



Project Managers' Emotional Intelligence and Team Performance: The Mediating Role of Team Cohesion

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the social exchange theory, the study aimed to assess the mediating role of team cohesion between predictor project managers' emotional intelligence and outcome as team performance to overcome the literature gap in the cultural context of Pakistan. The study therefore adapted cross sectional correlational study design and purposive sampling technique for data collection from project managers from various industries with at least one year of experience and possess project management certification from the recognized institution. Data were obtained from 185 project managers out of 210 distributed questionnaires (response rate = 88%). The standardized instruments used in the study are brief emotional intelligence scale, Erlangen Team Cohesion at Work Scale and team performance scale. The findings reported significant relationship among variables i.e. project managers' emotional intelligence, team cohesion and team performance. The mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS Macro 4.2 (Model 4) showed that team cohesion significantly mediated the relationship between project managers' emotional intelligence and team performance. The direct effect of project manager emotional intelligence on team performance was not significant, but the indirect effect via team cohesion was significant. Mean differences for team sizes remained nonsignificant for team cohesion and team performance while larger team size (13+ member) scored significant high on emotional intelligence than counterpart medium (7 to 12 members) and small (3 to 6 members). The study implications explained the study supported social exchange theory and filled the gap, and there is need of emotional intelligence training for project managers to maintain higher efficacy in the team to achieve organizational objectives.

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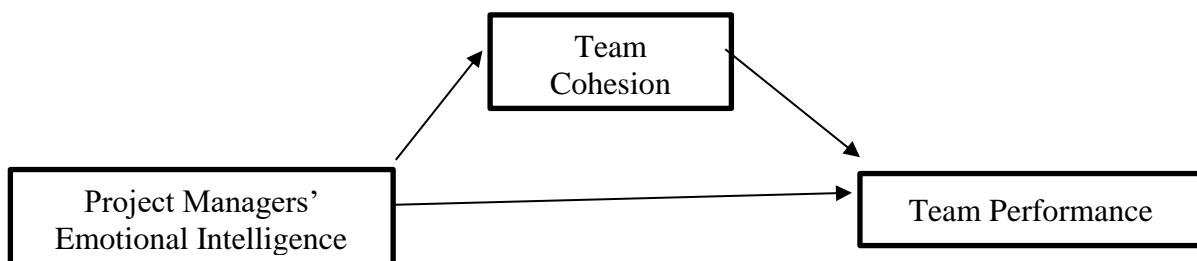
1. Introduction

Contemporary organizations have made project-based work their core mode of organizing tasks, which ultimately puts higher responsibility on the project managers to not only lead teams under pressure, but also handle uncertainties, and come up with a desirable outcome (Daðason, 2025; Schneider, 2024). The effectiveness of the project managers in such an environment is not just limited to his/her technical competencies, but the management and understanding of their team and themselves is also essential (Rana, 2025; Zada et al., 2023). Emotional intelligence helps the project managers to understand, recognize, regulate, as well as to respond

appropriately to emotional cues, which may be vital for enhancing cohesive and high- performing project teams (Clarke, 2010; Gul et al., 2024; Sinan, 2025). A previous cross-sectional study conducted in Pakistan reported that for a successful project, it is not just the managerial competencies but emotional intelligence too among the project managers; the study emphasized the emotional intelligence in the high-pressure environment among the project managers (Maqbool et al., 2017). Turner (2024) came up with an experimental study on the project team members of the US dense industry in order to examine the impact of emotional intelligence on job performance and satisfaction; he therefore used pretest posttest design along with control elements. Result indicated that emotional intelligence training among participants improved their individual performance and satisfaction. It was concluded that emotional intelligence is a vital element for the project's successful outcomes. Similarly, a study conducted in Serbia on 110 construction project managers demonstrated that emotional intelligence played a key role in the success of the project and higher team performance, as well as the satisfaction among internal and external stakeholders, as higher emotional intelligence enhances higher intra and interpersonal skills (Montenegro et al., 2021). Likewise, another study conducted on 75 project managers from 10 Serbian companies, using a self-reported questionnaire, reported that higher emotional intelligence leads to higher professional success. The study highlights how crucial emotional intelligence is in fostering the performance of the project (Obradovic et al., 2013).

Emotional intelligence among the leaders has also shown to have a positive influence on team cohesion. Team cohesion means connection, commitment, mutual trust, sense of belonging, collaboration and shared goal within the team members that drive them to work together and achieve the assigned objectives (Dewi & Hasmin, 2025; Omar, 2025). A study conducted in the United States, using a quasi-experimental design, indicated that among 146 business students (135 teams), their leaders' emotional intelligence has a stronger influence on team cohesion, making the overall performance of the teams higher (Black et al., 2019). A review study in Malaysia found that team leaders' emotional intelligence positively influences team performance through the mediating role of team cohesion (Chakkaravarthy & Bhaumik, 2025). The study is grounded in social exchange theory, that stated that social interactions are based on reciprocity, i.e., if a person is treated fairly, nicely, kindly, and empathetically that person develops trust, loyalty, and a positive attitude towards that certain party (Ragmoun, 2024; Ragmoun & Alfalih, 2024). In the corporate sector, when employees are treated fairly, it develops loyalty among them and subsequently enhances their performance, as reported from a previous study. When employees perceive corporate social responsibility from their upper management, they tend to develop pride in their organization, which ultimately keeps them engaged (Shahid et al., 2025). In case of project manager who has the responsibility of completing project on team and lead the project team, when come up with higher emotional intelligence tend to effect the higher team performance due to emphasizing with the team, understanding their emotions as well as his/her own and knows exactly how to use emotions effectively as it is just not about the knowledge and managerial skills but also about the emotional intelligence as reported from recent and previous studies (Ćwiąkała et al., 2025; Melita Prati et al., 2003; Zhang & Hao, 2022). However, the mediating role of team cohesion has not been widely explored particularly in the cultural context of Pakistan. Therefore, this study aims to address the existing gap in the Pakistani cultural context by examining the mediating role of team cohesion in the relationship between project managers' emotional intelligence and team performance (Dler M Ahmed, Z Azhar, & Aram J Mohammad, 2024; Dler Mousa Ahmed, Zubir Azhar, & Aram Jawhar Mohammad, 2024).

Figure 1: Hypothetical Model



The above hypothetical model depicts project managers' emotional intelligence as an independent variable, team performance as a dependent variable and team cohesion as a mediator

1.1. Hypotheses

H1: Project managers' emotional intelligence has positive and significant relationship with team cohesion and team performance.

H2: Team cohesion plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between project managers' emotional intelligence and team performance.

H3: There is a significant mean difference across team sizes (small, medium, and large) with respect to the study variables, namely project managers' emotional intelligence, team cohesion, and team performance.

2. Method

The study utilized cross sectional correlational study and a purposive sampling technique. Furthermore, the inclusion criteria of the study comprised certified project managers employed in industries in Pakistan, Pakistani citizens, at least the age of 23 years, with at least one year of experience in a contemporary organization. The following instruments were utilized in the study:

2.1. Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10)

It is a ten-item scale that measures emotional intelligence; its Likert scale *ranges from 1 to 5*, and the higher score on this scale depicts higher emotional intelligence (Davies et al., 2011). Its internal consistency is 0.73 to 0.84 according to some studies (Ashouri et al., 2020; Durosini et al., 2021). The internal consistency in this study is 0.79, which is satisfactory.

2.2. Team Performance Scale

The scale was developed by Puente-Palacios, Martins and Palumbo (2016), it comprised 9 items, the Likert ranges from *strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)*. The internal consistency of the scale is 0.92, depicting higher correlation among respondents' responses which is similar to the original internal consistency of the scale, i.e., 0.93.

2.3. Erlangen Team Cohesion at Work Scale

The Erlangen Team Cohesion Lieb, Erim and Morawa (2024) at Work Scale consists of 13 items, rated on a Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)*. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .87, comparable to the original scale's reliability ($\alpha = .86$).

2.4. Ethical Consideration and Procedure

The study followed the APA 7th edition ethical guidelines, and permission was obtained from the instruments' authors for data collection. Subsequently, the authors approached the project managers in various industries of Pakistan for the data collection purpose along with a consent form and study questionnaires. The consent form clearly demonstrated the confidentiality of the participants, right of withdrawal at any juncture of filling the data, data collection solely for research purpose and no harmful consequences would be caused to the participants throughout the data collection either physically or emotionally. Most of the participants completed the questionnaire (185 out of 210; an 88% response rate), while the remaining participants withdrew from the study. The data, once collected, were entered into IBM SPSS version 26 for analysis purposes.

3. Results

Table 1 summarizes the demographic and professional characteristics of the respondents ($N = 185$). The mean age of the project managers was 36.51 years ($SD = 11.11$), indicating a predominantly early to mid-career sample. Men constituted 63.8% of the respondents, while women accounted for 36.2%, and all participants held formal project management certification. In terms of experience, the largest group reported 1–3 years of project management experience (38.9%), followed by 4–7 years (21.6%), 8–11 years (19.5%), 11–15 years (15.1%), and more than 15 years (4.9%). Respondents were affiliated with diverse industry sectors, with the highest representation from finance and banking (34.6%), followed by telecommunications (20.5%), information technology and software (16.2%), engineering and construction (14.6%), and healthcare and pharmaceuticals (14.1%). Regarding team size, 36.2% managed small teams,

29.2% managed medium-sized teams, and 34.6% supervised large teams. With respect to project budgets, most respondents managed projects valued at less than PKR 10 million (40.5%), followed by PKR 10–49.9 million (24.3%), PKR 50–249.9 million (16.8%), PKR 250–999.9 million (6.5%), and PKR 1 billion and above (11.9%).

Table 1: Characteristics of the Respondents

	Mean	SD	Frequency	%
Age	36.51	11.11		
Gender				
Men			118	63.8
Women			67	36.2
Holds Formal PM Certification			185	100
Experience as a Project Manager				
1-3 years			72	38.9
4-7 years			40	21.6
8-11 years			36	19.5
11 to 15 years			28	15.1
More than 15 years			9	4.9
Affiliation with Industry Sector				
Information Technology and Software			30	16.2
Engineering and Construction			27	14.6
Healthcare and Pharmaceutical			26	14.1
Telecommunications			38	20.5
Finance and Banking			64	34.6
Team Size under the Project Managers				
Small (3-6 members)			67	36.2
Medium (7-12 members)			54	29.2
Large (13+ members)			64	34.6
Project Budget				
Less than PKR 10 million			75	40.5
PKR 10 – 49.9 million			45	24.3
PKR 50 – 249.9 million			31	16.8
PKR 250 – 999.9 million			12	6.5
PKR 1 billion and above			22	11.9

Note. N=185, % = Percentage, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2 indicates a significant relationship between project managers' emotional intelligence and both team cohesion and team performance. Furthermore, team cohesion has a significant positive relationship with team performance.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3
1. Project Managers' Emotional Intelligence	-	.81**	.76**
2. Team Cohesion		-	.92**
3. Team Performance			-

Note: N = 185, **p < .001

Table 3 depicts that PMEI significantly predicts team cohesion ($a = 1.14$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$), and team cohesion, in turn, significantly predicts team performance ($b = 0.70$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$). The direct effect of PMEI on team performance was non-significant ($c' = 0.01$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .83$). The models explained a substantial proportion of variance in both team cohesion ($R^2 = .67$, $F(1, 183) = 373.31$, $p < .001$) and team performance ($R^2 = .85$, $F(2, 182) = 553.67$, $p < .001$).

Table 3: Mediation Analysis Predicting Team Performance from Project Manager Emotional Intelligence Through Team Cohesion Using Hayes' PROCESS Macro 4.2 (Model 4)

Antecedents	Consequences			Team Performance (Y)				
	B	SE	P	B	SE	P		
PMEI (X)	a	1.14***	.05	<.001	c'	.01	.05	.83
Team Cohesion (M)	-				b	.70***	.03	<.001
Constant	I	2.88	1.93	.13	I	-3.46***	.97	<.001
	$R^2 = .67$, $F = 373.31$			$R^2 = .85$, $F = 553.67$				
	***P < .001			***P < .001				

Note: $N = 185$, *** $p < .001$, PMEI = Project Managers' Emotional Intelligence

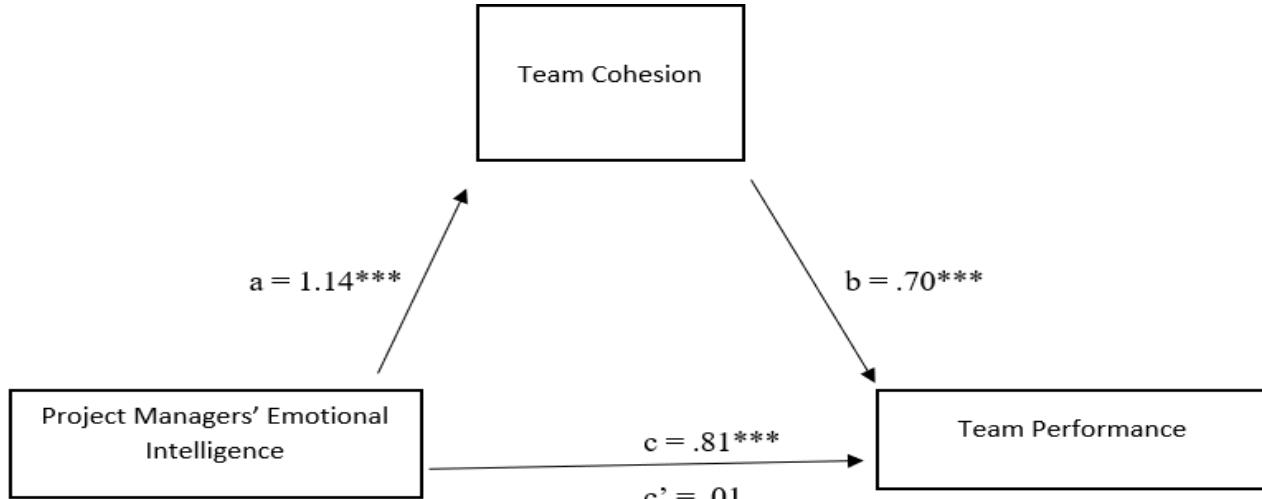
Table 4 depicts indirect effect of Project Managers' Emotional Intelligence on Team Performance via Team Cohesion is statistically significant ($\beta = .75$, 95% CI [.66, .84]).

Table 4: Indirect Effect

Pathways	B	β	BootSE	95% CI (BootLLCI – BootULCI)
PMEI \rightarrow TC \rightarrow TP	.80	.75	.04	(.66 - .84)

Note: $N = 185$, PMEI = Project Managers' Emotional Intelligence, TC = Team Cohesion, TP = Team Performance

Figure 2: Statistical Model



Note: $N = 185$, *** $p < .001$, PMEI = Project Managers' Emotional Intelligence

The above statistical model shows that PMEI has a significant positive effect on team cohesion ($a = 1.14$, $p < .001$), and team cohesion, in turn, significantly predicts team performance ($b = 0.70$, $p < .001$). The total effect of PMEI on team performance is significant ($c = 0.81$, $p < .001$), but the direct effect after accounting for team cohesion is non-significant ($c' = 0.01$, $p = .83$). This pattern indicates full mediation, meaning that PMEI influences team performance indirectly through its effect on team cohesion.

Table 4 presents a significant difference in PMEI across team sizes, $F(2,182) = 4.20$, $p = .01$, with a medium effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.61$), suggesting that project managers leading larger teams (13+ members) reported higher emotional intelligence compared to smaller teams. No significant differences were found for team cohesion, $F(2,182) = 1.91$, $p = .15$, or team performance, $F(2,182) = 0.67$, $p = .51$.

Table 4: Mean Differences in Project Manager Emotional Intelligence, Team Cohesion, and Team Performance by Team Size

Variables	Small members) $n = 67$		Medium members) $n = 54$		Large members) $n = 64$		$F(2,182)$	p	Effect Size
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
PMEI	29.68	8.62	31.11	8.86	33.89	7.71	4.20	.01	0.61
TC	37.31	11.72	38.12	12.27	41.18	11.57	1.91	.15	0.43
TP	23.25	9.25	24.31	9.11	25.09	8.97	.67	.51	0.14

Note: $N = 185$, ** $p < .01$, n = sample size per group. PMEI = Project Managers' Emotional Intelligence; TC = Team Cohesion; TP = Team Performance

4. Discussion

In this contemporary era, most of the organizations are adapting project-based work. Project managers often face considerable stress to meet the project charter and satisfy stakeholders. It is not that just the managerial decisions and project scope related knowledge is enough but emotional intelligence also play a key role in enhancing the team performance, although, literature demonstrates the relationship between project managers' emotional intelligence and team performance but the mediating role of team cohesion remained unexplored, this study aimed to fill this gap in the literature. The first hypothesis of the study is proved as the project managers' emotional intelligence is significantly and positively associated with team

cohesion and team performance. The findings of this study align with the findings of the previous study conducted in Pakistan on construction worker with depicted that emotional intelligence is positively and significantly associated with both team cohesion as well as project success. The study emphasized the essential role of emotional intelligence (Watanabe et al., 2024). Another similar study also aligns with the result of this study, data collected from 422 respondents in the US military teams reported that team performance and competitiveness are influenced by the higher emotional intelligence of the leaders (Stubbs Koman & Wolff, 2008). The reason behind the significant relationship of project managers' emotional intelligence with team cohesion and team performance could be their understanding of their own and others' emotions. This helps maintain team flow and cohesion and enhances work efficacy. Emotional intelligence is highly associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal communication skills, which ultimately helps resolve conflicts, manage time effectively, and meet deadlines without burnout.

The study also reported significant relationship between team cohesion and team performance. The study aligns with the previous finding a time-lagged study conducted in Pakistan on 212 software team members, it was reported that higher team cohesion is associated with higher team performance (Ejaz, Shafique, & Qammar, 2024). Another indigenous study conducted on 100 university employees of Pakistan depicted that team togetherness is significantly associated with higher team performance and higher quality of organizational performance (Ibrahim, Rahman, & Johar, 2019). The reason of significant relationship of team cohesion with team performance could be due to higher collaboration and support within the team makes the organizational objectives timely and conveniently attainable thus team performance enhances as the team cohesion increases. Mediation analysis significantly proved the second hypothesis of the study as the team cohesion significantly mediates the relationship between project managers' emotional intelligence and team performance. The study aligns with the previous study conducted in China in the construction sector which reflects the crucial mediating role of team cohesion between project manager emotional intelligence as a predictor and team effectiveness as an outcome (Zhang & Hao, 2022). Furthermore, the mediation model aligns with social exchange theory (Blau, 2017; Cook et al., 2013; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), which stated that human interactions are embedded on reciprocity; when individuals are treated positively and kindly, they tend to develop trust and loyalty toward the other party. In the reciprocal exchange process, project managers' emotional intelligence enhances fair interaction and supportive environment that encourage and motivate team members to reciprocate with higher commitment and cooperation, that strengthened the team cohesion. Consequently, higher team leads to higher team performance, since due to higher emotional understanding in the team minimizes conflicts, maintain harmony and foster the team cooperation which are essential elements for achieving project objectives.

The third hypothesis of the study is partially proved as the Anova analysis reported that project managers' emotional intelligence of larger team scored significantly higher than medium and smaller team, whereas no significant mean differences found for variables i.e., team cohesion and team performance. This suggest that project managers with larger teams are better equipped with emotional intelligence than their counterparts. This could be due to their experience in the project management field, as reported by a recent and previous studies that higher exposure of leaders to the larger complex team dynamics, and requirement to manage communication with larger team and resolve the conflict timely enhances the emotional intelligence of the project managers (Fiedler, 1994; Humphrey, 2002; Stein et al., 2009). Whereas, the reason for nonsignificant team size difference with respect to variables i.e. team cohesion and team performance could be due to team size does not determine the success of the project, it is about team dynamics rather than just leaders' behavior and their ability to manage the group effectively, structure it properly, relationship between group members also matters as well as professional attitude towards the project scope (Jamshed & Majeed, 2019; Lee & Wong, 2019; Zhang & Hao, 2022).

4.1. Limitations and Recommendations

The study comprised several limitations i.e., small sample size, cross sectional correlational study design and self-reported data from only project managers, which may limit the generalizability of the study, Future studies need to adapt experimental or longitudinal study design for causal interpretation and incorporate multi-source data to reduce bias. Stratified sampling could have been beneficial in balancing demographic variables such as project budget, men and women, experience of the project managers, it is important to proceed with stratified

sampling technique for future studies to provide a more detailed analysis and comprehensive insight for the literature.

4.2. Implications

The finding of the study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study supported social exchange theory, shedding light on the important of emotional intelligence in project managers that foster loyalty, trust, and cooperation within the project teams that leads towards the higher team performance due to productivity enhancement. The study contributed in the literature by finding the explored mediating mechanism of team cohesion between project managers' emotional intelligence and team performance particularly in the cultural context of Pakistan. The practical implications derived from the finding are quite insightful i.e. the contemporary organizations need to start the training programs for the project managers as the project managers role in the successful completion of project is key, since higher emotional intelligence will have better impact on better team cohesion and higher team performance. Human resource officers along with the organizational psychologists need to come up with the effective assessment for hiring project management and consider the emotional intelligence as an important element in that assessment. Keeping cooperative, supportive and collaborative environment as part of the organizational culture is equally important in order to get higher productivity and timely attaining of objectives from the employees.

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