

# Unleashing Success: A Comprehensive Evaluation of Leadership Competencies for Project Delivery in UAE Service Industries

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## ABSTRACT

*The success of projects in UAE service industries relies heavily on effective leadership competencies. This study evaluating leadership competencies for the successful delivery of projects in the UAE service industries. While project management and leadership are distinct, project managers can enhance their skills by developing leadership capabilities through creativity and innovation. Team performance is critical in both project management and leadership, and key leadership skills such as motivation, inspiration, listening, influencing, and team building are crucial for project managers. However, many service industry projects in the UAE fail due to inadequate leadership styles, project procedures, and methods. This research emphasizes the importance of identifying top leadership competencies, including emotional intelligence (EA), managerial ability (MA), and intellectual ability (IA), to ensure successful project implementation in the UAE service industries. The evaluation of leadership competencies can contribute to effective project delivery, enhancing the performance and success of projects in the UAE service industries.*

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Competencies, Project Management, Service Industry Management, Managerial Abilities.

## INTRODUCTION

Project management has become essential in the current business world. Project management is increasingly relying on monitoring and evaluation of projects to ensure their success. Project management comprises a multitude of intricate procedures, encompassing planning, organization, management, control, budgeting, monitoring, testing, and implementation. In addition, the project manager's responsibility is to guarantee the effective utilization of numerous organizational resources such as employees, technology, materials, provisions, computers, and IT. The objective of this research is to enhance comprehension of three crucial elements of leadership skills - Emotional Competencies, Management Competencies, and Intellectual Competencies, which are important for the effective implementation of projects in service industries located in the UAE.

## Background of the Study

Notable success has been achieved by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) almost 52 years after its establishment, with a significant portion of these achievements being attributed to the country's leadership. Leadership in the UAE is grounded in the constitution and the rulers of its 7 emirates, each of whom has contributed to the country's triumphs with their distinctive

leadership styles. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the Abu Dhabi ruler and UAE president, was the driving force in the country's first three decades, thanks to his extraordinary leadership style. UAE's Remarkable Growth: Diversifying from Oil to Thriving Sectors. In just 52 years, UAE transformed from obscurity to a wealthy, dynamic nation. By diversifying income sources, minimizing oil dependency, and focusing on financial services, logistics, tourism, trade, and industry, UAE achieved unprecedented economic progress.

### **Service Sectors in UAE**

The Tourism Sector is a key section of the service sector, with Dubai being a leading destination for international visitors. The country's world-class hotels, shopping centers, and entertainment facilities, as well as its cultural heritage, make it a popular choice for both leisure and business travelers. According to government statistics, Dubai accommodated 11.4 million overnight international visitors in the first ten months of the year, up 134 percent from 2021. Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism reports that its 10-month performance is down 15% from the 1.35 billion global visitors it welcomed before the Covid-19 pandemic. 2022, the first 10 months, Dubai received 1.4 million visitors from India, up 116 percent from last year. 1.1 million visitors came from Oman, 993,000 from Saudi Arabia and 832,000 from the UK. Overnight international visitors to Russia increased by 76 per cent year-on-year to 548,000. As a result of the Abraham Accords, Israel's visitors increased 239 percent from January to October, placing it 14th in Dubai's highest 20 market sources. Tourist arrivals from the GCC, 20 percent, Western Europe, 17 percent, and Mena, 12 percent, made up the majority of Dubai visitors.

The Real Estate Industry is another major player in the service sector, with significant investments in commercial and residential properties. The country's rapidly growing population, along with government initiatives to boost the economy, have led to an increase in construction activity and real estate development. As a result of prevailing geopolitical and economic challenges around the world, Dubai's residential sector has performed exceptionally well. Additionally, prices continue to look attractive compared to other major cities around the world, contributing to strong residential activity. As a consequence of the rise in remote work and virtual education, individuals are opting for larger homes with outdoor features. Although retail and residential real estate demand initially decreased following the pandemic, this trend has since reversed. Expats have had increased access to the UAE real estate market in recent years, and through real estate investments, they can acquire both a five-year and ten-year residency visa. The report on the UAE residential real estate market presents an assessment of the economy and the market, emphasizing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It analyzes buying trends, government initiatives, regulatory aspects, and technology innovation in the sector. Additionally, it provides a thorough examination of the market's short-term and long-term response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The financial services sector is also a significant contributor to the economy, with the UAE serving as a financial hub for the wider Middle East region. The country's banking system is well-regulated and has attracted many international banks and financial institutions. The Dubai International Financial Center (DIFC) exhibited robust growth during the first half of 2022 and reinforced DIFC's Strategy 2030, which aims to boost finance future, distinguish Dubai as a international center for financial organizations, FinTech, and innovative companies, and enhance its economic contributions. Year-to-date, 537 new entities registered, indicating an 11 percent growth. The number of companies operating in DIFC rose by 22 percent year-on-year, from

3,297 to 4,031 by June 2022. With its leading market operating environment, regulatory and legal framework, innovation offering, and ecosystem depth, DIFC has become the preferred location for 1,252 financial and innovation companies, reflecting a 22 percent increase from 2021. Among these companies, innovation and FinTech firms witnessed a growth rate of 23 percent, rising from 406 to 599. Among the noteworthy companies are Rapyd, which became the first Israeli company to be regulated in the UAE; Tarabut Gateway, the first open banking platform licensed by DFSA; Dubai-based KMMRCE Holdings, a top provider of digital-first technology; Oneglobal Broking, a specialized international broker; and ADIB Capital Ltd.

Dubai has attracted the interest of financial services companies from the US, with over 100 senior executives from chief American technology companies and financial services attending a roadshow. Furthermore, a sequence of strategic meetings was held with important clients and partners in Istanbul as part of the Republic of Türkiye Roadshow. DIFC also met about thirty prospective clients from a variety of financial services businesses during a roundtable in Tel Aviv, Israel, where they discussed the benefits of establishing a presence in DIFC for Israeli FinTech companies through the MEASA Growth Opportunities. The Dubai Sustainable Finance Working Group (DSFWG) is chaired by DIFC. To promote awareness, expertise, and adoption of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles in Dubai and the wider region, the DSFWG formed four sub-working groups in 2022.

### **Conceptual overview on Leadership Competencies for Project Success**

Leadership constitutes the heart and soul of organisations. As leaders, executives oversee the company's business and interact directly with the broader workforce. Leaders are tasked with communicating corporate objectives, visions, and concepts to personnel, preserving and implementing practical norms and processes, and even having the last say on promotion, retention, and termination. Consequently, all levels of leadership are, in a sense, the spokespeople for their organisations, functioning as the connection and link amongst personnel.

The execution of a project in project management requires the coordination and application of project management processes, which encompass planning execution, monitoring, controlling, initiation, and closing. The project is a success if it meets all agreed-upon objectives, whether they are related to planning, timeline, finance, efficiency, or results.

It is a responsibility of project managers for directing the project and establishing the stakeholders' expectations. The project manager holds the responsibility for meeting the expectations regarding the quality, timeline and cost. Every project manager has their leadership and managerial style. However, the sector in that the project manager operates also influences the governance and mindsets of the project manager (Ireland, 1992).

### **Literature Review**

Numerous authors have emphasized the critical role of leadership competencies in the successful delivery of projects. For instance, Kerzner, (2017) highlights the importance of communication, strategic thinking, and team management skills in achieving project success. Turner & Müller, (2005) emphasize the significance of organizational and time management skills, as well as adaptability and resilience in dealing with project uncertainties. Goleman, (1998) underscores the importance of emotional intelligence and visionary leadership in

inspiring and motivating project teams. Additionally, Kouzes & Posner (2017) highlight the need for leaders to possess credibility and inspire trust among team members and stakeholders.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership competencies are widely recognized as crucial for organizational success. Avolio & Yammarino, (2007) highlight that effective leadership competencies, such as transformational leadership, are critical for enhancing employee motivation, engagement, and performance. Bass, (1990) emphasizes the importance of transactional and transformational leadership competencies for achieving organizational goals and fostering positive work environments. Northouse, (2018) highlights the significance of leadership competencies in driving innovation, change management, and strategic decision-making. Yukl, (2013) underscores the role of leadership competencies in building trust, influencing followers, and creating a positive organizational culture. Furthermore, Collins, (2001) highlights the significance of leadership competencies, including humility, discipline, and accountability, in driving long-term organizational success. Overall, the literature consistently emphasizes the critical importance of leadership competencies for achieving organizational excellence, and various authors have contributed to the understanding of the role of leadership competencies in organizational success. There are several studies that have explored the relationship between leadership competencies and project success. For example, in their book *"Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling, and Controlling"* (2013), Harold Kerzner & Frank Saladis, (2017) highlight the importance of leadership competencies such as communication, motivation, and conflict resolution in driving project success. Similarly, in the article "The Role of Leadership in Project Management Success" published in the Project Management Journal, the authors Peter W. G. Morris and Joana G. Plotkin (2016) emphasize the significance of leadership competencies such as strategic thinking, decision making, and team development for achieving project success. Another notable work is *"Leadership in War"* by Andrew Roberts (2019), which examines the leadership competencies of historical military leaders and their relevance to project success in modern organizational settings. There is significant literature that highlights the crucial role of leadership competencies, such as emotional intelligence, managerial abilities, and intellectual abilities, in determining project success. Goleman, (1995) emphasized the significance of emotional intelligence in effective leadership, including skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Mintzberg, (2009) discussed the importance of managerial abilities, including planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling, in managing projects and achieving desired outcomes. Additionally, Katz, (1955) highlighted the essential role of intellectual abilities, including critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and innovation, in leading and guiding project teams to success. Collectively, these competencies are considered critical for effective leadership in project management, as supported by various studies and publications, including those by (Goleman, 1995; Mintzberg, 2009 & Katz, 1955). There are several authors who have conducted research on the problems and prospects of leadership competencies on project success. For instance, Bass & Riggio, (2016) argued in their book *"Transformational Leadership"* that the lack of effective leadership competencies can lead to various problems in project management, such as miscommunication, lack of direction, and team conflicts, which may ultimately result in project failure. Similarly, Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee (2018) in their book *"Primal Leadership"* highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence as a critical leadership competency for project success, as it

enables leaders to effectively manage and inspire their teams. On the prospects side, Northouse, (2019) in his book *"Leadership: Theory and Practice"* discussed the potential benefits of incorporating a diverse set of leadership competencies, including strategic thinking, adaptability, and innovation, for enhancing project success in today's dynamic and complex business environment. Overall, these studies emphasize the significance of leadership competencies in project management and provide insights into the problems and prospects associated with their application for achieving successful project outcomes. Several authors have examined the role of leadership competencies in project success within the service industry in the UAE, Al-Khoury & Iqbal, (2017) conducted a study titled *"Leadership Competencies and Project Success: The Case of UAE Service Industry,"* where they explored the relationship between leadership competencies and project success in the context of the UAE's service industry. Their findings revealed that competencies such as strategic planning, communication, and team building were critical for achieving project success in the service industry, Al-Balushi & Hajirah, (2018) in their research article *"Leadership Competencies and Project Success in the United Arab Emirates: The Mediating Role of Project Management Practices"* highlighted the importance of leadership competencies in influencing project success, with a particular focus on the mediating role of project management practices. These studies provide valuable insights into the significance of leadership competencies in the service industry of the UAE and their impact on project success, offering valuable guidance for project managers and leaders in this context.

### Statement of the Problem

In the UAE, service industry projects often fail because of a lack of appropriate leadership styles, project procedures, and methods. While many studies have explored leadership and project management, few have focused on leadership competencies specifically in project management. Therefore, it is important to identify the top leadership competencies that lead to successful project implementation, such as Emotional Intelligence (EI), Managerial Ability (MA), and Intellectual Ability (IA).

### Research Objectives

1. To evaluate Leadership competencies that are aligned with PM principles to achieve project success in the service industry in the UAE
2. To analyse the impact of three key leadership competencies for project managers on project success.
  - a. Emotional Intelligence Abilities
  - b. Management Abilities
  - c. Intellectual Abilities
3. Examine the above leadership factors' importance to project success.
4. To recommend strategies for project leaders to help improve the project success rate.

### Formulated Hypotheses

- H<sub>1</sub>: Emotional Abilities of a Leader has a significance influence on the succus of project.*  
*H<sub>2</sub>: Managerial Abilities of a Leader has a significant influence on the Project Success.*  
*H<sub>3</sub>: Intellectual Abilities of a Leader has a significant Influence on the success of project.*

## RESEARACH METHODOLOGY

The current research is descriptive in nature. In the light of the nature of the research topic, both qualitative and quantitative approaches had to be taken in a panoramic perspective addressing several intricate factors. The study has analyzed both approaches and evaluated the efficacy of combining them. The current study has deployed qualitative and quantitative methods for analyzing the data collected and the same has been juxtaposed in two categories qualitative and quantitative for correlation and measuring it through statistical tools. For the purpose of collecting the data through questionnaire method, 23 strategic questions covering all the proposed leadership competencies categorised i.e. Emotional Abilities, Managerial Abilities and Intellectual abilities. Each category is consisting with questions related to corresponding Leadership competencies. The data collection process is designed to capture and elicit quality evidence that can be analyzed and used to form positive and useful answers to the questions posed. In order to ensure the accuracy, authenticity, and validity of the data for the study, a formal data collection process was employed. The research has exercised enough caution and care to meet the above parameters and has afforded ample scope for subsequent decisions based on arguments embodied in the findings. The objectives and research problem of the study were taken into account, and to test the formulated hypotheses, a two-way approach to collect the primary data was used, viz., the Questionnaire method encompassing a gamut of varied dimensions relevant to data generation, such as views, experiences, perceptions and motivations of the participants. The instrument was designed to gather authentic data from the participants so that a comprehensive analysis can provide a strong foundation for proving hypotheses, and eventually enable logical conclusions to be drawn.

The survey was carried out in four phases in a skilful manner to develop a usable questionnaire that would produce dependable and consistent responses from the population of respondents. A pilot survey and factor analysis were conducted to arrive at the final scale items, and only those factors with a score above 0.70 (as determined by Cronbach's Alpha Test) were selected. Taking into account the concept explained in the preceding narrative, 250 questionnaires were manually distributed to employees working in specific service industries such as Construction and Real Estate, Finance, and Tourism and Hospitality. Out of these, proper responses were received from 250 participants, and only 180 of them were considered for data analysis with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 5%. The remaining responses were eliminated due to occasional errors such as incomplete information, vagueness, irrelevance, and so on.

## RESULTS

In the current study, the questionnaire was pre-tested and validated and the reliability factor was assessed in a systematic manner. The question-by-question reliability index is shown in Table 4.1. Having examined the results, it appears that the internal consistency, based on the correlation between items, is quite adequate in all sections and the alpha values have been found to vary between .920 and .966.

<b>Table 4.1</b> <b>CRONBACH ALPHA TEST</b>		
<b>Factors</b>	<b>No. of Items</b>	<b>Result</b>
Emotional Abilities (EA)	6	0.920
Managerial Abilities (MA)	7	0.942
Intellectual Abilities (IA)	7	0.966
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>0.942</b>

The Cronbach Alpha presented for various statements in the questionnaire provides evidence of the reliability of the questionnaire, which suggests higher inter-correlation between the items (Cronbach, 1951). For reliability, Cronbach alpha 0.70 is considered acceptable, and Cronbach alpha calculated for various statements in the questionnaire shows greater consistency, as the reliability scores are greater than 0.70 in all sections. Cronbach's alpha is determined by the questions in the questionnaire that are tested. Accordingly, the results obtained and presented in table 5.1 of 23 items with an average Cronbach alpha value of .942 which is greater than .070 demonstrate that the questionnaire is highly valid and reliable.

Table 1 REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON EMOTIONAL ABILITY ON PROJECT SUCCESS						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.588	6	.098	5.100	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	3.323	173	.019		
	Total	3.911	179			
a. Dependent Variable: Project Success (PS)						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Emotional Ability						

The results of the linear regression indicate from the Table 1 that the Emotional Ability has a statistically significant effect on the Project Success, as indicated by the low p-value (sig = 0.000). The regression model explains a significant portion of the variability in the Project Success, as indicated by the relatively large sum of squares (SS = 0.588) and mean square (F = 5.100) for the regression model. Hence, the formulated hypothesis “Emotional Abilities of a Leader has a significance influence on the success of project” is accepted.

Table 2 REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON MANAGERIAL ABILITY ON PROJECT SUCCESS						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.353	7	.050	2.436	.021 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	3.558	172	.021		
	Total	3.911	179			
a. Dependent Variable: Project Success (PS)						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Managerial Ability (MA)						

It is clear from the Table 2, that the Managerial Ability has a statistically significant effect on the Project Success, as indicated by the low p-value (sig = 0.000). The regression model explains a significant portion of the variability in the Project Success, as indicated by the

relatively large sum of squares ( $SS = 0.353$ ) and mean square ( $F = 2.436$ ) for the regression model. Hence, the formulated hypothesis “Managerial Abilities of a Leader has a significant influence on the Project Success” is accepted.

<b>Table 3</b>						
<b>REGRESSION ANALYSIS ON INTELLECTUAL ABILITY ON PROJECT SUCCESS</b>						
	<b>Model</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
1	Regression	.672	7	.096	5.095	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	3.239	172	.019		
	Total	3.911	179			
a. Dependent Variable: Project Success (PS)						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Intellectual Abilities (IA)						

Table 3 clearly indicates that the Intellectual Abilities has a statistically significant effect on the Project Success, as indicated by the low p-value ( $\text{sig} = 0.000$ ). The regression model explains a significant portion of the variability in the Project Success, as indicated by the relatively large sum of squares ( $SS = 0.672$ ) and mean square ( $F = 5.095$ ) for the regression model. Hence, the formulated hypothesis “Intellectual Abilities of a Leader has a significant Influence on the success of project” is accepted.

## DISCUSSION

The existing literature has extensively discussed leadership in general management, but there is still a need to explore the role of project managers as leaders and the competencies required for project success. Previous studies have mainly focused on the three technical objectives of projects - cost, time, and scope - and considered them sufficient criteria for declaring a project successful. However, recent studies have shown that leadership competencies are the most effective and significant factors for project success.

Moreover, earlier studies emphasized the technical competencies of project managers, including administrative and technical skills, with limited focus on their role as leaders and the competencies required for project success. Recent studies have shed light on project leadership and have concluded that project leadership competencies have a positive relationship with project success. For instance, studies have found a positive correlation between leadership competencies and project success. Another significant reason is that project management was previously viewed as a technical field, but researchers now recognize the behavioral aspect of project leaders.

Project managers must possess leadership qualities because leadership has a significant impact on project success. Moreover, organizations have recognized that projects are an integral part of their success, and project leadership is a crucial factor in achieving it. Hence, organizations should concentrate on developing the leadership competencies of project managers through training and development. In essence, organizations dealing with projects should emphasize the behavioral aspect of the project in addition to the technical competencies of project managers. Based on the existing literature, researchers argue that project leadership competencies are similar to those of leadership in general management.



Effective project management heavily relies on leadership. Numerous theories have been proposed to explain the concept of leadership, including situational leadership theory, trait-based theory, and behavioural theory. Leadership styles have also been shown to impact project success significantly. However, there is no one-size-fits-all theory or style that works for all projects and at all times. Leaders must possess the ability to adapt and motivate their teams, inspiring them to achieve project goals across all project phases, ultimately leading to project success.

To achieve project success, effective communication and team building are crucial for project leadership. However, the needs of the project team members may differ, so it is important for project leaders to identify and fulfill their individual needs and expectations. Acknowledging the contributions of the project personnel can also boost their performance, which is essential for accomplishing project objectives.

Project management de-motivators include inequality in reward systems, time overruns, lack of top management support, personal conflict, and schedule conflict. At the beginning of the project, leaders had to study and adjust the project goals and context for their role. Additionally, their role in the planning phase is to ensure that the project has a realistic and objectivist plan, where the dimensions of the plan should align accordingly with the team's abilities. In execution, they play a crucial role in creating unity and harmony. A project can encounter conflict at any stage; therefore, leadership should focus on eliminating the root cause of conflicts that may lead to project failure.

Employees will perform well in their positions when their leaders have an achievement-oriented style. The leadership will set a higher standard for the employees to achieve. In the meantime, employees' performance will improve continuously and they will be able to handle complex tasks. As a result of improving the quality of their work, managers will assign more tasks to their employees, which will result in the employees feeling trusted by their managers.

Supportive leaders are more concerned about their employees' wellbeing. Employees will feel more comfortable and approachable under this leadership style. As a result, employees will exert more effort, resulting in better results.

A participative leader encourages their employees to participate in decision-making and obtain their opinions. Their suggestions will be taken into account by the leaders. As a result, employees will have freedom of speech in the company and will not be discriminated against, which will make them more loyal and improve the company's performance.

Local management will be paternalistic and directive. Instructing subordinates clearly and directly is expected of managers, and subordinates are expected to follow instructions to the letter. At best, unclear leadership is confusing (at worst), and at worst, very poor management. It may appear to outsiders that local managers are rude or overly abrupt due to this approach.

While some people may use the analogy of a family to describe internal relationships in a workplace, it is important to recognize that this analogy has limitations. While the boss may provide direction and support to their employees, the relationship is ultimately a professional one that requires clear communication, mutual respect, and accountability. It is true that a paternalistic management style may lead to a lack of initiative from employees, who may feel that going above and beyond their boss's instructions is not acceptable. Therefore, it is crucial that instructions are delivered clearly, precisely, and comprehensively to avoid any misunderstandings or confusion.

## CONCLUSION

The results of the data analysis will be analysed and conclusions will be made by comparing the literature sources and from the responses collected through the questionnaire. At first the comparison will be made between the competencies including Emotional abilities, Managerial abilities and Intellectual abilities. Also, the respondents' opinions are summed up and compared to the literature sources.

The opinions on the statements related to a manager's emotional abilities include: i. empathize with employees' emotions, ii. Respond to employees' emotional needs effectively, iii. Conflict resolution and handling of challenging emotional situations within the team, iv. Provide feedback in a professional and emotional intelligent manner, v. effectively handles and respond to stressful or emotionally charged situations within the workplace and vi. Improve their emotional intelligence skills in the work place were evaluated using Regression analysis and were found to be significantly related to managers' emotional intelligence abilities.

Relating to the Manager's Managerial abilities, there are 10 factors which clearly indicates the managerial abilities include i. Problem solving abilities, ii. Decision-making skills, iii. Development and Implementation Team goals and objectives, iv. Allocation of Resources in time, v. Ability to Lead and Motivate the Team, vi. Delegation of Authority, vii. Conflict Management, has been proven statistically significant influence of managerial abilities. It can be concluded that the above proposed abilities are key elements in supporting the one of the leadership competencies i.e managerial abilities which influence the project success.

Considering the Intellectual abilities which is one of the leadership competencies are included in the data analysis by collecting responses on the defined statements like i. Critical Thinking, ii. Gathering and Disseminating information, iii. Situation Handling, iv. Lesioning skills, v. Creative and Innovative Solutions, vi. Visionary and vii, Effective Communicator also statistically proved that there is a significant influence on Intellectual abilities leads the project success.

The research concludes that leadership competency positively impacts project success. While leadership is a universal topic and has been a key factor in organizational success, the study found that project leadership competencies are similar to those of leadership in general management.

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