



INFLUENCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON THE PROFESSIONAL FULFILMENT OF STUDENTS SPECIALIZING IN SPORT MANAGEMENT

D. Ilieva^{1*}, T. Marinov²

¹Department of “Management and History of Sport”, Faculty of Sport, National Sports Academy
„Vassil Levski“, Sofia, Bulgaria

²Department of “Theory of the Physical Education”, Faculty of Pedagogy, National Sports Academy
„Vassil Levski“, Sofia, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

After a thorough theoretical analysis and a summary of the problem we formulated the following aim: to identify the level of emotional intelligence of students specializing in Sport Management as a prerequisite for their professional fulfilment. Methods: The study included 63 participants: men and women in different years of their education at Vassil Levski National Sports Academy and career-pursuing graduates. The Bulgarian adapted version of the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test consisting of 33 questions whose responses are indicated on a 5-point Likert scale was used to achieve the goal of the study. The analysis of the results shows that the overall emotional intelligence and all its factors are significantly higher in men specializing in sport management. Male professionals demonstrate higher motivation for overcoming obstacles, and optimism in solving problems and achieving goals. The positive attitudes and emotions of the graduates determine the significant differences identified with respect to their abilities to “share emotions and empathy”, “perceive the non-verbal expression of emotions in others” and “perceive one’s own emotions and self-control” in comparison to students who are still in the process of learning. Conclusion: We consider emotional intelligence as a necessary criterion that determines the possibilities for professional fulfilment of sport management students.

Key words: emotions, sports managers, realizations, relations.

INTRODUCTION

At present, the need to meet the European educational standards and to increase competitiveness leads to new, higher requirements for the professional qualification of future specialists. The continuous accumulation of knowledge and the development of information technologies create conditions of oversaturation with information that is difficult for humans to process and memorize. This has led to a shift in the requirements towards students and, in

particular, towards the ones enrolled in the specialty of Sport Management. For a short period of time the students need to master a broad range of knowledge and to develop professional qualities and skills to work under the conditions of the contemporary social and commercial dimensions of sports. On the other hand, the complex work of sports organizations makes it difficult to point at particular leadership skills necessary for successful sport management. Therefore, emotional intelligence (EI) is considered as a common thread of successful management and professional fulfilment in sports structures and could be used to inform the selection of sport managers. According to George (2000) moods, emotions and their expression are key to leadership. The success of sport managers

*Correspondence to: *Desislava Ilieva, Todor Marinov, Department of “Management and History of Sport”, Faculty of sport, National Sports Academy „Vassil Levski“, 21 Acad. Stefan Mladenov, str., Sofia, 1700, Bulgaria, e-mail: desislava.ilieva@nsa.bg, phone +359 887 198 064*

may depend on their ability to manage their own emotions and those of the employees. The manager must demonstrate positive emotions while developing, encouraging and supporting such positive emotions among team members (1, 2).

Up until recently the intelligence quotient (IQ) was considered as the main criterion for cognitive skills, thinking and problem-solving abilities. In the past few years, the thesis that intelligence on its own has a leading role in professional fulfilment and success has been rejected. Different studies prove that the correlation between the intelligence quotient of individuals and their success is weak, less than 20%. The conclusion is that apparently other factors, more important than logical intelligence, are responsible for the remaining approximately 80%. In this regard, there is an increased awareness of the influence of emotions and the so-called “emotional intelligence” which, in general, implies particular knowledge and habits supporting the choice of successful behaviour in certain situations. In sport management, more developed emotional skills would likely result in more effective mechanisms for dealing with particular circumstances. Adequate control of one self’s emotions and behaviour, especially in stressful situations or when time is short, would lead to more effective work. For every leader emotional intelligence is of great significance to success (3-7).

The American professors Salovey and Mayer have made important contributions to the emotional intelligence theory. They combine emotion and intelligence as a cognitive ability in one term, describing it as “a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action.” First, their emotional intelligence model groups the different abilities of the self, so that EI can be assessed on the basis of four functions: (1) self-awareness (for understanding one’s own emotions); (2) self-management (for management of emotions and motivation); (3) social awareness (for perception of others’ emotions) and (4) relationship management. Through the years this model has been improved and emotional intelligence is now defined as “the ability to

perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others”. And so, to better understand the nature of EI, it is necessary to clarify its constituent terms “emotion” and “intelligence”. The connection between them, related to the abilities of the self to react appropriately and achieve success in a particular situation, is reflected by the use of intelligence to assess the situation and make decisions regarding the self’s actions and emotional state. This process determines whether one would react with maximum efficiency under the particular circumstances. Intelligence reflects the thinking ability of a person. Thinking is the main cognitive process that determines our actions and behaviour. Its content is always connected to emotions and feelings which can be positive or negative and determine whether the type of thinking would be positive or negative. Therefore, any emotional state and any experience includes thoughts and feelings mutually influencing each other (6, 8-10).

The relation between cognition and emotionality as key components of EI has been the subject of extensive research in sports practice. T. Yancheva *et al.*, (2022) point out that EI is connected both with cognitive processes and abilities and with personal and behavioural attitudes. The authors have adapted one of the most popular tests for measuring EI in sports, the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT). Other research shows that EI is connected with the achievement of better professional and sports results, and increased stress tolerance. High values of EI contribute to the effectiveness of the sports technique and help future specialists in physiotherapy to fulfil successfully their personal potential and build healthy relationships with their patients, which is the key motivation factor for their active participation in the healing process. EI shows significant correlation with coaching performance and can therefore be considered as one of the main characteristics of the contemporary coach on the path to successful and efficient professional activity. Research on the role of EI in the field of sport has been sporadic. This makes it difficult to systematically review and summarize the existing studies in order to arrive at a general concept about the importance of EI in sports and its influence on the

professional fulfilment of staff in the sports sector (11-17).

Led by the understanding that EI reflects the ability to perceive, recognize and manage emotions in connection with the achievement of success at almost any job, we were specifically interested in investigating EI in sport management students. This would help us outline a lot more clearly the possibilities for their professional fulfilment. The scientific literature has already described the link between EI and professional fulfilment. A major study by Bradberry and Greaves (2019) reveals that 90% of high-performing employees also have a high emotional intelligence quotient. Their results confirm that EI is the most important factor for professional fulfilment and explain 58% of the achievement of success in all professions. It has also been established that EI and academic efficiency correlate significantly with high academic achievement. In this respect university professors need to be aware of the EI of their students in order to facilitate a continuous improvement of the learning process and relationships on the path to professional development and successful fulfilment of potential (18-20).

METHODS

The aim of the study was to determine the level of EI of students specializing in Sport Management as a prerequisite for their professional fulfilment. The following objectives were formulated:

1. To clarify the theoretical basis of EI and its connection to professional fulfilment.
2. To study the state of EI.
3. To determine the peculiarities of EI of Sport Management students and graduates.

The study was performed with a total of 63 men and women, of whom 8 women and 9 men were in their first year of their studies, 11 women and 9 men were in their fourth year of their studies, and 11 women and 15 men had graduated and pursued a career in Sport Management.

The Bulgarian version of the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test adapted by S. Stoyanova (2008) was used to achieve the aim of the study. The test consists of 33 questions. The responses are indicated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". The reliability of the test is $\alpha = 0.73$ and

the results of the test have a four-factor solution with four subscales: "sharing of emotions and empathy" with $\alpha = 0.76$; "motivation for overcoming of obstacles and optimism", $\alpha = 0.75$; "perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others", $\alpha = 0.74$, and "perception of one's own emotions and self-control", $\alpha = 0.60$. The results of the test were processed by: 1) analysis of variance (to calculate mean values and standard deviations) and 2) hypothesis testing using Mann Whitney's non-parametric U-test (21-23).

RESULTS

After mathematical and statistical processing, the survey results showed particular patterns in relation to the subjects' EI. Specialists who had fulfilled their potential in sport management demonstrated significantly higher EI quotients in comparison to students who had just started their education in this particular field. Also, in the framework of the 4-year education programme, a significant increase in the values of the separate EI factors was observed. This trend is attributed to the correct approach to teaching and learning of the course information in direct connection with its application into practice.

Women in their fourth year at the university showed significantly higher scores with respect to "perception of one's own emotions and self-control" ($P = 99.7\%$) and "perception of one's own emotions and self-control" ($P = 99.6$). These differences are probably a result of the education in sport management and particularly of the practical classes in solving problems and acting out scenarios requiring adequate decision-making and planning of activities in a given time-frame.

Female fourth-year students showed a tendency for significantly higher emotional intelligence ($P = 90.2\%$) and better ability to share emotions and empathy ($P = 80.8\%$). Their scores for motivation for overcoming of obstacles of the participants in the study showed a very small difference ($P = 35.3\%$).

The EI structure among fourth-year students is almost identical (**Table 1**). As a result of the favourable influence of the education they demonstrated significantly higher scores for the factor of "perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others" ($P = 99.2\%$) and "perception

of one's own emotion and self-control" (P = 97.5%) in comparison to first-year students. The ability for self-control of one's own emotions in relation to others' emotions has a favourable effect on decision-making. This was well understood by fourth-year students who had already accumulated specialized information and developed skills for its implementation in the field of sport management. We established that fourth-year students have a significantly higher total EI

score of 133.3 points (S = 6.82) as compared to first-year students with 124.9 points (S = 5.64). The calculated value of the coefficient for confidence level is P = 98.1%. By the time of completion of their education the students had developed skills for good communication in a collective environment. This is a prerequisite for good organization with appropriate conditions for problem-solving and achievement of the set goals.

Table 1. Statistical significance of the differences in EI between the participating first-and fourth-year students.

№	Indicators Test	I year		IV year		U _{emp}	P%	SE
		\bar{X}_1	S ₁	\bar{X}_2	S ₂			
1	Motivation for overcoming obstacles and optimism	30,9	2,70	31,5	2,62	-0,458	35,3	WOMEN
2	Sharing of emotions and empathy	24,6	2,20	23,4	1,21	-1,305	80,8	
3	Perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others	14,9	1,73	17,9	1,45	-3,021	99,7	
4	Perception of one's own emotions and self-control	15,9	1,13	18,0	1,41	-2,770	99,6	
5	Emotional intelligence (overall)	123,9	9,06	130,6	5,03	-1,654	90,2	
1	Motivation for overcoming obstacles and optimism	29,3	2,24	30,4	1,67	-1,441	85	MEN
2	Sharing of emotions and empathy	24,0	2,35	25,3	2,24	-1,301	80,7	
3	Perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others	14,9	1,90	17,7	1,22	-2,669	99,2	
4	Perception of one's own emotions and self-control	16,0	1,22	17,7	1,73	-2,244	97,5	
5	Emotional intelligence (overall)	124,9	5,64	133,3	6,82	-2,345	98,1	

The accumulation of knowledge in the field of sport management leads to an apparent tendency for increase in the motivation to overcome obstacles and the ability to share emotions and show empathy. The lack of practice in a real working environment is the likely reason for fourth-year students to demonstrate scores similar to their first-year fellows' scores with respect to the listed EI factors.

The comparison of the scores for overall EI for men and women did not show significant gender-

specific differences. The mean scores for both genders were close to the established arithmetical mean of 124.5 points for the test (22).

Our study did not show significant differences in overall EI and its factors between fourth-year students and graduates in Sport Management. Therefore, we investigated the EI differences between students who had just started their education and specialists who were developing their potential in the profession. These differences are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Statistical significance of the differences between first-year students and graduates in Sport Management.

№	Indicators Test	I year		Graduated		U _{emp}	P%	SE
		\bar{X}_1	S ₁	\bar{X}_2	S ₂			
1	Motivation for overcoming obstacles and optimism	30,9	2,70	32,7	2,00	-1,547	87,8	WOMEN
2	Sharing of emotions and empathy	24,6	2,20	26,7	1,49	-2,091	96,3	
3	Perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others	14,9	1,73	18,4	1,21	-3,265	99,9	
4	Perception of one's own emotions and self-control	15,9	1,13	18,2	1,08	-3,235	99,9	
5	Emotional intelligence (overall)	123,9	9,06	133,2	8,59	-2,067	96,1	
1	Motivation for overcoming obstacles and optimism	29,3	2,24	32,3	2,40	-2,617	99,1	MEN
2	Sharing of emotions and empathy	24,0	2,35	27,9	1,83	-3,362	99,9	
3	Perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others	14,9	1,90	17,1	1,30	-2,586	99	
4	Perception of one's own emotions and self-control	16,0	1,22	18,6	1,30	-3,448	99,9	
5	Emotional intelligence (overall)	124,9	5,64	133,7	7,14	-2,689	99,3	

Professional sport managers who had improved their skills through practice demonstrated higher levels of EI and abilities for effective team work in comparison to first-year students who had just started their education. This pattern was characteristic for both women and men. The ability to apply the acquired knowledge in practice is based on the good control of one's own emotions which have a major role in the adaptation of sport managers in the working environment. Female graduates demonstrated significantly higher scores for three of the four EI factors as compared to first-year students: "sharing of emotions and empathy" (P = 96.3%); "perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others" (P = 99.9%) and "perception of one's own emotions and self-control" (P = 99.9%). Their mean EI score of 133.2 (S = 8.59) was significantly higher than that of first-year students with 123.9 points (S = 9.06) and the difference was supported by P = 96.1%.

Only the factor of "motivation for overcoming of obstacles and optimism" did not show a significant difference between the two

investigated groups (P = 87.8). Still, motivation was more pronounced in female sport managers guaranteeing higher intentional activity towards the achievement of the defined goals.

The overall EI and its separate factors were at significantly higher levels in male sport management specialists as compared to first-year students. The professionals demonstrated higher motivation for overcoming of obstacles and optimism in problem-solving and achievement of goals. Their professional success was also guaranteed by their significantly higher levels of overall EI, 133.7 points (P = 99.3%). This was the highest value among the groups participating in the study lying closest to the threshold of 140.1 points defining high EI (22).

The positive attitudes and emotions of graduated specialists are prerequisites for the significant differences observed with respect to their abilities for "sharing of emotions and empathy" (P = 99.9%), "perception of non-verbal expression of emotions in others" (P = 99.0%) and "perception of one's own emotions and self-control" (P = 99.9%).

CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence is a necessary criterion defining the possibilities for professional fulfilment of sport management students. Their education in the field is connected to the acquisition of particular knowledge and skills contributing to the control of their own emotions and behaviour, especially in stressful situations or when time is short. On the other hand, the ability of sport managers to adequately control their own emotions depending on the emotional state of others has a favourable effect on their thinking. This facilitates the implementation of the main functions of leadership: defining of goals, prediction and modelling as a basis for future decisions for action in particular situations. Emotions influence both cognition and confidence. Graduated sport management specialists are significantly more confident in their own actions. They are optimistic with regard to the achievement of the defined goals and put more effort in overcoming obstacles.

The obtained mean values for overall EI of sport managers are similar to the ones established for other sport specialists and professionals working in different fields (11, 24, 25).

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