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**Leadership and project success  
in development sector**

DOI: 10.22367/jem.2017.30.01

Accepted by Editor Ewa Ziemba | Received: June 2, 2017 | Revised: August 1, 2017; September 13, 2017; October 30, 2017 | Accepted: October 31, 2017.

**Abstract**

**Aim/purpose** – The study aims to investigate the relationship among the leadership, operational efficiency and project success in general and the impact of transformational leadership and operational efficiency on project success in particular.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Mean comparison from descriptive statistics and multiple linear regression from inferential statistics was used to determine the association between variables and further impact of the transformational leadership and operational efficiency on project success in the development sector. The paper presents the results of a survey conducted among 200 employees from the top, middle & lower management levels of various national & international development organizations working in Pakistan like Microfinance Banks and other Rural Support Programs. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to process data.

**Findings** – The result shows positive association among transformational leadership, operational efficiency and project success. In addition, it was found that transformational leadership and operational efficiency have a positive and statistically significant impact on the project success. It is concluded that both transformational leadership and operational efficiency are vital to achieving the optimum level of success in any project, especially in the development sector.

**Research implications/limitations** – The integral limitation of the study was the respondents because most of the development organizations have their operations in rural areas where access was difficult because of limited time and resources. In addition, such organizations are always reluctant to provide survey feedback.

**Originality/value/contribution** – The paper contribution is in the theoretical and practical knowledge of the project success factors in the development sector which is

still a somehow unexplored area. Regulators of the development sector may be benefited from this study.

**Keywords:** multiple linear regression, development sector, project success.

**JEL Classification:** M10, L31, M21.

## 1. Introduction

Many small and big organizations are working in the world to help deprived people and help them in the availability of food, shelter, medicine, education and clean water, etc. Many newly founded organizations are speedily progressing than many other old organizations and securing good funding. Research shows that it is because of true leadership. Project leaders are the ones who select the projects, implement and run by the project teams. Thus project teams should be the right teams who can put the projects on track of success [Heeralall 2013]. Turner & Müller [2005] reviewed the contribution of project manager competency and leadership style to project success and concluded that literature has ignored the impact of leadership on the project success.

Here, it is important to define project and project management. Wysocki & McGary [2003, p. 3] defined a project as “[...] a sequence of unique, complex, and connected activities having one goal or purpose that must be completed by a specific time, within budget, and according to the specifications”. Another definition of project and project management given by Munns & Bjeirmi [1996, p. 81] is that: “[...] a project can be considered to achieve a specific objective, which involves a series of activities and tasks which consume resources. On the other hand, project management is the process of controlling the achievement of project objectives”. In addition, controlling and management is directly associated with the operational efficiency of the organization.

Operational efficiency shows the capacity or ability of the organization to deliver the product or service to the end consumer in time and better quality. Bassem [2008, p. 344] presented a definition of operational efficiency of development organizations, particularly microfinance institutions (MFIs): “[...] it refers to how well MFIs allocate the input resources such as asset, subsidies, and personnel to produce output calculated in terms of a loan portfolio and poverty outreach. Most of the development sector organizations usually work in the most vulnerable areas. Therefore, it is quite important for these organizations to ensure their operational muscle in order to be responsive and effective”.

To develop the operational capacity, link with local community and government is of vital importance. The failure in operations occurs either because of

internal failures like unskilled human resource, unstable communication system, undefined processes, etc., or external factors like government regulations, community disagreement, etc., e.g. polio vaccine delivery teams have been attacked several times in different areas in Pakistan. These organizations need leaders equipped with better skills who could lead successfully to achieve the sole purpose of development. The imbalance between leadership and operational efficiency of an organization hinders its performance or projects success.

In addition, project success is also perceived in different ways by the project teams and management. Shenhar et al. [2001] explains that most commonly, it is perceived and understood that project success means the completion of a project on time, within budget and the short-run success of a business. Another writer investigated and mentioned; project success means client satisfaction and customer welfare. He also explains that there are two types of projects; operationally managed projects and strategically managed projects. First one is normally focused on getting the job done in time and in the budget while the other one focuses on business success and achievement of market share.

The main objective of the paper is to analyze the association between the variables as well as determine the impact of leadership on project success. Turner & Müller [2005] reviewed the contribution of project manager competency and leadership style to project success and concluded that literature has ignored the impact of leadership on the project success. In addition, it envisages highlighting and presenting the importance of operations efficiency in project success as most of the organizations are not focusing on it.

The paper is aligned as follows: In the first section, the purpose and a brief introduction of leadership and project success is included. Second and third sections comprise the prior research related to the topic, hypotheses and research methodology detailing about the variables, association among them, population and sampling. The fourth section presents the results and further discussion. Section five explains the conclusions as well as presents recommendations.

## 2. Literature review

Rao [2014] reviewed book *Soft skills for strong leaders* written by H. Isacke; she describes that it has been seen that sometimes the lack of emotional intelligence and traits of self-esteem can derail the most knowledgeable leaders. In addition, she also mentioned that leader's lack of communication in most of the organizations has been observed from the managers and teams. Related to the traits of successful leaders, different kind of theories prevail and base on differ-

ent criteria. Most prominent are eight leadership theories which are called Relationship, Behavioural, Participation, Management, Situation, Contingency, Trait and Great Man Theory. These theories differ on the basis of functions or inner qualities. It is because of the wider scope of leadership concept which covers political, individual and organizational side as well.

Pearce [2015] examined the creation of leaders through teachers learning and leadership programs. He found that leadership skills can be learned through mentoring, training and leadership programs. Yang, Huang, & Wu [2010] analyzed the association among the leadership style, teamwork and project success. The basic aim was to measure whether the impact of teamwork on project performance is moderated by the following factors: installation cost, owner regulation, initial site, team size, project type and international involvement. Müller & Turner [2007] measured the effect of project managers on the project success criteria and project type association with project success. It was found that the project success criteria and project success differ by project complexity, age and project manager's nationality.

Jiang [2014] explored the leadership style and its relationship with project success. He found that although the project managers are really included in the project success factors, leadership style also helps the project to be successful in different ways like collaboration in teamwork, management of source and communication with subordinates and clients. Feger & Thomas [2012] concluded that there is no leadership style which is fit for all projects. It is because of the uniqueness of each project and specific environment. Geoghegan & Dulewicz [2008] analyzed and found that although increased competencies of leadership increase the chances of success of the project, leadership style also has an impact on the project's success. Bass & Avolio [2000] developed the multifactor leadership questionnaire in order to assess the competencies and found that transformational leadership has a significantly greater impact on the organization than transactional.

### **Hypothesis 01**

$H_0$  = There is no statistically significant association between transformational leadership and project success.

$H_1$  = There is a statistically significant association between transformational leadership and project success.

Efficiency, in Microfinance Institutions (MFIs), refers to how well the allocation of input resources such as assets, subsidies, and personnel to produce output is calculated in terms of the loan portfolio and poverty outreach [Bassem

2008]. Therefore, there are two sides of efficiency; input and output. Operational efficiency may also be an examination of how well banks combine their resources to support the largest possible number of transactions at lower costs [Sherman 1985].

Kaplan [1999] expressed that any non-governmental organization (NGO) which does not have competent working comprehension is inefficient or ineffective regardless of how many other skills and capabilities it has. Basharat, Arshad & Khan [2014] asserts that factors which drive efficiency are the size of a firm, interest rate, growth rate, peer group, and members of the loan per staff. In research, it is most widely assumed that operational efficiency is the input of resources like personnel, technology, etc., and the output measured in terms of services provided like number of people served, number of transactions processed, etc. [Soteriou & Zenios 1999].

Undoubtedly, from the input side, the availability and deployment of the right people on the right job is very important to achieve the optimum level of output. Heeralall [2013] explains in her write-up that if there is something appropriate which can tilt the scale of success of a project, it is the working team. If the team is not developed with proper care then all other efforts or capabilities of the organization are useless. Ika, Diallo & Thuillier [2011] investigated and found that the most prominent critical success factors for project supervisors are design and monitoring. He recommended that project supervisors should strengthen project design, monitoring and implementation afterwards which can enhance the likelihood of project success. Another researcher added that most of the work in the bank projects fails just because of the managerial and organizational reasons. Thus about 39% projects of the World Bank were unsuccessful in 2010 [Duponchel, Chauvet & Collier 2010] whereas previously, this figure was about 50% in Africa. Diallo & Thuiller [2005] found that there are two factors which affect the level of success in World Bank projects; communication and trust.

Li [2007] studied the role of information technology in the operating cost and the operational efficiency in the banking sector. It was believed that the information technology can reduce the operational cost. It was found the inefficiencies are prevailing because of either overuse of technology or less investment in the information technology. Diallo & Thuillier [2005] found that project success is linked with the communication and cooperation between the stakeholders. In addition, results show that trust between the task manager and the coordinator is important for project success.

### Hypothesis 02

$H_0$  = There is no statistical significant association between operational efficiency and project success.

$H_1$  = There is a statistically significant association between operational efficiency and project success.

Ofori [2013] added that the success of projects lies on upper-level management support, strong communication, project purpose, and goals and stakeholder involvement. Boyer, Creech, & Paas [2008, p. 4] conducted research to explore the critical success factors and evaluated that there are eight critical success factors: “[...] leadership, partnerships, proof, and clarity of innovative concept, business planning and marketing, triple bottom line planning, short and long-term benefits management, community engagement, and risk management”.

Müller, Geraldi, & Turner [2012] assessed the relationship between the project manager competencies and project success by the moderating effect of project complexity. The managerial competencies: intellectual, emotional and managerial. Results show that the intellectual and managerial skills are correlated with the project success. The complexity of interaction has a direct effect on project success. Gemünden, Salomo & Krieger [2005] documented in his manuscript that for the success of a project; structured autonomy is important but it is not a sufficient condition for the project success. Resource autonomy is not possible because projects require sufficient resources to survive.

### 3. Research methodology

Association among two independent variables: transformational leadership & operational efficiency and one dependent variable: project success is established below in Figure 1.

**Figure1.** Relationship among variables



Table 1 shows the major variables and their dimensions like Transformational leadership is the main variable while leadership style and intellectual competencies are considered as dimensions. Dimensions are developed according to the definition of the variables and the purpose/role of the variables. Operational efficiency is the main variable which comprises the human resource, community involvement, communication and monitoring and evaluation. Likewise, project success is the variable which includes project objectives, client satisfaction, time/cost and future benefits to the organization are the dimensions. Although, major variables have many sub-variables but here only the most strategic dimensions have been considered according to the country circumstances.

**Table 1.** Dependent and independent variables with their sub-variables

Transformational leadership	Operational efficiency	Project success
Leadership style	Human resource	Project objectives
Intellectual competencies	Community involvement	Client satisfaction
–	Communication	Time/Cost
–	Monitoring and evaluation	Future benefits

Primary data used which was collected through standardized data collection tool “Questionnaire”. The questionnaire was developed by combining different questionnaires which were used for a high-quality research related to our selected variables. The 5-point Likert scale used as response categories ranging from 1-5 related to strongly disagree to strongly agree respectively. In other words; as the number will increase, the level of disagreement will decrease and level of agreement will increase. Questionnaires were distributed among the following selected development Organizations like Society for Human Rights and Prisoner’s (SHARP), National Rural Support Program (NRSP), International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC), Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC), Khushhali Bank Limited (KHBL), Pak Oman Microfinance Bank Limited (POMB). Convenient sampling was used due to the limited time and resources. Those organizations were selected from the population groups which have offices in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and near to these cities. From the selected organizations, 200 employees were selected; comprising project Managers, Assistant Managers, Supervisors, and project coordinators

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to process the collected primary data. From the descriptive statistics, the mean comparison was used to compare the results among the population groups. From inferential statistics Cronbach’s ( $\alpha$ ) Alpha-Internal consistency measure used to assess the internal consistency or reliability of the instrument then multiple linear regression was used to find out the correlation and impact of independent variables on the dependent variable.

## 4. Research findings

### 4.1. Response description

Total response size was 188 (94%) consisting of 69 males, which is 37.10%, and 119 females, which is 62.90% of the total response size. It also shows that in the development sector percentage of female workers is more than the male workers. Total organizations were six which are as follows: (SHARP), (NRSP), (ICMC), (BRAC), (KHB), and (POMB). Out of total 200, 188 respondents who responded were as follows with their respective weightage; 8 respondents responded from SHARP which is 4.30%, 8 responses came from NRSP which is 4.30%, 22 are from ICMC which is about 11.83%, 34 are from BRAC which is about 18.28%, again 34 are from KHB which is 18.28% and 80 are from POMB which is about 43.01% of the total response.

Two types of organizations; private and public were selected. From the public organizations; 42 people responded which is 22.58% while 144 people responded from the private organization which is about 77.42%. Related to budget, response categories were sufficient, insufficient and others. 124 respondents (66.67%) responded that the budget is sufficient while 56 (30.11%) respondents responded that the budget is insufficient, but some of the respondents were either not sure or have not any idea. Six Different categories of area of operations were involved and the responses were as follows; General affairs were clicked by 45 (4.19%) respondents, 32 responses of personnel/training and finance/fundraising each, 2 responses of project planning, 47 responses of project management and 28 (15.05%) respondents clicked others.

### 4.2. Descriptive analysis

Descriptive statistics describe the properties of the data or characteristics of the respondents. The researchers used mean and standard deviation from the measure of variation or central tendency. The mean and standard deviation values for all the variables are almost consistent (Table 2). It means the variation among the variables is very small which show that the data is streamlined and normal.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics

Variables	N	Maximum	Minimum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Operational efficiency	186	2.60	5.00	3.67	0.64
Project success	186	1.86	4.71	3.55	0.62
Transformational leadership	186	2.38	4.67	3.48	0.59
Valid N (list wise)	186	–	–	–	–

Reliability elaborates about the measuring instrument – questionnaire that whether the questions made and the questionnaire developed measures the purpose for which it was developed. Here, Cronbach's Alpha which is a measure of internal consistency was used to calculate the reliability. Its value varies between 0-1, but experts say that if its value is about .70 or more then it is better. Table 3 shows that the value of the alpha related to all three variables in case of Transformational leadership it is .90, with respect to operational efficiency it is .84 while the value of alpha is .73 in case of project success. Therefore, we conclude that the questionnaire was good and reliable.

**Table 3.** Reliability statistics

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Operational efficiency	0.90	36
Project success	0.84	17
Transformational leadership	0.73	8

Table 4 shows the relationship between the variables which is measured through Pearson correlation significance (level 2 tailed). The values show that the relationship between the variables is linear because the significance value is less than the p-value ( $P < .005$ ).

**Table 4.** Correlation

Variables	Operational efficiency	Project success	Transformational leadership
Operational efficiency	–	**0.321	**0.415
Project success		–	**0.401
Transformational leadership			–

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### 4.3. Regression

In this research; multiple linear regression was used because we have two independent variables and one dependent variable. The purpose is to predict the value of the criterion by two predictors. The regression equation will be like:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where:

Y = Dependent Variable which is project success;

$\beta_0$  = Slope intercept;

$\beta_1$  = Regression coefficient of first variable;

$x_1$  = First independent variable which is transformational leadership;

$\beta_2$  = Regression coefficient of second variable;

$x_2$  = Second independent variable which is operational efficiency;

$\varepsilon$  = Error term.

Following Table 5 shows the value of R which is .435. It is a proportion of the variation in the dependent variable because of the independent variables. In third column value of R-Square is .189 which explains the intensity of the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable. In other words, if there is variation in the independent variable by 1% then the dependent variable will take affect up to 19%. Here we can also see how well the model fits the data. We can explain this with the help of standard error of the estimates which shows the distance of the observed values from the regression line. The small values are good because they fall close to the regression line. Here, the value of the standard error of regression or estimates is .564.

**Table 5.** Model summary<sup>a</sup>

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.435 <sup>b</sup>	0.189	0.18	0.564

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Project success.

<sup>b</sup> Predictors: (Constant), Operational efficiency, Leadership.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is shown in Table 6. Value of F is given here which again explains the model fitting to the data. Here, value of F is 21.369 and significance is .000, i.e.  $F [2,183] = P < .005$ . It means that model is a good fit to the data.

**Table 6.** Analysis of variance (ANOVA<sup>a</sup>)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	13.612	2	6.806	21.369	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	58.287	183	0.319		
Total	71.899	185			

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Project success.

<sup>b</sup> Predictors: (Constant), Operational efficiency, Leadership.

**Table 7.** Regression Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	1.685	0.291	-	5.787	0.000
Transformational leadership	0.344	0.078	0.323	4.418	0.000
Operational efficiency	0.182	0.071	0.187	2.552	0.012

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Project success.

Here, by putting the values from Table 7, the regression equation is:

$$Y = 1.68 + 0.34x_1 + 0.18x_2 + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

Therefore,

$$\text{Project success} = 1.68 + 0.34 * \text{leadership} + 0.18 * \text{operational efficiency} + \varepsilon$$

Results of multiple linear regression are shown in Table 7. According to results shown in Table 4, there is a positive significant relationship between the transformational leadership and project success as the value p is less than .005. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) that there is no significant relationship between transformational leadership and project success. We accept the alternate hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) that there is a positive and significant relationship between variables. In Table 7, the regression coefficient related to transformational leadership is .344 which is significant because the value of significance is less than p-value (p < .05). It means that 34.4% of the variation effect is taken by project success from the variation in the transformational leadership.

Results also show that the association between operational efficiency and project success is positive and significant as p < .05. Therefore; null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted that there is a statistical positive association between operational efficiency and project success. In Table 7, the Beta coefficient for operational efficiency is .182 which is positive and significant. It shows that with an increase in the level of operational efficiency of the organization, success level of the project will also increase by about 18.2%.

## 5. Discussion

This study shows positive and significant association among the variables. In addition, the transformational leadership and operational efficiency have a significant role in achieving the optimum level of success in any project. We could not find any single leadership style which could serve the purpose for all the projects. According to Feger & Thomas [2012], there is no leadership style which is fit for all projects. Unfortunately, we have seen that practically this is being considered during the selection of the project managers which is not good. Moreover, it is considered that one project manager can handle all ongoing and different kinds of projects. We believe this is one of the reasons of low success rate in the development sector.

Projects vary on their specific associated factors like working environment, culture, deliverables and organization. The requirement of a specific manager is

due to the uniqueness of each project and specific environment. A greater set of skills equipped by the manager will be incredible for good management and achievement of better results. Geoghegan & Dulewicz [2008] analyzed and found that increased competencies of leadership increases the chances of success of the project but leadership style also has an impact on the project success. Bass & Avolio [2000] developed the multifactor leadership questionnaire in order to assess the competencies and found that transformational leadership has greater significant impact on organization than transactional.

In addition, especially in the development sector; organizations are trying to enhance their operational capacities through information technology in order to increase social performance as well as to take cost reduction benefits. According to Li [2007], information technology can reduce the operational cost. It was found that the inefficiencies are prevailing because of either overuse of technology or less investment in the information technology. Moreover, results show that trust between the task manager and the coordinator is important for project success.

## 6. Conclusions

Project success was the dependent variable while transformational leadership and operational efficiency were the independent variables. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of the instrument. We concluded that the instrument was reliable ( $\alpha = .935$ ). Descriptive statistics also showed that there was not much variation in the mean and standard deviation values. Pearson correlation results show that there was statistically significant and linear relationship among the variables. As Bass & Avolio [2000] developed the multifactor transformational leadership questionnaire in order to assess the competencies. He found transformational leadership has a greater significant impact on the organization than transactional leadership. Multiple regression showed the intensity of impact of the independent variables on the dependent variables. In other words, how much variation happens in the criterion variable with the change in the predictors? The regression coefficients (beta) showed that the impact of the transformational leadership and operational efficiency has a positive and significant impact on project success. The beta value for transformational leadership and operational efficiency was .344 and .182, respectively at P value less than .05 ( $P < .05$ ) and value for the project success is 1.685. Thus, we conclude that while the true selection of transformational leadership is very important to grab the optimum level of success in any project, operational efficien-

cy of the organization is also vital. If an organization hires true leaders with the best education, knowledge, experience, and project planning, but the operational efficiency side like skilled and experienced human resource, monitoring and evaluation, community involvement, etc., is weak then it is difficult to achieve the expected level of performance/success. Although there are so many other factors which affect the success level, but according to our findings, transformational leadership and operational efficiency and balance with other forces is vital to make any project successful especially in the development sector as the level of vulnerability is always quite uncertain.

On the basis of our results it is recommended that:

- Define the project clearly and then hire the relevant leader, who could be the project manager, and the other staff.
- Very clearly, assess the operational strength of the organization and take actions accordingly. If up gradation is needed then, before launching the project, measure the available resources and enhance the operational capacity of the organization.
- Before launching the project; make sure the organization does have a backup plan in case any unexpected incident happens.
- Make sure the engagement of local community and ties with other local departments to implement the project and afterwards (especially for the NGO's).
- Develop a monitoring team which will monitor the progress of the project on the set dates and predict the occurrence of any event in near future which may probably affect the project.
- Develop mitigation strategies in order to cover the risk or to deal with the unexpected happenings.
- Make sure that the communication lines among the departments are clear. The flow of power is properly defined and understood by every personnel in every department.
- Do not focus much on the budget limits, but keep focusing on the delivery of the deliverables.

Further efforts are important to explore the project success especially in the context of development sector as it is a vulnerable area and its impact on the society is remarkable. The researchers may try to overcome the limitations and can come up with better results which would really help the sector managers to achieve the optimum success level. They can also contribute significantly in poverty reduction based on success stories.

## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the cooperation of the officials of all organizations, contacted to get response. We appreciate their efforts and professional conduct as it is quite difficult when privacy is required. In addition, we are obliged of everyone who supported us to conduct this research.

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