THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF PROJECT SUCCESS: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORK PRACTICES, TRUST, AND TEAM VOICE

Milena Savković[1] [0000-0003-4270-4383], Danijela Ćirić Lalić[2] [0000-0002-4834-6487], Danijela Gračanin[3] [0000-0002-2150-4852], Tanja Todorović[4] [0000-0002-2264-3168]

Abstract

This study explores the human dimension of project success by examining the roles of high-performance work practices, project team members trust and voice. By combining a literature review of key concepts with bibliometric thematic mapping analysis of project success within the time span of 2019-2024, the introductory study provides a theoretical foundation and highlights the need for further investigation into the mediating roles of project team members trust and voice in the relationship between high-performance work practices and project success. Our work bridges literatures on project success, leadership, human resource management and behavioral science.

Key words*: Project Success, High-Performance Work Practices, Leadership, Trust, Voices*

1. Introduction

1.1 Justification & Study Objective

In the realm of general management literature, the impact of leadership traits and competencies on team performance is widely recognized (Castro et al., 2023). However, within the field of project management, the influence of a project team's trust and voices (among team members, towards the project manager, project outcomes, or the organization) remains underexplored (Castro et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2019). While it is acknowledged that trust among project team members (PMTs) is essential for successful collaboration and task execution, the significance of trust itself presents a notable gap in existing studies.

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[1] University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Serbia, milena.savkovic@uns.ac.rs
[2] University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Serbia, danijela.ciric@uns.ac.rs
[3] University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Serbia, gracanin@uns.ac.rs
[4] University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technical Sciences, Serbia, ttodorovic@uns.ac.rs

Transformational leadership (TFL) has emerged as one of the most extensively studied leadership theories, demonstrating a strong connection with anticipated outcomes for individuals and teams (Fareed et al., 2022). Studies have consistently shown that TFL positively affects project success (PS), work outcomes, and overall organizational performance (Iqbal et al., 2019). Nonetheless, some studies emphasize the complex interactions between leadership, high-performance work systems (HPWS), and employees' emotional well-being, underscoring the necessity of integrating these elements to cultivate a sustainable work environment (Ehrnrooth et al., 2023). Furthermore, findings indicate a close relationship between the motivational and inspirational behaviors associated with TFL and PS.

Recent studies highlight that the integrated and synergistic nature of high-performance work practices (HPWPs), as part of the HPWS, can lead to an increased occurrence of viable and PS (Savković et al., 2023; Zaman, Khan, et al., 2022). Despite these insights, a significant lack of longitudinal studies tracking the effects of these practices over time has been identified, alongside limited research at the industry level (Zaman, Khan, et al., 2022). For instance, the authors of the paper "Fall Seven Times, Stand Up Eight: Linking Project Management Innovation, Project Governance, and High-Performance Work Practices to Project Success" suggest that future studies should explore the roles of PMTs voice and silence in achieving PS (Zaman, Khan, et al., 2022).

Trust is recognized as a crucial psychological factor, often identified as an antecedent to silence in teams (Fareed et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2019). The Tuckman Ladder Theory illustrates that trust plays a vital role in the transition from the norming to the performing stages of team development. PMTs need time to learn how to communicate effectively and collaborate productively; the 'storming' phase is essential in this process, during which initial conflicts and disagreements may arise. For example, in the Agile "Scrum" framework, it is anticipated that the initial sprints may not proceed smoothly, which is acceptable as relationships develop over time. Thus, PMs must acknowledge that their teams consist of individuals who need time to build trust and cohesion.

TFL exhibited by PMs has been shown to reduce silence behaviors among PTMs by fostering a sense of trust (Wang et al., 2019). Additionally, TFL has been demonstrated to positively impact employee voice (Zhu et al., 2019).

This discussion highlights a critical loop: Specifically, TFL enhances HPWPs and PS while also positively influencing PTMs voices. Furthermore, HPWPs contribute positively to PS. However, an important question arises: What are the roles of PTMs trust and voices mediate the relationship between HPWPs and PS?

This introductory study offers insights into the complex nature of collective behavior, advocating for a re-examination of existing models for assessing project success. The study aims to provide a theoretical foundation and highlight the need for further investigation and testing of the roles of PMs trust and voices in the relationship between HPWPs and PS.

Lastly, it can be concluded that TFL serves as the underpinning theory of this study, effectively bridging the discussed concepts.

Based on the provided rationale, the authors propose the following research question:

- RQ: How does PMTs trust and voice influence the relationship between HPWPs and PS?

This study is organized as follows: (1) The introductory part describes the need, objectives, study question, and methodology; (2) The second section presents the state of the art; (3) The discussion answers the RQ; and (4) The study concludes with key findings, implications and limitations.

1.2 Methodology

The research design in this study combines two primary approaches: a literature review of key concepts— HPWPs, PS, and the dynamics of voice and trust within PMTs—as well as thematic mapping of PS through bibliometric analysis.

The literature review aimed to identify relevant studies published within the last six years (including 2024). Articles were sourced through the Google Scholar search engine, using specific keywords related to the aforementioned concepts.

The bibliometric analysis followed the standard workflow (Zupic & Čater, 2015). The initial step involved the formulation of a study scheme, defining the research questions and identifying the tools and techniques necessary for conducting the bibliometric analysis, as detailed in the introductory section.

Next, data collection was performed by retrieving a dataset from the Web of Science (WoS) core collection for the period 2019–2024. The search was limited to articles in English within the WoS Business and Management categories. Filtering ensured that only documents containing the specified search terms in the title, abstract, keywords, and keyword plus (i.e. Topic) were included, with a focus solely on journal articles.
Query link:
https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/summary/9fbf1246-aaef-44c6-ab37-937e1597eecd-010ea4a7d3/relevance/1

The bibliometric analysis, conducted using the "bibliometrix" R package, provided a comprehensive review of the literature. This analysis helped identify knowledge gaps, generate new research ideas, and highlight contributions to the field. A thematic mapping was also conducted at this stage.

In the next step, visualization techniques were applied using VOSviewer software, which allowed for the graphical representation of bibliographic data (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

The final step, interpretation, focused on analyzing the findings from the bibliometric analysis and providing insights into emerging research trends and the study's contributions to the field.

2. The State of Art

2.1 Project Success: Thematic Mapping and Its Implications

In thematic analysis, density and centrality are crucial attributes. Density measures theme cohesiveness, while centrality reflects topic relevance. The thematic map is divided into four quadrants: driving themes (upper right), basic themes (lower right), niche themes (upper left), and emerging themes (lower left) (Dores et al., 2021).

Figure 1 illustrates thematic analysis from 2019-2024, revealing seven clusters within PS:

- **Cluster 1 (red)**: *Information*—includes terms "information", "implementation", "trust", "strategies", "integration", "R&D", etc.
- **Cluster 2 (blue)**: *Complexity*—covers terms "construction projects", "costs", "time", "failure", "decision-making", "risk management", etc.
- **Cluster 3 (green)**: *Product*—focuses on terms "product development", "supply chain management", "collaborative product development", etc.
- **Cluster 4 (violet)**: *Transformational Leadership*—addresses terms "emotional intelligence", "creativity", "job satisfaction", "work behavior", "team performance", etc.
- **Cluster 5 (orange)**: *Performance*—highlights terms "project success", "innovation", "knowledge management", "organizational culture", etc.
- **Cluster 6 (brown)**: *Allocation*—emphasizes terms "resource allocation", "delivery in project management", etc.
- **Cluster 7 (light violet)**: *Post-Truth Era*—discusses terms "misinformation", "decision-making processes", etc.

Clusters 1, 4, and 5 emerge as the largest, underscoring the importance of information integration, leadership, and performance metrics. Clusters 3 and 6, which pertain to product development and resource allocation, represent niche themes, suggesting that while these areas are relevant, they may not dominate current discussions in project management. Cluster 2 reflects challenges in decision-making and risk management. Lastly, Cluster 7, centered on the "post-truth era," highlights an emerging theme, addressing the growing concern about misinformation and its implications for decision-making processes. This indicates a need for increased awareness and strategies to mitigate the effects of misinformation in project management contexts.
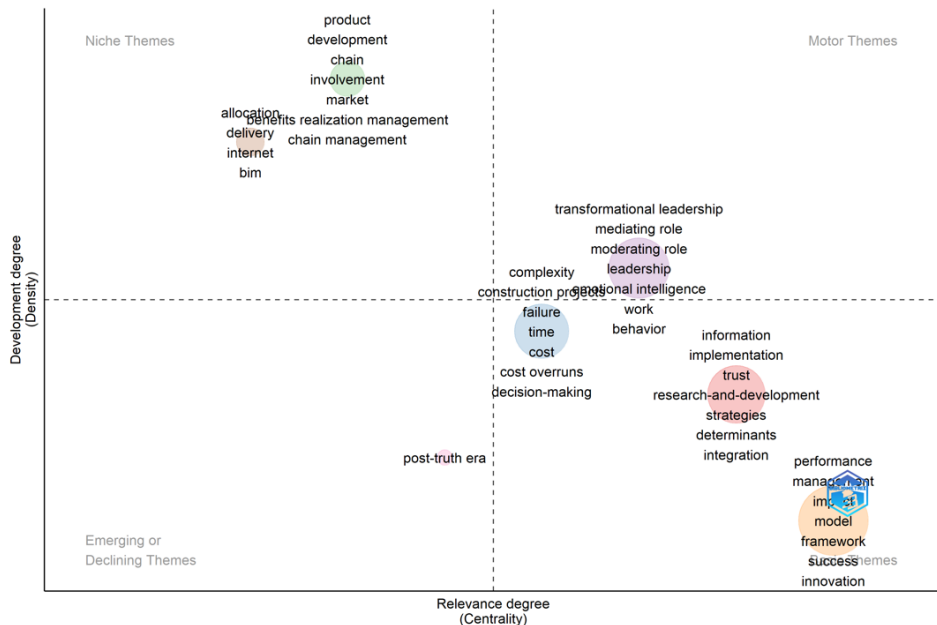
Figure 1: Thematic Map

2.2 High-Perfrmance Work Practices: Literature Review

Recognized as integrated bundles of human resource practices, HPWPs are identified as key drivers of employee motivation, job quality, and meaningful work (Mansour et al., 2023). The theoretical foundations of HPWPs have been linked to principles of high involvement and high commitment, demonstrating applicability across diverse industries (Zaman, Khan, et al., 2022). Furthermore, the triad framework of ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO) has been proposed as a critical basis for achieving desired organizational outcomes by enhancing the capabilities and decision-making skills of team members (Mansour et al., 2023; Zaman, Khan, et al., 2022). Collectively, these practices are understood to create a synergistic effect that amplifies employee commitment, skills, and knowledge, resulting in outcomes that surpass their contributions (Dasí et al., 2021). Despite their acknowledged significance, HPWPs remain in the process of being firmly established as definitive determinants of PS; however, they are viewed as essential for cultivating a supportive work environment that encourages continuous improvement among project team members (Zaman, Khan, et al., 2022). In this regard, the lack of HPWPs can give rise to detrimental consequences such as organizational politics, conflict, and project failure (Hussein, 2019). Therefore, it is clear that HPWPs play a crucial role in facilitating both innovation and sustainable success within organizations. (Jalali et al., 2021) These work practices are typically classified based on their impact on employees' involvement, skills, motivation, and task structuring abilities.

2.3 Project Team Members Trust and Voices: Literature Review

Trust is defined as a general tendency to depend on others with a personal decision. Trust in management is regarded as a critical practice and tool that facilitates organizations in promoting enhanced employee productivity within a supportive environment (Jalali et al., 2021).

Employee voice is defined as the informal and voluntary expression of ideas, suggestions, concerns, problems, or opinions related to work issues, aimed at fostering improvement or change (Morrison, 2022). Organizational policies and practices serve to define the appropriate beliefs, values, and behaviors within a given environment, thereby shaping collective perceptions regarding whether expressing voice is deemed acceptable and encouraged within the organization(Knoll et al., 2021). Furthermore, managers play a key role in interpreting and implementing these policies (Milenkovic et al., 2023; Savkovic et al., 2024), influencing team members' perceptions by fostering a culture of openness, modeling vocal behavior through their own actions, and providing opportunities for team members to develop confidence in voicing their opinions (Zaman, Florez-Perez, et al., 2022).

3. Discussion

Recent project management literature consistently highlights the pivotal role of behavioral factors—such as leadership styles, communication, project management expertise, commitment, and teamwork quality—in project success (PS) (Zaman, Florez-Perez, et al., 2022b). HPWPs are increasingly recognized as a critical solution to enhance team performance by fostering collaboration and commitment, both essential for PS (Savković et al., 2023; Zaman, Khan, et al., 2022).

Implementing HPWPs for all PTMs, including PMs, addresses several challenges, while trust among PTMs, trust in the PM, and the concept of PTMs' voice are critical influences on project outcomes (Bjelica et al., 2023; Savković et al., 2024). Trust enhances communication, reduces conflicts, and fosters collaboration, while voice encourages PTMs to contribute ideas, driving innovation and improving performance (Fareed et al., 2022; Morrison, 2022; Zhu et al., 2019).

Although TFL has been shown to enhance HPWPs by promoting trust and encouraging PTMs to voice their opinions, the roles of trust and voice between HPWPs and PS remain underexplored, requiring further investigation (Wang et al., 2019). Trust and a culture that supports open communication may unlock the full potential of HPWPs, contributing significantly to PS.

Thematic analysis has underscored the importance of these interactions, identifying gaps, such as the "post-truth era" theme, which highlights diminished trust in projects. This gap further accentuates the comprehensive role of trust in PS. Future research should focus on a deeper analysis of trust, voice, and the factors influencing their development to fully understand how they impact project outcomes.

Additionally, HPWS, which encompass HPWPs, have been shown to reduce job demands and lower emotional exhaustion, with some studies suggesting that

prioritizing HPWS development over TFL might better improve employee well-being (Ehrnrooth et al., 2023). Previous research supports the idea that trust directly impacts individual, team, and project performance, while HPWPs, through training and skill enhancement, improve trust and provide the motivation for creativity and innovation (Jalali et al., 2021).

These findings underscore the necessity of rethinking how we measure project success (PS) today by integrating a "human dimension" that accounts for PMTs trust and voice. This adjustment emphasizes that fostering these behavioral factors is critical to fully unlocking the potential of HPWPs and ensuring more sustainable and impactful project outcomes.

4. Conclusion

This study investigates the relationship between PS, HPVPs, and project PMTs' voices and trust, positioning this inquiry within the umbrella of the TLF as an overarching management theory that integrates these concepts. The findings indicate the need for further studies that will form a theoretical framework and develop hypotheses. Based on the literature review and bibliometric thematic mapping, the authors anticipate the mediating role of PMTs' trust and voices in the relationship between HPVPs and PS. In the long term, the authors anticipate extending existing models for measuring project success by incorporating a new human dimension.

The study has limitations, including its reliance on literature from last six years, which may constrain the understanding of long-term trends.

Acknowledgments

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