**Title**

Soft Skills and Emotional Intelligence in managing culturally diverse Small and Medium Enterprises during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic is fundamentally shifting perspectives on job delivery and workflow. The COVID-19 pandemic is not only forcing companies to scale back operations, but to also redesign how they execute projects in general and tasks in particular. The result has been leaner working units with more dynamic personal job descriptions for project managers in SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) (Papadopoulos, Baltas & Balta, 2020). That pressure, in addition to the uncertainty of commerce during this difficult period is having an adverse effect on worker productivity (Godinic, Obrenovic & Khudaykulov, 2021). That is especially true for those SMEs that choose to outsource labor across multiple nationalities, languages, ethnicities, and races as a means of reducing operating costs (Brynjolfsson et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence is thus emerging as a critical tool in managing remotely positioned project management. Soft skills such as relational dynamics, personality profiling and cultural competence are vital to the employee-project manager relationship. The parameters of monitoring and motivating projects remotely are different from the *in situ* setup; necessitating an adaptive Emotional Intelligence (EQ) strategy.

**Problem Outline**

Rapid advances in ICT (information and communication technology) are resulting in an unprecedented globalization of production value chains. For the SMEs that benefit from cheaper professional labor from the larger pool of workers on the internet, it has been a blessing since it has made it possible to access cheaper infrastructure and operational resources during the present pandemic (Akpan Udoh & Adebisi, 2020). But then there is the emerging need to ensure that managing these individuals is culturally competent so as to maintain productivity. The shift to remote project management structures is making it necessary for managers to re-orient their EQ stratagems. The reason is that the pandemic has put immense psychosocial strain on public health all across the world. The effect is that workers are being put in a situation where they have immense emotional and psychosocial stress. The challenge is therefore to determine how the application of soft skills can proactively enable the remote manager to inspire sustainable productivity. Therefore, in accepting these challenges, the paper seeks to unravel the problem of managing projects remotely.

**Research Aims/Objectives**

The main objective is to find out what EQ skills are necessary to manage projects with an increasingly globalized workforce, and during a pandemic

The secondary objectives help to understand the main aim better. These secondary research objectives could thus be to:

1. Define the role of emotional intelligence in cultural competence in SME project management
2. Explore the effect COVID-19 pandemic is having on remote project management practices in multicultural organizations
3. Outline the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on remote project management as opposed to the pre-COVID *in situ* task delivery model

**Hypothesis**

Dynamic project managers in charge of operations that adapt their EQ strategies to ensure the continued but remote productivity in a post-COVID world achieve sustainable operational outcomes

**Research Questions**

The research will utilize a qualitative method. The following questions help to interrogate the hypothesis and enable the study to achieve its objective.

1. How does emotional intelligence manifest in cultural competence during project management?
2. What best practices currently exist in project management in remote administration?
3. What recommendations could help improve project-based operational efficacy in employing EQ for remote project management

**References**

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