

Impact of Project Managers' Leadership Practices on Project Success in NGOs: Evidence from Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of project managers' leadership and management on the success of the projects in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in Nangarhar, Afghanistan. Data were gathered from 246 male staff (programmatic and administrative) using a structured questionnaire. The findings showed leadership practices had a positive and significant relationship with project success. A Spearman correlation coefficient value of 0.68, with the associated p value of < 0.01 , showed a statistically significant relationship between enhanced leadership behaviors and project outcomes, suggesting that positive leadership behaviors (empowering employees, fostering trust, encouraging collaboration) are related to better project results. Further, this result was confirmed by regression analysis where the unstandardized coefficient of $B = 0.083$ and p value = 0.015 indicated that leadership practices have a significant prediction to project success. Model performance accounted for 42.2% of the variance in project performance ($R^2 = 0.422$), indicating the significant influence of leadership in practice on project performance. The ANOVA results were ($F = 930.22$, $p = 0.023$) which confirmed the robust and significant regression model. Moreover, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of the instruments (0.90 for leadership practices and 0.90 for project outcomes) indicated a very high internal consistency, implying high instrument reliability. The results support the alternative hypothesis (H_1) and reject the null (H_0) hypothesis, which means that effective leadership is a very important success factor for a project. The study reinforces existing literature that highlights the significance of supportive communication, empowerment of staff, participative management to improve performance in NGOs. The findings indicate that leadership capabilities need to be enhanced within the organizations of Nangarhar to achieve greater success with projects, higher employee engagement, and greater organizational effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: Project Managers, Project Success, NGOs, Nangarhar, Afghanistan

1. INTRODUCTION

In Afghanistan, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are key actors in humanitarian and development interventions, especially in provinces like Nangarhar where institutional capacity of the Government is still weak. NGOs deliver vital services in the fields of education, health, livelihoods and emergency response, where the impact of their projects on the resilience of the local community and socio-economic stability is crucial (World Bank, 2023). But the factors that affect the success of projects in Afghan NGOs have not yet been studied at the provincial level.

Project managers play a key role in the achievement of project objectives, as they are responsible for planning, resource allocation, coordination, risk management, and monitoring, within the constraints of time, cost and quality (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2021). However, in fragile and conflict affected countries like Afghanistan, project implementation becomes further complicated due to lack of security, donors compliance requirements, institutional weaknesses, and infrastructural constraints (UNDP, 2022). In such environment, leadership practices in particular as transformational, transactional and adaptive leadership behaviors can significantly affect the performance of the team, coordination of the stakeholders and the success of the project. Empirical research in recent years has also shown that, besides communication and managerial adaptation, leadership competence is a key factor determining project outcomes (Ali et al., 2022; Müller et al., 2023). However, there is a lack of quantitative research to systematically analyse how and whether the skills required by a leader in an NGO—planning, budgeting and stakeholder engagement skills (People in Need [PIN] 2024)—are translated into measurable indicators of project success in Afghanistan. The lack of stability or uncertainty in Nangarhar Province, frequent turnover of staff, and administrative bottlenecks are also hindering implementation efforts in this province (Pajhwok Afghan News, 2021).

Although the number of NGOs working in Afghanistan is increasing, there is not enough empirical evidence of the role of project managers' leadership and decision-making in project success in NGOs working in the Nangarhar Province. Although project management literature recognizes leadership as a key competence in project management, there are not many quantitative studies that measure the impact of leadership in fragile and conflict affected provinces. The distance reduces the possibility of evidence-based managerial improvement and policy formulation in implementing the project of NGOs in the region.

Hence, this study makes an attempt to quantitatively analyze the effect of project managers' leadership on project success in NGOs of Nangarhar Province. This study empirically tests the relationship between leadership behaviours and project performance outcomes, which not only helps to inform practices for managing NGOs, but also also provides insights which can advance the project management literature in FCAS.

1.1 Research Problem

Project managers with professional competencies, experience and leadership are a key factor in the success of development projects. In Nangarhar province of Afghanistan, there are numerous NGOs that are working on various development projects in challenging social, economic and cultural contexts. Project managers play a pivotal role in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a project, but little academic research has focused on how project managers influence project success in this context.

Several projects have not reached objectives and/or have been completed less than as scheduled and budgeted, indicating potential project management issues. So, the purpose of this study is to explore the role of project manager skills, decision making power and leadership style in the success of the development project of NGOs in Nangarhar province. The results will yield a theoretical analysis and practical suggestions for the benefits of the projects.

1.2 Main Objective

To explore how project managers' leadership behaviors affect project success in NGO projects in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan.

1.2.1 Sub- Objectives

- To evaluate the leadership practices of project managers in NGO working in Nangarhar Province.
- To measure the key success factors of the project (time, cost, quality and stakeholder satisfaction).
- To explore the link between project managers' leadership behaviours and their project success.
- To identify the extent of the predictability of project success outcomes by the leadership practices.

1.3 Research Question

How do project managers' leadership behavior influence the success of projects in NGOs in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan?

1.3.1 Sub-Research Questions

- What leadership practices are used by the project managers in NGO in Nangarhar Province?
- What are the key project success indicators achieved by NGOs in Nangarhar Province?
- Does the relationship of project managers' leadership practices with project success exist significantly?
- How well do project managers' leadership practices forecast project success outcomes?

1.4 Significance of the Research

This study is important because it focuses on the role of project managers in the NGOs working in Nangarhar province where the key determinants of project success or failure are not well examined. It explores various aspects of project manager related to planning, implementation, and monitoring to determine the crucial issues that need to be addressed to enhance project performance.

In addition, the conclusions and recommendations will offer practical and academic guidance for the project management capacity and effectiveness of NGO leaders, policy makers and practitioners. The study will also be a reference for future studies as well as contribute to the scarce literature on project management in Afghanistan.

1.5 Research Hypothesis

H1: The project management leadership practices are statistically significant in improving the success of projects in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan.

H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between project managers' practices of leadership and the success of the project in NGOs working in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Project Management and Project Success

Project management has become a field of study recognized worldwide, offering a set of frameworks and processes to plan, execute, track, and complete projects efficiently (Kerzner, 2017). For development actors, especially the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the project management is regarded as a critical tool that contributes to the success of the project in meeting its desired goals within limited resources and fragile environment (PMI, 2021). The role of project management in project success is clear, the effective project management works to balance out the “triple constraints” of time, cost, and quality, ensure stakeholder satisfaction and ensure long-term sustainability (Atkinson 1999).

2.2 Defining Project Management

According to PMI (2021, p. 10) project management is defined as, “The application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to project activities in order to meet project requirements”. It is a systematic process where the resources are planned, organized, directed and controlled to attain desired objectives within stipulated constraints (Lock, 2020). Project management in the NGO sector is more complicated due to the extra requirements of social and donor compliance, accountability, transparency and social impact rather than financial profitability (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005).

2.3 Project Success

Project success has been a topic of much debate in the literature. The "iron triangle" (time, cost and quality) was traditionally used to measure success (Atkinson, 1999). But recent research indicates that success in a project is multi-faceted and is to be measured across different dimensions, such as stakeholder satisfaction, strategic project outcomes, and benefits to the community in the long term (Müller & Jugdev, 2012).

Some of the criteria of a successful project are:

- Efficiency: Getting the project done on time and within budget (Shenhar et al., 2001).
- Effectiveness: Achievement of project goals and donor needs.
- Stakeholder Satisfaction: Making sure that the project is considered successful by the beneficiaries, donors and implementing partners (Davis, 2014).
- Sustainability: The project's ability to produce results after it is finished (Ikea, 2009).

2.4 Project Management to Project Success

Project management practices and the probability of project success are closely related. Research shows that a structured project management process, such as a project plan, risk management, stakeholder management, and monitoring, increases the chances for attaining project goals (Turner & Müller, 2005). Project success, for NGOs, is not only about results and outputs but also about being accountable to donors and having a positive social impact on communities (Crawford et al., 2014).

Some examples of this include the low rate of success in development projects in fragile states related to poor project management practices, insufficient context responsiveness and poor stakeholder engagement (Ikea, 2012). On the other hand, the use of the standardized project management paradigm like the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) or Logical Framework Approach (LFA) by NGOs leads to increased efficiency and sustainability (Khang & Moe, 2008).

2.5 Challenges in Measuring Project Success in NGOs

Notwithstanding the project management being recognised as one of the success factors, the difficulty of measuring success in NGOs is still a challenge due to the fact that many projects in NGO work are aimed at intangible results like empowerment, capacity building or social change (Diallo & Thuillier, 2004). Further, in nations such as Afghanistan, the security and political instability create uncertainties that hinder project goals (Barakat et al., 2018). Project managers in NGOs need to therefore tailor their approaches to meet local needs and expectations, all while keeping donors happy.

2.6 Role of Project Managers

Project managers are key to the success of any project, especially in situations with significant resources and complexity like NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in Afghanistan. They are not just administrative people but are strategic leaders, communicators and decision makers who guide the project throughout its initiation to closure phase (Turner & Müller, 2005). The role of the project manager directly affects project results, project stakeholders' satisfaction, and organizational performance (Kerzner, 2017).

2.7 Challenges of Project Management in NGOs

Project managers in the NGO environment are confronted with a series of challenges that have their own distinct characteristics and that directly impact on their job and effectiveness in the organization.

1. Resource constraints may prevent project implementation, including limited budgets, reliance on donor funds and the lack of skilled personnel (Khang & Moe, 2008).
2. Complex Stakeholder Environment: Oftentimes, negotiating, diplomacing, and consensus building with donors, communities, and government agencies are required in order to manage expectations (Crawford et al., 2014).
3. Pressure on project managers in NGOs, ranging from donors to the media, is constantly increasing for NGOs to prove impact, compliance, and ethical practices, namely through accountability and transparency requirements (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005).
4. Security & Political Instability: Projects in politically unstable areas are subject to breakdown as a result of political and security risks, or regulatory changes (Barakat et al., 2018).

2.8 Project Success Models

Project success has been defined in various ways. Traditional models emphasized the “iron triangle” of time, cost and quality (Atkinson, 1999). However, modern models take a multi-dimensional approach to success and incorporate the following factors:

- Efficiency: On schedule and budget (Shenhar et al., 2001)
- Effectiveness: Achievement of project objectives (Müller & Jugdev, 2012)
- Stakeholder Satisfaction: Fulfilling the expectations of the donor, beneficiary and partner (Davis, 2014).
- Sustainability – long-term impact and benefits to the community (Ikea, 2009)

The Project Manager is at the heart of attaining these dimensions. According to Turner & Müller (2005) the leadership style, decision making and technical skills have a direct influence on a project's success criteria.

2.10 Conceptual Framework Diagram

The conceptual framework shows the relationship between Project Manager's Role (independent variable) and Project Success (dependent variable). The independent variable will consist of several key leadership factors, such as Transformational Leadership (inspiring, motivating, and building relationships), Transactional Leadership (planning, execution of tasks, and procedural compliance), and Adaptive Leadership (flexibility in decision making and problem solving). Project Success (dependent variable) is measured by its major components: Time, Cost, Quality, Stakeholder Satisfaction and Compliance & Objectives Achievement. Scores that reflect the dimension of each leadership practice can be composite and then correlated or regressed against the dimensions of project success to evaluate the hypothesized effect of each dimension of leadership on the project success dimensions separately.

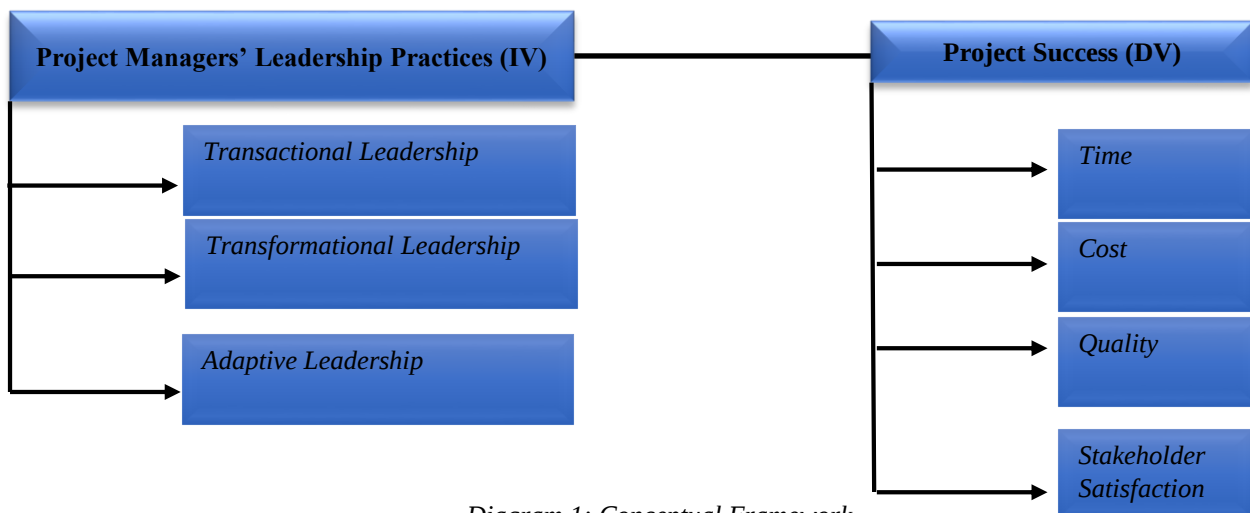


Diagram 1: Conceptual Framework

This model makes the assumption that the Project Manager's Role has a direct and positive impact on Project Success. Further elaboration of pathways of influence could be undertaken through optional mediating factors like organizational support, stakeholder collaboration, and institutional capacity (Ali, Khan, & Ahmad, 2022; Müller, Drouin, & Sankaran, 2023). Project managers place significant focus on good project planning, leadership, communication and risk management, which create a structured and supportive project environment. This approach helps to make sure activities are carried out on schedule, within budget, of the right quality, and builds stakeholder satisfaction and the sustainability of the project outcomes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A correlational research design was used in this study. This is an appropriate design for testing an association between changes in the independent variable (Project Managers Practices) and changes in the dependent variable (Project Success). Correlational design is used to determine the nature and direction of relationship between these variables without changing the variables, which helps to keep the natural situation within NGOs in Nangarhar Province intact.

A structured questionnaire will be developed and administered to collect data. It will be designed based on scales validated in previous literature in order to guarantee reliability and validity. The instrument will consist of sections measuring:

- The independent variable is the Project Managers' Leadership Practices involving planning, decision making, communication, team coordination and problem solving.
- Project Success (dependent variable): This includes aspects of project success including achievement of project goals, on time project completion, budget adherence, stakeholder satisfaction and overall project impact.

The questionnaire will be subject to pilot testing before actual deployment with a small number of respondents such as project managers and team members to highlight and address any concerns about clarity, reliability and validity.

Descriptive and inferential statistics will be used to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaires. The following are key statistical techniques to be focused on:

- Descriptive statistics (such as means, standard deviations) to summarize the data and give overview information about the project managers' leadership practices and project success outcomes.
- Correlation analysis to find the strength and direction of the relationship between project managers' leadership and management practices and project success.
- Regression analysis to see what predictors of project managers' leadership and management practices have predictive power for the project success indicators.

The study uses quantitative research approach because the task of research is organized and the constructs that are measurable. This process allows one to obtain numerical data that can then be statistically analyzed to obtain objective information about the relationship between the variables. Therefore, a quantitative approach is

appropriate for finding patterns, relationships and correlations between project managers' leadership and management practices and project success indicators in the context of Ngos working in Nangarhar Province.

3.2 Research Method

The research method in this study is quantitative research that is carried out systematically in collecting and analyzing data. One is quantitative research which involves the use of numerical data to examine the relationships between the variables and provides an objective and repeatable analysis. In spite of the fact that quantitative research is heavily dependent on the use of numerical figures, the major aim of this study is to use the quantitative data collected using a structured questionnaire for statistical analysis.

This research aims to investigate how successful project managers lead and manage their projects in NGO in the context of Nangarhar Province in Afghanistan. This focus was consistent with the previous studies that have used quantitative methods in order to discuss similar relationships which provide a solid basis for application of these methods.

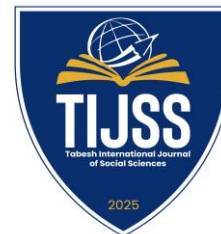
Moreover, this research is explanatory in nature and seeks to explore cause and-effect relationships between project managers and project success, further lending support to the quantitative approach. The information gathered in this way will help in a scientific analysis of the relationship, which will provide clear guidance and ideas for academic and practical implications for the NGOs working in Nangarhar.

3.3 Population

Target Population: Project managers, team leaders and key project staff in NGOs in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. Participants will be representative samples, taking into account participants from various departments, project types, and levels of responsibility, through the use of stratified random sampling. This strategy also increases the generalizability of the results, and allows for the study to encompass the entire picture of leadership behaviors and their influence on project success throughout the local NGO arena.

Table 1: Population

No	NGO Name	Population
1	International Rescue Committee (IRC)	100
2	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)	80
3	Save the Children	100
4	Welfare Organization for Women and Children	100
5	UNHCR	120



6	UNICEF	75
7	DRC	60
Total Population		635

3.4 Sample

This study has a population of 635 project managers, project team leaders and key project staff from seven NGOs in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. The specific NGOs included in the sample were specifically chosen because they were relevant to the research topic, accessible, and were known to play an important role in the development and humanitarian context of the region. The distribution of this population in detail is given in Table 1.

This study uses stratified random sampling technique because it is appropriate for representation of staff from all NGOs. In this case, stratified sampling is very appropriate as the overall population is divided into different NGOs, and it is important to represent the sample population of respondents from each organization in the proportion found in the total population. This method increases representativeness and decreases sampling bias.

Yamane's formula (1967) was used for determining an appropriate sample size, most commonly used in social science research to determine sample size based on total population. The formula is given by the following:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = total population size

e = level of precision (sampling error), typically set at 5% (0.05)

This formula ensures that the sample size is statistically sufficient to yield reliable and valid results while taking into account the total population of project managers, team leaders, and key staff across the seven NGOs. By applying this formula, the study ensures that the selected sample accurately represents the population, thereby enhancing the credibility and generalizability of the findings.

Table 2: Sampling

NGO Name	Population	Sample Calculation	Sample Size
International Rescue Committee (IRC)	100	$(100/635) \times 246$	39

Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)	80	$(80/635) \times 246$	31
Save the Children	100	$(100/635) \times 246$	39
Welfare Organization for Women and Children	100	$(100/635) \times 246$	39
UNHCR	120	$(120/635) \times 246$	47
UNICEF	75	$(75/635) \times 246$	29
DRC	60	$(60/635) \times 246$	23
Total	635		246

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this chapter is to present the data collected in this quantitative research, explain the methods used to analyse the data and outline the results of the quantitative research on the relationship between Project Managers and Project Success in NGOs in Nangarhar, Afghanistan.

For the study, a sample of 246 project managers, team leaders and key project staff was selected using a stratified random sampling method to ensure that the sample was proportional to all selected NGOs. The study focused on analysing how project managers' leadership behaviour influences project success, based on the following hypotheses:

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant difference between the Project Managers' Leadership Practices and Project Success.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Project Managers' Leadership Practices significantly improve project success.

Table 3: Demographic Information

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	246	100%
Education	High School	40	16.26%
Level	Bachelor's	103	41.87%
	Master's	83	33.74%
	Ph.D	20	8.13%
Age	20–30	32	13%
	31–40	112	45.53%

	41–50	78	31.70%
	Above 50	24	9.75%
Designation	Project Manager / Team Leader	148	60%
	Administrative Staff	98	40%
Organization (NGO)	International Rescue Committee (IRC)	39	15.85%
	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)	31	12.60%
	Save the Children	39	15.85%
	Welfare Organization for Women and Children	39	15.85%
	UNHCR	47	19.11%
	UNICEF	29	11.79%
	DRC	23	9.35%

Source: SPSS Output

The demographic profile of the study sample (N = 246) is displayed in Table 3, consisting of male project managers, team leaders and administrative staff members of seven NGOs working in the Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan. Demographic variables are gender, education level, age, designation and organizational affiliation.

The majority of the respondents were male (100%, n = 246) because the participating organisations were comprised of males. As far as educational qualifications are concerned, most of the respondents said that they had a Bachelor's Degree (41.87%, n = 103) while the 33.74% (n = 83) of the respondents said that they had a Master's Degree qualification. High school education was obtained by 16.26% (n = 40) and only 8.13% (n = 20) have a Ph.D.

The age distribution shows that most respondents were between 31–40 years old (45.53%, n = 112), followed by those aged 41–50 years (31.70%, n = 78), 20–30 years (13%, n = 32), and above 50 years (9.75%, n = 24).

Administrative staff (40%) and project managers and team leaders (60%) represented the majority of the sample when it came to designation.

The organizational distribution of respondents was proportional to the size of each NGO: Afghan Health NGO (15.85%, n = 39), Nangarhar Education NGO (12.60%, n = 31), Rural Development NGO (15.85%, n = 39),

Women Empowerment NGO (15.85%, n = 39), Community Support NGO (19.11%, n = 47), Child Welfare NGO (11.79%, n = 29), and Environmental Action NGO (9.35%, n = 23).

This socio-demographic profile gives a clear picture of the background of the respondents and helps to get a representative sample of key staff involved in project management and implementation from NGOs in Nangarhar, which is necessary for analyzing the role of project managers on project success.

4.1 Reliability and Validity

For data collection two standardized instruments were used in this study, “The Project Managers Practices scale” and “Project Success (PS) scale” in case of NGOs, Nangarhar, Afghanistan. The internal consistency and reliability of these instruments were tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which measures the consistency of the items that measure the intended variables of the instrument in each construct.

Both scales have been shown to be highly reliable and valid in extensive empirical studies. The Project Managers' has been found to be a powerful instrument for measuring the major aspects of leadership in a project including planning, communication, decision-making, coordination, feedback, transparency and team motivation (Men, 2014; Saks, 2006; Karanges et al., 2015; Welch, 2011). Likewise, the Project Success scale has been found consistently reliable and valid across a variety of measures of project outcomes, such as achievement of objectives, timeliness, budget adherence, quality of output, stakeholder satisfaction, and overall project effectiveness (Men, 2014; Saks, 2006; Karanges et al., 2015; Welch, 2011).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest that internal consistency is acceptable if the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ranges from 0.7 to 0.9 and excellent if the coefficient is greater than 0.9. In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha values were calculated as follows:

Table 4: Reliability and Validity

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Project Managers	8	0.90	Excellent internal consistency
Project Success (PS)	7	0.90	Excellent internal consistency
Overall Instrument	15	0.91	Excellent reliability

The results of these findings support the high reliability and high internal consistency found in both instruments, thus the data obtained are reliable and valid for this research. High Cronbach's Alpha values demonstrate the strength of the survey instruments in measuring the project managers' leadership and management practices' impact on project success in NGOs within Nangarhar, Afghanistan.

Table 5: Correlational Analysis

Variables	Spearman's rho (ρ)	p-value	Significance Level
Project Managers & Project Success (PS)	0.68	< 0.01	Statistically significant

A positive correlation coefficient of $\rho = 0.68$ shows that there is strong and positive relationship between project managers' leadership and management practices and project success. This indicates that the higher the level of leadership and management in areas like good planning, team coordination, empowering staff, trust and collaboration, the more likely the project will be a success.

Moreover, the p-value < 0.01 provides further evidence that this relationship is statistically significant at the 1% level, that is, there is less than 1% chance that this is a random result. Thus, there is strong evidence that the null hypothesis (H_0) is not accepted.

The results of this study corroborate previous studies:

- Men (2014) highlighted the importance of transformational leadership and effective communication in engaging employees and boosting performance.
- Saks (2006) stated that an important antecedent of employee engagement and effectiveness is the quality of leadership communication.
- Welch (2011) reiterated that good internal communication and leadership practices play an important role in developing high-performing teams.

Based on statistical evidence:

- The null hypothesis (H_0) that there is no significant difference between project managers' leadership practices and project success is rejected.
- The conclusions that can be drawn from the study are that the alternative hypothesis H_1 is accepted, that is, it is concluded that leadership practices have a significant influence on the improvement of project success.

The overall correlation analysis ($\rho = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) shows a strong and positive relationship between leadership practices and project success. This means that better project results are usually obtained in NGOs with managers who use good practices in project management and leadership, such as empowerment of staff, building trust and use of collaborative methods. The results clearly contradict the null hypothesis and the importance and criticality of the role of project manager for the successful implementation of a project.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

To examine the statistical significance of the regression model predicting project success from Project Managers' Leadership Practices, an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test was conducted. The results of this analysis are summarized in the following table:

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	587.25	1	587.25	930.22	0.023
Residual	125.01	245	0.6313		
Total	712.26	246			

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model is statistically significant, supporting the alternative hypothesis (H_1) that project managers' leadership and management practices significantly impact project success. These results are consistent with the correlational analysis and model summary findings, reinforcing the crucial role of effective leadership practices in enhancing project outcomes in NGOs operating in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan.

4.2 Regression of the Study

The regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the effect of project managers' leadership and management practices on project success. The results, including unstandardized and standardized coefficients, t-values, and significance levels, are summarized in the following table:

Table 7: Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	N	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig. (p-value)
(Constant)	0.652	246	0.032	–	20.37	0.001
Project Managers	0.083	–	0.015	0.081	5.533	0.015

The positive unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.083$) suggests that for each one-unit increase in leadership quality, project success increases by 0.083 units, holding other factors constant. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.081$) reflects a modest but positive effect, indicating that leadership practices contribute meaningfully to predicting project success.

The t-test confirms that this relationship is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, supporting the conclusion that effective leadership practices have a significant positive impact on project outcomes.

While the regression effect size ($B = 0.083$, $\beta = 0.081$) is smaller than the correlation coefficient, it remains statistically significant ($p = 0.015$). This suggests that even after accounting for other variables, leadership and management practices continue to positively influence project success.

4.3 DISCUSSION

In accordance with the findings of this research, there is a statistically significant and positive correlation between the leadership practices of project managers and project success in NGOs in Nangarhar Province of Afghanistan. The correlation analysis showed a high correlation ($p = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$), and the regression analysis showed the predictive relationship to be significant ($B = 0.083$, $\beta = 0.081$, $p = 0.015$). The results show that the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is supported and that positive effects of good leadership practices can be seen in project success.

The findings are in line with the theory of servant leadership by Greenleaf (1977) which states that those leaders who serve the needs of their team members will build trust, teamwork and improve organizational performance. Empowerment, communication and supportive supervision have also been shown to be important factors to increase employee engagement and project success in previous empirical research (Liden et al., 2008, Eva et al., 2019).

But, the relatively low standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.081$) suggests that although leadership practices are significant predictors of project success, they don't have a strong direct impact. This finding could be attributed to the contextual factors of the NGOs activities in Nangarhar Province. Implementation in this area is, amongst other external constraints, constrained by financial resources, donor imposed project frameworks, security issues and infrastructure constraints. The structural limitations could restrict the ability of project managers to have a significant role in shaping project outcomes.

Furthermore, many NGOs in Afghanistan have a hierarchical organizational framework, with donor oversight. In these settings, project managers often have to adhere to a pre-specified project plan and project guidelines, and have limited decisions over project strategy. Thus, in addition to leadership practices being essential for team coordination, motivation and communication, organizational and environmental issues have a significant impact on the success of the project.

The model summary also indicates that variance in project success ($R^2 = 0.422$) is explained by leadership practices, which further supports the importance of leadership as part of a set of factors and not the only one that determines project performance. In the Afghan NGO sector, other factors like organizational support, staff competence, community involvement and institutional stability can also have a great impact on project results.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that good leadership practices are essential to improve project success and recognise the unique operating context of NGOs in Nangarhar, Afghanistan. Future research could draw in other context factors to gain a deeper understanding of the success of projects in fragile and developing contexts.

5. CONCLUSION

The influence of project managers' practices on the success of the projects in NGO in Nangarhar, Afghanistan was studied. The results, gathered from 246 male staff members, show that the project managers' practices have positive and significant impact on project success. Empowering employees, fostering trust, promoting teamwork and collaboration, supporting team members, and engaging employees in decision-making were effective leadership behaviors that were linked to project success. The findings indicated that good managerial practices are one of the important organizational factors which can affect the successful execution of NGO projects in Nangarhar.

The regression analysis also verified that project managers' practices significantly influence project success, suggesting that successful managerial behavior has a significant impact on project objectives. Project managers build an atmosphere of trust, honesty, engagement, and respect with their employees, which encourages employees to be more involved, motivated, and responsible in the project activities. The impact of these practices can therefore be a more effective project implementation, clear team collaboration, effective use of resources and timely attainment of project objectives.

The results also corroborate the general research on leadership, employee engagement and organizational performance literature pointing out that effective leadership is key to enhancing organizational performance. However, in the context of NGOs which are often subject to financial constraints, changes in community requirements, restricted resources and challenging operational environments, the challenge for competent project managers becomes even more significant. A project manager who can motivate and guide the team well is more likely to be able to cope well with project problems, deal with project risks, and be able to keep the staff members committed during the project life cycle.

Thus, NGOs should focus more on building managerial and leadership skill of project managers in Nangarhar. Training and professional development on leadership, communication, conflict management, team building,

decision making, employee empowerment, project management and other relevant skills can be recommended to enhance managerial skills. Furthermore, for NGO management, it is important to implement participatory leadership practices that value employees' efforts and offer opportunities to them to assume responsibility and actively contribute to decisions related to projects.

The study findings show that the role of project managers is more than administrative and can be considered as strategic components that can positively affect the success of projects and the effectiveness of organizations. Through developing leadership strategies that focus on employee development, engagement, trust, collaboration, and well-being, NGOs can build more effective and productive project teams, and enhance their capacity to achieve desired project results. The results offer several implications for managing projects and working with NGO managers, policy makers and development agencies to enhance project performance and organizational sustainability in the context of Nangarhar and other contexts in Afghanistan. These relationships could be further explored in future research by incorporating female employees, other NGO categories, and other variables that could affect the success of projects, such as project environment, employee motivation, availability of resources, and organizational culture.

5.1 Recommendations

It is recommended that NGOs undertake leadership development projects by organizing regular training sessions, workshops, mentorship and support programs to enhance managerial skills in improving project effectiveness. Participative decision making, open communication and empowerment of employees need to be encouraged so that organizational policies can be strengthened to support inclusive and accountable management practices. Additionally, the work environment needs to be conducive to the organization's success, with the implementation of psychological safety, frequent recognition and feedback, and wellness programs to keep employees engaged and productive. Leadership assessment should be integrated into performance management systems and be an important element of the evaluation process. Moreover, NGOs need to foster a culture of servant leadership by role modelling and ensuring that leadership is consistent with the vision and mission of an NGO. Finally, policies and strategies need to be linked with contextual issues, for example cultural sensitivity and gender inclusiveness, to ensure sustainable and socially responsible project implementation.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, it is restricted to NGOs in Nangarhar province, this may have reduced the generalizability of the findings to other provinces of Afghanistan, or to other contexts of NGOs. Secondly, for the study, self-reported data from project managers and staff is relied on mainly and this may be

based on personal biases and subjectivity. Thirdly, limited time and resources may restrict the amount of data collected and the size of the sample. Furthermore, external considerations like security, political pressures and lack of funds that also influence the success of a project might not be considered in detail.

Future research should focus on comparing results from other provinces or at the national level, by implementing the same study as this one. Mixed methods or longitudinal studies can also be used to better understand how leadership impacts project outcomes over time. In addition, future research may be conducted on other factors like organizational culture, donor policies, and community involvement that will give a deeper insight into development project success in Afghanistan.

5.3 Conflict of Interest

All authors express no conflict of interest in any part of the research.

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