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Posted Date: 9 December 2025

doi: 10.20944/preprints202512.0757.v1

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Article

Investigation of the Association Between Emotional Intelligence and Decision Making for Improving Productivity in the UK Construction Industry

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Abstract

Construction project failures in the UK are frequently attributed to human error factors and increasing technical complexity, highlighting the need for competencies beyond technical skills. Emotional intelligence (EI) has been identified as a critical yet underexplored factor influencing decision-making and productivity among Construction Professionals (CPs). This study investigates the association between EI and CP decision-making processes throughout the project life cycle phases to enhance productivity and project success. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, comprising a quantitative survey (n=40) and qualitative semi-structured interviews (n=22). Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase reflexive thematic analysis and SPSS. Results indicate that perceived EI competence significantly influences decision-making in complex contexts, surpassing the impact of technical skills. Correlations were observed between EI and situational decision making rather than overall EI scores, highlighting the importance of contextual application. The findings reveal that EI is a notable deficiency in the UK construction sector and a key determinant of CP performance and productivity. This research contributes to industry knowledge and professional practice by emphasising the integration of EI development into training frameworks to improve decision-making, safeguard and protect teams, and ensure successful outcomes in large-scale projects.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; decision-making; productivity; project success; construction professionals; built environment; construction industry

1. Introduction

Emotional Intelligence (EI), defined as the ability to recognise, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others, has become increasingly relevant in organisational and project management contexts since its formal introduction in the 1990s [1]. In contrast, its origins lie in earlier psychological theories emphasising the role of emotions in cognition and behaviour [2]. EI is now widely applied in education, business, and leadership. In the construction industry, where project failures are often linked to human error and complex decision-making (3,4). EI offers potential benefits for improving performance and productivity [5]. However, despite growing interest, research on EI in construction remains limited and fragmented, with ongoing debates over its measurement and practical integration [6]. This study addresses these gaps by examining the relationship between EI and decision-making among Construction Professionals (CPs) across project life-cycle phases. Using a mixed-method approach, the research explores how perceived EI competence influences decision-making in complex contexts. Findings reveal EI as a critical determinant of CP performance, surpassing technical skills in specific scenarios. These insights underscore the need to integrate EI development into professional training frameworks to enhance productivity and project success.

2. Background and Methods

Emotional Intelligence (EI) emerged in the early 1800s as a concept addressing human behavioural patterns, though its formal recognition occurred much later [7]. Despite debates regarding its validity in workplace settings (8,9). Recent studies have linked EI to project success and organisational performance [10]. Hosani et al., [11] Identify EI as a critical success factor for project management, while Afshari and Ghamkhar [12] They argue that EI significantly influences project delivery outcomes. In today's dynamic construction environment, project failures often stem from human error and increasing technical complexity [13,14].

Navigating these challenges requires more than technical proficiency; it demands strong interpersonal capabilities. EI facilitates collaboration, teamwork, and communication key drivers of project success [15–17]. However, other EI scholars have emphasised that EI's role is in enhancing performance and productivity. While technical skills remain essential throughout the project life cycle, soft skills, particularly EI, are increasingly recognised as determinants of success and safety.

Current research positions EI as the most influential soft skill since its inception, defined as the ability to perceive, understand, manage, and positively influence emotions within oneself and others [18]. Goleman asserts that EI predicts success and distinguishes exceptional leaders, noting that IQ and technical skills serve only as threshold capabilities [1]. Without EI, even individuals with superior analytical skills and innovative ideas cannot achieve effective leadership. Consequently, EI competence is indispensable for construction professionals tasked with managing complex projects and diverse teams, underscoring its critical role in achieving productivity and project success. Figure 1 below demonstrates the methodology design framework employed for this study and the research analysis. Figure 2 below illustrates the demographic information of participants.

2.1. Aim

This study investigated the association between EI and decision-making among construction professionals, focusing on project success, team safety, and productivity.

2.2. Objectives

1. Explore the relationship between decision-making and awareness of EI competence among the construction professionals
2. Assess where construction professionals' perception of EI influences decision-making in critical situations for mega-sized projects.
3. Evaluate the links between EI and decision-making to identify strategies for improving productivity.

2.3. Hypothesis

It is that CP with higher EI, particularly in self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness, will make more precise, safer, and more effective decisions in critical project settings.

3. Emotional Intelligence Impact on Decision-Making

Ensuring safety in the construction environment depends largely on individuals working within it, and this is closely linked to their decision-making processes, particularly those related to health and safety and to achieving project objectives. Between these priorities lies the human factor, which combines decisions about worker safety with stakeholder satisfaction [19–21]. These decisions often reflect the emotional state of those leading the project. Therefore, the ability to understand, regulate, and perceive emotions is critical. Distinguishing, identifying, and observing feelings, both in oneself and in others, helps achieve better performance without biases and pressures, enhancing one's ability to make better decisions.

EI influences the ability to make effective decisions in critical situations [22]. For example, a construction professional with high emotional self-awareness might make poor choices due to traits linked to self-awareness, such as integrity, accountability, and motivation, which drive achievement beyond expectations [18,23]. Moreover, those who control their emotions are often seen as symbols of charisma and power. Construction professionals are expected to work with diverse teams, and

those displaying extreme negative emotions may find it challenging to make sound decisions, thereby reducing credibility and adherence to plans [24]. Since the construction industry is highly stressful [25] stress hampers functioning [26] Contend that high stress and pressure negatively influence both work and personal life. Failing to address these issues can result in incorrect decisions, project failures, and accidents that threaten overall operations.

3.1. Emotional Intelligence Impact on Productivity and Decision-Making in Construction

This section provides an in-depth understanding of EI's practical implications for construction professionals. The emphasis on the construction industry stems from significant revenue losses resulting from project failures driven by human error. Studies demonstrate a strong correlation between decision-making processes and performance outcomes in this sector. Decision-making styles influence organisational performance through competitive strategies, with analytical and directive styles being the most common [22,27,28]. Abuezhayeh [29] asserts that integrating knowledge management with business process management enhances decision-making and organisational performance [30]. Khahro et al. [30] identified delays in client decision-making as a significant barrier in construction projects and proposed a decision-support model to address these challenges. Factors such as insufficient technical competence and ineffective communication contribute to delays in early decision-making. Gora [31] conducted a bibliometric analysis of decision-making and performance, revealing an increasing trend in research. Collectively, these studies emphasise the importance of effective decision-making strategies for improving outcomes and organisational performance in construction.

3.2. Emotional Intelligence and the Construction Professional

The role of a construction professional is critical, demanding, and complex for successful project delivery [32–34]. Timofeeva et al. [35] and the Egan Report highlight the need to align development and learning with role complexity. From a soft skills perspective, competence in project management is essential. Ives recognised the need to prioritise people management over tools and techniques [36] and Winter et al. [37]. Internal and external environments influence complex projects, and unpredictability increases decision-making complexity, especially when multiple unexpected variables arise during execution. This unpredictability demands adaptability beyond conventional project lifecycles.

From a cultural sensitivity perspective, EI competence plays a pivotal role, particularly in self-awareness and social awareness, requiring both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Despite EI's proven impact, uptake and application in construction remain low. Across other sectors, EI has yielded positive outcomes in high-risk situations [1,28,38]. Thus, while leading and motivating teams through challenges, appreciating EI's impact is crucial [39]. In multicultural settings, emotionally intelligent professionals can navigate cultural diversity, ensuring harmony and inclusiveness. This raises the question: Should EI be integrated into construction industry standards to promote uptake and application across all levels? Goleman's definition of EI highlights its importance, encompassing the capacity to recognise and manage emotions to foster productive, success-driven environments. This study proposes developing a conceptual framework for EI training.

3.3. Methodology

3.3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-method design. Combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine the relationship between EI and decision-making among construction professionals. An online questionnaire was administered to collect the necessary data for this study, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with construction professionals. As such, the literature review findings and reports from professional bodies also informed the study. These methods were chosen because they were deemed appropriate, and the mixed-methods design allowed the researcher to listen to and understand the construction professional's perception of EI. The quantitative method was used to assess participants' capacity to understand the EI competencies based on Goleman's model of EI, covering variables such as relationship management (7 questions), social awareness (5

questions), self-management (6 questions), and self-awareness (5 questions). Furthermore, the participant's skills in project success (15 questions), collaboration (4 questions), communication (5 questions), teamwork (7 questions), and conflict management (8 questions) were assessed via a link.

The interview survey comprised 64 items grouped into six categories: EI components, conflict management, teamwork, communication, collaboration and participant demographics. All responses were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = lowest, 5 = highest). The semi-structured interview included 14 main open-ended questions and four sub-questions, designed to explore participants' understanding and perceptions of EI and its influence on decision-making. Table 1 shows how the data were coded, and themes were identified from participants' excerpts.

Design considerations

- The following factors guided the research design:
- Assess EI levels and awareness among construction professionals
- Link EI competence to decision-making and project success using numerical scales
- Highlight associations between EI variables and performance indicators.
- Employing statistical tools such as SPSS for quantitative analysis,
- Ensure practical and efficient data collection methods

Sampling and participants' primary data were collected from 22 construction professionals representing diverse roles and responsibilities. A probability sampling approach was applied based on the criteria such as relevance to the objectives, time feasibility, accessibility and sample quality.

3.1.1. Data Collection Procedure

- The following steps were undertaken
 - Participant selection and obtaining written/verbal consent
 - Compliance with ethical considerations
 - Development and piloting of the questionnaire
 - Determination of delivery mode
 - Administration of survey and interviews
 - Monitoring response rates
- The text continues here.

3.2. Figures, Tables and Schemes

All figures and tables should be cited in the main text as Figure 1, Table 1, etc.

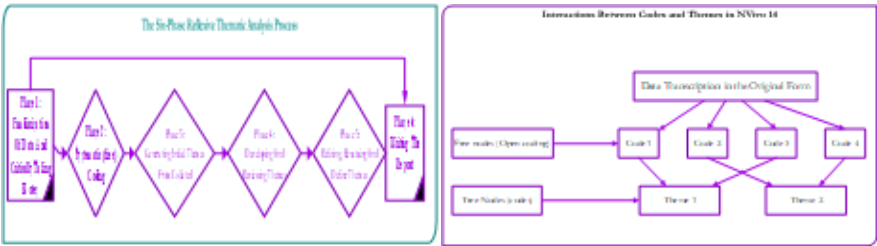
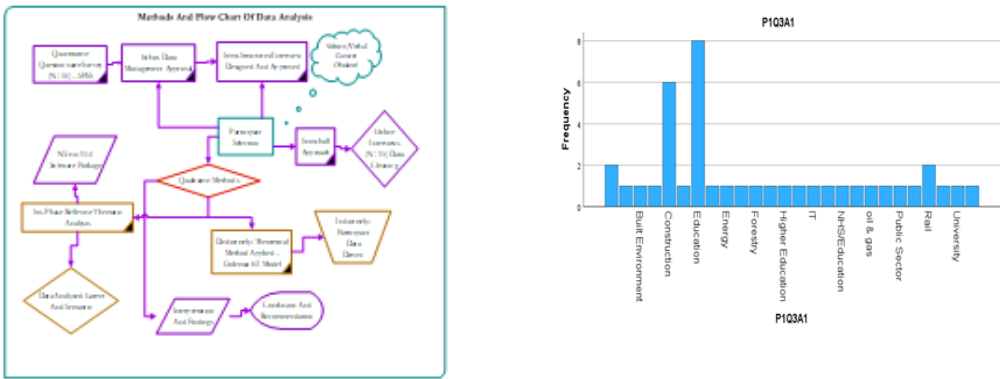


Figure 1. shows the Six-phase reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), which illustrates the steps employed in the data analysis phase. Figure 2 (right) illustrates the coding pattern and how themes were discovered as the phases progressed.



(a) Figure 3: Method and Flowchart of the study (b) Figure 4 – Participants' Demographic Information

Figure 2. This is a figure. Schemes follow another format. If there are multiple panels, they should be listed as follows: (a) demonstrates the methodological design of the study; (b) highlights the demographic configuration of the participants. The Y-axis represents the years of working experience, while the X-axis indicates the work designation.

Table 1. Display some fraction examples of the quotes from participants and how the themes were discovered from the participants' perspective.

Key Themes	Participants Excerpt	Interpretation
EI Awareness or EI familiarity	P9: Let me say I am not familiar P5: I am somewhat aware. P7: I am relatively familiar P20: I am not familiar with it	Participants' excerpts reveal varied familiarity and awareness of emotional intelligence. In contrast, some showed a solid understanding of EI, most displayed little or no awareness. This highlights a gap that requires EI training, both for theoretical understanding and practical application in the workplace.
Productivity	P17: You must be broad in your EI to understand and be sensitive, and must ensure everybody is happy to be productive When they are happy, they are more productive.	Participants in this bubble found that EI is connected to harmony and happiness. This, in turn, influences decisions, which contribute to the project's success. When people feel happy, their motivation increases. This sense of feeling valued and appreciated ultimately helps project tasks run smoothly and achieve high productivity.
Decision making	P6: I incorporate EI in my decision-making when assigning tasks P10: Emotional intelligence serves as a foundation that filters through all your decision-making. P12: Any decision I make, if I do not integrate emotional intelligence properly, will impact the delivery of my project. P14: Your emotional intelligence enables you to balance others' needs. P18: I am always conscious of checking in with people to ensure they are comfortable with tasks assigned to them.	A question was asked about how they incorporate EI into the decision-making process. Many participants report integrating EI into their decision-making, and a significant number apply it in various ways, as shown in the participants' quotes. The implication extends to several aspects of their work, including daily project management tasks related to their roles, motivating team members, communicating with others, understanding stakeholders'

		requirements, and assessing their work capacity.
Body language	P2: You must learn to read body language properly when working on a project, and emotional intelligence helps you to understand that.	Participants recognise that EI aids their understanding of body language and tone, as they believe body language requires specific responses. The participants compared body language and tone to a communication medium, implying they can elicit a response.
	P21: Body language is all part of the concept of understanding human behaviours.	

* Tables show some of the excerpts from the participants and the interpretations.

4. Discussion

Limited EI Competence Awareness

The findings of this study indicate a significant lack of awareness and formal understanding of EI among construction professionals, despite its acknowledged benefits for stress management, stakeholder engagement, and decision-making. This finding supports the initial hypothesis that higher EI levels enhance decision-making clarity and safety in critical project settings. Participants who demonstrated greater EI competence reported improved adaptability, empathy-driven reasoning, and situational awareness, aligning with previous studies by [40–42], which emphasise EI as a predictor of leadership effectiveness and project success. For example,

P20 said, “I am not sure if I am familiar with it.” P16 said - Umm. I would not say very. Yeah, I am not super. Familiar with it,” P18 said – “True, not very. Yet. So, I need a brief explanation.

This implies that construction participants were unfamiliar with the concept; some were aware, while others required further explanation of EI or EI competence. Additionally, those with some knowledge lacked the theoretical underpinnings. The findings of this study align with those of several studies that have acknowledged the growth of the body of knowledge and the increasing awareness of the concept, including [43,44]. Most studies, like this study's findings, acknowledge the growing importance and benefits of EI intelligence competence in, for example, stress management, self-awareness, people management, self-management, stakeholder management, client care, and health and safety. However, the author of this study is concerned about the lag in uptake, the lack of formal understanding, inadequate information, insufficient awareness, and the lack of training in EI competence within the industry.

This study also argues that government, industry leaders, professional bodies, government agencies, and educational institutions play a significant role in promoting EI competence among construction professionals. The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB), which primarily provides training and establishes programmes to help workers meet industry demands, has conducted a systematic review and a study on enhancing the performance of 600 employees, stakeholders, and behavioural change experts. The study examines industry solutions to drive behavioural change and improve performance. Although the study recommends a focus on cultivating culture, trust, quality, and collaboration by prioritising behavioural and interpersonal skills training and boosting uptake, so far, there is no structured initiative, program, or partnership to promote EI competence in the industry. This study suggests that the uptake of behavioural and interpersonal soft skills, such as EI competence, will remain low unless industry agencies, such as the CITB, establish training programmes and incorporate EI competence into the curricula of universities and colleges in the built environment.

Moreover, professional bodies also play a significant role in increasing awareness of EI among industry professionals. Bodies such as the RICS, APM, CIAT, and CIOB would need to first recognise EI as an essential competency, alongside others such as communication and client care. For improved uptake of EI, the need needs to be recognised as a professional standard in occupational competency standards of the professional bodies. To increase students' awareness of the built environment, universities need to understand the conceptual framework and teach EI as part of the key

competencies in their programmes. This will help build awareness, formal understanding, and knowledge, as well as the application of the concept in professional environments.

Culturally Sensitive and Body Language:

Emotional intelligence is critical for bridging cultural gaps in the construction industry. Research indicates that EI has a significant impact on expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment, accounting for 60% of the variance in adaptability to the foreign work environment [45]. For example, in the Thai construction industry, emotionally intelligent project managers and engineers effectively navigate conflicts by combining local cultural norms with collaborative problem-solving approaches [46]. Additionally, [47] and [5,17] states that it is valuable in healthcare settings where increasing cultural diversity demands high levels of emotional and cultural sensitivity from clinicians. Despite the importance, the construction industry has been slow to adopt the EI concept [48]. Moreover, [49] posit that construction students develop EI more slowly than students in other professions, emphasising the importance of integrating EI into construction curricula. Therefore, this study argues that enhancing EI competence among construction professionals can help them manage cross-cultural interactions, resolve conflicts, and adapt to diverse and complex construction environments, thereby increasing project success in the global construction industry.

The construction industry is a multifaceted global sector, and in recent years, construction professionals have been able to work from anywhere. This has become very prevalent since the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown [50,51]. Technologies that foster collaborative work have increased. In line with this global norm, project teams are composed of people from diverse cultural backgrounds. This competence enables these construction professionals to navigate cultural differences and understand body language with sensitivity, ensuring that project team members feel valued, appreciated, and included. The participant said,

"I am not familiar with it, but I believe the concept is all about understanding human behaviour, reading your body language and responding to it accordingly."

The participant statement above acknowledges that the concept of EI involves understanding human behaviour, interpreting body language, and responding accordingly. This aligns with Goleman and with the work of [7], whose work borders on the ability to perceive. A construction professional with a high level of EI competence would be able to bridge the cultural gap by fostering a cultural awareness campaign, an inclusive team culture, and a work environment where diverse perspectives are respected, celebrated, and leveraged, thereby leading to more innovative solutions and a more harmonious work environment. The participant said,

"I would say that you must be able to be broad in your EI to deal with anybody, not just trying to keep these guys happy because they have got the chequebook. You want to make sure that everybody is happy so that it runs in harmony."

All these quotes emphasise the importance of cultural sensitivity and of creating a more conducive, harmonious work environment where projects and project teams can thrive.

Regarding body language, EI is essential for interpreters to understand non-verbal cues in their work. This aligns with the work of [52]. A study on language perception claims that the listener retrieves the articulatory gesture and attributes the speaker's intentions [53]. This study argues that, due to individual differences, construction professionals' emotional displays can influence project teams' attitudes and behaviours. In contrast, these mechanisms can be likened to the ability to influence others positively; observing others' emotional displays can help read and understand team members' emotional cues, especially when a team is under pressure. Hence, emotionally intelligent construction professionals would be sensitive to the variation in non-verbal cues. P22 said,

"There is an acknowledgement in their body language and their physical behaviour that they know they have done something wrong."

P5 added,

"You must learn to read body language properly when working in a project environment. You must also learn to understand tones."

The findings of this study suggest that some construction professionals may struggle to understand certain words and may respond with body language. The participants above expressed

concern about the need to understand emotional body language as a tool for effective communication, especially for those with limited English or their tribal language. This study argues that the connection between emotional intelligence and body language should not be underestimated. It is integral to effective communication and emotional regulation, both of which are vital components of EI competence. In a construction environment, the ability of construction professionals to read, interpret, and understand, as well as respond to body language, is critical. Particularly subtle signs of disengagement, such as avoiding eye contact or fidgeting during project briefing meetings, are also important. On the contrary, the use of positive body language by construction professionals, such as humour, smiles, laughs, maintaining open gestures, and nodding, encourages trust and collaboration and creates a supportive work environment. This is because non-verbal cues, such as gestures, postures, facial expressions, eye contact, and body movements, provide crucial insights into emotions, intentions, behaviours, and attitudes, often more accurately than verbal expressions. Moreover, it aligns with Goleman's definition of the ability to recognise, understand, manage, and interpret one's own emotions and those of others. Therefore, his definition relies on non-verbal communication to interpret the meaning conveyed.

The theme of *perception of EI competence* suggests that while EI may not be explicitly acknowledged as a formal construct, it is viewed as an inherent part of daily practice [54,55].

The participants expressed that EI is significant in their decision-making, as it enables them to consider the impact of their decisions before acting.

Stakeholder Sensitivity in Decision-Making

P10 *"Each person requires a different kind of... they have their own different needs and wants... so your emotional intelligence needs to be able to balance on who it is, what they need, and how you are going to resolve issues."*

This response highlights the need for project managers to tailor their decision-making to the unique needs of different stakeholders. EI enables managers to assess the expectations of various groups, ensuring that decisions are inclusive and considerate.

P10 stated, *"Emotional intelligence serves as a foundation that filters through all your decision-making."* P10 also mentioned that if I were to decide on the stakeholder group, they must understand the stakeholders' backgrounds. How significant is the impact of the decision when it is made, and what effect does it have on others? This aligns with that of P12, who stated that *"EI is essential in any decision I make because it applies to people. This implies that construction professionals with higher levels of EI and competence consider it significant in their decision-making. Research highlights that construction project managers operate in complex, multi-stakeholder environments where understanding and responding to individual stakeholder needs is critical. Effective stakeholder management relies on EI competencies, such as empathy and active listening [42]. According to [56], project managers with high EI build stronger relationships with stakeholders, leading to increased cooperation and project success."*

Empathy-Driven Decision-Making

P12 *"Any decision I make, if I do not capture (EI) properly, will affect the delivery of my project."*

This statement reinforces the importance of empathy in decision-making. A failure to integrate EI considerations may lead to misunderstandings, disengaged stakeholders, or project inefficiencies. Empathy ensures the human element is not overlooked, resulting in smoother project execution.

P12 further noted that *"in the delivery of my project, I have to make sure that my reasoning is emotionally intelligent and the influence of my decision has to be emotionally intelligent"*

Empathy, a core component of EI, is vital for understanding team members' and stakeholders' perspectives. This study suggests that emotionally intelligent project managers are more effective in resolving conflicts, fostering collaboration, and ensuring stakeholder satisfaction. This aligns with the works of [42], which posit that poor EI in decision-making can lead to disengagement, resistance to change, and project delays.

Emotionally Informed Decision-Making

P12 "I have to make sure that my reasoning is emotionally intelligent... The influences for my decisions have to be emotionally intelligent."

This highlights the integration of EI principles into cognitive decision-making processes. Rather than making purely technical or logistical choices, emotionally intelligent project managers factor in relational dynamics, ensuring that decisions are both logical and considerate. Decision-making in construction projects is not purely technical; it involves human factors such as morale, motivation, and conflict resolution [57]. This implies that EI helps project managers consider both logical and emotional aspects of decision-making. Studies show that emotionally intelligent managers make better decisions because they assess the impact of their choices on both project outcomes and people [56].

Similar to [43,44], this study confirms that EI remains underutilised in the construction industry, primarily due to insufficient training and a lack of integration into professional standards. While other sectors have successfully embedded EI into leadership development, the construction industry lags, reflecting systemic gaps in behavioural skills training.

4. Findings

Of the twenty-two interviewed professionals, only four had prior emotional intelligence (EI) training and associated it with project success. While most participants acknowledged EI as important, awareness of its role in stress management, communication, and interpersonal relationships was limited. Significant gaps were observed in self-awareness and relationship management, indicating the need for structured EI development within the construction industry.

The study also revealed a sector-wide lack of understanding of EI. A conceptual model integrating EI principles with management tools is proposed to enhance productivity and performance, offering practical value for academia, training providers, and professional bodies. Despite the small, homogeneous sample, the findings suggest that EI training improves stakeholder engagement, supporting the literature that identifies EI as critical for relationship building, conflict resolution, and effective communication in construction projects.

5. Conclusions

Current understanding of EI remains incomplete, particularly due to cultural influences on emotion perception, understanding, and regulation. This study reinforces the need to integrate EI into leadership development and organisational practices. Practical strategies, such as reflective exercises, mindfulness, cultural sensitivity training, and conflict resolution workshops, can strengthen Goleman's four EI dimensions: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Beyond training, embedding EI into leadership evaluations, succession planning, and mentorship programs will foster emotionally intelligent workplaces. Recognising EI as a measurable competency and challenging the stigma around "soft skills" is essential for improving decision-making, collaboration, and organisational success. Future research should explore cultural contexts and develop sector-specific EI frameworks to address these gaps.

Author Contributions: "Conceptualisation, Peace Echeonwu and Nimi Dan-Jumbo.; Methodology, Peace Echeonwu.; formal analysis, Peace Echeonwu.; investigation, Peace Echeonwu.; resources, Peace Echeonwu.; data curation, Peace Echeonwu.; writing—original draft preparation, Peace Echeonwu.; writing—review and editing, Nimi Dan-Jumbo, Robert Hairstans, Lina Khaddour.; visualisation, Peace Echeonwu.; supervision, Nimi Dan-Jumbo.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: A copy can be obtained at this link (<https://survey.napier.ac.uk/n/zz81d.aspx>), and a link to the qualitative interview consent form can be accessed from this link (<https://survey.napier.ac.uk/n/zz8iu.aspx>).

Acknowledgments: This paper and the research behind it would not have been possible without the exceptional support of Dr Lina Khaddour, Prof Sarah Hitt, Dr Nim Dan-Jumbo, and Prof Robert Hairstans. GenAI is used

for spelling corrections, such as Grammarly. The authors have reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.”.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

CP	Construction Professional
DOAJ	Directory of open access journals
EI	Emotional Intelligence
LD	Linear dichroism
MDPI	Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute
TLA	Three-letter acronym

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