their personal lives, IV-5 and several other interviewees, suggest that a leader should offer support by sharing their own experiences in similar situations. However, it is important to leave the individual the freedom to make their own decisions.
- *Complex project.* Team members who feel overwhelmed often find it helpful to break a large project into smaller parts. As IV-8 shared: *'a project member, on whom the outcome of the entire project depended, could no longer withstand the stress (...) And that worked - we 'ate the elephant in pieces', marking the implementation of each agreed-upon smaller step in the project plan, thus bringing positivity so that issues are resolved one by one.'*

- *High workload.* In high-workload situations, a leader should spot signs of frustration among team member's and step in to alleviate some of their pressures and responsibilities. By alleviating the source of distress, this approach enables employees to work more efficiently, maintain focus, and successfully complete the remaining projects, effectively mitigating the risk of reduced quality or missed deadlines that could lead to the failure of multiple projects. As IV-6 notes: *'In situations where something can be changed, like the high workload of a certain team member, if we can change it, we need to do it right here right now. Going through the priorities, the importance, the busyness and taking one thing or another off and communicating that to that team member.'*
- *Client-team member incompatibility.* In some cases, the 'magnetic fields' between the client and the team member may be incompatible, causing distress on both the side of the client and the team member. If possible, the leader should proactively take action, adjust the project team, or otherwise clearly communicate the situation to both parties and help the team member to cope with the situation. IV-6 suggests the following: *'I often address, that this is a temporary situation which will basically end someday. Yes, the situation may be unpleasant at the moment, but it is not really the worst thing that has happened and can happen (...) If we get through it, it will make us all stronger.'*

3.4.2. Understanding strengths and weaknesses of your team

Building on the last point in the previous section regarding '*Client-team member incompatibility*', the majority of interviewees emphasise leader's ability to understand their team's strengths and weaknesses as well as their ability to leverage this knowledge when assembling project teams as a critical factor for project success in PSFs. This requires the leader effectively utilise his interpersonal skills to quickly assess the client's personality and needs, often based on limited interactions. Since every client is unique, the leader must adapt and align this knowledge about the client with their understanding of the team's capabilities. Failing to do so, could result in potential conflicts between the client and the team member or even the leader, potentially causing the PSF to fall short of expectations, leading to dissatisfied clients, cancelled projects or a loss of future business opportunities.

IV-6: *‘team is basically formed according to the needs of the client. (...) some clients are demanding and attentive to details, other clients are generalists, and they need more of a generic answer or answers that are not necessarily numbers driven. And taking into account the needs of those clients, you usually try to form a team because we are all different people and we all have our own core competencies, so that the delivery team also meets the needs of the client.’*

IV-1: *‘You must know what kind of people you're working with. (...) when projects start (...) you still have to assess who can work on the project and what qualities are needed.’*

However, leaders acknowledge that forming a perfect team may not always be possible. In situations like this, it becomes of utmost importance that a leader precisely understands the competencies of a team member. If a person is weaker in some area, a leader should support and stand by them until the person gets the hang of it. Only by knowing this can a manager plan effectively, as otherwise, the individual may make mistakes that could potentially lead to a loss of client trust.

IV-3: *‘when you assign someone to a project, to assess whether they lack any knowledge and then support them, stand by them until they get used to it.’*

3.4.3. Developing a sense of ownership in teams

Developing a sense of ownership among team members is recognised as a critical factor for project success in PSFs, as employees who take responsibility for their output are more likely to deliver high-quality results that meet client expectations. However, several interviewees expressed their concerns regarding the erosion of this quality in the current generation (e.g. IV-6 and IV-9), attributing it to broader social trends, such as the rise of liberalism. Leaders in PSFs recognise that it is something that is here to stay and requires them to adapt their leadership to accommodate various practices that would help develop a sense of ownership of the team members. If this is not addressed, it could lead to a significantly reduced quality of work that would likely not meet client standards, ultimately resulting in a rise of failed projects in PSFs or a significantly increased workload related to quality control of senior leadership, hindering the efficiency of the PSF.

IV-7 shared an interesting observation on how it is often the structural challenges within PSFs that can hinder the development of ownership, particularly among junior staff. IV-7 emphasised the importance of balance between the leaders taking ownership themselves and empowering others:

IV-7: 'But this is a very dangerous situation, (...) especially in a professional environment, people who take ownership move forward. And when you become more mature over time, there is a big risk that you take too much ownership. (...) but this is a trap. Because then you do not give other people ownership, which is what they need and helps them grow and make mistakes. (...) then a situation arises where the person who takes too much ownership gets angry with themselves and everyone else, why others don't take ownership, even though in reality they are creating the problem themselves.'

This observation underscores the importance of leaders in PSFs being able to control their own emotions and desires, letting go of their ego and need for personalised achievement and allowing others to take responsibility instead, developing their skills through experience – even at the risk of occasional failure.

Majority of interviewees emphasised that micromanagement often stifles ownership and accountability and is something that should be avoided at all costs. Instead, they advocate that the absolute best way to foster a sense of ownership in a person is to place them directly in front of the accountability – either by setting clearly defined goals supported by structured monitoring processes or by installing accountability frameworks that promote independence.

IV-8: 'It is important to identify the team member's responsibility for their area and allow them to organise and implement actions themselves, agreeing on common principles for monitoring progress and status, but not micromanaging. When a member understands that they are responsible for this part or area and must achieve a result, their thinking and vision changes.'

IV-5: 'I would say that the best lesson is when you put it in front of the client (...) when a person realises that what he is doing, he will have to represent it in front of the client. Then he gets a very strong sense of responsibility. (...) responsibility, on the one hand,

grows a person, on the other hand, sometimes it motivates them to do the job as well as they can, because they will have to represent the client, not me.'

This observation highlights the importance of a leader's ability to 'give work back to people', understanding that not only will it be beneficial for the leader themselves and PSF but also help team members grow, strengthening their confidence and problem-solving abilities. However, interviewees indicate that this should be done gradually, particularly with junior staff, balancing between support and autonomy. IV-8 shared an example of helping the team member to transition to a greater level of ownership by initially approving major decisions while encouraging autonomy on smaller tasks, which ultimately resulted in successful project implementation.

IV-4 shared another example, emphasising the importance of leaders' ability to foster learning through constructive feedback rather than directly correcting mistakes. By treating mistakes as opportunities for their team members to grow, raising questions, and providing comments that provoke critical thinking, leaders allow team members to learn from their own errors, developing critical thinking and, most importantly, a stronger sense of accountability for the quality of their work.

While fostering a sense of ownership in a team may require greater initial involvement from the leader, it ultimately fosters a stronger sense of ownership within the team, enhances team performance, and improves the quality of results, resulting in increased client satisfaction and probability of project success.

3.4.4. Creating emotional attachment in teams

The majority of interviewees agree that creating emotional attachment within teams and fostering employee's 'love for work' are vital components of effective leadership and project success in PSFs helping to build effective and curious teams that strive for excellence.

Leader's success in building this relationship is highly dependent on one's ability to leverage EI, specifically interpersonal skills, to understand and find ways to motivate employees in ways that address their individual needs and preferences. Motivational factors are inherently personal. Some team members may thrive on responsibility and direct communication with the client, and others may be motivated by interesting tasks or an ability to acquire financial incentives

for exceptional results and so on. As an example, IV-5 highlights the importance of tailoring motivational approaches to individual preferences:

IV-5: *‘Different people, different team members need to find the right motivation. For some, it's giving responsibility, it's direct communication with the client, preparing a full delivery, where I might just need a review. For others, of course, there are interesting tasks, such as those that they haven't done before, where they need to delve deeper.’*

Another aspect that some of the interviewees touched upon is the importance of a leader taking a genuine interest in their team members, not just in their work, but also in their personal lives, creating that personal connection and remembering to ask the employee about various events and milestones in their personal lives, such as their children, vacation or a sports championship. IV-1 expressed this as a vital and *‘complex skill that very few managers have’*. Vital because it helps to create a sense of a long-lasting meaning and emotional connection to work team members, fostering an environment where employees feel valued and cared for as individuals. This helps to build employee trust and loyalty, making them excited for new challenges and encouraging them to perform at their best, ultimately driving project as well as organisational efficiency and success in PSFs.

IV-1: *‘what's important and I would say, this is one of the more complex leadership skills, (...) ask “how are you, how are things”? (...) they remember that you said a week ago that you were going to some store to buy something, (...) and that makes you feel special. (...) it's important for them to feel like they're part of a big team.’*

IV-8: *‘It is important to have 1-on-1 conversations with each team member, during which you can discuss both the main tasks, status, and the emotional side.’*

IV-3 further highlights the importance of such personalised connection between the leader and a team member, particularly during critical transitional periods such as onboarding into a new workplace.

IV-3: *‘but especially, for example, new people and the like feel very much if you don't show them attention, at least write every day how you're doing, what's good and so on,*

then somewhere they start to feel that they're so lost and left alone. This is probably the key thing here in my opinion, that you need to talk to them and communicate with them.'

Following the topic of communication, multiple interviewees also brought the importance of a leader being able to foster open communication within the team, creating environments where individuals feel comfortable and welcome to approach the leader with the intention to talk, share stories, and seek advice. This requires a leader to fully leverage their interpersonal skills, showing empathy to the individual, listening to what they have to say and suggesting potential individualised solutions. When team members feel secure doing so, they can more easily overcome their personal and work-related hurdles, allowing them to return to their most productive state quicker, ultimately impacting project efficiency and sometimes even success.

IV-2: *'in our team, we probably value that openness as one of the greatest values, saying, "I just can't do it or something happened" is simply a must.'*

IV-8: *'The manager must be accessible – when a team member has a problem or needs advice, the manager must find time.'*

Another recurring theme in the interviews is the leader's responsibility to motivate employees by ensuring that team members recognise the value of their contributions, regardless of the size or scope of their tasks within the broader picture of the project. Leaders must be able to empower teams by involving them in decision-making processes and demonstrating that every opinion and part of the project really matters.

IV-1: *'I think my team's success is based on empowering the team to make decisions, involving them in decision-making, so that they understand that they are part of a large team, and their opinion is also important.'*

IV-8 further shared a story about a team member who initially underestimated the importance of their role in the project, which ultimately damaged their effectiveness and motivation at work. Recognising this, IV-8 took the initiative to explain how the team member's specific task fit into the broader scope of the project, emphasising its criticality. Doing so, IV-8

shifted the team members' perspectives, reigniting their sense of purpose and positivity, which ultimately contributed to project success.

IV-8: *'A team member was responsible for one part of the project and sometimes he would say that this was just an insignificant part of the whole project - after we talked and discussed what would happen if this part of the project was not implemented, the importance for the entire project and customer satisfaction became obvious. And the team member maintained that positive line until the end of the project.'*

Closely connected to the topic of effective communication, most interviewees emphasised the importance of a leader's ability to create a sense of security and foster a cohesive 'team vibe'. This helps employees to feel reassured that even if a mistake occurs or a deliverable falls short, the leader – and a team as a whole – will provide support in managing the client's feedback or help in finding alternative solutions that would mitigate potential negative impacts of the initial error. However, interviewees also stressed that it is equally important for leaders to address such situations constructively, ensuring that lessons are learned and similar mistakes are avoided in the future. Thus, the leader must act as a shield between the team member and the client, creating that sense of security in a team and allowing employees to fully focus on successfully accomplishing their duties.

IV-5: *'The team, let's say, misses something, maybe doesn't delve into it fully and then you get that kind of feedback from the client, so you try to really represent the team and try to manage that client feedback and discuss a possible solution in one situation or another. Then it is communicated to the relevant team constructively, but there is never any negativity, condemnation, shouting or whatever.'*

IV-2: *'it's again that communication, reassurance, that business doesn't stop because of this and we have other solutions and you don't have to be afraid.'*

In conclusion, interviewees highlighted that leader's interpersonal skills – awareness of other's feelings and needs, combined with the ability to demonstrate empathy and develop mutually satisfying relationships – are crucial components of emotional intelligence in driving

project success in PSFs. These skills enable leaders to effectively deal with team member's frustrations, foster a sense of ownership and accountability and leverage individual strengths and weaknesses of team members when assembling project teams that can meet client expectations. However, more importantly it allows for a leader to build meaningful and personalised relationships with the team members, promoting their sense of belonging and enjoyment at work, thus driving resilience and sustained performance.

3.5. Stress management

The third dimension of Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence – stress management – focuses on individual's ability to effectively and constructively cope, manage and control emotions. The following parts of this section will explore the critical role of stress management in achieving project success within PSFs, particularly highlighting its impact on decision making and learning from mistakes.

3.5.1. Decision making

As a leader in the professional services industry, you must accept that unexpected events are an integral part of the job. Keeping your emotions intact during decision-making in dynamic environments is critical, ultimately leading to project success.

Where all the interviewees seem to agree is the importance of avoiding impulsive decisions during moments of emotional distress. Instead, they emphasised the need to step back, take a break, and approach the problem with a clear mind before identifying solutions to the problem at hand and communicating them to the client:

IV-9: 'as I say, you take a break, digest it. And then I think, okay, if there is a problem, let's look for ways (...) how to solve it. (...) if it happened, it happened, let's see what is the best outcome we can achieve in this situation with the existing resources and existing conditions.'

Building on this point, multiple interviewees highlighted the importance of maintaining emotional stability in high-pressure and fast-paced situations, stressing the fact that leader's emotional balance directly impacts team's cohesion and efficiency. If such a balance is not present

on the leader's part, the teams can quickly become unsettled, leading to decreased performance and, thus a lower probability of project success:

IV-8: *'In such cases, I focus, I don't let negative emotions take over, I don't cause unnecessary confusion and waves in the team and stakeholders, although I directly identify to myself and the team how serious the obstacles are, and I still maintain the positivity that a solution can always be found.'*

IV-5: *'I try (...) not to bring any negative emotions or stress into the office to the team. Well, there are those tasks, you can tell the team that there is work, but you have to control yourself, not be emotional, and not say that you can not do anything. (...) Because bringing that negative emotion will immediately fall on the team.'*

Several interviewees further outlined the benefits of utilising emotion-free, structured approach to decision-making, emphasising that this method not only ensures better decision quality but also creates confidence that the decisions made were the best ones possible under the given resources, conditions and constraints at the time:

IV-6: *'the delivery process of professional services management consulting always requires a structured, common-sense approach to the question, where if A follows B, then B follows C and so on (...) if you take a pause and do that rethinking and choose the lesser of two bad decisions and you know that you came to it through structured thinking and not emotional decision-making, then you feel calmer and you are less stressed too.'*

Several interviewees identified the ability to manage stress effectively under stressful and unexpected situations as a skill that improves over time with experience. With practice, leaders learn to handle unexpected situations with greater calmness and perspective, viewing at them as a natural part of the job in PSF rather than crises:

IV-2: *'avoiding emotions in situations like this comes with time. At the very beginning, it is very difficult, then it just happens, you understand that this is life and there will be no other way, and then you accept it as just part of the job.'*

As an additional benefit of mastering own stress management, as highlighted by interviewees, is that leaders who develop the ability to respond to challenging situations adequately become better equipped to monitor the emotional states of their team members. This proactive awareness helps to mitigate the risk of significant emotional distress or burnout – something that would otherwise significantly reduce the effectiveness of the team:

IV-8: *‘Identifying for myself where anxiety comes from, what the main reasons are, led me to be able to constructively reflect and plan how and what to do, how to collaborate with team members, how to understand their emotional state, and how to respond and communicate appropriately.’*

IV-2: *‘more adequate response to situations has been helping me (...) to see in advance (...) increased emotionality among team members.’*

3.5.2. Learning from mistakes

Interviewees indicate that when receiving feedback from a client about the work you have done, it is important not to take it personally, accept the situation as a professional, and accordingly assess what you could do better next time. A recurring theme among the interviewees was the importance of admitting mistakes as this helps to alleviate emotional stress and think rationally how to get out of a particular situation. Interviewees note that this quality comes with time and is very often lacking in younger colleagues, who often attempt to shift blame instead of accepting responsibility:

IV-4: *‘colleagues who have less work experience (...) are very afraid to admit mistakes and they try to blame those mistakes on someone else. (...) you have to admit that you made a mistake, then it becomes easier emotionally and you can think rationally.’*

IV-5: *‘I try not to take it personally. If, say, I get some constructive feedback from a client (...) I try not to take it personally, just accept it as a specialist and assess accordingly what you could do better next time.’*

In addition to this, IV-1 highlighted handling of emotionally charged situations calmly as a critical skill across employees of all levels. IV-1 emphasised on extreme importance of staying composed when a client calls to voice dissatisfaction or blame. Responding calmly in situations like this helps to defuse tension but also demonstrates professionalism and EI. Recognising the importance of these skills, IV-1's team undergoes annual client servicing coaching sessions to help employees learn how to control their emotions in these challenging scenarios.

In conclusion to this third sub-part of the Bar-Ons model of emotional intelligence, leaders who are able to effectively and constructively cope, manage and control their emotions are better equipped to navigate challenging situations, leading to improved project outcomes and, thus, project success. This is largely because such leaders adopt a structured and logic-based decision-making approach, enabling them to keep their minds free from their own emotions while understanding and addressing the emotions of both team members and clients. Moreover, their capacity to acknowledge mistakes, take responsibility, and respond constructively to feedback strengthens client relationships and builds trust. These qualities contribute to greater project success in dynamic and high-pressure environments often found in the professional services industry.

3.6. Adaptability

The fourth dimension of Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence – adaptability – focuses on an individual's ability to effectively adapt and adjust their own feelings and thinking to new situations, allowing one to solve problems in an efficient manner. The following parts of this section will explore the critical role of adaptability in achieving project success within PSFs, particularly highlighting its impact on problem-solving, team dynamics, and client relationships in the presence of evolving challenges and uncertainties.

3.6.1. Problem-solving

Most interviewees agree that open communication is key to maintaining client relationships in situations where ambiguities, miscommunication or unforeseen obstacles arise. However, as highlighted by many participants, addressing such challenges requires more than just generic communication, simply outlining the problems at hand. Instead, leaders in PSFs must adapt and proactively manage the situation, employing a structured and emotionally intelligent approach to

safeguard client relationships and project outcomes in situations like this. This is well-articulated in the following:

IV-6: *'The important thing here is that you can't leave it to the last minute. First, if you see that something is going north, you need to deal with it proactively. Second, you need to know the client and know how to tell them the news so that they accept it more positively than negatively. That's very important. And the third thing is to explain the reasons why it happened and rationalise everything. (...) The most important thing here is to be open and not lie.'*

This quote uniquely touches on the importance of leader's emotional intelligence across multiple dimensions, showcasing that in situations like this, the leader has to truly adapt and manage the client by fully utilising own emotional intelligence across multiple dimensions:

- ***Stress management.*** The leader must manage own stress and emotions, quickly transitioning to structured thinking in order to find and evaluate potential solutions to the problem at hand along with the impact of each of the solutions on project success, balancing the needs of both the client and PSF;
- ***Interpersonal skills.*** Effective communication requires a leader to understand the client's personality, emotional state and preferred method of communication, even in cases where interactions have been limited. This is of utmost importance as this emotional awareness allows leaders to frame messages in a way so the client perceives the situation in a positive manner, thus benefiting the PSF;
- ***Intrapersonal skills.*** Leaders must clearly understand their own emotions and be willing to openly admit their mistakes in front of others, demonstrating vulnerability where necessary. Fostering this open communication benefits the leader and PSF on multiple grounds. Not only does it build trust, but it also encourages collaborative problem-solving, strengthening the relationship with the client in the long term.

The insights shared above closely align with IV-9's perspective, highlighting that when addressing problems, it is very important for a leader to have that helicopter view, focusing on making decisions that will provide a long-term solution to the problem instead of wasting resources on short-term fixes that may eventually escalate into more significant challenges. Interestingly,

this perspective closely mirrors the core principles of adaptive leadership, suggesting that adaptability, in general, is about finding solutions that are sustainable and future-proof.

3.6.2. Solving complex or / and unprecedented challenges

The majority of interviewees agree that in situations where complex or / and unprecedented problems are present, both the leader and the team must adapt to the situation at hand and collaborate closely to identify the best possible solution. Effective leadership approach in such scenarios requires recognising that no single individual – including the leader – has all the answers. Instead, the leader must actively engage the team, truly listening to the ideas of everybody regardless of their position within the organisation. Because it is this collaborative brainstorming and openness to diverse ideas that drives project success in PSFs by uncovering the best possible solutions for the client. The following quotes effectively illustrate this approach:

IV-1: ‘It all starts with setting priorities and most importantly, I, as the DIRECTOR, don't decide alone, we sit down together and decide.’

IV-8: ‘Together with team members, we analyse the problem in detail, look for possible solutions, and identify their shortcomings and advantages. Working together with a team to find solutions helps to feel a sense of community. By looking for solutions together, team members feel involved and take responsibility for achieving the result.’

Building on this, IV-7 emphasises the complexity and novelty of problems often faced by management consultants. The interviewee states that the dynamic nature of management consulting requires one to constantly adapt and employ creative problem-solving. According to IV-7, the most important thing is flexibility – not being rigidly focused only on what is outlined in the contract as very often during the projects, unexpected circumstances arise, hindering the initial goals unattainable. In such circumstances, it is essential for the leader to adapt to the situation, pause, reassess, and identify alternative outcomes and solutions that would still meet the client's expectations in this new state. IV-7 emphasises that often this adaptive approach is the only way to achieve project success.

There is no doubt that periods of uncertainty and the search for unknown solutions to problems can be psychologically demanding on both the leader and the team. However,

interviewees share that what helps to adapt in situations like these is maintaining a growth-oriented mindset and looking at this as just another opportunity for professional growth:

IV-5: ‘We look at it as an opportunity to learn. Learning and the client pays us for it (...) this is your self-development in your professional field. (...) maybe that project will not be, let's say, profitable, as it could be in your field, but it still pays for it. (...) that's how I motivate the team to solve it, that it is new for us, but maybe the next client will come, and we will already know.’

Situations where leader’s adaptability is truly tested arise when they must admit to the client that they do not have immediate answers to client’s questions, particularly when the topic is unfamiliar. Leaders of high emotional intelligence and strong self-awareness are not afraid to acknowledge this reality. Instead, they focus on evaluating the situation realistically, preserving client trust by avoiding the temptation to pretend they have an answer and thus mitigating the potential risk of potentially misleading the client. Such leaders adapt to the situation at hand and are not afraid of telling the client that they will come back with well-informed answers after they have done their research (IV-2). IV-5 further emphasises this by stating that the most important thing is open communication, and, in such situations, you should never lie because that shows very quickly. Interviewee even suggests that sometimes *‘clients come up with questions that they already know the answers to in order to test your knowledge, and if you are dishonest, then you immediately lose that trust, and you definitely don't show yourself as a proper partner.’*

3.6.3. Finding a win-win solution

Additionally, 4 out of 9 respondents emphasised the importance of leader’s ability to adapt to the situation at hand, proactively searching for win-win solutions that would suit both the needs of the client and the team. IV-3 notes that in the professional services industry, where the whole business is centred around solving client’s problems, it is important to never leave a client in trouble and try to help them solve the problem in some way. Whether to provide the answers yourself or direct them elsewhere, but to help.

IV-7 also shares a similar view to this, emphasising that a leader must take such an approach even in times when high workload is already present, trying to adapt and suggest ways of how to solve this client problem in the most efficient manner:

IV-7: 'you approximate it and see that it would be good for all parties, that win-win situation. (...) There is such a decision-making here that if you make one client very happy now, but people burn out or one person leaves the job, that's very simple math. Then you won't have revenue from other clients the next month, where that person could contribute. That's the equation that everyone often thinks about and decides. (...) And you still try to balance that thing somehow. And it's often possible to do that.'

This is an important skill for a leader in PSF, as not leaving the client in trouble allows to build strong and long-lasting client relationships. This approach not only delivers short-term benefits for the PSF, but also unlocks untapped potential for the future revenue opportunities, ultimately contributing to the overall success of an organisation.

In conclusion to this fourth sub-part of the Bar-On model of emotional intelligence, leaders who are able to effectively adapt and adjust their own feelings and thinking to new situations, allowing them to solve problems in an efficient manner, are better equipped to navigate challenging situations, leading to improved project outcomes and thus project success. This is largely because such leaders have mastered the ability to cope with their own stress and emotions while quickly recognising and adapting to the personalities and emotions of others. This ability allows them to navigate complex situations in the most efficient manner. Moreover, their understanding that the best solutions to complex and / or unprecedented problems are found through team collaboration, coupled with a mindset focused on supporting clients and seeking to find a win-win solution at all times, is a key driver of project and organisational success in the professional services industry.

3.7. General mood

Another dimension of Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence – general mood – focuses on an individual's overall outlook on life and emotional well-being, influencing how effectively they can cope with daily challenges and stressors. Bar-On (2006) outlines two key dimensions of general mood – optimism and happiness. The following parts of this section will highlight the

importance of overall happiness and a comfortable mindset within teams, as well as a critical role of leader's positive mindset and their ability to transfer this view to their teams, particularly in moments of high stress and uncertainty as commonly found in PSFs.

3.7.1. Overall happiness

Following the definitions of Bar-On (2006), happiness is related to one feeling '*content with oneself, others and life in general.*' Many interviewees suggest that a large part of creating this feeling can be attributed to giving feedback, both positive and negative, as this is what motivates team members to grow and become better versions of themselves:

IV-4: '*Another thing is probably that feedback is very important for all of them. People (...) need to feel valued and welcome.*'

Moreover, interviewees agree that when someone is doing well and putting in extra effort, it's important to show it both individually and in front of the whole team. Praising someone for doing the job well creates a sense of accomplishment for the person being praised. It motivates them to push even further, continuing to put in this extra effort, thus increasing the probability of project success. The ideas of some of the interviewees were as follows:

IV-8: '*It is also necessary to celebrate the project's achievements by naming a team member whose contribution was significant. Provide positive feedback to the team member both personally and to a wider audience.*'

IV-4: '*I think that if someone delivers something, it's good for them to find out, especially (...) if they do it effectively or correctly, so don't be afraid to praise those people. (...) I really feel that people need that incentive. At least a good word and sometimes maybe you can even do it in front of others, so that the person feels satisfaction.*'

Adding to this, IV-8 and IV-9 pointed out that leaders should recognise and celebrate not only major milestones but also smaller achievements of the team or individual team members:

IV-8: *‘problem in this case was complex and difficult (...) we “ate the elephant in pieces”, marking the implementation of each agreed smaller step in the project plan, thus bringing positivity so that the issues are resolved one by one.’*

IV-9: *‘we have, let's say, that model of teamwork, where we really celebrate those small successes, if not during one, then during the next meeting.’*

However, it is inevitable that team members will not always perform as expected and may occasionally make mistakes. In moments like this, it is important that a leader acknowledges these mistakes openly and is not afraid to give constructive criticism to an employee. While this requires determination from the leader and is not enjoyable, it is necessary and ultimately results in positive outcomes for both the individual and the team:

IV-1: *‘I had to decide and say this (...) not good feedback. (...) I was sincerely accumulating, for about 3 weeks (...) put my thoughts together (...) it's hard and totally not fun delivering bad news and feedback, but it is necessary if you want to solve it.’*

When mistakes happen, it is important for a leader to avoid punishing or shaming the individual. Instead, a leader should reflect on whether they themselves may have contributed to the situation by missing the mark somewhere and consider how similar issues could be prevented next time. In such situations, empathy plays a critical role. Leaders should try to put themselves in that person's shoes and understand what circumstances led to the existing result. Resulting in punishment is unlikely to produce positive and long-lasting results and may instead lead to demotivation or reluctance to take the initiative, for example, the next time you ask them to work longer hours. The following ideas from IV-9 provide evidence of this:

IV-9: *‘What often helps me “not to cut off heads” is empathy (...) that you understand and put yourself in such a situation, that you assess yourself, that there were circumstances that made a person act this way, not otherwise. (...) you can nail the person to the wall, but when that situation happens again, you know, the person can say, “Well, buddy, my working hours are over, and you can do whatever you want.” ’*

3.7.2. Positive mindset

Six out of eight interviewees who were asked to share their opinion about the role of positivity in driving project success within PSFs outlined the significance of leader's positive mindset and their ability to transfer this outlook within a team. Interviewees repeatedly noted that it is not just the leader's own optimism, but their ability to demonstrate and share this positivity that serves as a key driver of performance.

IV-1 noted that positivity and charisma coming from the leader are very important, because 'what kind of person will follow a leader who does not believe in the success of the project.' The perception is that a positive mindset results in higher efficiency, reduced stress levels, and better decision-making. IV-1 further elaborated on this, sharing that:

IV-1: *'The big projects we have undertaken in recent years would not have been possible without positivity, the right attitude and the transfer of that to the team.'*

While the importance of positivity was widely emphasised, several interviewees also stressed that positivity alone is not enough, introducing the importance of realistic optimism – a balance between believing that the goals are achievable in the current state while maintaining the understanding that reaching those goals will require proactive effort. IV-8 explained:

IV-8: *'Positivity helps the team overcome difficult stages of the project. (...) realistic optimism - when you optimistically believe that everything will be fine and it is possible to achieve the goals, but as a realist, you understand that you will achieve them only by taking action yourself is key.'*

On the contrary, IV-3 argued that positive mindset is unnecessary, emphasising the importance of a realistic approach that you will not be able to solve all situations. Moreover, IV-7 added to this that while positivity is important, it should be intentional and situational – adjusted to fit the challenges at hand rather than being applied blindly.

Despite this, the majority of interviewees consistently described how a leader's positive mindset, especially when paired with realism, not only inspires confidence in a team but also helps to sustain motivation and focus in challenging phases. IV-8 provided a very well-fitting example

to this, sharing that after completing complex projects, team members often pointed out how positivity helped them to push through difficult project stages:

IV-8: *‘After the projects ended, project members shared that positivity, faith in the result, and timely search for solutions were precisely what led to the project's success.’*

Even in cases where leaders face projects of extreme complexity and very low probability of success, they must remain resilient. Instead of giving up, they should first focus on fostering a sense of positivity within themselves and then actively transfer this mindset to their team to maintain motivation and focus. IV-1 reflected her experience in a similar scenario:

IV-1: *‘Although I knew inside that the project would be very difficult and possibly impossible. I started from finding positivity in myself and then I motivated and supported the team all the way, checking-up with team manager every day (...) and getting involved in such a project myself in every way.’*

3.7.3. Maintaining overall happiness and positivity

Many interviewees emphasised that overall happiness and a positive mindset require active monitoring and nurturing by the leader. They outlined several strategies that helped them change their own and their team’s perspectives, setting the stage for more efficient and productive work attitudes.

Contributing to this, IV-6 shared a personal strategy for maintaining optimism even during setbacks by reminding oneself that *‘it's not the worst thing that has happened in life and probably not the worst thing that will happen in life.’* This further demonstrates that positivity must be intentionally fostered and maintained within teams, especially in times of high uncertainty and stress.

Others indicated the use of humour to lighten the mood and shift perspective. IV-2 commented that *‘healthy sarcasm is also good (...) when things are really bad. So bad that it's even funny. (...) I'm saying that there are situations (...) where it helps looking at the situation through that other prism.’* More interestingly, adding to the above, IV-7 shared an observation, that humour not only helps to lighten the mood and shift perspective but also works as a good

sensor for feeling team dynamics: *‘if people are no longer laughing, then you understand that something is not right. (...) Well, you just have to constantly monitor it.’*

In conclusion, leaders in PSFs highlighted that fostering overall happiness – through recognition, constructive feedback, and empathy – combined with maintaining a positive mindset grounded in realism and proactive effort, is a vital leadership tool for driving project success in PSFs through sustaining motivation, confidence, and efficiency within teams. As IV-8 stated, it is important to always keep in mind that *‘that a solution can always be found. And indeed, a solution can always be found.’* reinforcing that a positive mindset, when promoted by leaders, emerges as a powerful driver for completing complex projects that might otherwise face failure.

3.8. Client focus

This section extends the discussion of emotional intelligence beyond what is discussed by the Bar-On’s ESI model, connecting and highlighting the importance of EI in the unique business environments of PSFs – serving clients across a diverse range of industries, delivering individualised solutions to complex business challenges, and significantly contributing to client’s success and overall economic growth by helping them implement cutting-edge business practices. The following parts of this section will outline the critical role of trust and strong client relationships in general – two emerging trends indicated by the interviewees – in achieving project and organisational success within PSFs.

3.8.1. Building client relationship and trust

The project and organisational success of a PSF is highly centred on how effectively a leader can build and maintain a strong and long-lasting relationship with a client that is built around trust and mutual understanding. Building such a relationship is challenging and often requires leaders to effectively utilise a variety of EI features rather than just having know-how on how to solve the problem at hand. Interviewees outline several factors that help leaders in PSFs to build and maintain client relationships and trust. These factors are discussed in this subsection.

According to interviewees the grounding stone in establishing relationships with clients all together is being able to successfully structure and sell your intended offering. This is highly centred around clearly understanding the needs and situation of the client. To accomplish this, a leader has to show empathy and be mindful of the client’s perspectives, concerns and expectations.

He has to actively listen, making clients feel heard and understood and do so in a way that fits a particular client.

IV-6: *‘The first thing is to clearly understand what the client needs, what the end result is. And that thing, is not always written on paper in the client's request and it's not always the client who knows what they need. (...) the client is right, and you need to let the customer to talk himself out and say things that they want to say and start the conversation from there.’*

Once the leader has successfully identified and understood the client's problem, the next step is to thoroughly analyse the issue, delving deeper into the client's specific needs and expectations in that particular instance. Following this, a proposed approach is then structured and presented to the client. The following illustrates this:

IV-5: *‘I'm a good salesperson because I believe in what I'm saying. That's what I try to teach my team, that you sell what you know (...) So before you go to the client with some kind of offer, you do your homework by delving into what you want to offer them.’*

IV-4: *‘If you find that hook, why they need it, then in all cases I think you will be able to really sell that product or service. Of course, another thing is to understand what you are talking about, understand the client's expectations and, in many cases, even understand the specifics of the client's business.’*

From this it naturally follows that the step involves not just the general planning of necessary steps to solve the problem, but also utilising what the leader has learned about the client during his interactions, indicating the importance of intrapersonal skills. Having identified the client's mindset and priorities the leader can then adjust his proposal and budget in a way, so it has the best chance of selling.

Another effective practice for building client trust, as indicated by multiple interviewees, is demonstrating expertise through practical examples rather than relying solely on theoretical explanations. Leaders achieve this by showing own know-how in the field, providing examples of successfully solving similar problems in the past or even sharing relevant success stories from

comparable situations within the same industry. This approach allows the leader to use client's emotions to their advantage, connecting with the client on an emotional level, as clients tend to feel more attached and trust specialists who can demonstrate practical experience and industry knowledge. As emphasised in the previous sections of this analysis, doing so requires a leader to utilise his stress management and intrapersonal skills, maintain confidence in his own skills and approach the problem in a structured way.

IV-5: *'when you present your service not on a theoretical level, but by providing examples of your former clients (...) you create, let's say, your image as a specialist, that you are truly a specialist in that field.'*

IV-6: *'The thing that helps a lot is when you tell a client a case study from his industry and you say, for example, I know that in America a similar company did this and that (...) You gain trust and the client begins to believe in you, that you understand and are knowledgeable about what's going on in this industry.'*

Furthermore, where nearly all the interviewees agree is that the real trust in the consultant-client relationship is built after a successful completion of the projects. This trust is established when a leader in PSF effectively guides the team and supports the client by leveraging emotional intelligence to deliver the promised outcomes, effectively unlocking the potential for future collaboration and organisational success. This encourages leaders to do their best to manage their own emotions and prioritise client needs, which is essential for achieving project success. The following quotes emphasise this relationship:

IV-2: *'you can sell something with words at the very beginning, but after that you still need to back it up with actions (...) in the end, it's still those hard skills, where your professional knowledge is and how you look for solutions and how you perform.'*

IV-5: *'if it's a new client, that relationship comes after the successful completion of a project. If you and your team managed to achieve that result and deliver to the client what they expected (...) Then they will be the client who will return.'*

3.8.2. Maintaining client relationship and trust

Most professional services firms, with the exception of those providing accounting services, typically operate on a model where client-consultant relationships are more periodic rather than continuous, as clients tend to engage in these relationships at times when specific issues or challenges arise. As a result, one of the key things driving success in PSFs is leader's ability to maintain client relationships even during periods without active projects, reminding clients of their presence regularly. By doing so, leaders help clients feel supported and valued, making them much more likely to engage in client-consultant relationships in the future. One may argue that this practice is not directly linked to the success of individual projects. However, without this foundational step, clients would not be as likely to return, thus leading to fewer project opportunities and, consequently, fewer successful outcomes. Thus, maintaining strong client relationships outside of active projects can be seen as a vital step to sustained project success.

Interviewees outline a few methods for maintaining this relationship, such as inviting clients to various corporate events, bringing gifts during a holiday season or utilising the opportunity of follow leadership:

IV-5: 'group events, you invite them, or there are certain changes in tax laws, and you know that this is relevant to the client, you send a short message. I try to call after a while and get back to the client, just with some kind of offer or just to say hello.'

IV-6: 'Also, the client really likes it when you give, share what is called follow leadership material, send them some article, some research, some report, which the client does not know yet and it helps them.'

IV-2 further emphasised that PSFs are uniquely positioned to deliver this thought leadership effectively as leaders in PSFs engage with clients across diverse set of industries, being exposed to a variety of challenges and solutions. If used properly, this broad perspective allows leaders to transfer insights and best practices between clients, providing added value and thus preserving existing relationships and trust.

Several interviewees from Finance & Accounting, where client-consultant relationship tends to be more or less continuous, unlike in other services of PSFs, emphasised the importance

of consistently maintaining this relationship. Regular engagement helps clients feel valued and informed, making them more understanding during instances where mistakes or challenges arise.

IV-3: *'you need to maintain that connection all the time and call, go for lunch or meet up somewhere (...) because if you just work remotely (...) then it cools down at some point. And when it cools down, if you make a mistake, they start nagging you.'*

3.8.3. Importance of good client relationships

Several interviewees also touched on the importance of good client relationships and mutual trust in client-consultant relationships, emphasising that maintaining good client relationships fosters an environment where consultants, knowing they have the client's support, can approach challenges with greater confidence and creativity, ultimately leading to better project outcomes. Interviewees shared a few stories on this:

IV-4: *'we had a very, very close, good relationship with a client who really trusted us unconditionally and at that time maybe even we ourselves didn't have much knowledge (...) so there was a very, very close cooperation with the client. The exchange of that information and know-how, and in fact the client trusted us a lot and, I think, there were fails along the way. But in the end, we had a very good result.'*

Moreover, it also leads to more open communication and knowledge sharing from both parties, ultimately joining forces and together accomplishing what would have otherwise been impossible. This is further emphasised by a story from a real project by IV-8:

IV-8: *'On the last day of one of the projects, when the solutions for a new system replacing the existing system were to be implemented at 8:00 PM, it became clear around noon that the necessary permissions had not been granted (this was the first time in many projects that such permission had not been granted), so the system could not be launched. There was no Plan B to return to the previous system. After the customer communicated the problem, we took all possible steps together with him, in cooperation, without looking for blame - the permission was successfully obtained, and the system was launched. It can be said that good relations with the client saved the project.'*

In conclusion, leaders in PSFs are responsible for building and maintaining strong client relationships. By leveraging their emotional intelligence – particularly interpersonal skills – they can effectively engage with clients, foster trust, and make clients feel valued, helping to enhance collaboration and creating a basis for delivering high-quality results. Ultimately, these relationship building efforts contribute to overall project success and organisational growth of PSFs.

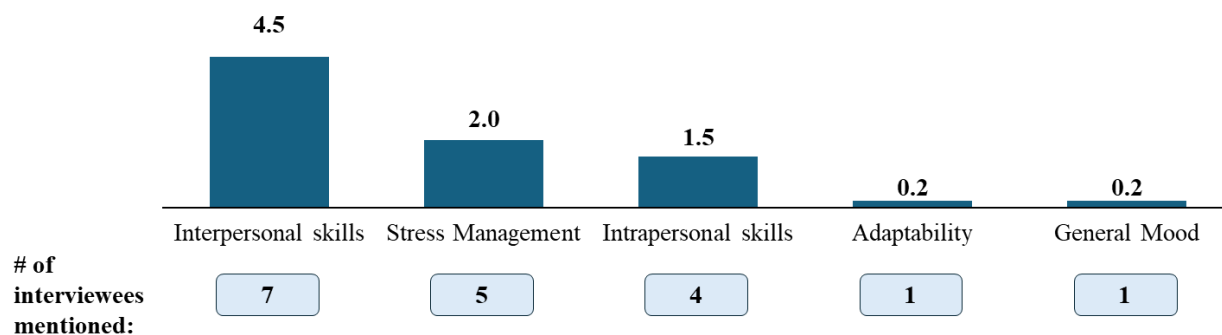
3.9. Leader's EI features that are key for project success in PSFs

Before proceeding to the summary of research results in this section, I shortly shift to discussing the answers of respondents to the final question of an interview: ‘19. *What do you believe is the most significant impact of emotional intelligence on project success?*’ Leaders were asked to identify the feature or features of emotional intelligence they considered as most important for a leader in a PSF. The results are summarised in Figure 9 below.

Although the significance of interpersonal relationships continuously emerged throughout the interviews, independent of specific sections, the results in Figure 9 provide further evidence that the two most important EI qualities for project success in PSFs, as indicated by the interviewees, are interpersonal skills and stress management skills, scoring 50% and 23% out of a total of 9 available points, respectively.

Figure 9

Branches of EI ranked by importance based on interviewee responses



Note on the scoring system. During the analysis each interviewee was assigned a total weight of 1, meaning that if a leader identified the whole concept of EI to be equally important, their 1 point was equally distributed across all five branches of Bar-On's emotional intelligence model (1 point / 5 branches = 0.2 point / branch) and so on.

Source: compiled by the author

Additionally, while not the primary subject of this thesis, many interviewees outlined that EI is a skill that can be developed and not something that people are born with, underscoring the fact that the findings of this research could, with practice, be applied by any leader in PSFs, independent of their current level of emotional intelligence. As IV-2 noted: *‘Emotional intelligence, in my deep conviction, is not somehow possessed, with birth, and it is truly acquired through experience.’*

3.10. Overview of research findings

The above clearly confirms a strong positive relationship between a leader’s emotional intelligence and project success within the professional services industry, mirroring trends observed by existing literature in other industries. The Table 4 below provides a summary of the findings, outlining key ideas and trends identified by the interviewees.

Table 4

Summary of research findings

3.3. Intrapersonal skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Know yourself well, fully understand and be able to distinguish between own emotions to be able to lead others effectively. ▪ Recognise and openly share your strengths and weaknesses to foster transparency, enabling teams to provide support and leverage their complementary abilities in complex environments. ▪ Knowing and understanding your strengths alone is not sufficient without knowing when and how to apply them strategically to achieve the best outcomes. ▪ Lead by example, aligning personal values with leadership style to create an environment of consistency, accountability and trust. ▪ Resist the urge to do the work yourself and instead step back and delegate tasks, empowering team members to take initiative and grow.

- Provide support, ensuring team members feel safe while also giving them the freedom to make their own decisions.
- Embrace mistakes as learning opportunities, promoting a mindset that shifts away from the fear of failure and focuses on continuous improvement instead.

3.4. Interpersonal skills

- Foster strong relationships and mutual trust within the team by showing empathy and addressing emotional cues early to prevent project disruptions
- Actively listen to employee's concerns, empathise, and tailor responses to individual needs and circumstances.
- Leverage informal conversations with team members to help alleviate tensions that hinder productivity.
- Offer support through shared experiences in similar situations while respecting team member's autonomy to make their own decisions.
- Effectively evaluate client's personality and needs by leveraging interpersonal skills to align teams effectively and enhance client satisfaction.
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of team members and leverage this knowledge when assembling optimal project teams to maximise performance.
- Provide extra support to less experienced team members, enabling gradual improvement while safeguarding client trust.
- Avoid micromanagement as it often stifles ownership and accountability of team members.
- Encourage ownership by establishing clear goals and installing accountability frameworks that promote independence.
- 'Give work back to people' by delegating tasks to team members, fostering confidence and problem-solving skills.
- Utilise constructive feedback to transform mistakes into learning opportunities, building a stronger sense of accountability for the quality of work.

- Motivate employees in ways that address their individual needs and preferences through personalised approaches.
- Form personal bonds with employees and enhance loyalty by taking a genuine interest in their personal lives.
- Promote open communication, making team members feel comfortable and welcome to approach the leader with the intention of talking, sharing stories, and seeking advice.
- Highlight the value of each team member's contributions to the project to maintain motivation and engagement.
- Foster a sense of security in employees by providing support during setbacks or problem-solving challenges.

3.5. Stress management

- Maintain emotional stability and avoid impulsive decisions during emotional distress, taking breaks to clear the mind before identifying and communicating solutions.
- Stay calm in high-pressure situations to ensure team cohesion and efficiency do not suffer due to a leader's emotional state.
- Adopt a structured, emotion-free approach to decision-making during periods of emotional distress to enhance the quality and confidence in chosen solutions.
- Respond calmly to challenges so to better monitor and address team emotions, reducing risks of distress and burnout among team members.
- Admit own or team's mistakes to alleviate emotional stress and enable rational problem-solving.
- Handle emotionally charged situations (e.g. client dissatisfaction with the final result) calmly to defuse tension and demonstrate professionalism.

3.6. Adaptability

- Adapt to ambiguities, miscommunication or unforeseen obstacles through open communication and emotionally intelligent approaches to safeguard client relationships and project outcomes.

- Tailor communication channels and methods to clients' personalities and emotional states, framing messages so that clients perceive the situation in a positive manner.
- Demonstrate vulnerability by openly admitting own mistakes in front of others where necessary, fostering openness and promoting collaborative problem-solving.
- Recognise that no single individual – including the leader – has all the answers and actively engage team members in problem-solving, valuing input from everybody regardless of their position within the organisation.
- Be flexible and creative, adapting plans when unexpected circumstances arise instead of focusing on rigidly adhering to initial contracts or strategies.
- Maintain a growth-oriented mindset, viewing challenges as just another opportunity for professional growth.
- Admit knowledge gaps when immediate answers are unavailable, focusing instead on realistic evaluation of own knowledge and preserving client trust through transparency instead of providing misleading responses.
- Proactively search for win-win solutions that meet both client and team needs, prioritising never leaving a client unsupported and strengthening long-term client relationships and trust.

3.7. General mood

- Recognise and praise team members' achievements privately and publicly to foster accomplishment and boost motivation.
- Provide constructive criticism when mistakes occur to promote growth while maintaining team trust.
- Avoid punishing team members for mistakes and instead reflect on your own contributions to these errors, focusing on prevention strategies while showing empathy to build understanding and trust.
- Lead with positivity, actively transferring within the team to enhance motivation, performance, and decision-making while also reducing stress.

- Balance optimism with realism, promoting confidence in achieving goals while acknowledging that reaching those goals will require proactive effort.
- Demonstrate resilience when facing projects of extreme complexity and very low probability of success, focusing on fostering positivity within yourself first and then inspiring the team to maintain focus and motivation.
- Continuously monitor and proactively nurture positivity within the team through active engagement and emotional awareness.
- Change perspective and reframe setbacks as temporary and manageable, promoting optimism during challenges and periods of high stress.
- Use humour strategically to lighten the mood, shift perspectives and act as a tool that helps assess the team's emotional status.

3.8. Client focus

- Identify and understand client's needs and perspectives by showing empathy, actively listening, and making clients feel heard and understood by tailoring communication in way that it fits a particular client.
- Demonstrate expertise through practical examples, showcasing industry know-how to build trust and connect with clients on an emotional level.
- Establish trust through successful project delivery, leveraging emotional intelligence to fulfil promises and unlock potential for future collaboration.
- Maintain client relationships even during periods without active projects, offering regular reminders of support to strengthen relationships and encourage future engagements.
- Foster strong client relationships based on mutual trust to create environments where teams can approach challenges with greater confidence and creativity, knowing they have the client's support.
- Promote open communication and knowledge sharing, enabling clients and consultants to collaborate and accomplish what would have otherwise been impossible.

Source: compiled by the author

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of the thesis was to provide a clear understanding of the relationship, or lack thereof, between the leader's emotional intelligence and project success in the professional services industry, with a specific focus on neo and classical PSFs – spanning Finance & Accounting, Legal & Tax Advisory, Human Resources, and Management Consulting services.

Several main takeaways emerge from the results of this research. First, consistent with the findings of an existing body of knowledge, interviewees identified traditional project success metrics – such as scope, cost, time, and quality – as insufficient in the contexts of PSFs, instead placing greater emphasis on more subjective measures, including client satisfaction and strong relationship management.

Secondly, the findings confirm a strong positive relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success within the professional services industry, mirroring trends observed by existing literature in other industries. Leader's emotional intelligence emerged as a central component in this relationship, supported by evidence across all five branches of Bar-On's ESI model – intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, stress management, adaptability, and general mood. While these findings align with those identified by existing literature in industries characterised by similar business environments, this study adds new depth and nuance, uncovering previously unexplored aspects of this relationship, which qualitative analysis may have overlooked by design.

Third, the thesis finds that a leader's emotional intelligence is of particular importance in successfully building and maintaining strong client relationships built on mutual trust and understanding. These relationships are essential not only to project success in PSFs but also for sustained growth and overall success of an organisation.

Fourth, while all five branches of Bar-On's model of emotional intelligence were identified as important, interviewees specifically identified strong interpersonal, stress management and intrapersonal skills as especially critical factors of emotional intelligence that affect project success in the professional services industry.

Lastly, beyond addressing the core research question, delving into interviewees' experiences with the help of a qualitative approach enabled the thesis to uncover complex and

nuanced ways of how exactly this relationship functions. Over 50 EI practices leaders may adopt to improve project successes within their professional services firms were identified.

In conclusion, this thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of leaders' emotional intelligence in driving project success within the professional services industry. Not only does it significantly contribute to the existing body of knowledge, but it also fulfils its aim of identifying emotional intelligence practices that leaders may adopt to improve project successes within their professional services firms.

Recommendations for future research

A recommendation for further research would be to perform a comparative study, exploring the differences in the relationship between leader's emotional intelligence and project success as perceived by leaders working in different subsectors of PSFs. While some of the subtle differences already emerged in this study, the sample size was too small to draw definitive conclusions. Collecting insights from a larger and more diverse sample of individuals would likely allow to understand this relationship in more detail.

Research limitations

The findings of this thesis, while offering rich and nuanced insights into the role of leader's EI in driving project success in PSFs, may not be generalisable to the broader population due to the choice of non-probability sampling. Moreover, although the interviewees were provided with the list of interview questions in advance, it must be taken into account that some of the stories from the personal experiences of the interviewees may contain inaccuracies due to the complexity and age of the events described. Furthermore, as the interviews were conducted at the end of the year – typically the busiest period in PSFs – some interviewees had very limited time, possibly resulting in some of the answers being discussed in less detail than they might have been under different circumstances or, in some cases, provided in writing altogether.

Nevertheless, while there are naturally some limitations to this study, it offers a valuable contribution to the relatively unexplored area of leader's emotional intelligence and its impact on project success in the professional services industry.

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ANNEXES

Example transcript of research interview with IV-6

00:00:01 Augustas B.

Ok, so I have started the recording. Just a second. So maybe starting with a brief intro, how many years have you been in this sector, what is your role and so on?

00:01:30 IV-6

OK, so I've been in the professional services sector since 2010. This will probably be my fourteenth year here. In those fourteen years I took a 2-year break, it was also in consulting, but it was not in professional services, so it was like an internal company consulting. But anyway, it's a bit out of context because professional services consist not only of the type of service but also of the sales moment, the delivery moment and then the organisational running moment. Well, but 14 years minus 2 years will be. Current role and responsibilities, so in my current role I'm the head of a professional services company, specifically management consultancy. My role is probably the ultimate responsibility for the legal entity, team building, strategy development and day to day operations, looking at it more from the organisational side and the people development role than from the sales side. But in the past, yes, there was a lot of that work with different projects and different clients, so I have a lot of that hands on experience.

00:03:19 Augustas B.

Ok. So now it mentions that you contribute a little bit less directly to the projects and sales themselves, but still, looking back, what is the approach of that leadership, what are the core values that drive your leadership?

00:03:48 IV-6

I'm going to say, I'm going to talk in general terms here, or as I imagine the answer to this question. I don't know if it's good or bad, if anything you comfort me. Yeah. The approach to the project and the project management I think consists of a couple of things or how I approach the project. The first thing is to clearly understand what the client needs, what the end result is. And that thing, it's

not always written on paper in the client's request and it's not always the client who knows what they need. And that is quite a difficult thing here. It's clear on a project where it's easy enough and they know, they understand, and they communicate it clearly. This is probably one of the key points where I start my whole approach and thinking. The second thing is, for me at least, important is the timeline and the delivery, these are 2 such cornerstones that come from the client. And from that the whole delivery mechanism of the project is formed by matching the competences and the team to match the client's expectations and basically to be able to meet the client's expectations.

Well, the team is basically formed according to the needs of the client. The client basically, some clients are demanding and attentive to details, other clients are generalists, and they need more of a generic answer or answers that are not necessarily numbers driven. And taking into account the needs of those clients, you usually try to form a team because we are all different people and we all have our own core competencies, so that the delivery team also meets the needs of the client.

00:06:51 Augustas B.

And then maybe to clarify what is project success for you, whether it's client related, whether it's some kind of team performance, or timelines, or something else?

00:07:07 IV-6

Yeah, I'd say it's got to be 3 needs. The 3 objectives have to be met. That's the first thing the customer has to be happy and satisfied. The outcome of that is usually a customer testimonial or a return customer. The second pole is the team that says this is the one to remember for the better. That this project was fun, clear, we gave, we gave value to the customer, the team felt that it grew and the person felt that they learned something and maybe learned something. And the 3rd thing is that the project was also useful for the professional services organisation and the income generated was more than the costs incurred.

00:08:36 Augustas B.

Then the intro part is done. And we move on to the actual blocks of this kind related to emotional intelligence itself. And one of the qualities is the self-awareness of the leader. Well, and how that responds to his leadership. So probably moving on, how did or does the perception of one's own

emotions influence the success of those projects that you manage, or the leadership style that you adopt?

00:09:23 IV-6

Yeah, so maybe I'll start answering this question from a little bit further on, because basically we're all different as human beings and we all have different emotional skills and non-emotional skills and expertise and so on. And there is probably no one thing that is successful and everybody somehow finds their place in the sun, adjusts their management style and uses it somehow in the different situations that we encounter at work. That is one thing. Or the intro thing is that in the delivery process of professional services management consulting always requires a structured, common-sense approach to the question, where if A follows B, then B follows C and so on, and then there is a logic that you can find all the time if you take the time, pay attention, have enough understanding and go through that logic and you usually get the answer. The problem is usually time, it is a time constraint that you cannot go through all the logic. Either you don't have all the answers or maybe part of the access to that question is not within your scope of work and there is some conflict with the client that you can't get to something or do something. Those are the two things that are at the heart of answering this question. First is my leadership style, as I would define it it's a calm approach to finding solutions to the question by utilising that structured approach, and basically, I've found that this thing has helped me in situations where there is a disagreement with the client, with anybody. It's basically pulling the emotions aside and taking some kind of pause or taking a calm tone to enter into a structured solution of the question. I have found that this one has helped. I would also highlight also the thing like the leadership here remains that the customer is right, and you need to let the customer to talk himself out and say things that they want to say and start the conversation from there. I have had situations where emotions have got the better of me and I have got into a discussion with a client or a potential client. And that has not ended in success, it's the fact that when you are trying to show the client that maybe you are smarter and you know better, when in reality you don't know better and you bring in the emotions, it usually doesn't end up with some kind of a joint resolution of the issue, or it takes a lot longer to reach that solution than it should.

00:13:23 Augustas B.

M.M. We have already touched on the next question a bit, but still, how would you say one's perception of own limits affects the project itself and that leadership approach?

00:13:55 IV-6

Yeah, this can be expanded to say that knowing and being aware of one's own qualities doesn't necessarily guarantee success. Because you still need to know and timing when you have to use them or not use them there. That's the key thing here. Because even if you know your strengths and weaknesses, but you don't know how and when to use them, so what if you do. That's probably the point here. It's that controlling emotions at certain times and using them at certain times is key. How to manage that, I think I'm largely successful, experience supports that. But equally I have had situations where I have not been able to do that. So how to change that, I have no clue. Then there is probably one other thing to mention. Because those emotional qualities of a leader, as I mentioned and I said, basically it helps a lot, at least I imagine it helps, in the relationship with the clients, but it doesn't necessarily work for that second pole, the team building, where sometimes more often than not, maybe it needs, like, not a calmness, but a strong word, a stronger word, which would allow to recover the project more quickly, to be efficient and to take some decisions. This is a project outcome here, how that can sometimes help us, but how it can sometimes hurt us, because it is a two-seeded thing anyway.

00:16:22 Augustas B.

Ok, ok. So unexpected situations, it's probably also an integral part of our work, whether some observations during the analysis or from the client side. What response do you have to that, what approach to starting to go to a solution of some kind?

00:16:58 IV-6

I, if it's some unplanned thing, something happens or we're at some dead end or something. Well, there's probably never a dead end. What I do is I say, okay, so we stop and think about what options we have, that's the thing I try to apply all the time. What are our option 1, option 2, option 3. And that's usually something that maybe I try to do, not alone, but together with the team that I'm working with to solve that obstacle. Then we put the pros and cons to each option and then often

usually there is a solution to it. It is not necessarily good, it can be bad, but sometimes you have to choose the lesser of 2 evils. It is that moment, that pause, that calm approach to the question, that helps us to sort it out and find the answer. And basically, if you call it a stressful situation, so if you take a pause and do that rethinking and choose the lesser of two bad decisions and you know that you came to it through structured thinking and not emotional decision-making, then you feel calmer and you are less stressed too. Because now you realise that you have done the best that you could.

00:18:54 Augustas B.

Ok. Then maybe the next section, interpersonal communication. So, say do you remember a situation or outline where a team member had some concerns or was stuck with some project there and how you helped resolve it? Do you think it needs to be addressed? And what impact does that ultimately have?

00:19:41 IV-6

This is something that needs to be addressed. As I said in a previous question that there are 3 poles of a successful project. So, this question addresses the potential failure to achieve the objectives of one of the poles perhaps that's the way to put it. Then it must necessarily be addressed. And there have certainly been situations like this, and these situations are probably twofold. There are situations that can be changed to some extent and there are situations that cannot be changed. In situations where something can be changed, like the high workload of a certain team member, if we can change it, we need to do it right here right now. Going through the priorities, the importance, the busyness and taking one thing or another off and communicating that to that team member. Communicating that we have seen it, we have seen it, we have taken action, we hope it will be better, if not we will take some additional action and see. And there are situations where we can't do that for some reason, where for example a customer and a delivery person, well, the magnetic fields don't match. And for example, sometimes you can't do something, so you also have to recognise, you have to say that you can't do anything, so basically you have to address, or I often address, that this is a temporary situation which basically will end someday. Yes, the situation may be unpleasant at the moment, but it is not really the worst thing that has happened and can happen,

I don't know, in work life and so on. If we get through it, it will make us all stronger. That is probably basically the answer.

00:22:27 Augustas B.

This next one, it's a little bit interconnected to the before. Previously it was more from the stress side of the team members, but here it's more in general terms, how to create a team vibe a little bit, how to make a person feel welcome at work and so on?

00:23:02 IV-6

Maybe, yeah, that's a good question anyway. I would probably also say in answering this question that every team member is different, and they feel the stress of the project at different moments or at different times or different needs. For one person it may be the stress of not knowing how to do something. Well, I don't know how to do something. A new industry, a new detail. That's stressful for a person. Conversely, for others, for example, there are people who get excited about it, they say oh new industry, it's fine, I'm going to read, I'm going to look. For some people a big workload might create stress, for others it might be saying I have a lot of work to do, but it's become my daily routine, and I'm no longer stressed. For others it might just be a demanding client who is looking for commas or so on. These stressful situations may be different for team members, and they need to be addressed in different ways, but the essential thing is to notice or to hear the team member's stress, at what point in time, and what is the stress there, and to address it. Again, people are very different, some are more talkative, some are less talkative, so it's harder with some and easier with others. Yes, yes. Usually how to see that, you know, the natural behaviour, the language, the tone, the mood and so on. That's for example one of the reasons why I sit in the common area with the team is to see, to see those things, because you can't see it from there, from the numbers or something. Aa, specific instance.

00:26:04 Augustas B.

So here, if you come up with it, I think we've touched on the general points.

00:26:24 IV-6

Well, I can't think of it that quickly now, but for us, for us, for us, workload is obviously the biggest problem, or the most frequent problem. Mostly you see there by our weekly meetings and by our working hours and you try to deal with that somehow. I can't think of anything else quickly.

00:27:08 Augustas B.

This is now also an integral part of professional services. It's still the case that the whole team and its members who contribute to the project have to feel some sense of ownership. So how to create that? Is it something that has to be created mostly or do people bring it in themselves? And what could be the approach to creating that sense of ownership in a person?

00:27:34 IV-6

A very good question too. This thing of sense of ownership and responsibility, in recent years, with the current generation of workers, it has very much escaped and is much less common, much less of a characteristic. Which is a bit sad, because probably the current generation is just there, the Facebook content, it's a short span of control and it's all on the go, it's here, it's not here, it won't be, whatever. That sense of freedom is probably banal, it's probably rubbing off that quality of ownership and responsibility in people. It's not that everybody doesn't have it, but there are a lot more people who don't have it than who do. A very good example of this is when, for example, if you have noticed, I have noticed, when you talk to an aunt who you meet 15 years later, she keeps asking you, well, do you have a job. You answer that you do, and she says, oh, that's very good, well, you're a good guy. It's that old generation attitude that if you have a job, you won't fall down and you will survive and that as a value, you have a responsibility and so on. And if you meet somebody on the street now, they say, well, I used to work here, I am now not working for six months, then I'll find a job again. So, this change of attitude is very much felt, with this liberalism that has come very much, the society, and you can't change it, it will happen. It is sorely lacking, and it is sorely needed. How to promote this, here it is. I have probably tried and done it through several aspects. There is feedback all the time, probably through the principle of feedback. So, there are probably a few things here. The first thing I am trying to do now, which is what I was talking to a new member of the team the other day, is to say what is expected in the context of work. Obviously often something is partially undelivered, everything here is normal. Then there

are feedback principles where you emphasise certain things, where you emphasise that a report or a task there is your responsibility, you have to do it. That report has to be of a certain quality, it has to be done on time, and it has to be proactively delivered. It is a responsibility for a certain something. It is very important to communicate that, to say what is expected when, and that it must be framed as an expectation and presented as an outcome. It is essentially the responsibility of that person and that team member. So, I try to do that education through this thing, that is, setting the expectation, seeing how it goes, giving feedback. And that's how you go. Responsibility and ownership is one of the cornerstones of professional services. It's basically the thing that starts a project. Because one thing is that you commit to the client that there will be this result, at this time and at this level, but you hand over that task to the whole team and if the team is compliant with all these things, then you are compliant with the client's expectation and the client is happy. It's clear all the time there's some kind of buffer somewhere in there somewhere, but if that happens, you try to deal with it. And also, maybe I should mention here what I am doing now in Romania, it is not really professional services, but I think it is relevant, it is guiding vs giving authority/initiative. That is that the person, one of the things that maybe should be applied more often, is that the person, the team member, has to proactively come forward and say and commit what is going to be done. I think in that case and what he can do, in that case there is more of a sense of responsibility and ownership that develops than when you are told what has to be done and how it has to be done in a very specific way, and then there is more of a sense of ownership, I think.

00:33:46 Augustas B.

This next question is asking when there are some high client demands or just difficult situations, how do you prioritise that decision making and how does that affect the team and the project itself? This will probably also be very much related to what you said about what are the core parts of project success.

00:34:18 IV-6

Yes. Here I'll probably repeat one thing here, maybe add a second thing. It's one thing is that if we have to do a 100-page report and it's due tomorrow and we've only got 2 pages done, then you're always starting to make deliverable from the points that are essential to the client. That is where

you are and that is where you prioritise. Because if you give the client a 50-page report instead of a 100-page report, but it's a 50-pages that address the client's needs, then the client won't be too unhappy about getting only 50 pages. So that is probably one thing, and that is to manage that target mindset in terms of meeting the needs of the client. The second thing is to do some prioritisation, because what happens is that sometimes you may know where the client needs are, last night, let's say, you know where the client needs are, but what happens is that you still don't have enough time to meet those client needs, because, well, we have to have A and B in order to have C and we have not enough time. That's often what's very important in our particular work, it's the data and the information and that raw material, that mapping, that basically, that mapping, well, to know what the client needs. If you know, say, that the client needs a spreadsheet C, and that spreadsheet is made up of A and B, then you start looking for A and B from day one, even though in addition to the spreadsheet you need a 100-page report. So that prioritisation of these things I think is essential because once you have all the data, the material, the figures, the results and so on, you can put all those things together and you can do it last night and so on. How does that affect the team and project success. It's that project success, it's that the earlier you start that planning, the more likely it is to be successful. How does that affect the project team, so it's probably about starting at the beginning of the project and putting these things in place and forming team members who can meet those client expectations.

00:37:30 Augustas B.

M. That's the next part, stress management, that's also part of the emotional intelligence concept. We have already touched upon working under pressure here, so I would say the key word here would be positive mindset. Well, how do you maintain your own positivity and how do you communicate it to the team? And do you think it is important?

00:38:55 IV-6

Staying positive that again it's not the worst thing that has happened in life and probably not the worst thing that will happen in life. And I probably try to follow that all the time, even in my personal life. Because here, when you look back at what you've experienced, it helps. I mean, I remember how stressed out I was and probably the rest of us were before the school-leaving exams and how it seemed like that was where life was going to end and that was the end of life. And you

look back now, and it puts a smile on your face. The same with writing a bachelor's degree, exams, graduating from university. And when you look back now, at that moment it seemed like the end of life, but now you realise it's just another thing in life. So, if you apply that attitude and project delivery, even in the most difficult situations you can find that positivity. And the second thing that I would say is necessary and that the team needs is lead by example. When there are high pressure situations, it's important not to leave the team alone, because naturally in high pressure situations the team doesn't have a sense of safety, a sense of comfort, and that leads to stress. Plus, the presence of one team member, the presence of the team, or the action planning, or the support of the team, it gives more comfort and helps to go through those situations a little easier.

00:41:18 Augustas B.

We've touched on this side of the issue, client expectations and demanding periods of project. I might want to talk about that second part. How do you communicate to the client the right way, when you already see that something is not going to work, how do you approach it so that they are satisfied?

00:42:00 IV-6

Yeah, I guess the important thing here is that you can't leave it to the last minute. First, if you see that something is going north, you need to deal with it proactively. Second, you need to know the client and know how to tell them the news so that they accept it more positively than negatively. That's very important. And the third thing is to explain the reasons why it happened and rationalise everything. Either we didn't get the data or there is something else that happened. The most important thing here is to be open and not lie and to tell it like it is. For example, we did not have people, a person fell ill and so on. Even if it was our fault, to tell the customer that out loud because, well, we're all human beings, things happen to everybody. It's also important to acknowledge that and to admit that, to tell the customer. That usually triggers that human feeling in the customer, and they accept it better. Don't try to somehow get into elaborate excuses where the client at the end of the day understands the real situation anyway.

00:43:36 Augustas B.

Ok. The next part, the adaptability, that's also probably an integral part in our field, in terms of having both different projects and different clients. I'm just wondering if we haven't already covered this.

00:44:15 IV-6

Maybe I would say here that it's not that it's adapted. How to change leadership approach in project to accommodate. Am. I don't know if it's right or if the leader actually has to change his leadership approach. I'm not sure if you can change your leadership approach. You probably cannot. You can maybe use some mitigating actions, but you cannot fundamentally change your leadership approach. Well, if I interpret my leadership approach as structured, so I probably can't become expressive, hardcore and whatever in some project, I think it can't be done. Because I would equate leadership with a person's personal qualities, and you can't change them that instantly. I would say here we have a whole skill set of certain tools, emotional and otherwise, that we need to switch on and off in different situations. And that set of tools defines our probably leadership approach. I would say so. So that's where that's very important and that has to just come naturally because it's very difficult to understand that oh, now we're in a bad situation, so now I need to pull a specific trait out of the third drawer and react to this situation in this way. It's something that's not so normal and it has to come naturally, and it's ingrained in your leadership style. But usually it is, if I were to relate it to this, if a mistake has been made, that the client is very demanding and project members who are not so detail-oriented have been assigned to the work, it basically means that everybody has to put in extra hours, extra effort to do that and probably that has to be recognised and told to all parties that there is a situation like this and extra effort has to be made. And that extra effort, well, we as human beings grow and add to our own weak points.

00:48:13 Augustas B.

This one, I think, is covered, so maybe let's not stop. Positive mindset is also covered, you've already told how it influences and relates to the success of the project. So maybe I would move on to the clients themselves. Anyway, a couple of questions. How to build that trusting relationship with the client even from day one? And the question here is twofold because when there is a returning client, that is one thing. But when you have to sell a project to a new client right from

the start, how do you build that trust and then how do you maintain that relationship of trust afterwards?

00:49:12 IV-6

That's a good question, I would say that through know how. Well, I kind of imagine and think and specialise. The thing that helps a lot is when you tell a client a case study from his industry and you say, for example, I know that in America a similar company did this and that, there was a case study here described here and there and you see they did it there and so on. Also, the client really likes it when you give, share what is called follow leadership material, send them some article, some research, some report, which the client does not know yet and it helps them. You gain trust and the client begins to believe in you, that you understand and are knowledgeable about what's going on in this industry. I do sometimes, I did recently, I sent after 8 months or a year when we did a project, an article that was about one of the things that we had discussed during the project, it was a very good feedback, that thank you for remembering, it's very cool, that you thought about it, that you gave us an update and so on. So, this is a very very very very good and strong thing to do, which is not so easy to do, but it should be done all the time before the project, during the project, after the project. Distributing this kind of material, know how, showing you know how, it helps a lot in building trust.

00:51:28 Augustas B.

M. Okay. Now I think we've touched on the next one too. So maybe then let's move on to that wrap-up question. Could you identify what you think is the most important part of emotional intelligence that somehow affects the success of a project? If you think it's all important, that's ok too.

00:52:06 IV-6

It's that sense, I guess I would say, of when to pull out the emotional intelligence tool. Or you could say all of that, the scanning of the situation probably. I think it is the key thing. Understanding that as early as you can sense. It's about sensing the situation at the earliest possible point, that's how you can summarise it. That allows you to basically pull out the tool of emotional intelligence and

use it, to feel the mood of the client and to respond. So that timely reading of situations, sensing, I think is the key.

00:53:13 Augustas B.

M. That was apparently the last question. We passed just in time. We talked, it was interesting to hear your thoughts. Maybe it was interesting for you to reflect as well. Thank you then, it will be interesting to analyse your ideas.