

# Effect of Democratic Leadership on Project Success in Higher Education Sector

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## Abstract

*This paper investigates the leadership practices in the Higher Education Commission projects of Punjab, Pakistan. Democratic Leadership looks the most appropriate in the world but it has not been investigated in the Pakistan Higher Education Sector projects. The research approach in this study is positive therefore it is a quantitative study. The sample size is only 86 because the target population of this paper is the higher education sector of the Punjab province. In this research, SPSS has been used for the data analysis. The reliability and regression tests were performed. The results indicate that the Democratic leadership significantly impact the project success. This research is cross sectional as data was collected one time, though in future this research will be conducted in whole Pakistan and then South Asia.*

**Keywords:** Democratic leadership; project success; Higher Education; quantitative study.

**JEL Classification:** O22 project analysis, D81 criteria for Decision Making under Risk and Uncertainty

## 1. Introduction

Organizations continuously thrive for success as this is the need of the contemporary competitive era. The leadership process has grown over the years where new dimensions, types and styles of leadership are being studied by academicians, researchers and practitioners across the world. Over the last century, various theories have evolved discussing leadership traits, characteristics, and behaviors that influenced project success. In addition, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan has recognized six priority areas to further expand the higher education system in Pakistan, in accordance with the national objectives outlined in Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. Hence, the significance of a leader is of paramount importance in planning for long-term objectives and then achieving that

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through implementing institutional growth. Furthermore, it is apparent that project managers, sponsors, senior management and other stakeholders worldwide have consistently faced the challenge of effectively managing projects due to the complex and diverse range of issues involved. Consequently, projects experienced delays and frequently incurred cost overruns. As a result, projects got delayed and often resulted cost overrun (Khan et al., 2021).

### **1.1 Research Gap**

Numerous studies have been conducted in the last decade, discussing the impact of leadership on project success. In a recent study, Mughal et al. (2019) has examined the correlation between top management support and project success, with a focus on the mediating impact of leadership styles in Pakistan's IT industry. That study has determined that project leaders have a vital role and exhibit a significant and positive relationship with project success. Hence, the study demonstrated the need to determine and investigate the impact of different leadership styles, such as democratic and autocratic, on project success. Imam and Zaheer (2021) found that characteristics of leaders contribute to the success of projects in the national IT industry, with knowledge sharing as a mediator. In their study, Zulfqar et al. (2016) investigated the transformational leadership and participative decision-making (PDM) among deans/heads in both public and private universities in Pakistan, and found the relationship positive and significant. This goal of this study is to determine the influence of democratic leadership on the success of projects in the Higher Education Sector of Pakistan.

The research question of this research is;

- What is the relationship of democratic leadership style on project success?

The objective of this research is;

- To determine the impact of democratic leadership style on the project success in higher education sector projects of Pakistan.

## **2. Literature Review**

This section of the paper discusses leadership perspectives that can be adopted based on the organizations' internal and external factors. Hersey and Blanchard (1969) were the pioneers in the development of situational leadership theory. They argue that there is no singular optimal leadership style for effectively managing a team; instead, it should be flexible subject to the specific requirements of the organization. In recent times, contrariwise, Bans-Akutey (2021) proclaims that according to the path-goal theory one leadership style cannot be adapted in all situations, highlighting the absence of a universally applicable leadership style. As, the directive style is used in task-related tasks, whereas the supportive style is requirement of relational activities successful management.

It has been stated by Amabile et al. (2004) that the effect of leadership depends upon internal and the external environment of work, complexity of the project and the organizational structure, and more importantly the organizational process assets. In their very interesting study, Opoku et al. (2015). studied six different styles of leadership among the UK construction industry leaders. These were transactional, transformational, autocratic, democratic, strategic and laissez-faire styles, which are already established in the industry and the academia. It was concluded through the research that each leadership style exhibits results different according to the circumstances. That study had found that the strategic leadership had a more significant role in ensuring the sustainability of projects. Therefore, it can be said undeniably that leadership is the more pivotal factor that translates the vision of an organization into reality through success.

### **2.1 Democratic Leadership Style**

Basit et al. (2018) performed a very interesting study to compare authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership and democratic leadership. This study was performed in private and public enterprises. The main purpose of the study was to determine worker engagement and performance in respect to democratic leadership. The results reflected that, democratic leadership had the greatest impact on worker performance because it encourages involvement of followers in the decision-making process. Moreover, research by Liphadzi et al. (2015) indicates that democratic leadership gives decision-making authority to project team members. Moreover, it gives them direction to achieve project goals. It was found by the researchers in South Africa that democratic style of leadership was to a certain extent associated with successful project completion. Contrary to autocratic leaders, democratic leaders foster an environment where employees feel comfortable speaking out and contributing, as per the research of Khan et al. (2015). Subsequently, the employees felt esteemed and remained motivated, which not only had a positive effect on the project team and employees, but also supported leaders to gain insight into the diverse opinions of team members. This evidence might prove valuable for a democratic leader when making decisions. This approach yielded high-quality output through its collaborative workforce, as multiple studies indicated that financial incentives were not the sole driving force for employees for the keen contribution to the growth of the organization.

Hence, the team was driven to perform at their utmost potential due to the incentive and inspiration provided by recognition. The study also highlighted that the democratic leadership style is most appropriate when a project or organization consists of a group of exceptionally proficient teams. Abodunrin (2022) examined the correlation between the democratic leadership style and employee performance in the educational sector of Nigeria. The research findings revealed that the democratic leadership style was widely embraced within the higher education sector of Nigeria, resulting in enhanced employee performance and success rates.

## 2.2 *Project Success*

Angus et al. (2005) aimed to achieve the desired project goals by considering the efficient management of the triple constraints (time, money, and quality) as a determinant of project success. However, according to Hussain et al. (2020), the three components of time, cost, and quality are insufficient to meet the criteria for project success. This is due to the fact that projects as a whole necessitate high-quality management methods and the satisfaction of all parties involved stakeholders. The alignment of organizational objectives with the project objectives which also reflect as integrated project management, customer influence on project performance, project effectiveness, and workspace environment for project implementation, are all factors that have been studied in relation to project success (Albert et al., 2017).

Hussain et al. (2022) conducted extensive research on building projects in Pakistan that used renewable energy and discovered that projects need government support, community involvement, and organizational innovation to be effective. Furthermore, Uçar et al. (2012) investigated the relationship between different leadership styles and project success and decision-making. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between democracy and project success within the context of higher education development projects.

## 2.3 *Democratic Leadership and Project Success*

According to Grzesik and Piwowar-Sulej (2018), there are three types of tasks involved in project implementation: operational, supporting, and management. The role of project management is the most important. The project team members chose a democratic leadership style, which was followed throughout the project's implementation. A more satisfactory work environment, particularly when faced with adversities, can be accomplished through democratic leadership (Khan et al., 2015).

Similarly, Karakiliç (2019) also studied that a democratic leadership style positively influences the performance of an organization. Additionally, Mohiuddin (2017) revealed that democratic leadership styles were more widely held in innovative businesses or projects requiring interdepartmental collaboration. One more Greek study saw at the relationship between project success factors and managers' emotional, behavioural, and managerial abilities (Trivellas & Drimoussis, 2013). Project managers with high levels of emotional intelligence, and behavioral skills were more likely to see their initiatives through to accomplishment. In contrast to authoritarian leadership, democratic leadership was more likely to succeed when emotional social awareness, team behavior, and managerial cooperation were recognized. Akpoviroro et al. (2018) also noted that employees' engagement in decision-making processes significantly increased their productivity. Employee motivation is also positively related with a participative leadership style, noted by the above researcher.

In order to determine how supportive leadership styles, affect the success of renewable energy projects, Zaman et al. (2022) performed research in Pakistan. Results showed that subordinates and followers were more likely to achieve success when their leaders were supportive. Elenkov (2002) argues that in today's cutthroat business climate, a leader's capacity to make sound judgements hinges on the backing and cooperation of their team. Because it successfully combines directive and empowering tactics, the democratic leadership is more results-oriented as discussed in the above literature.

This all supports us to establish through this study, in the higher education sector of Pakistan; the impact of democratic leadership on project success.

*H1*: Democratic leadership positively impact Project Success in the Pakistan Higher Education Sector.

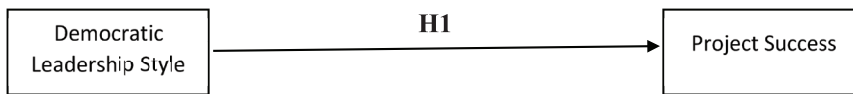


Figure 1: Research Framework

### 3. Methodology

This study is a quantitative investigation that examines the numerical influence of Democratic Leadership on the success of a project. Various scales from diverse sources have been utilized to examine the factors. The democratic leadership measure was derived from Tarhan and Tutgun (2021) while the project success scale was derived from Aga et al. (2016).

The questionnaire was created using Google Forms, and responses were collected for both pilot and detailed testing. The data analysis for this step was conducted using SPSS 26 software. The participants consisted of project leaders who held top positions and were directly involved in project matters. The variables under investigation corresponded to outcomes derived from the primary data source. The data was gathered from public sector universities located in the Punjab area of Pakistan. In this study, the term "project" refers to a specific unit of analysis that was carried out in public sector universities in Pakistan, with the support of the Higher Education Commission (HEC).

Prior to the comprehensive data collection process, pilot testing was undertaken to assess the reliability of scales used in the questionnaires, in accordance with the research objectives. A total of 110 projects in the Punjab province of Pakistan were completed by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) throughout the past decade. Based on the findings of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), it was determined that the ideal sample size is 86 because of the lesser number of HEI's in Pakistan. According to Saunders et al. (2003), the questionnaire

required enhancements to ensure that respondents could answer the questions without difficulty. They also emphasized that a pilot study should involve a least of 10 participants. Table 1 of Summary of Pilot Testing Reliability Statistics presents the Cronbach Alpha  $\alpha$ , which was used to assess the scale reliability and reflect its internal consistency.

Table 1  
*Summary of Pilot Testing Reliability Statistics*

| S:No | Scale Description           | Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------|
| 1    | Democratic Leadership Style | .721             | 7          |
| 2    | Project Success             | .832             | 14         |

Nunnally (1978) provided that  $\alpha > 0.700$  as a thumb rule for reliability of the scale. After having satisfactory values of Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) against all the scales, the questionnaire was widely circulated.

#### 4. Data Analysis

This section presents a comprehensive examination of the data gathered from participants and investigates the correlation between the variables. Initially, the data screening process was finalized, and each response item was systematically assigned a code to prevent any inconsistencies. An assessment was conducted to verify the dependability and accuracy of the data and measurement scales. Following the attainment of good results, a comprehensive examination of the data was conducted using SPSS using regression analysis to confirm the hypothesis.

The main focus of the study was the project leaders employed at institutions in Punjab. Among the 86 respondents, 82.5% (71) were male participants involved in project management activities, whereas just 18.5% (15) were female. The data suggested that the majority of individuals engaged in university projects were of the male gender.

Table 2  
*Gender Summary*

|       | Gender       | Frequency | Percent      |
|-------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| Valid | Female       | 15        | 18.5         |
|       | Male         | 71        | 82.5         |
|       | <b>Total</b> | <b>86</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

The data, gathered through a google form, was subsequently transferred to Microsoft Excel. Since all the choices in the questionnaire were designated as obligatory, there were no absent values detected in the data sheet. Subsequently, every row was encoded to associate each response with its corresponding numerical code designation. The data was examined for any atypical responses provided by the respondent(s). Upon reviewing 86 replies, no evidence of abnormal data representation was found. Correlation is a statistical metric that quantifies the extent of the relationship between two or more variables. The correlation coefficient is a statistical measure that runs from -1 to +1. A value of 0 indicates no correlation, -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation, and +1 indicates a perfect positive correlation. Table 3 of Correlation Summary displays the association between the Democratic Leadership Style and the effectiveness of the project.

Table 3  
*Correlations Summary*

| Variables                   | Democratic Leadership Style | Project Success |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Democratic Leadership Style | 1                           |                 |
| Project Success             | .522**                      | 1               |

The hypothesis test demonstrated a significant influence of the democratic leadership style (DL) on project success (PS). In order to examine the hypothesis, a regression analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between the independent variable, democratic leadership style (DL), and the dependent variable, project success (PS). The study found a significant relationship between the use of a democratic leadership style and project success ( $F = 71.099$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that the leadership style had a substantial influence on the project's outcome ( $b = 0.522$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The data unequivocally showed a moderate positive correlation between the democratic leadership style (DL) and PS. The table 4 of Regression Analysis of Democratic Leadership Style and Project Success, presents a concise overview of the findings.

Table 4  
*Regression Analysis of Democratic Leadership Style and Project Success*

| Hypothesis | Regression Weight | Beta Coefficient | R <sup>2</sup> | F      | t-value | p-value | Hypothesis supported |
|------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|--------|---------|---------|----------------------|
| H1         | DL → PS           | .522             | .272           | 71.099 | 8.432   | 0.000   | Yes                  |

Note:  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ , DL: Democratic Leadership Style, PS: Project Success

Every positive movement of one unit in democratic leadership style resulted in a.522-unit increase in project success. In addition, with an R2 of 0.272, the model clarified that democratic leadership style accounted for 27.2% of the variance in project success. This provides evidence for hypothesis H1.

## **5. Results and Conclusion**

Projects in Pakistan's higher education sector benefited from a democratic leadership style, according to the report. According to the results, a democratic leadership style was 27.2% responsible for the project's success in public sector universities' project leaders. Basit et al. (2018) discovered a favorable association between the democratic leadership style and employee performance, which contributed to project success, therefore past literature also supports this. Democratic leadership, according to Liphadzi et al. (2015), allows project staff to have some independence while yet receiving direction to reach project goals. This led to the Hypothesis approval.

### **5.1 Implications of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to determine effect of democratic leadership styles on project success in Pakistan higher education sector where universities were responsible for carrying out actual project execution. The study relied on both theoretical predictions and real data. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has just released its first ever comprehensive report on its funded higher education projects. The results showed that democratic leadership approaches were somewhat positively correlated with project performance. The research showed that initiatives are more likely to be successful when their leaders are democratic and have good rapport with the team members. As a result, Pakistan's public sector institutions desperately need qualified project managers, so the country must improve the overall project performance.

## **6. Limitations and Future Direction**

Public sector institutions in Punjab that received funding from Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) were the focus of this study. The research is continuing to incorporate data from all of Pakistan, even though this paper only covered Punjab province projects of higher education sector. In future research, decision making as a mediating factor will also be investigated. Project success has been influences by the democratic leadership style, according to the results of this research paper. It is recommended that both in Pakistan and internationally, the higher education sector should get benefit from this research in the long and short term. It will further encourage more studies in the area of leadership, strategic management and project management.



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