

Leading for Creativity in Projects: How Authentic Leadership Translates into Project Success through Employee Creativity and Cross-Functional Integration

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Abstract

Purpose: This research investigates the contribution of authentic leadership to project success in project-based organizations under what circumstances and how through looking at the mediating role played by employee creativity and the moderating role played by cross-functional integration.

Design/methodology/approach: It is suggested that a moderated mediation model be developed based on the leadership and project management literature, with employee creativity linking the authentic leadership and project success, and cross-functional integration linking the authentic leadership and employee creativity. The study involved the use of cross-sectional survey of 215 project-based organization employees in Pakistan. Regression-based mediation and moderation analyses together with the bootstrapping procedures were used to test hypotheses.

Findings: The findings show that authentic leadership is also in a positive association with employee creativity, which subsequently has a positive impact on the project success. There is a complete mediation between authentic leadership and project success with employee creativity implying that leadership has a major influence on project outcomes via innovative work behaviors. Moreover, cross-functional integration also enhances the positive correlation between authentic leadership and employee creativity that creates an indirect impact on project success in project environments characterized by high levels of integration.

Originality/value: The research contributes to the project management literature by shedding light on the behavioral process, via which authentic leadership is converted to project success and cross-functional integration is designated as one of the contextual boundaries' conditions. Its results provide practical information to those involved in projects and organizations who are aiming to improve the performance of projects by developing their leaders, fostering creativity and inter-functional cooperation.

Introduction

Projects are becoming more likely to perform not just as scheduled, at the right price, and up to the right amount, but also as to such less quantifiable results as innovation, learning, and flexibility (Olsson, 2006). In organizations that use project-based work in which work is temporary, knowledge-intensive and cross-functional, leadership is at the center of influencing the response of project teams to uncertainty and complexity (Zheng et al., 2022). However, even with the increasing literature on project leadership, very little is known about how leadership behavior is manifested into tangible project deliverables and in which circumstances such effects are enhanced.

Large parts of the project management literature recognize that leadership is important to project success (Mubarak et al., 2024) yet there are many empirical studies that concentrate on direct correlations between leadership styles and project success measures. It makes the underlying mechanisms, which leadership impacts project outcomes, not thoroughly theorized and tested. Specifically, little attention has been given to the contribution of employee creativity, meaning the ability to generate novel and useful ideas, in converting leadership behavior into project success in a project-based context (Nawaz & Tian, 2022), even though creativity is crucial in problem-solving, adaptation and innovation in projects (Adeoye & Jimoh, 2023; Almashhour et al., 2024).

Authentic leadership has become a leadership style that is especially applicable to modern projects (Uyanwatta, 2024). Authentic leadership creates trust, psychological safety, and ethical behavior (Mrayyan, 2024) because of its self-understanding, relationship openness, balanced processing, and an internalized moralistic outlook. Previous studies have established that authentic leadership makes a positive contribution to employee attitudes and behaviors (Chen & Sraphon, 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2022) although most evidence is based on functional or permanent organizational setting and not temporary project organizations. Consequently, it is not clear what and whether authentic leadership has an impact on the success of the project as time pressure, task interdependence, and role ambiguity are acute.

In addition, the concept of leadership in projects does not take place in a vacuum (Whyte et al., 2022). Project-based work is cross-functional as its nature is (Henderson, 2025), and collaboration and coordination between organizational and professional boundaries are necessary. Cross-functional integration (CFI)- the degree to which various functional divisions are successful in sharing information, coordinating efforts and harmonizing objectives- has been found as a key project

competency (Gbabo et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the current research of project leadership does not focus on CFI as a boundary looking with the influence of the effectiveness of leadership behaviors. (Wittrich, 2022).

To fill these gaps, this paper constructs and estimates a moderated mediation model of how authentic leadership can drive project success by way of employee creativity and how this mediating dependence is conditional on cross-functional integration. The study is based on the findings of a survey of 215 employees in project-based organizations in Pakistan to address the need to conduct more mechanism focused, and context sensitive studies on project management, especially in the emerging economy where project work is growing fast and institutional factors are different than those in the developed economies.

Consistent with contemporary project management research, project success is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, and perceived project outcomes. This research, through its direct connection of leadership behavior, creative effort, and project results, is a step beyond simplistic leadership-performance relationships and as such, provides a more distinct description of how and when leadership is significant in projects.

Contributions to Project Management Research

This paper contributes to the project management literature in three ways.

Firstly, to start with, it contributes to the research on project leadership by defining employee creativity as one of the primary processes by which genuine leadership can be used to determine the success of a project. The study is a pivot in stressing out the fully mediated relationship, which brings the focus to the behavioral processes that facilitate project performance in a temporary organizational environment instead of the direct leadership effects.

Secondly, the research presents cross-functional integration as a main boundary condition of an effective project leadership. By demonstrating that authentic leadership is also more closely linked to employee creativity in highly integrated project settings, the results inform the significance of structural and relational project settings in facilitating leadership effects.

Thirdly, the research study provides empirical data based on an emerging economic background to fill the gap on underrepresentation of such settings in the project management literature. Through the investigation of project-based organizations in Pakistan, the research expands on the contextual diversity of project leadership literature and offers knowledge that can be applied to projects that are run within the conditions of institutional complexity and resource limitation.

Collectively, these contributions enhance the knowledge of the translation of leadership into project success and give a basis to further studies on the issue of leadership, creativity, and cooperation in project-related work.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Project Leadership in Project-Based Organizations

Traditional functional organizations are fundamentally different in that project-based organizations (PBOs) are more temporally oriented (Söderlund, 2023), and they are more uncertain in their tasks and collaborate cross-functionally (Petrailis, 2025). Projects are ad hoc systems established to deliver the attainment of certain targets within the limitations of time, cost, and scope (Panchal & Khokrale, 2024), which in most cases necessitates a fast coordination among people with different professional and organizational backgrounds (Evans et al., 2022). Consequently, project leadership is no longer based on formal authority, but instead, it is facilitated by collaboration, trust, and adaptive behavior (Whyte et al., 2022).

Research on project management is becoming confident in its identifications of leadership as one of the key determinants of project success. Nevertheless, a significant part of the available literature dwells on instrumental styles of leadership or competent models with special consideration for planning, control, and decision making (Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2024). Although these views are useful, they tend to ignore the relationship and ethical aspects of leadership that are very crucial in temporary and stressful project settings.

Recent criticisms within project management studies have stressed the necessity of (Sonmez Cakir et al., 2025). In this respect, leadership strategies, which focus on authenticity, transparency and ethical behavior, can be particularly applicable to the projects (Cao et al., 2024), where the trust must be built within the shortest time possible, and where the formal frameworks tend to be feeble.

Authentic Leadership in Project Contexts

Authentic leadership is described as a leader behavior pattern, which is typified by self-awareness, a relational transparency, a balanced processing of information and an internalized moral perspective (Jiewen et al., 2024). True leaders have strong values and beliefs, are open in disclosure of information and allow their followers to be themselves (Hulse III & Winston, 2023). This leader style has been linked to employees such as trust, engagement and psychological well-being (Baquero, 2023).

The research on authentic leadership is still underdeveloped in the context of projects, even though its applicability in this case has been widely investigated in the permanent organizational setting. Role ambiguity, high interdependence, and uncertainty are the typical characteristics of projects, in which the followers are the most sensitive to the behavior of the leader (O'Connor et al., 2022). In these situations, authentic leadership can be particularly useful due to the psychological safety and sense of ethics it provides as team members can explore the uncertainty and interpersonal complexity (Mrayyan, 2024).

Under project management viewpoint, real leadership may be considered as a relational project capability which underpins coordination, learning and adapting (Huang et al., 2023). Instead of influencing project outcomes directly, authentic leadership is likely to influence the behavior, interaction, and contributions of project

team members in the process of project implementation towards problem solving (Cao et al., 2024).

Authentic Leadership and Employee Creativity

Employee creativity is described as coming up with new and productive ideas concerning work-related products, services, or work practices (Amoozegar et al., 2025). Creativity is necessary in project settings to respond to unforeseen setbacks, transform plans and to come up with creative solutions within boundaries (Massari et al., 2023). When the project team members make creative contributions, the quality of decisions, improved problem-solving, and eventual success of the project can be achieved (Wawak, 2024).

It is a well-known fact that leadership is one of the antecedents of creativity (Vukadinović, 2022). Leaders can impact creativity by creating a social and psychological environment within which employees will work (Royston & Reiter-Palmon, 2022). Particularly, the idea of authentic leadership is likely to encourage creativity through trust, openness, and intrinsic motivation (Baquero, 2023). With leaders acting in accordance with their values, fostering open communication, and taking into consideration a variety of opinions, employees will be more likely to feel secure about suggesting unorthodox solutions and trying out new ideas and methods. Psychological safety is particularly critical to creativity in project-based organizations because errors may be very expensive, and time is always of the essence (Han et al., 2022). Real leaders diminish the fear of negative criticism and promote learning-based behaviors, and as a result, employees become able to engage in creative problem-solving.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Authentic leadership is positively related to employee creativity in project-based organizations.

Employee Creativity and Project Success

The traditional conceptualization of project success has always been based on the cost, time and quality (Ciric Lalic et al., 2022), but the new project management studies are inclined to give wider definitions which incorporate the aspects of stakeholder satisfaction, value generation, and long-term effects (Blak Bernat et al., 2023). Whatever definition is applied, the capability of project teams to respond creatively to issues is a key critical aspect when it comes to producing successful results (Suradika et al., 2023).

Employee creativity also leads to project success by allowing teams to come up with other solutions (Almashhour et al., 2024), better processes and adjust to the new needs. The creative employees will be able to see the areas to be improved, address conflicts in a better way and benefit from the quality of the project's output (Al Saaidi et al., 2026). Such creative behaviors can be exceptionally useful in complex and uncertain project environments.

External sources of empirical research have always revealed positive correlation between creativity and performance. In the project-based context, though, there is still

a lack of study of this relationship, despite good theoretical grounds to support the connection of creativity with successful execution and outputs of projects.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Employee creativity is positively related to project success.

The Mediating Role of Employee Creativity

Theories of leadership have been more inclined towards indirect effects implying that most leaders shape their contributions on the outcome by their impact on the behaviors of the followers instead of acting on them (Caniëls & Curseu, 2024). This view specifically applies in the context of project, since the project managers heavily depend on the experience and initiative of team members to accomplish the project goals.

Authentic leadership can hardly affect the success of projects directly. Rather, its effects are likely to work by behavior mechanisms, like creativity of the employees (Umrani et al., 2025). Creating an atmosphere of trust, openness, and ethical behavior, real leaders can motivate employees to be creative in their approach to problems that, by extension, improve the success of the project (Khattak et al., 2022). This mediation view is consistent with recommendations of research in project management to unbox the black box between leadership and project performance by establishing intermediate processes and behaviors.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Employee creativity mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and project success.

Cross-Functional Integration as a Moderating Condition

Cross-functional integration (CFI) is a concept that is used to define how various functional units interact, exchange information and plan through which they can effectively attain shared objectives (Biel, 2025). CFI is especially relevant in project-based organizations since these organizations' projects tend to cross departmental boundaries and necessitate the combination of different knowledge bases (Zhou et al., 2023).

The high rates of cross-functional integration provide the necessary conditions under which creative ideas can be exchanged, developed, and put into practice (Ahmad et al., 2023). However, Low integration, on the contrary, may restrict communication and the influence of leadership behavior on team outcomes (Jun et al., 2023). Although leaders may covet a particular culture of openness and creativity, these ways of doing things may not be delivered into efficient action due to structural and relational obstacles.

In this light, CFI may be regarded as a contextual facilitator which enhances the impact of genuine leadership on staff creativity (Ton et al., 2022). In case of high integration, employees can respond to leader support more effectively and work creatively across functional boundaries.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Cross-functional integration positively moderates the relationship between authentic leadership and employee creativity.

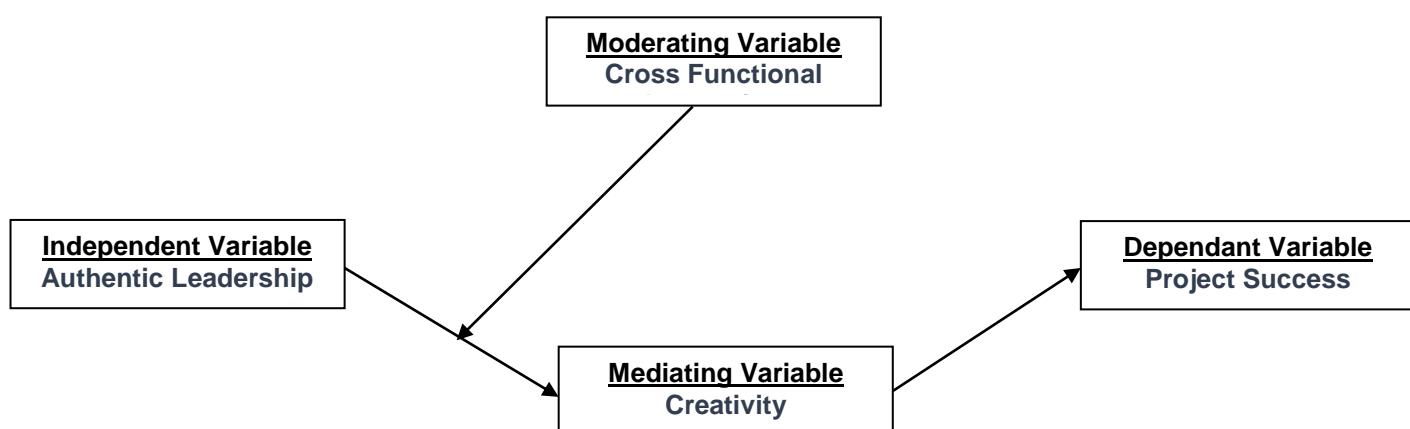
Moderated Mediation: Integrating Leadership, Creativity, and Project Context

Summing up the arguments above, this paper will suggest that the indirect impact of authentic leadership on project success via employee creativity depends on cross-functional integration. Precisely, the indirect influence of authentic leadership on the success of project activities in project settings that are highly cross-functionally integrated is supposed to be stronger (Bömelburg & Gassmann, 2024). Under these circumstances, high cooperation, cross-functional sharing of information, and understanding across the functional borders, employees are provided with good opportunities to transfer the openness, trust, and psychological safety developed by true leaders into innovative actions capable of directly affecting project results.

On the other hand, in the case of low cross-functional integration, functional silos and low coordination can restrict the manifestation and exploitation of employee creativity, which undermines the communication of legitimate leadership impact to project success (Malladi & Chhapola).

This moderated mediation approach offers a more detailed view of the impact of leadership on projects since it explicitly considers both the behavioral process in which leadership has an impact (employee creativity) and the contextual factors that most probably support the functioning of that mechanism (cross-functional integration). The proposed model brings together leadership behavior, individual-level processes and project-level context to emphasize the boundary conditions of authentic leadership and refine a more contingent perspective of how and when leadership can lead to successful project outcomes.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Cross-functional integration moderates the indirect relationship between authentic leadership and project success via employee creativity.



Methodology

Research Design and Context

In this research, the survey design is a quantitative, cross-sectional study that aims to verify a mediation model (with a moderator) that provides the relationships between authentic leadership, employee creativity, cross-functional integration, and project

success. Empirical context is the project-based organization (PBOs) in Pakistan where there is an increasing trend towards the use of projects as the prevailing form of organizing work in the construction sector as well as in the engineering, IT, and services.

Pakistan is an empirical setting that is of relevance in the project management research because of its fast-growing economy based on projects and the institutional features that are not similar to those that are generally studied in Western project research. The analysis of leadership processes herein answers the calls for conducting more context-sensitive research on project management and increases the external validity of the leadership theories concerning project settings.

Sample and Data Collection

The employees of the project-based organizations in Rawalpindi and Islamabad participated in either current or completed projects and were used to gather data. The respondents consisted of project team members and professionals who are under project managers or project leaders. The purposive sampling strategy was employed by making sure that the participants were directly involved in the project.

There were 215 usable questionnaires that were acquired. The involvement was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed to minimize the fear of evaluation and common method bias. The survey required the respondents to consider their immediate project leader and the last experience they had in a project when filling out the survey.

Measures

The established and validated scales were used to measure all constructs in previous studies. The rating was carried out using a five-point Likert scale with a strong disagreement (1) to strongly agree (5).

Authentic Leadership. The independent variable in this study was authentic leadership and the scale used to measure this variable was adopted from (Bömelburg & Gassmann, 2024; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Scale consists of 16 items.

Project Success. The dependent variable in this study was project success and the scale used to measure this variable was adopted from (Robey et al., 1993). Scale consists of 6 items

Creativity. Creativity is a mediator in this study. The scale to be used to measure this variable was adopted from (Hirst et al., 2011) It consisted of 4 items.

Cross Functional Integration. Cross functional integration of the leader was a moderator in this study. The scale to be used to measure this variable was adopted (Montoya-Weiss et al., 2001). It consisted of 3 items

Control Variables

Consistent with prior leadership and project management research, relevant control variables such as respondents' tenure, project experience, and organizational role were considered to account for alternative explanations. Including these controls did not materially alter the pattern of results.

Data Analysis Strategy

The testing of hypotheses was done through regression-mediation and moderation analysis in accordance with the existing procedures. Indirect effect significance and moderated mediation were evaluated using the bootstrapping methods (5,000 resamples) based on the bias-corrected confidence intervals.

The moderate variable was also experimented by seeing the interaction terms of authentic leadership and cross-functional integration. The index of moderated mediation was used to test moderated mediation, and it offered a direct test of the variation of the indirect effect with levels of moderator.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The last sample was comprised of 215 respondents employed in project-based organizations in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The sample consisted of male respondents (61.4 percent) with females (38.6 percent). Majority of the participants were the early and mid-career professionals with 37.7, 30.2 and 17.2 percent aged 18-25, 26-30 and 31-35 respectively. On the issue of education, the sample was very well educated with 47.9% having graduate degrees, 34.9% postgraduate degree, and 16.7% MPhil/PhD. About work experience, 53.4% had a maximum of three years of work experience with 20.9% having over ten years of work experience as a staff member with a good representation of both junior and experienced project professionals. This profile is congruent with the structure of project-based organization teams and justifies the applicability of the data to analyzing the dynamics of leadership and creativity in projects.

Reliability Analysis

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Table 1. Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's α
Authentic Leadership (AL)	0.907
Creativity (Cr)	0.882
Project Success (PS)	0.892
Cross-Functional Integration (CFI)	0.842

Note: n = 215.

All values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating **strong internal consistency** and confirming the adequacy of the measurement scales.

Correlation Analysis

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Authentic Leadership	1			
2. Creativity	.736**	1		
3. Project Success	.459**	.496**	1	
4. Cross-Functional Integration	.627**	.676**	.603**	1

p < .01, n = 215

All study variables were **positively and significantly correlated**, providing initial support for the hypothesized relationships. Authentic leadership showed a strong association with creativity ($r = .736$), while creativity was moderately related to project success ($r = .496$). Cross-functional integration exhibited strong correlations with both authentic leadership ($r = .627$) and creativity ($r = .676$), suggesting its relevance as a contextual factor.

Hypotheses Testing

Regression-based mediation and moderation analyses were conducted using SPSS and bootstrapping procedures following Preacher and Hayes' approach (1,000 bootstrap samples).

Authentic Leadership and Employee Creativity (H1)

Table 3. Regression Results Predicting Creativity

Predictor	Coefficient	SE	t	p
Authentic Leadership (AL)	0.4714	0.1800	2.6188	.0095
Cross-Functional Integration (CFI)	0.1444	0.1622	0.8791	.3803

Model summary: $R = .7875$, $R^2 = .6202$, $F = 114.87$, $p < .001$

Authentic leadership had a **significant positive effect on employee creativity**, supporting **H1**. Cross-functional integration did not show a significant direct effect on creativity in this model.

Employee Creativity and Project Success (H2)

Table 4. Regression Results Predicting Project Success

Predictor	Coefficient	SE	t	p
Creativity (Cr)	0.2846	0.0717	3.9711	.0001
Authentic Leadership (AL)	0.2295	0.0975	2.3725	.0196

Model summary: $R = .5147$, $R^2 = .2649$, $F = 38.20$, $p < .001$

Employee creativity had a **significant positive effect on project success**, supporting **H2**. Although authentic leadership also showed a significant direct effect at this stage, its influence is reassessed in the mediation analysis below.

Mediation Analysis (H3)

The bootstrapped mediation analysis showed risky significance of the indirect influence of authentic leadership on project success through creativity with a confidence interval not containing a zero (CI [.1166, .8263]). Once the notion of creativity was added to the model, the explanatory role of authentic leadership became significantly less significant, and it suggests that creativity is the main transmission mechanism.

Result: Full mediation, supporting H3.

Moderating Role of Cross-Functional Integration

The relationship between genuine leadership and cross-functional integrating was studied in forecasting creativity. The findings showed that cross-functional integration enhances the effect of authentic leadership and creativity, where there exists a strong relationship when integration is high. **Result: H4 & 5 supported.**

Discussion and Implications

Discussion of Findings

This research paper aimed to clarify the idea of authentic leadership, and under which circumstances that leadership would help organizations succeed in projects based on projects. The findings go beyond direct leadership-performance relationships and provide a more detailed account of the leadership effectiveness in the projects by constructing and probing a moderated mediation model.

To begin with, the findings illustrate that authentic leadership is important in improving employee creativity within project environments (Rehman & Zeb, 2023). The observation also applies the genuine leadership theory to the project management sphere and justifies the belief that leadership actions based on transparency, ethical behavior, and making balanced decisions promote psychological safety, which is a crucial factor in creative project decisions (Zhu, 2025). Such leadership behaviors seem especially useful when it comes to motivating employees to come up with new and helpful ideas, given that project work is temporary and unpredictable.

Second, it was found that employee creativity is positively correlated with project success, which is why creative behavior should be considered an essential performance-enabling mechanism in projects (Muneer et al., 2024). Subway Projects are often faced with unexpected issues, task reallocation, and coordination issues; creativity in this case helps the team to change plans, find other solutions, and enhance implementation. This result supports the calls in research in the project management field to expand the conceptualization of project success beyond technical control and the identification of behavioral and cognitive contributions to project success.

Third, and most significant, is the fact that the study has found out that the relationship between authentic leadership and project success is completely mediated by employee creativity (Nawaz & Tian, 2022). This finding implies that genuine leadership is not directly reflected in high-quality project results, but the effect of this leadership is manifested mainly via creative actions of the project team members.

This contribution allows opening the black box between leadership and project performance in direct response to long-standing invitations in project management research to determine the processes by which leadership is consequently relevant in temporary organizations.

Lastly, the results indicate the moderating importance of cross-functional integration. The positive correlation between authentic leadership and creativity is much greater in projects where the cross-functional integration is high (Verma & Bala, 2022). This implies that not only does the behavior of leaders contribute to leadership effectiveness in projects but also structural and relational conditions of the project environment. Even genuine leaders might have problems in transferring their leadership into creative action when structures of projects hinder communication, coordination and collaboration across functional boundaries.

Combined, these results can be said to point to the fact that leadership, creativity, and project structure are interdependent. Authentic leadership offers social and psychological ground on which creativity is built and cross-functional integration allows flow of creative ideas, refining and implementing them towards achieving success of a project.

Theoretical Implications for Project Management Research

This research contributes to research on project management in several ways. First, it works towards the development of project leadership theory, as it moves the emphasis of leadership on direct and indirect effects to behavior mechanisms. In pinpointing employee creativity as the mediating variable, the study addresses the questions that are raised by researchers that are more process-oriented theorizing of leadership effectiveness in projects and counters excessively simplistic assumptions about linking leadership actions to project success.

Second, creativity research is combined in project management literature, which makes creativity one of the core capabilities in project-based work, and not a peripheral or discretionary behavior. Integration expands the theoretical background of the research in project management and emphasizes creativity as an essential resource to deal with the unpredictability, complexity and change in projects.

Third, the research provides cross-functional integration as a qualification of project leadership efficacy. Although cross-functional integration has been studied as a project strength, little attention has been paid to its contribution in defining leadership behavior relationships. The study highlights the role of factoring structural and relationship conditions of the project when theorizing about leadership in projects by showing that an integration enhances the leadership-creativity relationship.

Lastly, the study provides contextual knowledge in a developing economy. The implications of investigating project-based organizations in Pakistan are that it allows expanding the geographical boundaries of project management research and proves that the theories of leadership and creativity are applicable in non-Western settings. That is what makes this contextual contribution especially meaningful in the context of the fast development of project-based work in the developing economies.

Practical Implications for Project Management Practice

The results have several practical implications on project managers, sponsors, and PMOs.

To begin with, organizations must acknowledge that the development of leadership is not enough to enhance the outcomes of the projects. Although authentic leadership behaviours are significant, their influence on project success depends on their ability to provoke the creative behaviour of the project team members. Project managers leadership development initiatives must, therefore, not just focus on ethical and transparent actions, but also focus on skills involved in promoting psychological safety, idea exchange, and experimentation.

Second, the findings also emphasize the need to make project environments structurally integrated. The positive impact of leadership on creativity is enhanced by cross-functional integration, and this implies that organizations ought to invest in cross-functional coordination and communication mechanisms. Such mechanisms can encompass cross-functional project teamwork, joint planning, common performance indicators and joint online platforms.

Third, the PMOs and senior managers are advised to consider employee creativity as strategic project capability and not an individual attribute. The benefits of even the most authentic leadership can be sabotaged by project practices that inhibit creativity such as too much formalization, inflexible systems of control or siloed decision-making. Flexible problem-solving methods to be encouraged and room for creative input should be improved to make projects successful.

Lastly, in the context of emerging economies where there is a shortage of resources and uncertainty in the institutions, the implications of the research findings are that authentic leadership and effective integration mechanisms can assist the projects to address the structural difficulties. Project leaders can enhance flexibility and performance even in challenging situations by establishing trust and creativity and allowing them to work across multiple sectors.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research.

First, the research adopted cross sectional and self-reported survey design, which restricts causation and creates the potential of common method bias. Longitudinal designs, multi-source data or objective performance measures can be used in future research to strengthen causal data.

Second, the research targeted one national setting. Although this can offer an interesting contextual perspective, future studies can identify whether the proposed model is applicable in various cultural and institutional settings and make comparative analysis.

Third, even though the present study examined the role of creativity as the overall significant mediating process, other behavioral processes (e.g., knowledge sharing, trust, or learning) can also be used to mediate leadership and project success. Future studies can examine several mediators or dynamic process models.

Conclusion

This paper shows that true leadership is a key driver to project success mainly because it leads to the enhancement of employee creativity and is enhanced in projects with high cross functional integration. The study contributes to the theory of project management and offers practical information on the development of leadership and design of projects by repacking the mechanisms and conditions of project outcomes. Finally, the results highlighted that creativity leadership, as opposed to control leadership, is critical in realizing success in modern project-based organizations.

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