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**The Role of Emotional Intelligence in the Career  
Development of Employee in Public Organizations**

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**Abstract**

*Research background: Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability of an individual to be aware of their own emotions, feelings, to identify and manage them in different situations. Dealing with one's own feelings implies precisely to distinguish elements or circumstances in which we lose focus or efficiency. It is important to be confident in your own strengths and to be able to manage your emotions and moods, so that they lead you to those wise choices that will bring success for you career. Emotional intelligence and career development are important psychosocial capacities for a successful adaptation of professional life, including careers management. Employees who have developed emotional skills have the ability to act better, and make the right decisions, as compared to other individuals who do not have developed emotional skills, so they think more clearly, more constructive even when they are in extreme situations or when working under stress. However, there is a reduced number of publications on the relationship between emotional intelligence and career development in public institutions. The purpose of the current research is to study the relation between emotional intelligence and career development of public employees. The research was conducted on employees from a Romanian selected public organization. Methods: we used a questionnaire distributed online to all the employees from the selected public institution. Data was centralized and processed with EXCEL applications. Findings: the results of the study show the importance of developing employees' emotional intelligence in order to better manage their career development. The research contributed new and valuable insights, as the understanding of developing the association between emotional intelligence and career development could be helpful to the top management in the development of public organizations HR practices so as to ensure high achievements of public sector employees' performance.*

**Keywords:** Emotional Intelligence, career, employee, performance, public sector.

**JEL Classification:** D91, H11, O15

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## **1. Introduction**

Employees are the most valuable resource of a public administrative system, and financial and material means, although they are important components in the activity of a system, they are transposed to the background in relation to human resources. Thus, the impact of emotional intelligence on the professional development of public sector employees is a new and interesting issue. Emotional intelligence is embedded in many human resource management activities, such as recruitment, where certain sets of emotional skills are required for the public sector employee, such as creative thinking or the ability to communicate with citizens, to listen to them and empathize with them. Emotional intelligence is the ability of a person to be aware of its own emotions, feelings, to identify and manage them in different situations. Managing our emotions means accurately identifying the factors or situations in which we lose focus or efficiency (Goleman, 2001). This means knowing your own moods, attitudes, preferences and being able to distinguish certain non-verbal elements of communication, so that you would always be one step ahead of others. It is important to be confident in your own strengths and to let your feelings lead you to those healthy choices that will bring success in your career. According to studies in the field (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Jain, 2012; Coetzee & Harry, 2014, Emmerling & Cherniss, 2003; Farnia et al., 2018), people who have developed their emotional skills have the ability to act better, and make the right decisions, as compared to other individuals who do not have developed emotional skills, so they think more clearly, constructively even when they are in extreme situations or when working under stress.

## **2. Problem Statement**

### ***2.1. Emotional intelligence***

In recent years, the concept of emotional intelligence has become more widespread and its definition continues to be constantly changing. Initially, psychologists developed this concept based on cognitive aspects, such as memory or people's ability to solve problems. In contrast, Locke (2005) proposed redefining the concept as a personality trait. This strong aspiration to a detailed knowledge of the concept has led to the elaboration of several reference tests and models (Bar-On, 1997; 2000). In the literature (Higgs, 2004; Woolfolk et al., 2008; Stough, Saklofske, & Parker, 2009; Schutte et al., 2009) there are numerous studies that address the concept of emotional intelligence. A representative example is the work of two American professors and researchers, John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey, who set out to develop an instrument to measure differences between people in terms of emotional abilities (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The results of this study confirmed that some people are more capable at raising their own emotions, perceiving emotions as they occur, and paying special attention to those around them. Also, people with a high level of emotional intelligence have the ability to solve their personal or work problems much more easily, and so they are seen in the position of

leaders with high potential or more productive (Sabie et al. 2020). Reuven Bar-On (2000) analysed the concept emotional intelligence in terms of intrapersonal, interpersonal appearance, individual adaptability, mood and stress resistance. Instead, Goleman (1995, 1998) argues that emotional intelligence is about one's own feelings and ability to motivate oneself, to accomplish things in an inventive way, to achieve performance, managing relationships effectively.

## ***2.2. Career development***

Traditionally, the concept of career was associated with people who held management positions or well-paid jobs. Gradually, this concept evolved, applying to the entire staff of the organization and refers to the evolution of a person from one position to another. In the field of human resources from public administration, the career reflects the evolution of a civil servant, progressively and in accordance with the skills, knowledge and performance of the official, but also in accordance with the needs of the organization (Androniceanu, 2012; Manole & Nica, 2018). In view of this, the development of an employee's career in the public sector is an equally shared responsibility between civil servants and the organization. Even though human potential is the most important resource of any institution, being the one that leads to performance when proper management is practiced, many employees do not benefit from this support and do not receive adequate formal guidance. Here comes the concept of emotional intelligence, managing one's own negative emotions in discouraging situations. Lee and Kusumah (2020) stated that between two people with good skills and similar theoretical and practical skills, the difference will be made by emotional intelligence, the employee will either have self-control over his/her own emotions and adapt to existing circumstances, or will be overwhelmed by the situation and will be demoralized.

## ***2.3. Emotional intelligence in career development***

Although we are not aware, emotional intelligence plays an important role in many areas of our lives. Various types of careers focus mainly on those responsibilities that can be achieved through individual or teamwork, the tasks being well structured and pre-established. It is about applying technical skills, which are relatively easy to learn and measure. According to HR professionals, trainers and recruitment teams, emotional intelligence can make the difference between those who make optimal career decisions and those who make the wrong choices. Watkin (2002) states that emotional intelligence leads to successful recruitment decisions. Goleman (1995) argues that emotional intelligence should be used as a determinant of hiring decisions based on his assertions about the link between emotional intelligence and performance. Fox and Spector (2000) also claim that emotional intelligence is important in the recruitment and selection processes. The authors argue that the emotional management skills associated with emotional intelligence contribute to the ability of interviewees to adjust their emotional state during interviews. Studies have also shown that the positive affectivity of the interviewee

plays a major role in influencing the employer's decision. Other researches (Isen & Baron, 1991; Nouri & Mousavi, 2020) demonstrated that employees who have been able to regulate their mood in an organization, have a significant advantage in obtaining promotions, respectively in career development. In the case of a civil servant, the position may require the ability to be empathetic and to understand the needs of the citizen / client (Nica & Popescu, 2010). People who have a low level of emotional intelligence don't have this ability to "read" people, so they will consider these positions difficult or even unsatisfactory. The association of emotional intelligence and effective leadership qualities was first suggested by Goleman (1998) in his book, which examines the impact of emotional intelligence in the workplace environment. Other researchers specifically identify emotional intelligence, considering that it contributes to effective (George, 2000), transformational (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000) and emerging (Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002) leadership. Humphrey (2002, 2005) argues that there is a strong link between emotions and leadership. He indicates that specific aspects of leadership are quantified by emotional abilities. Feelings generated at work, such as fear of failure, anxiety or worries, have critical information about how we feel. For example, if a superior has higher demands at work, at a level where civil servants feel tense, they will either mobilize and ignore these fears, or they will be overwhelmed by worries and fail to resolve the tasks in time. When such worries arise, they can be used constructively. All feelings at work are extremely important, not just fear or apprehensions. The feeling of success, for example, is one of satisfaction at work. Managers who have an increased level of emotional intelligence make the right, satisfying decisions for the team, using their emotions creatively. In order to perfect their thinking, they observe things objectively, they control their emotions, even if they are tempted to let themselves be led by them (Burcea & Sabie, 2020). Also, employees who have a high level of emotional intelligence, feel and know how to empathize with others. Thus, emotional intelligence is a key benchmark in working with people, and the skills of emotionally intelligent people, such as flexibility, conflict management, persuasion, and social reasoning, are becoming increasingly important and contribute to career development (Mandell). & Pherwani, 2003).

### **3. Research Questions/Aims of the research**

The aim of the research is to study the impact of emotional intelligence in the career development of public sector employees, the way in which emotional intelligence is a key factor in career advancement. The main point from which the research starts is that there are people who have outstanding professional results, due to the emotional intelligence skills with which they were born or which they have developed over time.

The research hypotheses are:

- H 1. There is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the career development of civil servants.
- H 2. The career development chances for a civil servant are higher, if his/her emotional intelligence level is above average.
- H 3. Emotional intelligence is the only key factor in the development of civil servants' careers.
- H 4. Employees with a low level of emotional intelligence will not advance more slowly in their career.

It is hypothesized that people with above-average emotional intelligence will be able to communicate effectively with citizens, and will get along better with co-workers, so that they will have better professional results. Also, for the purpose of the research it is necessary to observe a difference between people with below average emotional intelligence level and those with above average emotional intelligence level. Emotional intelligence is a distinctive ability and can lead to success for an employee in an organization.

#### **4. Research Methods**

In order to achieve this goal, we conducted a quantitative study, respectively, a questionnaire-based survey, allowing us to analyse the relationship between emotional intelligence and employee's career development, within the Bucharest District 2 City Hall. In order to establish the sample size, we worked in the conditions of the existence of a possibility to guarantee the results in proportion of 95%, with a margin of error of approximately +/- 3%. The questionnaire was distributed online to the employees of the Bucharest District 2 City Hall due to the physical restricted contact (COVID-19 pandemic) and was completed between May and June 2020 by 119 respondents. Following the processing of the database, 98 fully completed questionnaires were validated. The presented results are part of a larger research project.

#### **5. Findings**

In the first section we present demographic data, like: the gender of respondents, the age of employees, the last form of education completed, experience (tenure) in public service and the type of position held.

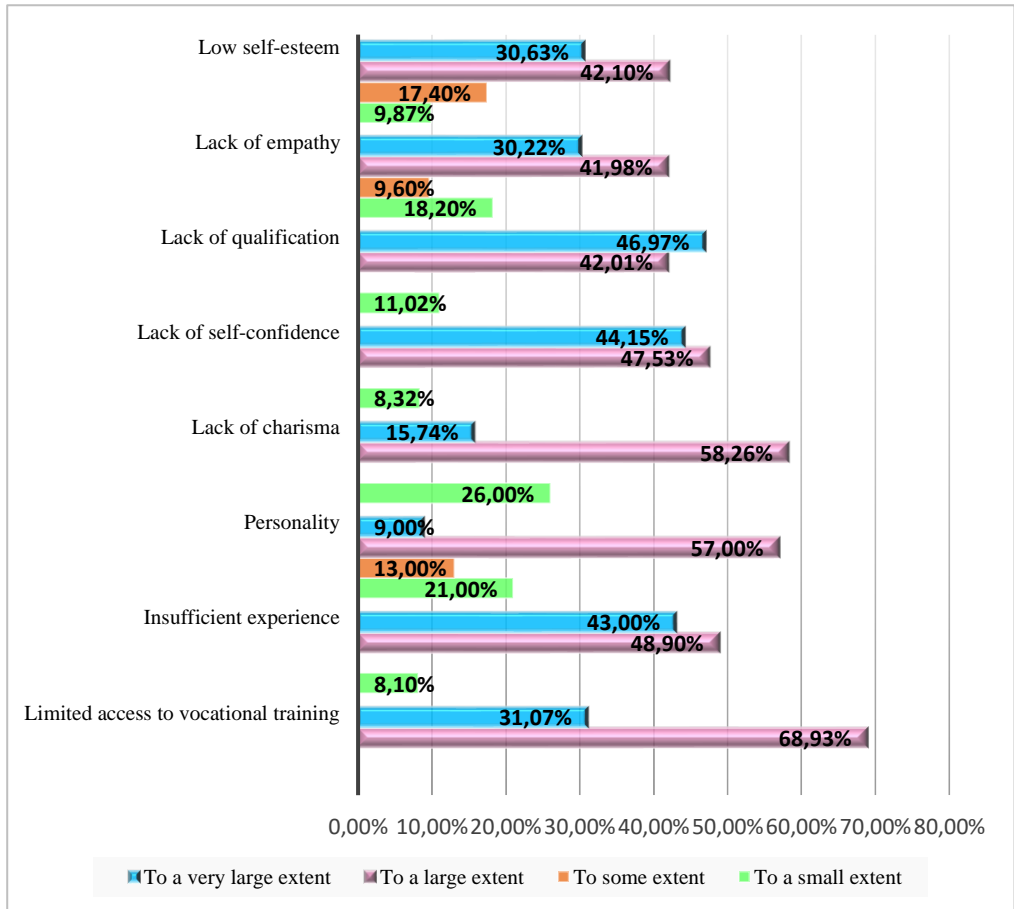
**Table 1. Main characteristics of the sample**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Men	25	25,51
	Women	73	74,41
<b>Age</b>	Under 30 years old	28	28,56
	Between 30 to 40 years old	43	43,88
	Between 40 to 50 years old	12	12,24
	More than 50 years old	15	15,31
<b>Education</b>	High school and professional	17	17,35
	Bachelor degree	51	52,04
	Master degree	26	26,53
	PhD and post-university	4	4,08
<b>Tenure in organization</b>	Under 5 years	15	15,31
	Between 5 to 10 year	41	41,84
	Between 10 to 15 years	26	26,53
	More than 15 years	16	16,33
<b>Position in organization</b>	Management level	17	17,35
	Non-management level	81	82,65

*Source:* our survey among 98 respondents, conducted in May – June 2020

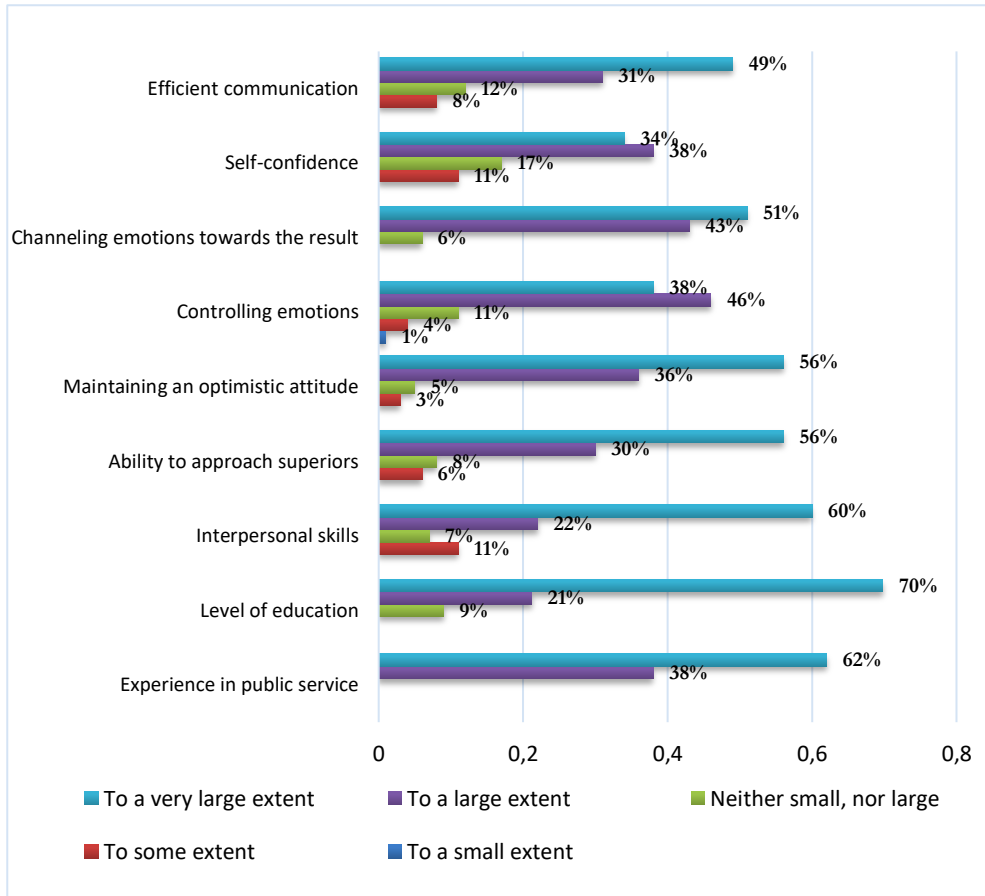
As it has been shown in Table 1, 26% of the respondents were men and 74% were women. In terms of age, 29% of respondents were under 30 years, 44% between 30 to 40 years, 12% between 40 to 50 years and 15% more than 50 years. In terms of tenure in organization, 15% of the respondents had under 5 years, 42% between 5 to 10 years, 27% between 10 to 15 years, 16% more than 15 years. In terms of education, 17% of the respondents held a high school diploma, 52% held a bachelor degree and 31% held master's degree and higher.

The second section presents data on a number of factors that can either be a barrier or a key element in the career development of civil servants.



**Figure 1. Factors that represent barriers in career development of public employee**  
 Source: our survey among 98 respondents, conducted in May – June 2020

In Figure 1 we see a number of factors such as: low self-esteem, lack of empathy or insufficient experience, factors that are an obstacle to career development or promotion. We will analyse each factor separately, to see to what extent civil servants consider these factors as barriers to the development of their careers. By low self-esteem, we understand the value we give each other and that comes from a flawed self-image. Most respondents stated that self-esteem is largely ( $\approx 73\%$ ) a barrier to career development, while only 10% granted little importance to this aspect. Lack of empathy, of the way in which we, as individuals, understand what those around us live, according to the respondents, represents, to a great and very great extent, a barrier in career development. Regarding the lack of qualification, it is very important, as over 88% of respondents stated that it is to a large and very large extent, an obstacle to career development. Self-confidence, along with charisma, are in the respondents' opinion important barriers to career development, but the biggest obstacles are limited experience and access to training.

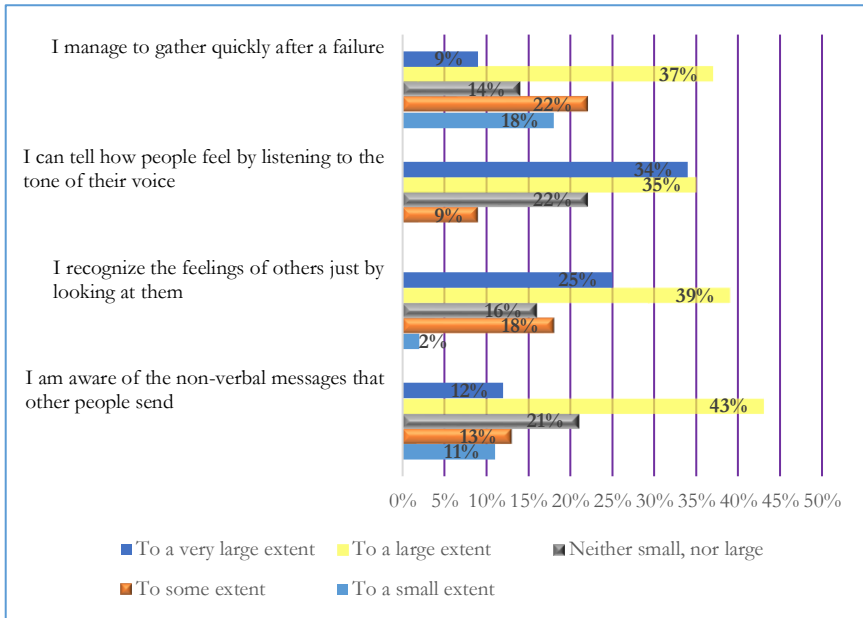


**Figure 2. Key elements in career development of public employee**  
 Source: our survey among 98 respondents, conducted in May – June 2020

In Figure 2 we present which are the factors of a successful career in civil servants’ opinion. Experience in the public service, along with the level of education, maintaining an optimistic attitude and channelling emotions towards the result are key factors that ensure success and contribute greatly to the development of civil servants’ career.

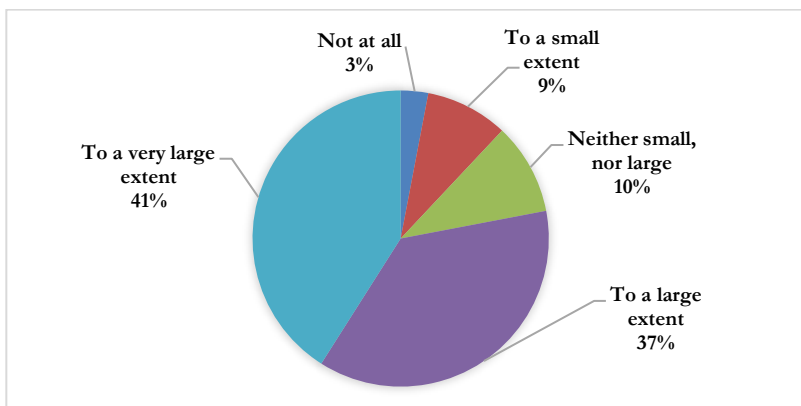
Next, we present the results regarding the respondents' perception about the role that emotional intelligence has in managing emotions, relationships between colleagues, but also whether or not it contributes to career development.





**Figure 3. Respondents' perception of managing emotions at work**  
 Source: our survey among 98 respondents, conducted in May – June 2020

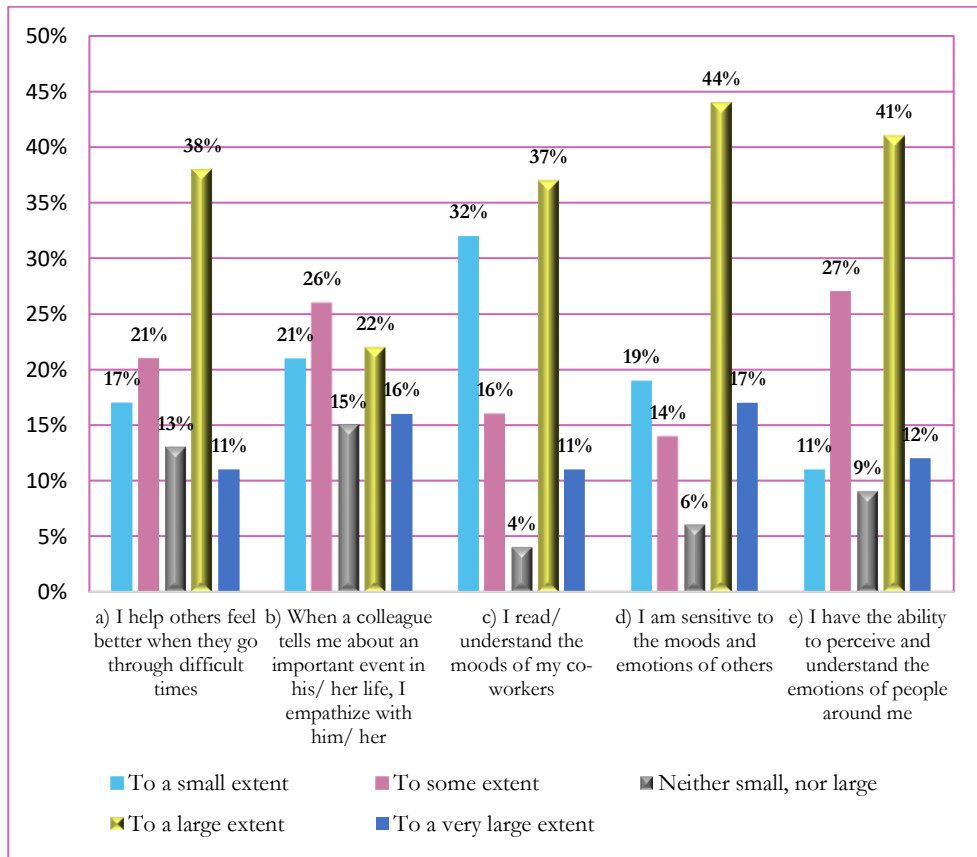
Figure 3 shows that more than half of Bucharest District 2 City Hall employees are aware to a large and very large extent of non-verbal messages sent by other people (55%), 64% of employees realize the feelings of work colleagues just by looking at them, and the majority of respondent employees (69%) said they can tell how people feel by listening to the tone of their voice. Less than half of the respondents (46%) stated that they have the ability to easily overcome a failure, most of them encountering difficulties.



**Figure 4. The extent to which the ability to effectively manage own emotions influences the career development of civil servants**

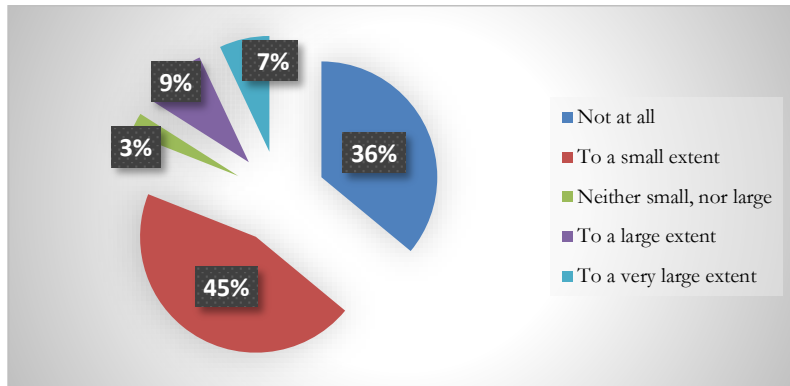
Source: our survey among 98 respondents, conducted in May – June 2020

Analysing Figure 4 we can observe that 78% of employees consider the ability to effectively manage their emotions as playing a significant role in career development. To the question "To what extent do you think the following statements about managing your own emotions at work suit you?" over 59% of the respondents answered that they fail to stay calm and relaxed at work, while about 41% manage their emotions at work to a large and very large extent. At the same time, they are not convinced that they will be able to solve their work tasks when they face emotional challenges. In general, when employees are in a negative situation, 31% of respondents said that to a large and very large extent they try to look for and carry out activities that make them happy, and only 43% listen carefully to all parties and analyse various aspects of the problem before concluding and adopting a certain decision or behaviour. The results presented above show that most respondents fail to effectively manage their emotions at work.



**Figure 5. The degree to which employees perceive and manage the emotions of co-workers**  
 Source: our survey among 98 respondents, conducted in May – June 2020

According to the results shown in Figure 5, we can make the following statements: over 61% of respondents are sensitive to the emotions and moods of others to a large and very large extent, 53% of employees believe that they have the ability to perceive and understand the emotions of others, and only 62% of respondents stated that they empathize with colleagues to a small and very small extent regarding the events in their lives.



**Figure 6. The degree to which the ability to understand the emotions of others influences career development**

*Source:* our survey among 98 respondents, conducted in May – June 2020

According to Figure 6, in respondents' opinion, the career development is influenced to a small extent by the ability to understand the emotions of those around them. Only 16% of employees said that this ability can greatly and very much influence their career. To the question "To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding the management of emotions in employment relationships?" employees answered that to a large and very large extent (60%), they tend to assume their own mistakes at work. At the same time, 30% of employees stated that they assume their mistakes to some extent, and 10% of them do not admit when they make mistakes.

In terms of accepting negative or constructive feedback, only 69% of respondents stated that they accept criticism to a large and very large extent. The rest of the employees appreciated that this statement suits them to a small extent, as they hardly accept criticism (23%), and only 8% of the employees accept negative feedback to some extent. Regarding the capacity for self-control in times of crisis, 22% of respondents consider that they have this capacity to a small extent, while 47% of respondents said that they fit the statement on managing negative moods to some extent. Of course, the percentage of 31% is represented by employees who manage, to a large and very large extent, to calm down quickly when they are upset or nervous.

## **6. Conclusions**

Following the interpretation of the results, we can conclude that the employees of the Bucharest District 2 City Hall have an average and slightly above average level of emotional intelligence, and consider this concept as a basic one in the development of their career. According to the data presented, we can say that in addition to the lack of aspects related to emotional intelligence, such as lack of empathy, charisma, personality, self-confidence, or low self-esteem, which are limits in their professional development, reduced access to vocational training is, to a much greater extent, an obstacle to the growth of employees from a professional point of view. Also, emotional intelligence alone cannot contribute to success, but it must be accompanied by cognitive intelligence and practical skills. Most respondents stated that the lack of qualification matters to a great extent when it comes to career promotion. Other key elements, which respondents considered to be important in career development, are related to both emotional intelligence and individual performance arising from professional/practical skills. Therefore, the respondents consider that, at the base of the career development, in order to be successful within the organization, a high level of education and a considerable work experience are needed. There are cases, however, in which employees met these criteria, turning it into personal goals, but they have not managed to develop their career until after a lot of effort. On the other hand, there are employees who, although they may not have a high level of education, have distinguished themselves through effective communication, maintaining a positive attitude, self-confidence, the ability to approach superiors and manage crisis situations.

All these aspects listed above are related to what emotional intelligence means and have in mind a good management of emotions in order to achieve a pre-established result. Most employees believe that the ability to manage your emotions at work influences professional activity and career advancement to some extent.

Given the above, we can conclude that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and career development of public service employees. Thus, hypothesis 1 according to which there is a positive relationship between IE and the career development of civil servants was confirmed. The relationship is not significant, as the training of civil servants and experience prevail.

Hypothesis 2 was confirmed, as most employees have an average and above average level of emotional intelligence, managing to develop their career also due to IE skills, not only because of the training and experience gained.

Hypothesis 3 which states that IE is the only key factor in the development of civil servants' careers has been rejected, because emotional intelligence is just a trait that helps them advance in their careers. Along with IE, career development of public employees provides the following requirements: demonstration of the set of professional skills required by the job, the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and practical skills necessary for public office, respectively, seniority in the specialty of studies necessary for public office.

Hypothesis 4 was confirmed by the fact that employees' practical skills and cognitive intelligence help them advance in their careers at some point, but the

factor that differentiates between two competent and well-trained employees is emotional intelligence, the trait that turns a simple employee into a leader, even though informal.

The main research limits of this study are related to the respondents' number, their mental discomfort created by the external situation caused by the globally declared pandemic with COVID-19 and the disproportion given by the type of respondents (man and women).

The present study contributes to previous research, reaffirming the way in which emotional intelligence increases the confidence of public sector employees in their own strength to cope with different situations (especially political decisions and changes). Therefore, we can conclude that emotional intelligence adds value to human resource professionals, who are constantly looking for ways to advance their practice.

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