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ACADEMIC PAPER

Impact of Project Leadership on Project Success: Mediated by Project Governance and Moderated by Goal Clarity

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the connections between project leadership, governance, goal clarity, and project success in Pakistan's Civil Engineering (Private) sector. Data was collected from employees using a quantitative approach. A questionnaire was distributed to gather information on project governance, goal clarity, and project success. The results showed a strong relationship between project leadership and project success, with a robust governance framework impacting project leadership effectiveness. Goal clarity moderated the relationship, emphasising the importance of well-defined objectives. The study emphasises the critical role of project leadership in Pakistan's civil engineering sector, emphasising the importance of solid project management frameworks and clear objectives. This information is crucial for organisations and project managers seeking to improve project performance in the dynamic environment of Pakistani civil engineering projects.

KEYWORDS

Project management; project leader; project success; project governance; goal clarity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Projects are supposed to meet three main criteria such as time, money, and performance. These characteristics define Project-oriented tasks as distinct from regular day-to-day activities. The main difficulty encountered by project managers in contemporary times is dealing with good management practices of projects in different roles. If Project is not governed, it damages the project in several ways, such as time estimates, cost, and resource deployment. All these actions and uncertainties generated inside the Project are the main elements of the Project. These kinds of uncertainty can be managed; however, project managers are unaware of these concerns in other circumstances. Moreover, if cost, time, scope, and resource deployment is not handled on time, then it affects the development of the Project and also impedes the project results (Hubbard, 2009).

A previous study was conducted to mention that Project Control is a critical component of project management since it ensures the timely completion of the project within the budgetary provision. One of the essential components that are considered in controlling the project is dynamic or effective scheduling, basic scheduling, that helps the Project to reach its goals till completion (Vanhoucke, Khan, & Vu, 2014).

The impact of project governance on project success was examined in a recent study. Furthermore, cohesion in the project team and organisational support were analysed as mediating factors. Organisational support and team cohesion were found to have direct and indirect effects on project success. In this study, the authors sought to provide project managers with an understanding of how team cohesion affects project success. A positive correlation was found between project governance and project success. There is, however, a need to examine the influence of other variables on project success and other relationships with the project governance (Waseem, Iqbal, & Khan, 2022).

In another study, the mediating role of goal clarity was explored through the lens of conservation of resources theory (COR). This theory suggests that individuals strive to preserve and protect the resources they possess, such as time and effort. When goal clarity is high, individuals are more likely to focus on the task at hand and thus protect their resources, leading to better performance.

The regulation of direct and indirect interactions through goal clarity is a key function of organisational culture. The mediating role of aim clarity has been emphasised in research. However, there is a dearth of research examining the moderating influence of goal clarity within the context of humble leadership and its consequential effects on the success of projects. Therefore, the primary objective of the current investigation was to address the identified research void by examining analogous factors in conjunction with alternative constructs (Ali et al., 2021).

By taking into account the existing research deficit and the unique aspects of the proposed research paradigm. The objective of this study is to investigate the role of

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project leadership in the achievement of project success and timely completion. Additionally, this study has also emphasized the mediating function of project governance in ascertaining the manner in which leadership governance within the project influences the connection between project leadership and project success. The study additionally emphasised the moderating function of goal clarity in examining the influence of goal attainment on project leadership and success.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Project leadership and project Success

According to the research literature, leadership is one of the most significant factors to consider, and with time, it has been explored that human behaviour has various impacts on project success (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008). The concept of project leadership was considered task-oriented in the previous literature. Leadership was repeatedly perceived as a soft or 'human' phenomenon required to ensure the project team delivered on time and within a budget (Ali et al., 2021; Packendorff, 1995).

Simultaneously, it was recognised that managing projects and temporary systems had unique challenges and features (Gaddis, 1959; Miles, 1964). Leadership is a subject of great interest in organizational structure, and it has been studied more extensively than any other element of human behaviour throughout the years (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008). It takes a combination of Project technical capabilities and leadership qualities to project success (Gudarzi & Chegin, 2011).

Bass et al. (2003) categorised leadership styles into three categories: transformative, transactional, and capitalistic (Sohmen, 2013). Compared to the latter one, which is considered to be rather harmful, the first two leadership styles have nettled the concern of project managers since they are closely linked to the outcomes (Yang, Huang, & Wu, 2011). Leadership solely depends upon the experience that leads the Project toward success and influences the project governance (Ali et al., 2021; Koontz, 2010).

The literature pertaining to the relationship between leadership styles and project success has been limited in its scope, with only a limited number of peer-reviewed journals featuring research articles on this topic (Aga, Noorderhaven, & Vallejo, 2016). Basic leadership abilities are essential for success in general management; but, to be effective as a project manager, one must balance both technical and leadership qualities (Ong et al., 2009).

Multiple research studies have demonstrated that leadership plays a vital role in the field of project management (Helgerud et al., 2007). Moreover, it has been empirically established that leadership is a critical factor in determining the success of projects (Sumner, Bock, & Giamartino, 2006). Based on the preceding discourse, the ensuing hypothesis is posited:

H1: *Project leadership (PL) impacts project success (PS).*

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2.2. Project leadership and project governance

The success of a project is heavily influenced by two critical factors: project leadership and project governance. Project leadership pertains to the capacity of a leader to provide guidance and inspiration to a team in order to accomplish project objectives, whereas project governance centers on the structure, principles, and protocols that guarantee the proficient and effective management of the project (Ahmad, Shafique, & Jamal, 2020; Müller & Turner, 2007).

The interdependence between project leadership and project governance is significant. The establishment of a robust project governance framework is essential for the attainment of effective project leadership, as it delineates the specific duties and responsibilities of all project stakeholders. This framework helps to establish clear lines of communication, accountability, and decision-making authority, which are critical for effective project management (Patanakul, Shenhar, & Milosevic, 2016).

On the other hand, project governance cannot function effectively without strong project leadership. A project leader who possesses strong leadership skills can effectively implement the governance framework and ensure that all stakeholders adhere to it. Moreover, an effective project leader can create a positive team culture that is conducive to project success and aligns with the governance framework (Kerzner, 2017).

In two qualitative case studies conducted in South Africa, the significance of project governance as a success element in large-scale investment projects was empirically evaluated. The researchers discovered practical improvements among respondents in implementing governance principles that had an impact on project success (Ali & Shafique, 2020; Bekker & Steyn, 2008). Sharma, Durand, and Gur-Arie (1981) applied the quantitative study to explore the project management and relationship of project success in various project governance settings and found no relationship at all.

Recent research has examined the behaviour of project leaders and governance about project success. Study results indicate that early and active participation of the team members is important to the success of the project, not only to help the team members understand their roles and responsibilities but also to help them achieve their goals. According to the study results, both project leadership and project governance, if combined to determine success, have negative effects on projects. Due to their close relationship with project culture, project governance and project leadership rely very heavily on one another. According to the results of our study, it was found a significant positive correlation between project control and success (Amjad, 2018).

As a result, research on project leadership is in high demand and is regarded as a separate field of expertise. Abednego and Ogunlana (2006) stated that a governance process is described as a process by which decisions are taken and put into action. Turner and Keegan (2001) defined project governance as a key instrument for reducing a specific project's exposure to risk. The authors proposed two distinct interface roles for successfully enacting project governance.

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The study emphasised the need of governance orientation within the organisational context of project management, as well as the adoption of a stakeholder-oriented approach to project governance, in order to effectively achieve long-term project success. The aforementioned study revealed a substantial and favorable correlation between project governance and the success of the project (Hussain, 2022; Joslin & Müller, 2016).

According to Hu and Liden (2011), the project manager is responsible for formulating project objectives that are integral to the collective performance and achievement of the team. Goal ambiguity, as described by Lee, Rainey, and Chun (2009), is a contributing factor to failure. It refers to a state of lacking awareness regarding the expected standard and expectations. Effective communication between the project manager and the team is crucial for ensuring clarity and minimising ambiguity regarding the project's objectives, requirements, and specifications (Ali et al., 2021). Therefore, the subsequent hypothesis is offered in accordance with the aforementioned information.

H2: *Project leadership impacts project governance (PG).*

2.3. Project governance and project Success

Different professional bodies and authors define project governance as a managerial process that acts continuously to take decisions regarding the project performance (Abednego & Ogunlana, 2006) and a set of fairly stagnant mechanisms for organising and securing interactions between firms participating in a project and project governance (Olsen et al., 2005). Even though project management has been extensively studied, most of the study on leadership in project management has been static and has not specifically addressed the connection between project governance and project leadership in projects (Thomas & Bendoly, 2009). Nowadays, projects are designed to manage deliveries, development, and adjustments in all areas of the organised world and research field. Research on project management has extended from a focus on planning and control, which is driven by operations analysis-based models (Packendorff, 1995; Söderlund, 2011), including nearly all project management areas (Amjad, 2018).

In order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the impact of leadership designs on project performance, it is imperative to investigate the underlying mechanisms that drive the development of these leadership designs (Aga et al., 2016; Ding et al., 2017). The examination of project governance has been the subject of scrutiny from several theoretical perspectives, resulting in the development of numerous frameworks through collaborative research efforts. However, there remains a lack of consensus regarding the specific constituents of a project governance model (Ali et al., 2021; Levie, Burke, & Lannon, 2017). According to Ruuska et al. (2009), project governance encompasses a collection of regulations that are formulated to fulfill the demands of stakeholders, establish documentation procedures, facilitate communication practices, and implement specified metrics that enhance the achievement of project objectives.

H3: *Project governance impacts project success.*

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2.4. Mediating Role of Project Governance

By creating a secure, visible, and reliable technical environment within the project, effective governance helps project-based organizations to achieve success (Korac-Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2001). Moreover, strong governance helps organisations to ensure that their projects are conducted in a timely, cost-effective manner, enabling them to reach their desired outcome. Furthermore, effective governance allows organizations to evaluate their projects against these parameters, allowing for better decision-making and resource allocation. Ultimately, this leads to greater success in achieving the desired outcome. Furthermore, good governance also facilitates the establishment of an efficient communication and decision-making process, thereby enabling the project manager to efficiently monitor and control the project's progress (Korac-Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2001). Bygstad and Hanseth (2010) explain that the main purpose of governance is to align project goals with organisational strategies. Additionally, an experimental study shows that aligned project governance can improve project performance (Chan & Reich, 2007). Project governance plays a crucial role in facilitating the establishment and enhancement of organizational and project processes.

Another study suggests that project governance plays a mediating role in the relationship between project control and project success. The author (Amjad, 2018) noted that effective project execution is facilitated by robust governance and a sound system of checks and balances, as observed throughout their data collecting.

H4: *PG mediates the relationship between PL and PS.*

2.5. The moderating role of goal clarity

Project team members benefit from good communication, making project implementation less difficult for them (Grant, 2012). The successful completion of the Project is anticipated to align with the prescribed specifications, anticipated outcomes, and contentment of the client and other relevant parties involved. The success of projects is contingent upon their capacity to meet the needs and expectations of their clients, and projects that attain this degree of satisfaction are seen as successful (Ali et al., 2021; Kerzner, 2013; PMI, 2013).

A crucial prerequisite for the Project is the comprehensive comprehension of its scope, purposes, and objectives by all principal players involved (Kerzner, 2013). Clarity in goals is essential for attaining the desired levels of performance (Sawyer, 1992). Individual and group performance becomes high in situations where the objectives are obvious to both the individuals and the groups (Anderson & Stritch, 2016).

Bosselut et al. (2012) found that when project objectives are not clearly stated, people are less likely to understand the direction of the Project and the purpose of the Project (Bosselut et al., 2012). An effective project manager assures the achievement of both the

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short- and long-term goals and objectives of the project while ensuring that the project is executed in accordance with the customer's requirements. Regarding leadership, the members of the project team are provided with pertinent information pertaining to the objectives of the project, the expectations of both the client and management, as well as the criteria by which the team's achievements are evaluated (Balogun & Hailey, 2008; Moss, 2017).

The findings of a prior investigation suggest that there exists a positive correlation between the provision of contingent benefits within the context of transactional leadership and the achievement of project success. The study considered goal clarity as one of the criteria, alongside other factors, in its analysis. Based on the research conducted by Aga (2016), it has been determined that a project with high goal clarity is a more reliable indicator of project success compared to a project with poor goal clarity.

Furthermore, another study indicates that team members' commitment and clarity of objectives can enhance the effectiveness of innovation processes in their organization. This can be achieved by motivating the team members to use innovative processes to achieve desired results, as well as by guiding them in developing strategies that are appropriate for achieving those results in the first place.

Teams that integrate innovation processes without clear direction and dedication are unlikely to achieve success. This is because they may become disoriented in terms of their priorities, expend time on exploring less promising ideas, and experience difficulties in collaborating effectively due to a lack of shared objectives. The primary aim of this study was to examine the potential moderating relationship between two emergent team states, namely goal clarity and commitment and affective tone. Based on the empirical findings of the study, it can be inferred that the association between innovation processes and performance is subject to moderation by goal clarity and commitment. This implies that when there exists a heightened degree of goal clarity and commitment, the aforementioned relationship tends to exhibit a more robustly positive nature (Ali et al., 2021; Waseem et al., 2022).

Both studies indicated the social cognitive theory as a thought process to get succeed as the goal clarity does in the mind of a project leader (Ali et al., 2021; Waseem et al., 2022).

H5: *Goal clarity (GC) moderates the relationship between PL and PS.*

2.6. Theoretical framework

The Social Cognitive Theory validates the relationship of the variables in this research and aids in underpinning the findings. Social cognitive theory is deemed fit in this study since leaders serve as role models for their followers, and when leaders demonstrate appropriate behaviors, individuals are more likely to follow them. This indicates that the employee follows the actions of his or her boss, learns from those actions, and thus behaves by those actions. This study is based on existing project leadership and its impact on the success of the Project and how Project governance is related to it as moderator by taking goal clarity

as a moderator.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001; Bandura & National Inst of Mental Health, 1986) also stated that individuals behave as per their level of understanding about different things such as behavior, action, and decisions. Similarly, good project governance also increases the level of success as employees act accordingly. According to social cognition theory, motivation outcomes are stimulated and directed when goals are established (Bandura, 2001; Bandura & National Inst of Mental Health, 1986).

A goal is a visual picture of what one is trying to accomplish, such as getting an A on a test or defeating a specific time in a race. In the reciprocal interaction paradigm, goals are internal practices that assist people in focusing and sustaining their efforts oriented toward task accomplishment. When learners monitor and evaluate their progress toward a goal, a disparity between the objective and perceived progress motivates learners to exert the required effort and endure. Self-efficacy is increased when learners believe they are making progress toward a goal (Schunk, 2012).

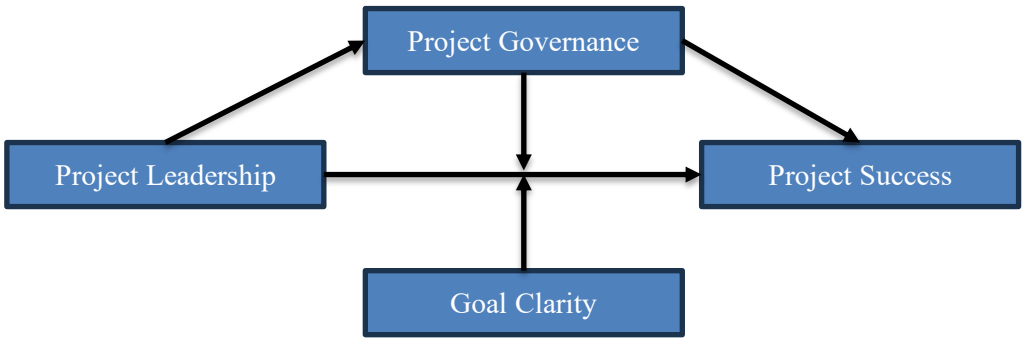

Figure 1: Theoretical framework

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative methodology was employed for data gathering, wherein data was gathered from various employees engaged in private civil engineering projects in Pakistan. Furthermore, the present study employed an inductive technique and utilized a cross-sectional design, with data being collected once by the researcher. The research population comprises project professionals, including project managers, team members, consultants, coordinators, and junior personnel. The current study pursues to emphasise Project-based organizations (private). The sample size of 300 individuals was taken from the population using the probability sampling technique and floating the structured questionnaire (Jamal et al., 2021; Salameh, Aman-Ullah, Mehmood, & Abdul-Majid, 2023; Shafique, Khizar, Jamal, Sarwar, & Khan, 2020; Shafique & Majeed, 2020; Shafique & Siddique, 2020).

4. ANALYSES AND RESULTS

In view of analyzing the results of the study, SPSS was used, and all those tests are applied from which all the hypotheses were evaluated. Confirmatory factor analysis was run to find out the model fitness of the study, Similarly, reliability, normality multicollinearity was found out to test reliability of data, having no outliers, missing values. Normality of

the data was checked with normal Z score values and skewness and kurtosis. Means and stand deviation was found to do the Descriptive analysis. Correlation was run to find out the association between the variables and regression is run to examine the main effects hypotheses. Mediation and moderation are also run to find out the direct mediation and Hayes Process was used to test the moderating effect of the variable.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis – CFA for this model showed the best fit [X^2 /df = 2.27 (513 / 226), CFI=.92, TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.067, SRMR=0.03] for the four-factor model (Table 1).

Table 1: CFA Results

Index	Acceptance	Literature	Result
Chi^2 / df	<5.00	Marsh and Hocevar (1985)	2.27
RMSEA	<0.07	Steiger (2007)	0.067
SRMR	<0.05	Hu and Bentler (1999)	0.031
CFI	>0.90	Bentler (1990)	0.92
TLI	>0.90	Bentler and Bonett (1980)	0.91

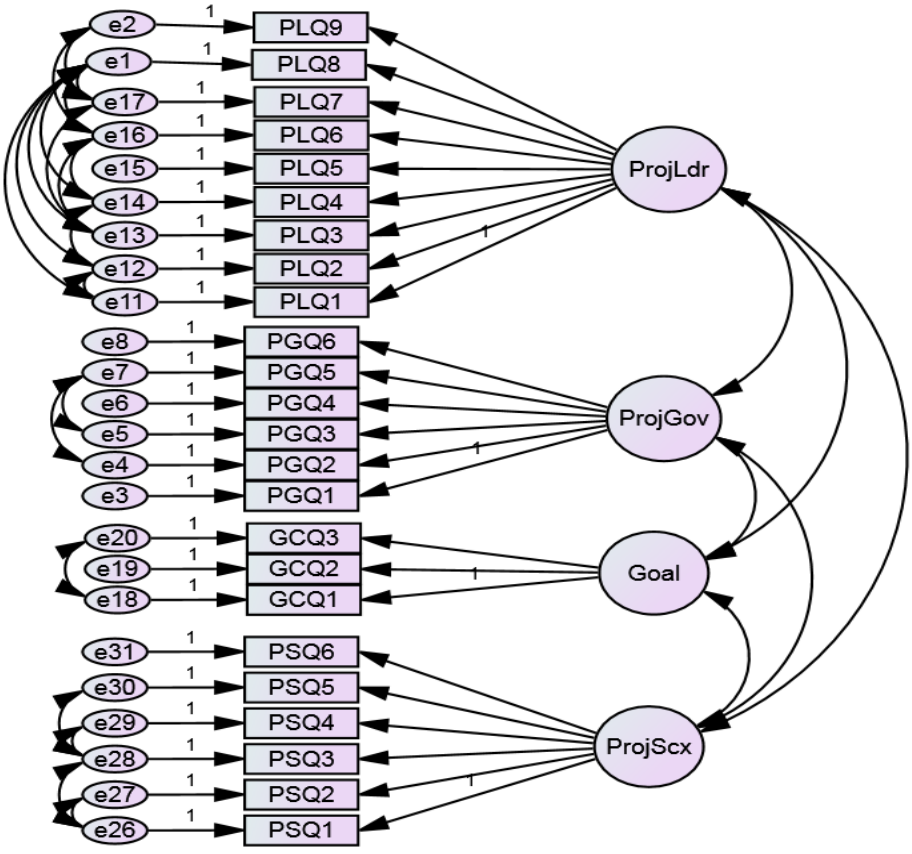

Figure 2: CFA Graphical Model

Reliability of Scale Items: To determine the reliability of the instrument used in the study, a reliability test was performed to analyze the reliability of each variable. The values suggest that the instrument used in the study is reliable, as they were above the accepted

threshold of chrone bach's value of 0.7 suggested by Hair et al. (2019) (See Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability of Scale Items

Scale	Scale Items	Cronbach Alpha Value
Project Leadership	9	0.78
Project Governance	6	0.76
Goal Clarity	3	0.73
Project Success	6	0.81

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations

	Mean	SD	N
Project Leadership	3.61	.44	281
Project Governance	4.00	.33	281
Goal Clarity	3.41	.51	281
Project Success	4.16	.48	281

Means, Standard Deviations and correlations: Correlation between the study variables was checked by using SPSS and it was found significant (P< (0.005). The results of the correlation indicated that there is significant correlation between PL, PS, PG and GC (See Table 3 and 4)

Table 4: Correlations

Sr.	Variable	1	2	3	4
1	Project Leadership	-			
2	Project Governance	0.34**	-		
3	Goal Clarity	0.18**	0.28**	-	
4	Project Success	0.28**	0.36**	0.54**	-

** p < 0.01

Data Normality and Multicollinearity: To check the normality assumption, the distribution of the independent variables at interval/ratio levels, and the distribution of the dependent variables has been examined. To ensure that the data in this study were normally distributed (Ain & Shafique, 2022; Jariyapan, Mattayaphutron, Gillani, & Shafique, 2022; Shafique, 2017; Shafique & Habib, 2020) skewness / kurtosis techniques were used to examine this. Using descriptive statistics, SPSS was used to check the skewness and kurtosis.

Table 5: Data Normality

	Skewness			Kurtosis		
	Statistic	SE	Z Score	Statistic	SE	Z Score
Project Leadership	-.152	.145	-1.05	-.948	.290	-3.27
Project Governance	.234	.145	1.61	.344	.290	1.19
Goal Clarity	-.259	.145	-1.77	-.002	.290	-.007
Project Success	-.300	.145	-2.07	-.362	.290	-1.25

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The results are shown in Table 5 in terms of skewness and kurtosis. An item's z-score is calculated by dividing its skewness and kurtosis by the standard error. Values of the z-scores are found within the acceptable range as observed in the different studies i.e., skewness between -2 to +2 and kurtosis between -7 to +7 (Shafique, 2017; Shafique & Ahmad, 2022; Shafique & Khan, 2020a; 2020b) (see table 5). There was no evidence of multicollinearity as Tolerance was above 0.2 and VIF was below 10 (see table 6).

Table 6: Multicollinearity

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Project Leadership	.879	1.138
	Project Governance	.839	1.192
	Goal Clarity	.913	1.095

a. Dependent Variable: Project Success

4.1. Hypothesis Testing

4.1.1. Direct Testing

Table 7 indicated that PL was significantly predicting PS [total effect (b = 0.31), direct effect (b = 0.20)] which indicated the approval of hypothesis 1. Using PROCESS devised by Hayes (2018), indicated that PL positively and significantly predicted the PG (b = 0.25, p = .000) which approved hypothesis-2. It also showed that PG significantly predicted the PS (b = 0.43, p = .000) indicating that hypothesis 3 was approved.

Table 7: Direct Analysis

Variable	Project Governance	Project Success	
	Model-1	Model-2	Model-3
Project Leadership	.25**	.20**	.11**
Project Governance	-	.43**	-
R^2	.11	.16	.08
R^2 *Change*	-	-	.08

*N = 281, **p < .01*

4.1.2. Mediation Testing

PL's direct effect on PS was significant, hence it was established that PG partially mediated the relationship between PL and PS. PL's indirect effect (b = 0.11, Boot SE = 0.04, 95% CI [0.05, 0.19]) was also significant, approving hypothesis 4.

Table 8: Mediation Analysis

PL-PG-PS	*B*	SE	Percentile 95% CI		
			LLCI	ULCI	p
Total Effect	.31	.064	.188	.439	.000
Direct Effect	.20	.065	.076	.332	.002
Indirect Effect	.11	.038	.048	.194	n/a

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Table-9: Moderation Analyses

Variable	Unethical Behavior		
	Coefficient	SE	p
Project Leadership	.21	.055	.000
Goal Clarity	.49	.047	.000
Project Leadership x Goal Clarity	.33	.106	.002
R^2	.35		
Conditional Effect of PL on PS			
Goal Clarity	*B*	SE	Percentile 95% CI
			LLCI / ULCI / p
-1SD	.04	.08	–.11 / .19 / .586
M	.21	.06	.10 / .32 / .000
+1SD	.37	.08	.22 / .52 / .000

4.1.3. Moderation Testing

Table 8, of the process devised by Hayes (2018), was used to test moderation hypothesis-5. Results indicated that interaction/moderation term (i.e., Project Leadership x Goal Clarity) met the condition of significance and was positively related to PS (b = .33, p = .002). Hence, it was concluded that GC moderated (Baron & Kenny, 1986) the relationship between PL and PS.

Moreover, following the Cohen et al. (2003) the moderation of GC was also plotted. PL was more positively related to PS at higher levels of GC (slope = .54, t = 8.54; p < .001) than the lower levels of GC (slope = .21, t = 2.71, p < .01). Thus, hypothesis-5 received further support. Figure 3 indicated the interaction effect with a simple slope and reflected that on higher goal clarity. Project success will be higher.

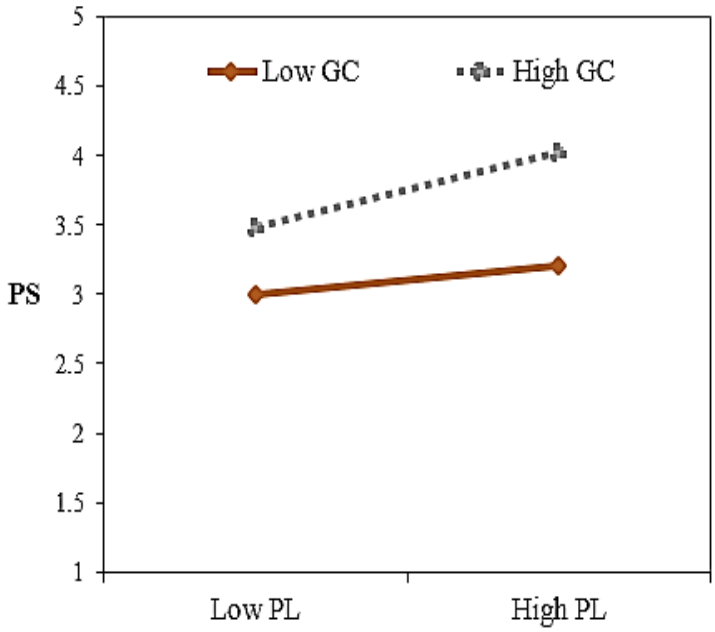

Figure 3: Simple Slope

5. DISCUSSION

In view of the first hypothesis, it was found that project leadership significantly predicted project success by running the process model, which indicates that a project leader plays a vital role in the success of any project. In view of the second hypothesis, it was found that PL positively and significantly predicted the PG which concludes that project leadership has a strong link with project governance. Findings of the analysis in the view of the third hypothesis exhibited that *Project* governance impacts project success, and a relationship exists between them that by increasing the project governance, the project's success can be predicted. Mediation analysis confirmed and approved hypothesis four that PG mediates the relationship between PL and PS. Exhibition of interaction plot confirmed the moderation and proved the hypothesis five that goal clarity moderated between the relationship of Project Leadership and Project success as if goals are clear to project leader then project leads towards the success (Ali et al., 2021; Amjad, 2018; Bekker & Steyn, 2008; Bosselut et al., 2012; Kerzner, 2013; Korac-Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2001; Levie et al., 2017; Waseem et al., 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

The study's findings indicate that project leadership plays a significant role in project success. Specifically, the presence of effective leadership is associated with positive project outcomes. In a similar vein, the presence of effective governance in a project ensures that it is well-managed, leading to successful outcomes. This highlights the role of project governance in facilitating the achievement of project objectives through the effective leadership of a project leader. Moreover, the project's success was evidently influenced by the implementation of project governance. Furthermore, the project leader effectively ensured goal clarity by incorporating a moderator. This strategic decision facilitated the provision of clear instructions for achieving the project's objectives and ultimately achieving a successful project outcome, all while adhering to project governance protocols. The correlation was deemed appropriate among all the variables, and no evidence of multicollinearity was seen. However, studies were conducted with different variables such as employee engagement, emotional intelligence, and a different structural model to incorporate new contributions. Similarly, different research designs, such as longitudinal design opted for further studies. Qualitative techniques also be useful in future studies to determine the results of the same or other variables with different research approaches.

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