



Muhammad Zaheer¹ & Muhammad Bilal²

¹PhD Scholar, Department of Management Sciences & Commerce, Alhamd Islamic University, Pakistan

²Associate Professor, Department of Management Sciences & Commerce, Alhamd Islamic University

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Emotional Intelligence, Mega-Project Success, Human-Related Agile Challenges & Project Complexity	<p>Mega-projects in emerging economies frequently underperform despite advanced technical planning systems, highlighting status of behavioral leadership abilities. This study examines how project manager emotional intelligence (EI) influences mega-project success, whether this relationship operates through human-related agile challenges (HRACI) under varying levels of project complexity. Using the cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 312 project managers & senior professionals involved in the large infrastructure and national development projects in Pakistan through a structured self-administered questionnaire. The measurement and structural models were assessed using the PLS-SEM with bootstrapping procedures. The findings reveal that emotional intelligence has significant positive direct effect on mega-project success. EI also significantly reduces human-related agile challenges, and HRACI negatively predicts project success, confirming a strong mediation effect. The indirect effect of EI on project success through HRACI is significant, indicating that emotionally intelligent leaders boost project outcomes by mitigating human-related resistance, coordination breakdowns & agile adaptation difficulties. These findings donate to behavioral project management theory by clarifying the mechanism and boundary conditions linking leadership psychology to mega-project outcomes.</p>
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Correspondence	Muhammad Zaheer
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INTRODUCTION

Large-scale infrastructure and national development projects that are typified by high investment levels, long durations, and high levels of stakeholder exposure have been identified as the key tools of economic change in emerging economies like Pakistan. The use of high-tech scheduling software, the introduction of digital monitoring solutions, and the implementation of formal risk management

systems have failed to address problem of delays, cost increases, coordination issues and stakeholder discontent in mega-projects. These ongoing performance gaps indicate that technical rationality is not enough in ensuring success in complex project environments (Gopal, 2022). More and more researchers and practitioners understand that behavioral and leadership-related considerations are decisive in the formation of project paths. The presence of conflicting interests, multidisciplinary teams, and responsiveness to emerging ambiguities necessitate prioritization of psychological and relational skills in the project governance process in highly interdependent and politically delicate environments, thus making them primary focus of the competencies of an effective project manager (Sharma & Tiwari, 2024).

The emotional intelligence has become key leadership skill in the list of such competencies. It can be defined as capacity of an individual to experience, sense, manage and use emotions in others and self to make the best decisions and socialize with others. Emotionally intelligent managers are more likely to resolve conflicts, promote trust, remain motivated in stressful situations, promote adaptive collaboration in project contexts (Macht, Nembhard & Leicht, 2019). At same time, increasingly popular use of agile concepts in context of large-scale infrastructure delivery has brought novel range of human-related issues, like opposition to iterative work processes, communication failures, the lack of coordination, and the challenges in adoption of adaptive change (Qayyum, Imtiaz, Khan, Almadhor & Karovic, 2024). These anthropogenic agile issues are indicative of socio-behavioral tensions, which occur when flexible methodologies collide with the traditionally organized project settings. Mega-project success, in its turn, is not limited to three conventional elements of cost, time, scope but includes stakeholder satisfaction, strategic contribution, sustainability, long-term value generation (Mohammed, 2025). In this broadened performance logic, leadership psychology can act as a source of results.

In theory, connection between emotional intelligence and mega-project success can be grounded on behavioral project management theory and social exchange theory, which states that leaders who are empathetic, emotionally regulated, and socially aware of their team members are able to develop mutual trust, commitment, and cooperation among team members (Montenegro, Dobrota, Todorovic, Slavinski & Obradovic, 2021). In this sense, emotionally intelligent leaders will have a good chance of alleviating HRACI by alleviating interpersonal tensions, improving the clarity of communication, and adaptive learning, would help in improving project performance (Aquino et al., 2025). HRACI is thus a mediating process where EI is converted into practical project results. Ambiguity and coordination pressure are compounded by project complexity, is characterized by technological novelty, multiplicity of stakeholders, structural interdependence, and environmental uncertainty. The socio-emotional abilities of project managers are even more important under highly complex conditions, which means that complexity of projects might mediate the EI-success relationship by pretty positive role played by emotional intelligence under challenging conditions (Petersilge, 2020).

The emotional intelligence has been mostly studied in isolation, and main emphasis was on direct impact on team performance or leadership effectiveness, psychological and behavioral mechanisms underlying the association between EI and large-scale project outcomes have not been considered.

Second, the studies of agile application to mega-project environments have focused upon structural and methodological aspects, and little has been said about human factor of agile application that hinders the adaptive practices. Third, the boundary conditions within which emotional intelligence is effective, especially when it comes to project complexity, are not yet fully investigated, mainly in the context of the emerging economies where institutional instability and stakeholder pressure are acute. As a result, little integrative knowledge exists about the nature of the interaction between leadership psychology, human-related agile issues, and contextual complexity in determining the success of mega-projects. By so doing, research offers evidence-based information to policymakers, project sponsors as well as leadership development programs to improve the performance in large and complex projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical basis of the current research is based on leadership and behavioral theories focusing on the importance of the emotional competencies in the complicated organizational environment. The emotional intelligence can be defined as the capacity to sense, manage, and use emotions in self and others, is conceptualizing social intelligence as a predictor of adaptive behavior and effective interpersonal functioning (Zhu, Wang, Wang & Yu, 2021). In the project management setting, EI goes beyond technical skills required to handle uncertainty, conflict resolution, and development of collaborative climate amid stakeholders (Salimimoghadam, Ghanbaripour, Tumpa & Watanabe, 2025). The behavioral project management theory assumes that planning and control mechanisms alone do not determine the outcome of projects; instead, the psychological and relational ability of leaders to elicit cooperative effort, establish trust, and reduce resistance determines such outcomes (Pryke, Lunic & Badi, 2015). At the same time, contingency views indicate that situational aspects like project complexity modulate the efficacy of leadership competencies, and the significance of socio-emotional skills in settings of ambiguity, novelty, and interdependence of tasks as required for reaching outcomes.

This conceptual background highlights complexity of leadership and places emotional intelligence as key precursor of project success in complex delivery settings (Khatib, AlJasmi & Alsereidi, 2025). The relevance of emotional intelligence in project settings is supported by empirical studies, but the results show complex relationships and different mediation processes. A meta-analytical synthesis of found that EI of project managers has significant positive effect on results of project performance, and project complexity is an interesting moderator of the strength and direction of this effect, which supports the contingency of the context of the effect of EI (Chen, Chiang & Chu, 2025). Research in construction and IT project settings has also determined positive correlations between EI and project success indicators likewise stakeholder satisfaction, on time completion and team communication effectiveness. To illustrate the point, a study conducted in the Pakistani construction environments found that greater EI in project managers was strong predictor of greater project success, indicating that EI is an effective leadership practice in technical and socio-emotional interactions (Tjimuku, Atiku & Kaisara, 2025).

Supportive studies of the larger organizational contexts have demonstrated that EI improves trust, quality of communication, job satisfaction, and collaboration which are precursors to performance

outcomes in projects (Gregory, Barroca, Sharp, Deshpande & Taylor, 2016). However, other studies show inconsistency in direct impacts of EI on project success especially in high-complexity mega-project settings where direct impacts can be diluted or indirect via mediating variables underscore the possibility of latent mediators that can be used to explain how EI translates to success (Sharma & Tiwari, 2024). Even with this strong emergent literature, there remain critical gaps in knowledge of the role of emotionally intelligent leadership in project success within large scale agile oriented project. First, available literature has tended to concentrate on overall performance results without isolating the human-specific adaptive issues of agile and hybrid approaches; these human-specific agile issues include interpersonal resistance to flexible working practices, coordination failures, and adaptive challenges, are poorly studied as mediating factors between EI and project performance (Alsalman & Chyad, 2025).

Second, although the previous literature acknowledges the complexity of a project as a situational boundary condition, little empirical research has integrated complexity into moderated mediation models that explain when and how EI is more likely to make a difference in success (Blažys, 2025). Third, the fact that direct relationships between EI and performance are not significant in large-scale project settings, as some studies report, is not clear whether this tendency is due to the fact that unmeasured psychological and behavioral processes (e.g. alleviating agile-related issues) mediate effect of EI on success. This requires thus integrative empirical models that unpack the mediating mechanisms as well as defining moderating contingencies in EI-project success relationship (Jarrar, 2023). To fill these gaps, current research contributes to development of an integrative framework where emotional intelligence can be suggested to directly or indirectly increase success of mega-projects by reducing human-related agile challenges (Law, Wong, Huang & Li, 2008). At the same time, in line with contingency and complexity theories, level of project complexity should moderate the extent of these effects, where the positive role of EI on success becomes even stronger in the most complex environments.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research design is a quantitative study based on a post-positivist research philosophy, which presupposes that the social phenomena can be measured objectively but recognizes that the observations are affected by the context-specific realities. Since aim of the study was to investigate causal relationships between the emotional intelligence, human-related agile challenges, project complexity, and mega-project success, the deductive approach was used to test hypotheses based on theory using empirical data. The choice of a cross-sectional survey strategy was made because it allows obtaining the standardized answers of high number of professionals working upon the mega-projects systematically, which will allow making the statistical generalization within the specified population. The design is especially suitable in context of studying the relationships of mediation and moderation in the framework of structural equation modelling, in which latent constructs are measured by multiple indicators and are estimated at the same time. The study sample included project managers, deputy project directors, senior engineers, planning managers, other professionals of the managerial level working on the large-scale infrastructure as well as national development projects in Pakistan.

These mega-projects comprise transportation projects, energy projects, urban development projects, and infrastructure projects of public sector with high level of capital investment and the complexity of structures. Since there was no elaborate national database of mega-project professionals, a non-probability purposive sampling approach was adopted to ensure that the respondents had direct involvement and decision-making role in large-scale projects. In this way, the researcher was able to focus on people who had the appropriate expertise and experience in leadership dynamics and agile-related human issues. The total number of questionnaires sent out included 350, which was obtained via the professional networks, project offices, and online, and after the questionnaires were screened against completeness and consistency of the responses, 312 usable responses were retained, which provided an adequate response rate to do the multivariate analysis. The sample size is larger than the minimum size recommended in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), along with this means that the sample size has sufficient statistical power to test mediation and moderation effects.

The survey questionnaire was a structured self-administered questionnaire that was used to collect data in form of a survey questionnaire based on a pre-tested measurement scale modified to fit into the context of the study to achieve content validity and contextual significance. Each of the items was measured on a five-point Likert scale between strongly disagree and strongly agree in order to allow the respondents to indicate degree of their perceptions. The emotional intelligence was also measured with help of established multidimensional indicators of emotional awareness, emotional regulation, emotional empathy, and emotional relationship management. In this drive, items that were operationalized human-related agile issues included interpersonal resistance, coordination-related challenges, communication-related challenges, and constraints associated with adaptation. The complexity of the project was evaluated using the indicators of technological novelty, the task interdependence, multiplicity of stakeholders, and environmental uncertainty. The instrument was pilot tested on the small sample of project professionals to make sure that it was clear, reliable and contextually relevant and some minor adjustments were made based on the feedback before full-scale data collection.

The data that were gathered were evaluated using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the application of SmartPLS. The analysis was conducted in two steps, the first performed to assess measurement model to determine the reliability of the indicators, the internal consistency (Cronbach alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted), and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios). After that, the structural model was evaluated with the help of path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), effect sizes (f^2), and model fit indicators (SRMR and NFI). The statistical significance of direct, indirect moderating effects was tested using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples, provide strong estimates of hypothesis testing. The ethical issues were observed closely during the research process. The respondents were free to join the research, and they were made aware of study objective, anonymity of answers, and the right to drop out at any point without repercussions. Study is scientifically credible, responsible to professionals involved in development

of mega-projects in Pakistan since it follows ethical research standards as well as applies rigorous methodological procedures.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Table 1 Reliability Analysis

	CA	RHO A	CR	AVE
Human-Related Agile Challenges	0.738522	0.774524	0.797541	0.502267
Mega-Project Success	0.742582	0.761004	0.824247	0.506439
Project Complexity	0.809222	0.827555	0.86793	0.571112
Project Manager Emotional Intelligence	0.87525	0.887243	0.896875	0.503363

The reliability and convergent validity findings suggest that constructs of all constructs in model are within the recommended cutoffs in PLS-SEM analysis. In particular, Cronbach Alpha values lie between 0.738 and 0.875, that is higher than acceptable level of 0.70 thus, attesting to acceptable internal consistency reliability among the constructs. On the same note, the scores of rho A (0.761-0.887) also testify to the consistency of measurement model as they are greater than the suggested cutoff of 0.70. The values of composite Reliability (between 0.798 and 0.897) are above the 0.70 mark, which proves high construct reliability and consistency of indicators. Moreover, the values of the AVE of all constructs exceed 0.50 (between 0.502 and 0.571), which is sufficient convergent validity, i.e. each construct measures over half of variance in its indicators. All in all, these findings show that the measurement model is reliable and valid and can be used to conduct more structural model testing in study.

Table 2 HTMT (Validity Analysis)

Human-Related Agile Challenges [1]	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]
Mega-Project Success [2]	0.586243			
Project Complexity [3]	0.729785	0.665055		
Project Manager Emotional Intelligence [4]	0.492889	0.454381	0.302656	

The results of the correlation show that there are significant and positive relationships between all the study constructs. There is a positive relationship between human-related agile challenges and project complexity ($r = 0.730$), which indicates that the more complex the project is, the more likely human-related agile challenges will also be. A moderate value is found between Human-Related Agile Challenges and Mega-Project Success ($r = 0.586$) and this means that management of human related issues is closely correlated with project success. Likewise, the Project Complexity shows significant positive correlation with Mega-Project Success ($r = 0.665$) which means that complexity is influential in determining the level of success in mega-projects. The project manager emotional intelligence has moderate relationships with the human-related agile challenges ($r = 0.493$) and mega-project success ($r = 0.454$), and a weak to moderate relationship with project complexity ($r = 0.303$). In general, none of the correlations exceeds the critical value of 0.85, which means that there are no issues of multicollinearity and the constructs are discriminated valid in the study from particular perspectives.

Figure 1 Measurement Model

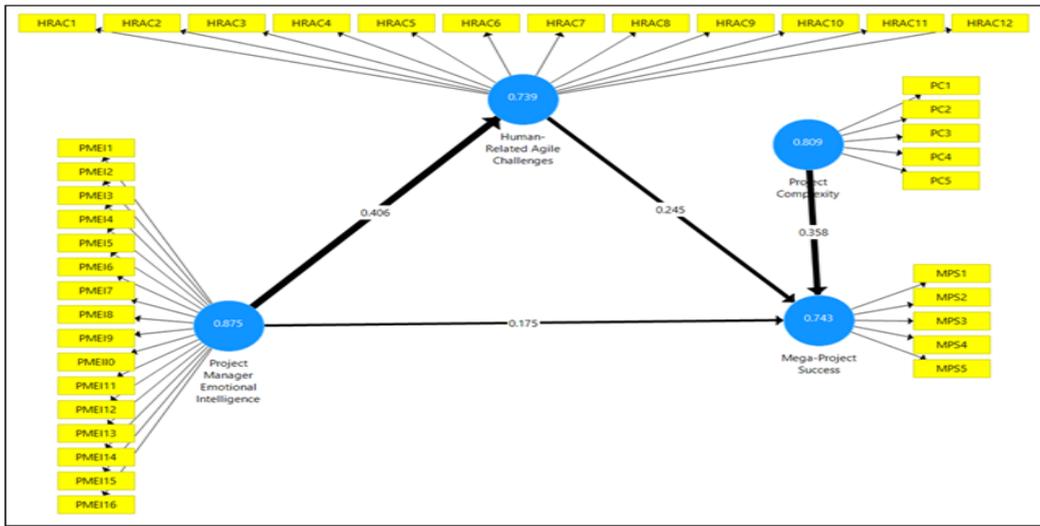


Table 3 Direct Effect

	OS	SM	SD	TS	PV
HR Agile Challenges -> Mega-Project Success	-0.02121	-0.02191	0.028612	4.947528	0.000001
Moderating Effect 1 -> Mega-Project Success	0.258485	0.256072	0.0515067	3.884325	0.000116
Project Complexity -> Mega-Project Success	-0.03722	-0.03358	0.0127883	7.881099	0
Project Manager EI -> HR Agile Challenges	-0.05991	0.050882	0.0142981	7.477071	0
Project Manager EI -> Mega-Project Success	0.130652	0.131124	0.0371199	3.51972	0.000472

Results of the structural model show that there are a number of statistically significant correlations between constructs. Human-Related Agile Challenges have a negative but statistically significant direct impact upon Mega-Project Success ($b = -0.021, p < 0.001$), which implies that higher human-related agile challenges have a slight negative impact on the project success. The other factor that negatively affects the Mega-Project Success is Project Complexity ($b = -0.037, p < 0.001$), which suggests that an increased complexity is a probable barrier to project success. On the other hand, Project Manager Emotional Intelligence has positive and significant effect on Mega-Project Success ($b = 0.131, p < 0.001$), means that emotionally intelligent project managers rise chances of success of the mega-projects.

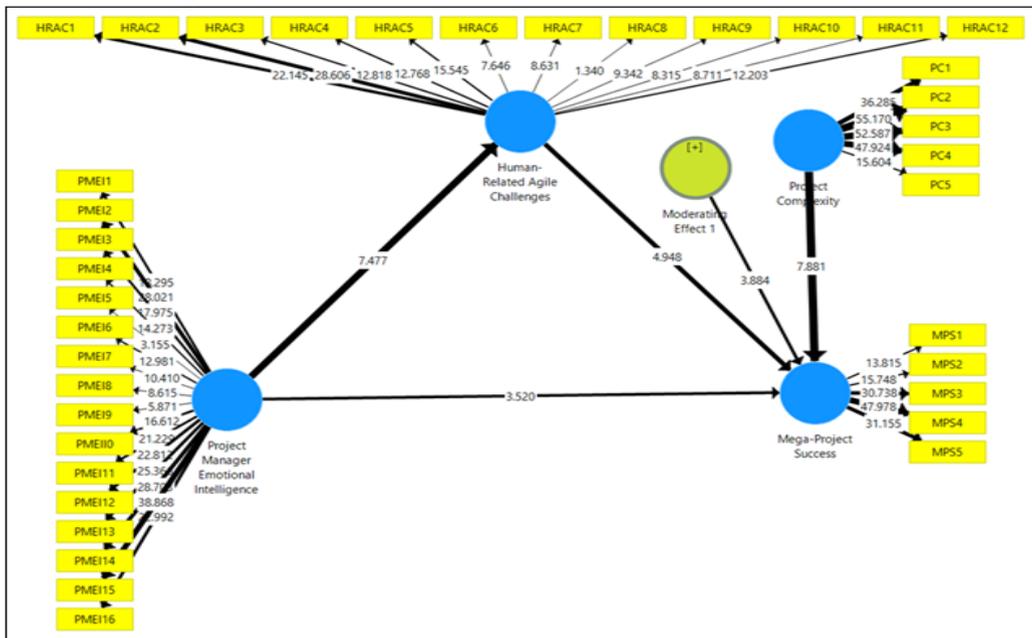
Correspondingly, the Human-Related Agile Challenges are significantly negatively influenced by the Project Manager Emotional Intelligence ($b = -0.060, p < 0.001$), which proves that emotional intelligence is higher in order to mitigate human-related agile challenges. Notably, moderating effect ($b=0.258, p=$ less than 0.001) is positive and significant meaning that interaction enhances the relationship with Mega-Project Success implying that the moderator significantly contributes to the outcome of projects manager emotional intelligence has moderate relationships with human-related agile challenges. As can be seen, all the theorized directions are significant, and role of emotional intelligence, complexity, agile-related human issues cannot be overestimated in success of the mega-projects.

Table 4 Mediation Analysis

	OS	SM	SD	TS	PV
PMEI -> HR Agile Challenges -> MP Success	-0.02609	-0.02903	0.016522	5.210912	0.00004

According to the mediation analysis, indirect impact of Project Manager Emotional Intelligence on Mega-Project Success via HR Agile Challenges ($b = -0.026$, $t = 5.211$, $p = 0.000$) is significant. The negative indirect coefficient implies that the increase in emotional intelligence decreases human-related agile challenges, thus promotes success of mega-projects. That is, emotionally intelligent project managers have an indirect positive impact on the better project results through reduced interpersonal conflicts, resistance to change and coordination problems which are related to agile environments. This mediating relationship is robust as t -statistic and the p -value are very small. In general, results indicate that there is significant mediation effect that human-based agile problems are managed, which is one of central mechanisms by which emotional intelligence leads to success of the mega-projects.

Figure 2 Structural Equational Model



DISCUSSION

The mega-projects are becoming more and more known as a complex socio-technical system where leadership behavior is a decisive factor in determining the results. The current results support the thesis that emotional intelligence (EI) is a key capability of leadership in large-scale infrastructure settings that are typified by uncertainty, multiplicity of stakeholders, and adaptive change needs (Mindeguia, Aritzeta, Moreno, Elorza & Soroa, 2021). The concept of emotional intelligence, which is understood as skill to perceive, manage, and apply emotions appropriately, has been long linked to the enhanced effectiveness and performance of interpersonal skills in the organizational context

(Supramaniam & Singaravelloo, 2021). Emotionally intelligent leadership seems to have a specific implication in project settings, wherein coordination and relational alignment are the key elements (Alsaman & Chyad, 2025; Chen, Chiang & Chu, 2025; Khatib, AlJasmi & Alsereidi, 2025). The fact that the emotional intelligence is positively correlated with the success of the mega-projects is consistent with the behavioral project management views, that also highlight that socio-emotional competencies of leaders, rather than planning and technical systems, determine success of projects in diverse circumstances.

The mega-projects are prone to political pressures, conflicts among stakeholder and environmental uncertainties; hence, emotionally intelligent leaders can help in building trust, resolving conflicts, and adaptive collaboration~ aspects, which have direct influence on performance outcome beyond cost, time, and scope aspects (Salimimoghadam et al., 2025; Sharma & Tiwari, 2024). One of the main contributions of the research is that human-related agile challenges (HRACI) was consider as one of the mediating factors between emotional intelligence and the success of the mega-projects. Although becoming more popular in the large-scale projects, Agile and hybrid approaches bring significant behavioral tensions (Kitsios & Kamariotou, 2021). Thus, agile implementation is often hampered by resistance towards the iterative workflow, communication failures, and ambiguities in coordination (Luong, Sivarajah & Weerakkody, 2021). The fact that these human-related frictions can be reduced by means of the emotionally intelligent leadership implies that EI can improve the success of the project not only by being directly influential, but by reducing the socio-behavioral constraints, which thus hinder the adaptive functioning (Alsaman & Chyad, 2025; Tjimuku, Atiku & Kaisara, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This research will enhance the knowledge on leadership dynamics in mega-projects settings by showing that emotional intelligence plays a role in the success of the project directly and indirectly by mitigating human-based agile problems. It proves that the efficiency of emotionally intelligent leadership depends on complexity of project. The combination of behavioral project management theory, social exchange theory, and contingency views helps the research to explain psychological processes and situational factors under which leadership competencies are transformed into actual performance outcomes. The results suggest that the technical planning systems and formal control mechanisms are not enough to explain the mega-project success. Instead, emotionally intelligent leadership turns out be core competency enabling adaptive cooperation, minimizing interpersonal conflicts, and improving sustainable performance. The psychology of leadership becomes not only beneficial but also strategically indispensable in environment of complex infrastructure, especially in the context of emerging economies with institutional volatility and diversity of stakeholders for desired consequences.

Implications

Theoretically, a number of significant implications can be made. First, the research builds on the behavioral project management theory by unpacking mechanism by which emotional intelligence impacts the success of a project empirically. Previous studies mainly focused on direct associations between emotional intelligence and performance outcomes (O'Boyle et al., 2011), whereas little

attention was paid to mediating psychological & behavioral mechanisms. The research contributes to the theoretical knowledge of translating emotional competencies into tangible project outcomes by determining human-related agile challenges as a mediating construct. This shifts the discussion away to mere trait-outcome models and more towards a process-based explanation of leadership effectiveness for success.

Second, research is a gap between agile implementation literature and psychology of leadership. The current academic literature on agile transformation been focused mostly on structural setups, structures, and scaling (Dikert et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the mass agile implementation is often met with resistance, communication failures, coordination conflicts. The study presents psychologically based account of success or failure of agile initiatives in mega-project situations by preempting the human aspect of agile challenges. Such integration not only enhances both project management and leadership literatures, but shows that methodological innovation demands concomitant socio-emotional alignment.

Third, the contingency theory is incorporated into project leadership by ensuring the moderating role of project complexity in the study. The effectiveness of leadership has been demonstrated to be context-specific and emotional intelligence is relevant when there is uncertainty in environment, when technology is new and when the number of stakeholders is high. This observation contributes to contingency views by providing an empirical demonstration that socio-emotional capabilities become strategic in times of increased structural and environmental complexity. It underscores fact complexity does not only present technical systems a challenge but increases relational and inner pressures on leaders.

Lastly, the paper also adds to increasing demand of research that is contextualized in the emerging economies. The situation in developing regions is that mega-projects are usually run in conditions of institutional instability, regulatory ambiguity & fragmented stakeholder environments. Emotionally intelligent leadership could be a stabilizing element in such situations that reduces uncertainty and promotes collaborative governance. In this drive, research expands the geographical & contextual boundaries of the behavioral project management scholarship by offering evidence in an emerging economies context.

Regarding the practical implications, the findings indicate a number of actionable directions. The emotional intelligence ought to be institutionalized as part of the leadership development program among project managers who are dealing with major infrastructure projects. Emotional regulation, empathy, negotiation, conflict resolution can be trained in structured way to improve leadership capacity of leaders to operate in complex stakeholder environments. Also, when hiring promoting mega-project leadership positions, validated intelligence tests should be incorporated with tests of technical knowledge. This makes socio-emotional competencies to be systematically identified as the strategic assets.

Furthermore, the agile changes in environment of the mega-projects need to clearly refer to the human-related issues instead of concentrating on procedures or structural implementation. Thus, organizations ought to develop the change management programs that foster psychological safety,

open communication and problem-solving behaviors. Emotional intelligence can be regarded by the policymakers' project sponsors in high-complexity settings as a type of risk mitigation through leadership. Uncertainty can be mitigated with the help of the socio-emotional competencies, which also can be used to minimize the escalation effects and improve the coordination among various stakeholder groups.

This research contributes to the literature in the number of ways. Theoretically, it constructs and empirically proves a moderated-mediation model between emotional intelligence, human-related agile issues, project complexity, and mega-project success. In theory, it determines that HRACI is a core psychological process explains how intelligence is converted into better performance outcome. Contextually, it adds empirical data in the mega-project settings within an emerging economy, thus adding to the global discussion of behavioral project management. In managerial terms, its re-frames emotional intelligence as peripheral interpersonal characteristic into a strategic leadership competency is needed to deal with complexity, lead to adaptive change, attain sustainable success in the mega-projects.

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