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A Review of Emotional Intelligence - Based Multi-Criteria Framework for Selecting Construction Project Managers in Malaysia

Norhidayah Tamrin[1], Mohd Nasrun Mohd Nawi[2], Abdul Ghafur Hanafi[3]

Abstract

The selection of competent construction project managers is one of the factors that influencing the project success in Malaysia, where delays, cost overruns, and abandoned projects remain persistent challenges. While traditional selection approaches emphasize technical expertise and experience, the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been largely overlooked despite its proven influence on leadership effectiveness, stakeholder engagement, and team performance. This study proposes an EI-based multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) framework to guide the structured selection of construction project managers. A qualitative inductive research design was employed, integrating expert interviews and thematic analysis to identify relevant EI attributes. These criteria were subsequently prioritized through MCDM techniques, producing a decision-support framework that combines both technical and emotional competencies. The findings highlight the significance of EI dimensions such as self-awareness, empathy, adaptability, and relationship management in the Malaysian construction context. The framework offers both theoretical and practical contributions, it advances project management literature by integrating EI into selection methodologies, and it provides industry stakeholders with a structured tool to improve recruitment and appointment decisions.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Construction Project Managers, Multi Criteria Decision Making, Selection Process*

Introduction

Construction project managers play a central role in shaping the outcomes of construction projects. Their responsibilities are not limited to supervising work on site, they also involve planning, coordinating resources, leading teams, and ensuring that projects meet agreed timelines and quality standards. In Malaysia, the importance of competent project managers has been emphasized through national initiatives such as the Construction Industry Master Plan (CIMP) 2006–2015 and the Construction Industry Transformation Programme (CITP) 2016–2020, both of which highlighted the need to strengthen leadership capacity in the industry (CIDB, 2019).

Research on leadership in construction has consistently shown that a project manager's personal qualities, such as motivation, adaptability, and resilience which are just as important as their technical expertise. Managing uncertainty, balancing competing demands, and maintaining strong relationships with stakeholders and team members are among the most common challenges faced in construction projects (Sunindijo & Zou, 2011). When these aspects are not handled effectively, issues such as low productivity, delays, and cost overruns often follow, reinforcing the need for capable and effective leaders (Rogo et al., 2020).

[1] Master Builders Association Malaysia (MBAM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
[2] School of Technology Management and Logistic, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia, EMAIL: nasrun@uum.edu.my (Corresponding author)
[3] Quest International University (QIU), Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

Selecting the right construction project manager is therefore more than a matter of filling a position, it requires finding someone whose skills and attributes match the specific demands of the project. The traditional recruitment methods such as interviews, work samples, and personality assessments are remain widely used (Robertson & Smith, 2001; Chien & Chen, 2008; Dodangeh et al., 2014). However, relying solely on technical expertise is no longer enough. Increasingly, qualities linked to emotional intelligence (EI) are seen as critical in ensuring project managers can lead effectively in today's complex construction environment.

Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions while also being sensitive to the emotions of others (Goleman, 1998; Mayer et al., 2016). For construction project managers, EI is particularly valuable because projects often involve diverse stakeholders, tight deadlines, and high-pressure situations. A project manager with high EI can build trust, communicate more effectively, and remain calm under stress, these qualities that help teams work more cohesively and adapt to challenges. Employers, whether consciously or not, often look for these traits during recruitment by observing how candidates interact, communicate, and present themselves. These interpersonal qualities such as empathy, honesty, and emotional stability can set one candidate apart from another, and they often contribute to better staff retention, stronger collaboration, and greater overall project success (Raj Mishra et al., 2020).

Background and Rationale of the Study

Construction project failures in Malaysia are influenced by a multitude of factors, including inadequate contractual provisions, poor project management, and economic challenges (Abdullah et al., 2010; Sambasivan & Soon, 2007; Yusof et al., 2020). The critical success factors (CSFs) have not been adequately addressed, particularly regarding human-related aspects, which are essential for project success (Yong & Mustaffa, 2017). The phenomenon of abandoned housing projects also highlights systemic failures involving developers, financial institutions, and regulatory bodies, often rooted in economic and management deficiencies (Norhayate et al., 2017; Daud et al., 2017).

In construction management, project failure is typically assessed using the "iron triangle" of time, cost, and quality. While a project delay indicates a failure to meet the time criterion, it does not automatically signify overall project failure. A project may still succeed if it meets budget, quality standards, and stakeholder expectations. However, delays are often a strong indicator or component of broader project failure, especially when combined with cost overruns and client dissatisfaction (Atkinson, 1999). Nonetheless, there is strong empirical evidence showing that project delays frequently co-occur with or precipitate other dimensions of failure; for example, project delays are closely linked to poor cost performance and are often symptomatic of inadequate planning, ineffective stakeholder coordination, and systemic breakdowns in project execution (Doloi, 2013; Dlamini & Cumberlege, 2021).

In Malaysia, construction project delays are a common issue that have a big influence on project budgets and schedules. Research on public sector building projects in Malaysia revealed that just 30% of them were finished on time, meaning that about 70% of them had delays (Ullah et al., 2018) and approximately 17.3% of 417 government projects experienced delays (Hisham & Yahya, 2016). Improving project management and communication is one of the factors that can significantly reduce delays in construction projects, as 80% of Malaysia's construction sector projects experience time overruns, making project delays a serious problem (Yap et al., 2021). Additionally, data released in March 2023 by the national housing task force reported 110 delayed, 435 sick, and 112 abandoned housing projects and reflecting the growing urgency

to address delay-related risks across both infrastructure and residential development sectors (Ministry of Local Government Development Malaysia, 2023).

Rahman et al. (2019) pointed up that the competencies of project managers significantly influence the success of construction projects in Malaysia. These competencies encompassing technical knowledge, leadership abilities, emotional intelligence, and decision-making skills are critical in navigating the multifaceted challenges of the industry. The complexity of construction project failures in Malaysia is often attributed to human related issues, such as poor leadership, ineffective communication, and inadequate stakeholder management (Yong & Mustaffa, 2017; Alias et al., 2014). The rapid expansion of the construction sector intensifies the need for organizations to appoint competent and adaptive project managers who can lead effectively under pressure.

According to Afshari (2018), selecting the right project manager is a strategic decision that directly affects project outcomes, particularly in terms of cost, time, and quality performance. Furthermore, Müller and Turner (2010) found that project managers' leadership competencies, especially emotional intelligence and team motivation, have a strong correlation with project success across sectors. These findings collectively highlight the urgent need for structured criteria in project manager selection processes, ensuring that individuals entrusted with project leadership possess not only technical know-how but also high-level soft skills and behavioural competencies (Rezvani et al., 2016; Clarke, 2010). Hence, addressing this gap is not only important but essential for reducing project failures and enhancing the performance of the Malaysian construction industry.

The success of a construction project is largely dependent on the experience of skilled project managers in the sector, according to the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB). The Construction Industry Competency Standard (CICS) for Construction Managers was created by CIDB in response to the industry's demand for professional growth (CIDB,2019). The selection process for construction project managers is a complex process involving cognitive limitations, psychological factors influencing outcomes, and a multi-attribute nature and indirectly it is facing several issues and challenges including complexity of decision making, subjective assessments, dynamic projects, lack of a structured framework, and limited use of decision-making tools (Anbarci et al.,2020; Yan et al.,2023). Addressing the identified gaps in project manager selection is essential for improving construction project outcomes. A comprehensive evaluation framework that combines technical and leadership assessments will ensure the selection of competent and well-rounded project managers capable of delivering successful projects (Maqsoom et al., 2019).

The quality of a project depends on the performance of effective team management. In this context, effective leadership is needed to enable effective team management. Project management encompasses the application of skills, knowledge, procedures, methodologies, and experience to attain the objectives of a project. As more private and public organizations undertake projects, the need for effective project managers increases. Construction project managers should utilize various leadership styles, varying based on project circumstances and phases, and selecting the most effective style requires accurate situation assessment and effective communication (Zulch, 2014). Previous research indicates that leadership styles significantly influence project outcomes, with transformational leadership fostering team cohesion and stakeholder satisfaction, while servant leadership enhances creativity and cooperation among team members (Ghafory & Sahnosh, 2024). Nwulu et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence in multidisciplinary projects involving diverse expertise.

Emotional intelligence significantly contributes to project success in the construction industry, fostering strong relationships between internal and external stakeholders, ultimately leading to successful project realization (Montenegro et al, 2021). Project managers who enhance their emotional intelligence become more self-aware, adept at managing emotions and behaviours, and can foster genuine relationships with their team members (Goleman, 2006). Leaders who possess emotional intelligence are able to regulate their emotions, which has a positive effect on teams and companies.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to accurately perceive, appraise, and express emotions, understand and regulate emotions, and is crucial for employees who produce results, generate transformational change, and lead the firm as a motivating force (Satchwell & Smallwood, 2016). The emotional intelligence of construction project managers is crucial in project management, and recent advancements in teamwork necessitate exploring improved methods for team effectiveness in the construction sector. An individual with a high level of emotional intelligence had certain skills related to the evaluation and regulation of emotions, and consequently, they were able to regulate emotions in themselves and in others in order to achieve a variety of adaptive outcomes (Luna et al., 2022).

Although emotional intelligence (EI) has been recognized as a critical success factor in project management in developed countries, its integration into the selection process of construction managers remains underexplored in the Malaysian context. While several studies have investigated the dimensions of EI using quantitative methodologies (Siddiqui et al., 2018; Solanki & Ahlawat, 2023; Castro et al., 2022), these have primarily focused on developed countries. Meanwhile, existing studies in Malaysia have mainly examined the presence and influence of EI among current project managers (Hanafi & Nawi, 2019; Abdul Rahim, 2021), rather than how EI can be systematically applied as a selection criterion during the hiring or appointment process. Khatib et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of incorporating EI competencies into recruitment and selection processes for project managers, as EI significantly correlates with enhanced team collaboration, conflict resolution, and stakeholder communication factors that directly impact project outcomes.

This research addresses that gap by proposing a development framework that integrates EI-based criteria with a Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) approach. This integration represents a novel methodological contribution, as few, if any, studies in Malaysia (or globally) have formalized the use of MCDM tools such as AHP, BWM, or TOPSIS to prioritize and select construction managers based on EI attributes. Most existing selection frameworks remain technical or experience-based, overlooking the behavioural and emotional competencies that directly impact leadership effectiveness and project success.

Literature Review

Construction Industry in Malaysia

The construction industry is a key pillar of Malaysia's economic development, contributing substantially to national growth and socio-economic progress. It supports numerous upstream and downstream industries, including manufacturing, real estate, engineering consultancy, and building materials, thereby acting as a multiplier for economic activities (EPU, 2023). The sector plays a critical role in job creation, infrastructure development, and urbanisation, making it an integral component of national development plans such as the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (12MP).

In 2024, Malaysia's construction sector exhibited robust growth, with the total value of construction work completed reaching RM158.8 billion, marking a 20.2% increase compared

to the previous year. This expansion was primarily driven by significant growth in special trade activities (35.9%), residential buildings (24.5%), and non-residential buildings (15.5%). The civil engineering sub-sector also contributed positively, registering a growth of 17.3% (DOSM, 2025). The civil engineering sub-sector remains a key contributor due to ongoing and new infrastructure projects, including highways, railways, and water treatment facilities.

The Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) projects that tender prices will rise by 3% in 2024, indicating stable demand despite external challenges such as global inflation, material cost volatility, and supply chain disruptions (CIDB, 2024). Furthermore, the Malaysian construction market is expected to reach USD 41.85 billion by the end of 2025, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.55% between 2025 and 2030, highlighting robust growth potential in the medium term (CIDB, 2025).

Government initiatives and public investments continue to drive industry growth. Strategic projects under national agendas, such as the Mass Rapid Transit 3 (MRT3), the Pan Borneo Highway, and affordable housing schemes, are key growth catalysts (Ministry of Works Malaysia, 2023). Additionally, the government's focus on sustainable construction and digital transformation through initiatives like the Construction 4.0 Strategic Plan that has further spurred innovation and efficiency in the sector.

Despite its resilience, the industry also faces several challenges, including skilled labour shortages, regulatory complexities, and rising costs. To remain competitive and sustainable, industry players are increasingly adopting Building Information Modelling (BIM), Industrialised Building Systems (IBS), and green construction practices (CIDB, 2023).

Overall, the construction industry in Malaysia is expected to remain a significant contributor to the national economy, driven by public infrastructure spending, private sector investments, and policy support.

Given the complexity and scale of ongoing infrastructure developments, the Malaysian construction industry requires efficient and systematic approaches to planning, executing, and monitoring projects. As construction works become increasingly multifaceted often involving multidisciplinary teams, advanced technologies, and stringent regulatory requirements, the adoption of robust project management practices is vital to ensure project success. Common challenges such as cost overruns, project delays, resource constraints, and quality inconsistencies continue to impact project outcomes, underscoring the need for more structured and strategic management approaches (Ismail, Adnan, & Hassan, 2021; Sambasivan & Soon, 2007). Furthermore, national initiatives like the Construction 4.0 Strategic Plan emphasize digital transformation, sustainability, and innovation, which demand that project managers not only possess technical skills but also exhibit adaptability, leadership, and strategic thinking (CIDB, 2023; Zakaria et al., 2022).

The integration of internationally recognized project management frameworks, such as the *Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK) by the Project Management Institute (PMI) and *PRojects IN Controlled Environments version 2* (PRINCE2) by AXELOS, has demonstrated significant potential in improving time, cost, and quality performance in construction projects (Alias et al., 2014; Bakhary et al., 2021). As such, enhancing project management capabilities within the construction sector is not just a strategic advantage but a necessary step to improve productivity, stakeholder satisfaction, and long-term industry sustainability. This growing complexity and dynamic environment provide the impetus for exploring how project management frameworks can be further optimized to meet the evolving needs of Malaysia's construction landscape.

Project Management

Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the requirements and objectives of a project (PMI, 2021). It involves the integration of various domains, such as scope, schedule, cost, quality, human resources, communication, risk, procurement, and stakeholder management (PMI, 2021). In dynamic sectors like construction, project management is not only a technical discipline but also a strategic function that contributes significantly to organizational success. A well-executed project is typically measured based on key performance criteria. Schwalbe (2009) identified three core indicators of project success:

1. the project meets scope, time, and cost goals;
2. it satisfies the client or sponsor; and
3. it fulfils its primary business objectives.

However, in complex and high-risk industries such as construction, success is increasingly evaluated using broader metrics such as stakeholder satisfaction, sustainability, safety, innovation, and adaptability (Toor & Ogunlana, 2010; Lim & Mohamed, 1999). These additional indicators reflect the growing emphasis on project outcomes beyond the traditional "iron triangle."

In Malaysia, the importance of project management practices is amplified by the scale of infrastructure and property development projects, where delays, cost overruns, and quality concerns are common challenges (Sambasivan & Soon, 2007). Moreover, previous research has shown that technical expertise alone is insufficient for managing modern projects effectively. Project managers must also possess soft skills such as communication, negotiation, leadership, and emotional intelligence to navigate interpersonal dynamics and manage stakeholder expectations (Clarke, 2010; Müller & Turner, 2010). This shift highlights a growing recognition of the human dimension in project environments, where successful leadership is increasingly associated with the ability to manage emotions, build trust, and foster team collaboration (Rezvani et al., 2016). Therefore, project management in the construction industry is no longer confined to rigid planning and execution. Currently, it encompasses strategic thinking, adaptive leadership, and the integration of emotional intelligence as a critical factor in achieving sustainable project success.

Construction Project Manager

The role of a Construction Project Manager is pivotal in the successful delivery of construction projects, encompassing the planning, coordination, and supervision of activities from initiation to completion. In a rapidly evolving construction environment, project managers are expected not only to manage time, cost, and quality but also to demonstrate leadership, adaptability, and strategic foresight. Their role has evolved from task-oriented oversight to a broader managerial function that includes stakeholder engagement, sustainability considerations, and digital transformation (Müller & Turner, 2010; PMI, 2021).

The Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) of Malaysia recognises the importance of competent project managers as central agents in transforming the industry. CIDB emphasises that project manager expertise significantly affects the likelihood of achieving project objectives, particularly in large-scale and high-stakes developments (CIDB, 2024). As a strategic initiative to enhance workforce professionalism and assure competency, CIDB has introduced the Construction Industry Competency Standard (CICS) for Construction Project Managers. This standard is in alignment with the Malaysia Construction Industry Development Board Act 1994 (Act 520) and supports national initiatives such as the Construction Industry Transformation Programme (CITP).

In today's complex construction ecosystem, construction project managers must navigate diverse stakeholder interests, strict regulatory requirements, and heightened expectations for environmental sustainability. As such, certified construction project managers are increasingly valued for their role in driving project performance, compliance, and innovation. They contribute to reducing cost and time overruns, improving communication among multidisciplinary teams, and fostering safer work environments. Moreover, the presence of certified managers enhances the credibility and competitiveness of Malaysian construction firms, both domestically and in international markets.

These efforts align closely with national strategic goals outlined in the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (12MP) and the Construction 4.0 Strategic Plan, both of which advocate for a highly skilled and technologically adapt construction workforce (EPU, 2023; CIDB, 2023). By institutionalising a structured certification pathway through the CCM program, Malaysia is proactively preparing its construction industry to meet global benchmarks and future demands.

Given the multifaceted responsibilities and strategic importance of Construction Managers, selecting the right individual for this role becomes a critical success factor for project delivery. As construction projects grow increasingly complex both technically and managerially, the process of selecting competent and capable project managers must go beyond evaluating technical expertise alone. It should also incorporate considerations such as leadership capabilities, communication skills, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. This highlights the need for a more structured and holistic approach to the selection of construction managers, ensuring that appointed individuals align with project requirements, organisational goals, and stakeholder expectations.

The selection of a qualified and competent construction project manager is a strategic decision that has a direct impact on the success of construction projects. In the context of the Malaysian construction industry, this process is becoming increasingly complex due to the dynamic nature of projects, increasing stakeholder expectations, and the need for advanced managerial and interpersonal competencies. While traditional selection methods focused on academic qualifications, technical experience, and project performance, modern approaches emphasize a more holistic evaluation of candidates, incorporating both hard and soft skills (Cheng et al., 2021; Müller & Turner, 2010).

Overall, the selection of construction project managers in the modern construction industry has evolved from subjective, experience-based judgments to structured, data-driven decision-making processes. With the increasing complexity of construction projects and the need for emotionally intelligent leaders, these decision models enable organizations to make more informed and strategic hiring decisions. In the Malaysian context, aligning such models with CIDB's competency standards and the Construction Industry Transformation Programme (CITP) can support the development of a more competent, professional, and future ready project management workforce. However, while technical competencies and managerial capabilities remain crucial, there is a growing recognition that emotional intelligence (EI) plays an equally important role in determining project managers' effectiveness. This underscores the need to review the concept of EI in the context of project management, particularly in understanding how it influences leadership, decision-making, and overall project success.

Emotional Intelligence Criteria for Project Manager

In the dynamic and complex environment of construction projects, the role of the construction project manager extends far beyond technical expertise. A growing body of research emphasizes the critical importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in enabling

construction managers to lead teams effectively, resolve conflicts, and manage diverse stakeholder expectations. Drawing on Goleman's model, widely accepted within EI literature the key competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and social skills are regarded as foundational to strong leadership and interpersonal performance.

Self-awareness is widely regarded as the foundation of emotional intelligence. It refers to an individual's ability to recognize and understand their own emotions, triggers, and behavioural patterns. For construction project managers, who often operate under high stress and tight deadlines, self-awareness is vital for regulating emotional responses, making objective decisions, and maintaining professional composure. According to Iftita and Arisandy (2023), project managers who are self-aware are better equipped to identify how their emotional states may influence interactions with team members and stakeholders, thereby enhancing their ability to lead with integrity and transparency. Goleman (1998), who popularized the concept of emotional intelligence, also emphasized self-awareness as the cornerstone of leadership effectiveness.

Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, is another critical EI skill in the construction management context. Empathetic managers are more likely to develop trust with stakeholders, anticipate potential conflicts, and facilitate open communication. Hosani and Khatib (2023) assert that empathy enables construction managers to navigate interpersonal complexities and cultural differences, which are common in diverse project teams. Furthermore, empathy contributes to team motivation and morale by ensuring that individuals feel heard and understood (Clarke, 2010). By considering stakeholders' perspectives and emotions, empathetic leaders are more adept at aligning project goals with stakeholder expectations, thus promoting stakeholder satisfaction and long-term collaboration.

Empirical studies consistently link these emotional intelligence competencies with enhanced project performance, team morale, and organizational effectiveness. For example, Myneni (2023) emphasizes that emotionally intelligent leadership results in fewer project delays, improved communication, and more effective conflict resolution. Bushuyev et al. (2019) report that EI contributes to leadership agility and adaptability, enabling managers to respond effectively to changing project conditions. In addition, Rezvani et al. (2016) found that EI significantly influences project success by enhancing leadership behavior, stakeholder engagement, and conflict resolution, particularly in high-pressure project environments.

In addition, previous literature has systematically identified key emotional intelligence criteria that are particularly relevant for construction and project managers. The table below shows the EI criteria for project managers as identified in previous studies, offering a consolidated view of the most commonly cited attributes such as self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, motivation, and social skill.

Table 1: Previous Study of Emotional Intelligence Criteria for Project Managers

No	EI Criteria for Project Manager	Sources									
		Myneni, K. K. (2023).	Al Hosani et. al. (2023)	Iftita & Arisandy (2023)	Rouissi (2023)	Castro et al. (2022)	Bushuyev et al. (2020)	Thomas (2018)	Saddiqui et al. (2018)	Connolly & Reinicke (2017)	Livesey (2016)
1	Leadership	√					√				
2	Team Management	√									
3	Effective Communication	√		√	√	√	√	√		√	
4	Problem Solving	√								√	
5	Empathy		√	√		√			√		√
6	Social Skills		√						√		
7	Self-Awareness		√	√					√		√
8	Relationship Management		√		√	√	√			√	
9	Managing People Emotions				√	√				√	
10	Optimistic Thinking						√			√	
11	Ability to Perceive Feedback										
12	Decision Making				√						
13	Self-Management							√			
14	Service Orientation										√
15	Social Awareness										√

The review of emotional intelligence (EI) criteria derived from previous studies underscores the multifaceted role that EI plays in effective project management. Key competencies such as leadership, team management, effective communication, empathy, decision-making, and social awareness have been consistently identified as essential traits for project managers across various disciplines. These criteria collectively emphasize the importance of managing both one's own emotions and those of others, fostering strong interpersonal relationships, and adapting to complex and emotionally charged project environments. While the literature provides a robust foundation, it is important to recognize that many of these criteria have been developed in generalized or cross-industry contexts. As such, there remains a gap in identifying EI criteria that are specifically tailored to the unique challenges faced by construction project managers, such as high-pressure timelines, multi-stakeholder coordination, safety-critical decision-making, and on-site conflict resolution. This

research aims to address that gap by developing a refined set of emotional intelligence criteria that are not only grounded in existing scholarship but are also contextually relevant and practically applicable to the construction management profession.

Methodology of Study

In alignment with the critical realism philosophy and an inductive research approach, this study adopts a qualitative research design to explore and develop a decision-making framework for the selection of construction managers based on emotional intelligence (EI) criteria, utilizing Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) techniques. Critical realism, which acknowledges the existence of an objective reality while recognizing that our knowledge of it is socially constructed, supports a methodological stance that emphasizes the identification of causal mechanisms and contextual influences (Bhaskar, 2008; Danermark et al., 2019). This makes it particularly appropriate for investigating complex phenomena such as the role of emotional intelligence in construction management, where both individual experience and organizational context shape outcomes.

Consistent with an inductive orientation, this study begins with the collection of rich, empirical data through in-depth interviews with selected participants from the construction industry. These participants may include construction project managers, human resource personnel, and other key stakeholders involved in the recruitment or evaluation of project managers. The interviews aim to elicit expert insights into the essential EI attributes considered important in the selection process and the practical challenges faced in current selection practices. The qualitative data obtained will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which enables the identification of recurring patterns and meaningful themes across the responses. This approach is appropriate for revealing the underlying dimensions of emotional intelligence relevant to the construction management context and aligns well with the critical realist aim of uncovering generative mechanisms.

Following the identification of relevant EI criteria, expert judgment will be employed to validate and prioritize these criteria. This will be operationalized through MCDM techniques such as the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) or Best-Worst Method (BWM). These tools enable a structured comparison of criteria and support the development of a robust selection framework by transforming qualitative expert insights into quantifiable weights or rankings.

This qualitative-inductive approach, coupled with the integration of MCDM tools, ensures that the resulting framework is not only grounded in real-world practice but also structured enough to support informed decision-making. The methodology thus aligns with the ontological and epistemological foundations of critical realism and supports the iterative, data-driven development of theory and practice.

In summary, the combination of in-depth interviews, thematic analysis, and MCDM techniques enhances both the credibility and applicability of the proposed framework for selecting emotionally intelligent construction managers, ultimately contributing to improved project outcomes within the Malaysian construction industry's integration of emotional intelligence as a critical factor in achieving sustainable project success.

Conclusion

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has emerged as a pivotal component in determining individual and team success, especially in high-stakes and emotionally demanding fields such as construction. According to Luna et al. (2022), EI can positively influence employee attitudes and behaviours by enhancing job satisfaction and reducing job-related stress, particularly in roles that demand consistent emotional regulation. In this context, emotional intelligence

encompasses the ability to recognize, interpret, and manage emotions both in oneself and others, thus becoming a key source of motivation, connection, and influence within professional environments.

In high-performing teams, EI is often the foundation of sustainable success, enabling members to collaborate effectively, manage interpersonal dynamics, and maintain a high level of motivation. Clarke (2010) notes that emotionally intelligent teams foster a positive working atmosphere in which workplace conflict is minimized, constructive feedback is welcomed, and each team member clearly understands their role and responsibilities. This environment significantly enhances productivity and contributes to overall project success.

Within the construction industry, emotional intelligence is especially significant due to the dynamic, team-based nature of project work and the frequent occurrence of high-pressure situations. Construction projects often involve multidisciplinary teams, tight deadlines, and fluctuating resource availability, all of which can contribute to stress and emotional strain. Saini and Soni (2016) emphasize that EI at both the individual and group levels facilitate better communication, emotional regulation, and task coordination, thereby enhancing project outcomes and organizational performance.

This study is significant in that it highlights the critical role of construction managers and the need to integrate emotional intelligence as a core criterion in their selection and evaluation. By developing a framework that systematically incorporates EI into the selection process using Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) methods, the study provides practical tools for improving hiring practices within the construction sector. Furthermore, the research supports the inclusion of EI-focused training and development programs in professional education, contributing to long-term industry improvements in leadership quality, team collaboration, and project delivery success.

Ultimately, the findings of this study are expected to inform both academic literature and professional practice, offering new insights into how EI can be leveraged to enhance the effectiveness of construction managers and the overall performance of construction projects. By doing so, it addresses a critical gap in current selection methodologies and promotes a more holistic approach to human resource development in the construction industry.

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