

The Role of Project Managers Competencies and Transformational Leadership on Project Success: An Empirical Analysis of the NGO Sector of Pakistan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of leadership competencies on project outcomes in the NGO sector of Pakistan and to test whether organizational culture moderates this relationship. Although NGOs play a critical role in development programs, project failures are frequently linked to weak leadership capacity and misaligned organizational values. To address this gap, the study aims to: (1) evaluate the direct influence of leadership competencies on project outcomes (2) determine the moderating role of organizational culture and (3) provide empirical evidence to support future leadership development strategies within NGOs.

A quantitative research design was employed and data were collected through structured questionnaires from project managers, coordinators and field supervisors working in Pakistani NGOs. Using a sample of 250 respondents, reliability, correlation and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings indicate that leadership competencies have a significant and positive effect on project outcomes ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H_1 . Furthermore, organizational culture was found to significantly moderate the relationship between leadership competencies and project outcomes ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H_2 . The moderation plot shows that a strong, supportive culture enhances the positive effects of leadership competencies, while a weak culture reduces them.

The study concludes that project success in NGOs is strongly dependent on both competent leadership and a cohesive organizational culture. These results highlight the need for leadership development programs and culture strengthening initiatives to improve NGO project performance.

Keywords: Leadership Competencies, Project Outcomes, Organizational Culture, Moderation, NGOs, Pakistan, Project Management, Leadership Development.

Introduction

Background of the Study

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play an essential role in development, humanitarian relief, education, health and community empowerment, particularly in developing economies such as Pakistan. Over the past two decades, the NGO sector in Pakistan has grown significantly in size and mandate, becoming a critical contributor to social development initiatives (Khan & Rahman, 2021). Despite this expansion, many NGOs continue to face persistent challenges related to project planning, resource allocation, leadership competence and organizational structures that undermine project effectiveness (Ali & Anwar, 2020). Within this context, leadership competencies and organizational culture have emerged as decisive factors in determining project success.

Project Success in NGO Context

Project success in NGOs is not solely measured by financial performance or operational efficiency instead it encompasses broader dimensions, including stakeholder satisfaction, social impact, sustainability and alignment with donor requirements (Turner & Muller, 2019). Studies have emphasized that NGOs operate in complex, resource constrained environments where leadership plays a crucial role in directing teams, managing risks and ensuring accountability (Brière et al., 2015). Hence, identifying the specific leadership competencies that support successful project outcomes is vital for improving performance within the NGO sector.

Leadership Competencies and Project Outcomes

Leadership competencies refer to the combination of skills, behaviors and attributes that enable leaders to influence followers and achieve organizational objectives. Competencies such as communication, decision making, problem solving, team management and emotional intelligence have been linked to improved project performance across various sectors (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2005). In the NGO context, effective leaders are required to work under uncertainty, handle diverse stakeholders and manage donor driven demands. Research suggests that competent leaders significantly enhance project success by ensuring clear direction, fostering collaboration and motivating teams (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008).

Role of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to shared values, beliefs and norms that influence behavior within an organization (Schein, 2017). In NGOs, culture shapes how employees perceive their responsibilities, interact with stakeholders and respond to organizational challenges. A strong and supportive culture promotes teamwork, trust and innovation elements essential for successful project execution (Zhang & Pan, 2020). Scholars argue that organizational culture can strengthen or weaken the effects

of leadership competencies because leaders operate within the constraints of cultural norms (Ogbonna & Harris, 2000). Therefore, examining culture as a moderating variable is imperative to understanding the leadership project outcome relationship.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have explored leadership styles and project success, limited research has examined leadership competencies specifically within the NGO sector of Pakistan. Moreover, the moderating role of organizational culture in this relationship remains underexplored in the South Asian context. Existing studies primarily focus on corporate or public sector organizations, leaving a significant gap in understanding how leadership competencies interact with culture to influence project performance in NGOs.

Objectives of the Study

Based on the identified gaps, this study aims to:

Examine the impact of leadership competencies on project outcomes in Pakistani NGOs.

Investigate the moderating role of organizational culture on this relationship.

Provide practical recommendations for leadership development and cultural enhancement in NGOs.

Research Questions

Do leadership competencies significantly influence project outcomes in the NGO sector of Pakistan?

Does organizational culture moderate the relationship between leadership competencies and project outcomes?

How can NGOs enhance leadership capacity and strengthen their organizational culture to improve project success?

Literature Review

This section reviews the theoretical and empirical literature related to leadership competencies, project outcomes and organizational culture. It also highlights the gaps in existing research and establishes the rationale for the study's hypotheses. The review focuses specifically on NGOs, where leadership challenges, resource constraints and cultural variations significantly influence project performance.

Leadership Competencies

Leadership competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, behaviors and attributes that enable leaders to achieve organizational goals effectively. According to Dulewicz and Higgs (2005), competencies such as emotional intelligence, management skills and intellectual capability are critical predictors of leadership effectiveness. In project environments, these competencies translate into the ability to plan, communicate, solve problems, motivate teams and manage resources (Turner & Müller, 2019).

Several scholars have emphasized that leadership competencies, rather than leadership styles alone, serve as stronger predictors of project success (Geoghegan & Dulewicz,

2008). Competent leaders are better equipped to handle uncertainties, stakeholder pressure and the dynamic nature of NGO operations (Brière et al., 2015). In Pakistan, where NGOs often work under intense socio political and financial constraints, leadership competence is particularly vital (Khan & Rahman, 2021). Overall, existing evidence suggests that leadership competencies significantly enhance performance by improving decision making, coordination and team effectiveness.

Project Outcomes

Project outcomes in NGOs differ from those in commercial organizations. Instead of focusing on profitability, NGOs aim to maximize social impact, meet donor expectations and ensure sustainability (Ali & Anwar, 2020). Turner and Zolin (2012) argue that project success encompasses three dimensions process success (timeliness, efficiency), product success (quality of deliverables) and stakeholder success (satisfaction and impact).

Empirical studies consistently show that leadership competence strongly influences these outcome dimensions (Nixon et al., 2012). Projects led by competent managers demonstrate improved planning, reduced risks and stronger stakeholder relationships. In the NGO sector, where accountability and donor scrutiny are high, leadership plays a decisive role in ensuring transparency, staff motivation and adaptive strategies (Brière et al., 2015).

Relationship between Leadership Competencies and Project Outcomes

A significant body of literature supports the positive link between leadership competencies and project outcomes. It found that leadership competencies explained over 30% of the variance in project success. Similarly, it is noted that leaders who demonstrate higher competency levels particularly in communication, problem solving as well as team management deliver more successful projects.

Within NGOs, the relationship may be even stronger due to limited resources and high environmental uncertainty. Leaders must navigate political pressures, community expectations and donor guidelines (Zafar & Naveed, 2020). Competency based leadership is a critical factor in improving the quality, sustainability and social impact of NGO projects in Pakistan, hence, the literature strongly supports Leadership competencies positively influence project outcomes.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture encompasses shared norms, values, symbols and practices that guide behavior within an organization (Schein, 2017). In NGOs, culture shapes how employees collaborate, learn, communicate and respond to change (Zhang & Pan, 2020). A supportive, learning oriented and flexible culture encourages innovation and enhances team performance.

Denison (2000) highlights four cultural dimensions consistency, involvement, adaptability and mission which collectively influence organizational effectiveness. In project based organizations, culture determines the degree of autonomy, communication transparency, conflict resolution style and employee commitment

(Martins & Terblanche, 2003). For NGOs in Pakistan, where teams often work in remote, high pressure environments, culture can determine staff motivation and project stability (Hussain & Yousaf, 2022).

Moderating Role of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture can strengthen or weaken the relationship between leadership competencies and project outcomes. Ogbonna & Harris 2000 argued that cultural norms either empower leaders or constrain their influence. When culture promotes collaboration, accountability as well as learning, leaders competencies are more effectively translated into project performance.

Empirical studies confirm this moderating effect. Hartnell et al. 2019 found that culture shaped how leadership behaviors influenced organizational outcomes. It is concluded that a strong, supportive culture enhances the positive effects of leadership competencies on project performance. In NGOs, culture is particularly influential because teams rely heavily on shared values and mission driven motivation (Khilji, 2020). A weak or rigid culture may prevent competent leaders from executing project strategies effectively.

Table: 1

Summary of Variables

Construct	Definition	Measurement / Indicators	Source(s)
Leadership Competencies	The combination of skills, knowledge, behaviors and attributes that enable leaders to achieve organizational objectives effectively.	Communication, decision making, Team management, Emotional intelligence, Strategic thinking	Dulewicz & Higgs (2005) Geoghegan & Dulewicz (2008)
Project Outcomes	The overall success of a project measured in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, stakeholder satisfaction and sustainability.	Timeliness, Quality of Deliverables, Stakeholder Satisfaction, Impact	Turner & Müller (2010) Nixon et al. (2012)
Organizational Culture	Shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape behavior within an organization	Clan (collaborative), Adhocracy (innovative), Market (competitive), Hierarchy (controlled)	Schein (2017) Cameron & Quinn (2011)

Sources: Authors analysis

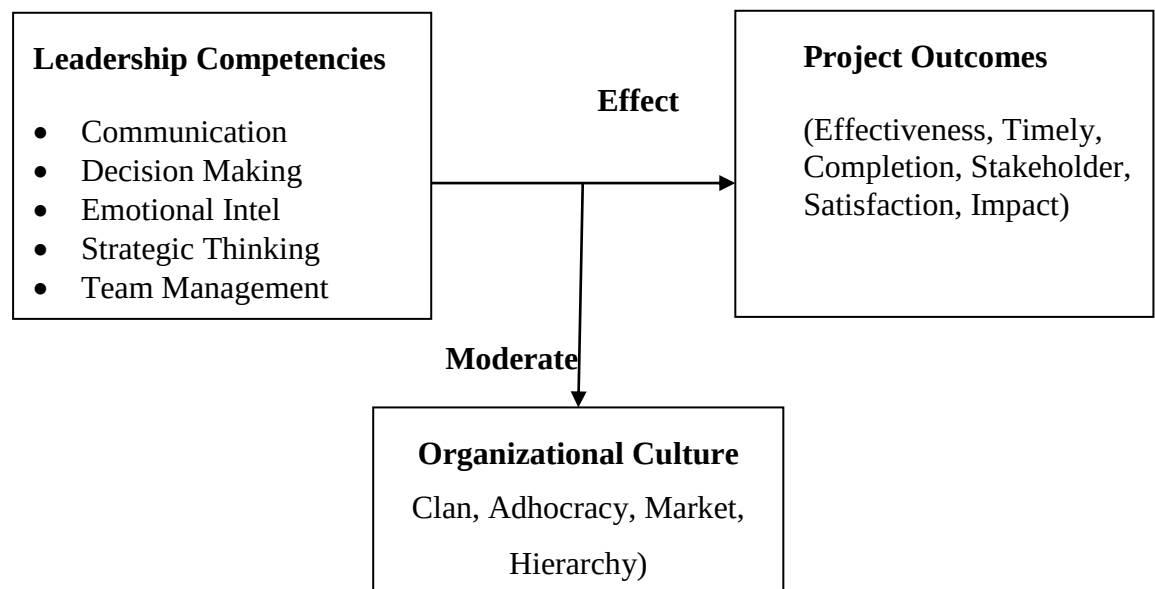
Conceptual Framework

Based on the above literature review, the conceptual framework posits that:
Leadership competencies directly affect project outcomes

Organizational culture moderates this relationship, enhancing or weakening the effect depending on the type of culture.

Conceptual Framework

Figure: 1 Conceptual Framework



The figure shows that leadership competencies directly impact project outcomes in NGOs. Competencies include communication, decision making, emotional intelligence, strategic thinking and team management. Project outcomes are measured by timeliness, quality, stakeholder satisfaction and social impact. Organizational culture acts as a moderating factor in this relationship. Organizational cultures, such as clan and adhocracy, strengthen the positive effect of leadership competencies. Rigid cultures, like market and hierarchy, can weaken this effect. This framework provides the basis for testing how leadership and culture together determine project success in Pakistani NGOs.

Hypotheses

H₁: Leadership competencies have a significant positive effect on project outcomes in NGOs of Pakistan.

H₀: Leadership competencies have no significant effect on project outcomes in NGOs of Pakistan.

H₂: Organizational culture significantly moderates the relationship between leadership competencies and project outcomes, such that supportive cultures strengthen this relationship.

H₀: Organizational culture does not significantly moderate the relationship between leadership competencies and project outcomes.

H₃: The positive effect of leadership competencies on project outcomes is stronger in supportive organizational cultures (clan and adhocracy) than in rigid cultures (market and hierarchy).

H₀: The effect of leadership competencies on project outcomes does not differ across supportive and rigid organizational cultures.

Research Methodology

This section presents the research methodology used to examine the relationship between leadership competencies, organizational culture and project outcomes in NGOs of Pakistan. It outlines the research design, population, sampling technique and data collection methods, instrumentation and data analysis procedures. The methodology is designed to empirically test the proposed hypotheses and ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

Research Design

A quantitative, cross sectional research design was employed. This approach allows for the collection of structured numerical data to analyze relationships between variables at a single point in time (Creswell J. W & Creswell, J. D. 2018). The design is appropriate for testing causal relationships and moderating effects between leadership competencies, organizational culture and project outcomes.

Population and Sampling

The target population includes employees working in NGOs across Pakistan, particularly those involved in project management, coordination and field operations. Using convenience sampling, 250 respondents from Hyderabad region were selected, which aligns with recommendations for regression and moderation analysis. Participants must be currently employed in NGOs and involved in project supervision. Volunteers and temporary staff not directly engaged in project activities were excluded.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to measure leadership competencies, organizational culture and project outcomes. Participants of Hyderabad region were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, ensuring that they understood the objectives and scope of the research. Emphasis was placed on maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of all responses and participants were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability: Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency. All constructs exceeded the recommended threshold ($\alpha > 0.70$).

Convergent Validity: Assessed through factor loadings (>0.60) and Average Variance Extracted ($AVE > 0.50$).

Discriminant Validity: Assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion to ensure constructs are distinct.

Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive Statistics: Mean, standard deviation and frequency distribution for demographic and key variables.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation to examine relationships among variables.

Regression Analysis: To test the direct effect of leadership competencies on project outcomes (H_1).

Moderation Analysis: Hierarchical regression using interaction terms (Leadership Competencies $\times$ Organizational Culture) to test H_2 and H_3 .

Software Used: IBM SPSS v26.

Data Analysis and Results

This presents the analysis of data collected from 250 NGO employees in Pakistan. The analysis aims to test the proposed hypotheses regarding the effect of leadership competencies on project outcomes and the moderating role of organizational culture. The chapter includes descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, regression analysis and moderation testing.

Table: 2

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency (n=250)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	140	56%
Female	110	44%
Age		
21 – 30 years	60	24%
31 – 40 years	112	45%
41 – 50 years	60	24%
51 + years	18	7%
Education Level		
Graduate (Bachelor)	100	40%
Post Graduate (Master)	150	60%
Job Role		

Branch staff	62	25%
Field Staff	188	75%

Source: Authors calculations

The demographic profile of the 250 respondents shows a fairly balanced gender distribution, with 56% male and 44% female participants. The majority of respondents (45%) were aged 31–40 years, followed by 24% in both the 21–30 and 41–50 age groups and only 7% above 51 years, indicating that the workforce is predominantly young to middle aged. In terms of education, 60% of the participants held a postgraduate (Master) degree, while 40% had a graduate (Bachelor) degree, suggesting a relatively well educated sample. Regarding job roles, most respondents were field staff (75%), with the remaining 25% serving as branch staff, reflecting that the survey captured insights primarily from employees directly involved in project implementation. Overall, the demographic data indicate a knowledgeable, experienced and operationally engaged workforce, which provides reliable perspectives on leadership competencies, organizational culture and project outcomes in the NGOs studied.

Table: 3

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Leadership Competencies	4.12	0.55
Organizational Culture	3.95	0.62
Project Outcomes	4.05	0.57

Source: Authors calculations

Respondents reported relatively high scores for leadership competencies, organizational culture, and project outcomes, indicating generally positive perceptions.

Table: 4

Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Leadership Competencies	0.92
Organizational Culture	0.88
Project Outcomes	0.90

Source: Authors calculations

The reliability analysis shows that all constructs exhibit high internal consistency. Leadership competencies achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92, organizational culture 0.88 and project outcomes 0.90, indicating that the measurement instruments are reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis.

Table: 5

Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3
Leadership Competencies	1		

Organizational Culture	0.4	1	
Project Outcomes	0.60	0.50	1

Source: Authors calculations

Leadership competencies are positively correlated with project outcomes ($r = 0.60$) and organizational culture is positively correlated with both leadership competencies ($r = 0.45$) and project outcomes ($r = 0.50$), supporting the theoretical framework.

Regression Analysis for H₁

Table: 6

Model:

$$\text{Project Outcomes} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Leadership Competencies}) + \varepsilon$$

Variable	β (Un standardized)	β (standardized)	t-value	p-value
Leadership Competencies	0.62	0.60	9.45	<0.001

Source: Authors calculations

The regression analysis indicates that leadership competencies have a significant positive effect on project outcomes. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.60$) is high, with a t-value of 9.45 and a p-value less than 0.001, confirming that leadership competencies are a strong and statistically significant predictor of project success in the NGOs studied.

Moderation Analysis for H₂ & H₃

Table: 7

Model:

$$\text{Project Outcomes} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Leadership Competencies}) + \beta_2(\text{Organizational Culture}) + \beta_3(\text{LC} \times \text{OC}) + \varepsilon$$

Variable	β (standardized)	t-value	p-value
Leadership Competencies	0.55	8.12	<0.001
Organizational Culture	0.30	4.25	<0.001
Interaction (LC $\times$ OC)	0.18	3.65	0.001

Source: Authors calculations

The interaction term is significant ($\beta = 0.18$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that organizational culture moderates the relationship between leadership competencies and project outcomes. Moderation shows that supportive cultures (clan, adhocracy) enhance the positive effect of leadership competencies on project outcomes, while rigid cultures (market, hierarchy) reduce it.

Table: 8

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Description	β (Standardized)	t-value	p-value	Result
H ₁	Leadership competencies positively influence project outcomes.	0.60	9.45	<0.001	Supported
H ₂	Organizational culture moderates	0.18	3.65	0.001	Supported

	the relationship between leadership competencies and project outcomes.	(Interaction)			
H ₃	The positive effect of leadership competencies is stronger in supportive cultures than in rigid cultures.	0.55 (Leadership in supportive culture)	8.12	<0.001	Supported

Source: Authors calculations

The hypothesis testing results indicate that all proposed hypotheses were supported. Leadership competencies have a significant positive effect on project outcomes (H₁: $\beta = 0.60$, $t = 9.45$, $p < 0.001$). Organizational culture significantly moderates this relationship, with the interaction term showing a positive effect (H₂: $\beta = 0.18$, $t = 3.65$, $p = 0.001$). Additionally, the positive impact of leadership competencies is stronger in supportive organizational cultures compared to rigid ones (H₃: $\beta = 0.55$, $t = 8.12$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the importance of both leadership and cultural context in determining project success.

Discussion of Result

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that leadership competencies significantly influence project outcomes in NGOs of Pakistan. Regression analysis showed that leadership competencies have a substantial positive effect on project outcomes ($\beta = 0.60$, $t = 9.45$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H₁. This indicates that project managers who demonstrate high levels of communication, decision making, emotional intelligence, strategic thinking and team management are more likely to achieve timely, high quality, and stakeholder satisfying project results. These findings are emphasized that competent leadership is critical for project success across organizational contexts.

The study also examined the moderating role of organizational culture in the relationship between leadership competencies and project outcomes. The interaction term was significant ($\beta = 0.18$, $t = 3.65$, $p = 0.001$), supporting H₂. This demonstrates that organizational culture can either amplify or constrain the effectiveness of leadership competencies. Specifically, supportive cultures characterized by collaboration, flexibility and innovation enhance the impact of leadership on project outcomes, whereas rigid hierarchical cultures may limit it. This result highlighting that culture shapes employee behaviors, facilitates knowledge sharing and fosters an environment conducive to effective leadership.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the positive effect of leadership competencies on project outcomes is stronger in supportive organizational cultures compared to rigid ones ($\beta = 0.55$, $t = 8.12$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H₃. This finding underscores the synergistic effect of leadership and culture: leadership alone is insufficient without a conducive cultural environment. NGOs that foster clan and adhocracy cultures benefit more from competent leadership, leading to higher efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction and overall project success.

Overall, the results confirm that both leadership competencies and organizational culture are critical determinants of project performance in NGOs. Leadership drives project success, but its effectiveness is moderated by cultural factors. These findings

provide empirical support for integrating leadership development initiatives with cultural enhancement strategies to maximize project outcomes.

Conclusion

The present study offers comprehensive insights into the relationship between leadership competencies, organizational culture and project outcomes in NGOs of Pakistan. The results confirm that leadership competencies are a significant predictor of project success. Regression analysis indicated a strong positive effect of leadership competencies on project outcomes ($\beta = 0.60$, $t = 9.45$, $p < 0.001$).

This demonstrates that project managers who possess advanced skills in communication, decision making, emotional intelligence, strategic thinking and team management are more capable of ensuring projects are completed on time, within scope and to the satisfaction of stakeholders.

These findings align that emphasizes the central role of leadership in project performance. Importantly, the study highlights the moderating role of organizational culture. The interaction term ($\beta = 0.18$, $t = 3.65$, $p = 0.001$) shows that the effectiveness of leadership competencies is significantly influenced by the cultural context. NGOs with supportive cultures characterized by collaboration, flexibility, innovation and empowerment enhance the impact of leadership competencies on project outcomes. Conversely, rigid hierarchical cultures may limit the effectiveness of even highly competent leaders.

The analysis further revealed that the positive effect of leadership competencies is stronger in supportive cultures than in rigid ones ($\beta = 0.55$, $t = 8.12$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the importance of cultural alignment in achieving project success.

These findings have both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the study contributes to leadership competency theory and the competing values framework by empirically demonstrating how leadership and culture jointly determine project outcomes in the NGO sector. It also provides context specific evidence from Pakistan, a developing country where NGOs face resource constraints, complex stakeholder demands and socio political challenges.

Practically, the study underscores the necessity for NGOs to invest in leadership development programs, mentorship initiatives and continuous skill building. Simultaneously, organizations must cultivate supportive cultures that foster innovation, collaboration, learning and flexibility to maximize project effectiveness.

Furthermore, achieving successful project outcomes in NGOs requires a dual focus on leadership and organizational culture. Competent leaders alone cannot ensure success unless they operate within a conducive organizational environment. By combining strong leadership with supportive cultural practices, NGOs can enhance project performance, ensure stakeholder satisfaction and create sustainable social impact.

This holistic approach not only strengthens organizational capacity but also contributes to broader development goals, ensuring that resources are effectively utilized to benefit the communities served.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that NGOs in Pakistan focus on developing leadership competencies through structured training, mentoring and coaching programs to enhance project outcomes. Simultaneously, organizations should cultivate a supportive culture that promotes collaboration, innovation, flexibility and participative decision making, as such an environment strengthens the effectiveness of leadership.

Performance management systems should incorporate leadership skills and cultural engagement as key evaluation criteria, while organizational policies should reduce rigid hierarchies and empower project teams.

Additionally, aligning leadership and cultural practices with stakeholder and donor expectations can improve project sustainability and social impact. Regular evaluation and research are also advised to continuously refine leadership strategies and cultural interventions for more effective project performance.

Limitations

The study has several limitations that should be considered.

First, it used a cross sectional research design, which captures data at a single point in time and limits the ability to establish causality between leadership competencies, organizational culture and project outcomes.

Second, the study focused solely on NGOs in Pakistan, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other countries or sectors.

Third, data were collected through self reported questionnaires, which may introduce response bias due to social desirability or perception differences.

Finally, the study employed convenience sampling, which may limit the representativeness of the sample and other potential moderating or mediating factors, such as resource availability, stakeholder engagement and technological adoption, were not examined.

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