

THE RELATIONSHIP OF LEADERSHIP STYLES AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE WITH PROJECT SUCCESS: MEDIATING ROLE OF JOB SATISFACTION AND TRUST

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between leadership styles and emotional intelligence with project success, with a particular focus on the mediating role of job satisfaction and trust. While extensive literature exists on project management in construction and IT sectors, limited research has been conducted in the context of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), especially in developing countries like Pakistan. NGOs often operate under project-based structures, facing unique challenges related to leadership, resource constraints, and human capital development. Drawing on data collected through a structured, pre-tested questionnaire from 160 project managers and team leaders working in NGOs, this research applies statistical analysis using SPSS to evaluate the proposed model. The findings reveal that transformational and transactional leadership styles, as well as high emotional intelligence, significantly contribute to project success. Additionally, job satisfaction and interpersonal trust partially mediate these relationships, reinforcing their importance in project-oriented environments. The study offers theoretical and practical implications by highlighting the significance of leadership behavior and emotional competence in achieving project outcomes, particularly in socially driven, resource-constrained organizational settings. Future research could expand these findings by exploring other moderating variables such as organizational culture or team dynamics in similar sectors.

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic environment of project-based organizations, particularly within the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector, leadership effectiveness and emotional competence have become increasingly vital to project success. Unlike formal government or corporate entities, NGOs often operate under uncertain conditions, limited resources, and evolving social demands, which place a unique emphasis on the soft skills of project leaders (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015). The success or

failure of such projects is heavily dependent on how well leaders engage their teams, manage emotions, and build trust within the organization.

In this context, leadership style (LS) plays a critical role. Leadership determines how tasks are delegated, how motivation is fostered, and how conflicts are resolved. Past studies such as Avolio and Bass (1990) categorize leadership into transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles—each impacting team morale and performance differently.

Transformational leaders inspire innovation and commitment, transactional leaders promote structure and reward-based systems, while laissez-faire leaders typically avoid active involvement (Bass & Bass, 2009). In project-based NGOs, transformational and transactional styles are believed to significantly affect both team cohesion and goal attainment (Maqbool et al., 2017).

Parallel to leadership, emotional intelligence (EI)—defined as the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and those of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990)—has been recognized as a key predictor of project performance. EI is particularly relevant in the high-stakes, emotionally charged environment of NGO work, where professionals regularly face pressure, community-level challenges, and emotionally sensitive contexts. Leaders with high EI foster stronger interpersonal relationships, manage team stress effectively, and facilitate open communication (Goleman, 2001; Sy et al., 2006).

Furthermore, emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to foster inclusive and psychologically safe environments that encourage knowledge-sharing and creativity, which are critical in developmental and humanitarian projects (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Jordan & Troth, 2011). Such environments are known to reduce turnover intentions and increase organizational commitment in mission-driven sectors.

Recent research suggests that job satisfaction (JS) and trust (T) are significant mediators in the relationship between leadership or emotional intelligence and project outcomes. Employees who trust their leaders and are satisfied with their jobs demonstrate higher commitment, improved cooperation, and better problem-solving capabilities (Güteryüz et al., 2008; Rezvani et al., 2016). This is especially important in NGOs, where intrinsic motivation often outweighs monetary compensation.

Moreover, trust is essential in NGOs where accountability structures are often informal, and successful project outcomes depend heavily on team interdependence and mutual respect rather than formal authority (Atkinson & Butcher, 2003; Gillespie & Mann, 2004). This makes relational leadership and emotional awareness even more critical for success.

Despite growing interest in soft skills and leadership dynamics, most research in project management focuses on corporate and government sectors, especially in construction and IT (Müller & Turner,

2007; Nikagude & Stare, 2018). The NGO sector, particularly in Pakistan, remains underexplored, despite its growing role in social development and public service delivery (USAID, 2014; Ronalds, 2010). Given Pakistan's increasing reliance on donor-funded NGOs for social service delivery amid governance challenges, there is a pressing need to understand how leadership behaviors and emotional intelligence translate into effective project execution (Bhattacharya, 2014; Golini, Kalchschmidt, & Landoni, 2015).

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how leadership styles and emotional intelligence affect project success in NGOs, while considering job satisfaction and trust as mediating variables. The objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the soft leadership dynamics that drive successful project execution in NGOs operating under challenging environments. By doing so, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on project leadership in developing economies and offers actionable insights for improving leadership practices in mission-driven organizations.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Leadership Styles and Project Success

Leadership Style (LS) is a foundational element influencing how teams behave, collaborate, and achieve project objectives. Bass and Avolio (1990) introduced the Full Range Leadership Model, which identifies three core styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. Transformational leaders inspire, intellectually stimulate, and individually consider their team members, which fosters innovation and long-term commitment (Bass & Bass, 2009). In contrast, transactional leaders focus on goal achievement through clear expectations and reward mechanisms, while laissez-faire leaders demonstrate minimal involvement, often leading to ambiguity and reduced team effectiveness (Avolio & Bass, 1994).

This research wanted to accurately assess this idea by looking at the impact of servant leadership from HR managers on project results, through a model where project governance, ethical workplace environment and interpersonal trust moderate the effects (Mozammel & Abdullah 2024).

In project-based organizations like NGOs, transformational and transactional leadership styles are particularly influential. Research shows that transformational leadership enhances team performance, employee motivation, and adaptability, especially in uncertain environments typical of NGOs (Maqbool et al., 2017; Adams & Anantatmula, 2010). Transactional leadership also contributes positively by creating structure and accountability, essential in resource-constrained projects (Yang et al., 2011). However, laissez-faire leadership often results in unclear roles and project inefficiencies (Spinelli, 2006).

Hypotheses 1:

The project team leader's leadership style significantly and positively influences overall project success.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence and Project Success

Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to an individual's ability to perceive, regulate, and use emotions effectively in interpersonal interactions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In leadership contexts, EI contributes to conflict resolution, team cohesion, and effective communication (Goleman, 2001). Project managers with high EI can manage team stress, navigate ambiguity, and foster trust - critical in NGO environments where emotional labor and uncertainty are prevalent (Jordan & Troth, 2011).

Empirical studies consistently support EI as a significant predictor of project success. Müller and Turner (2010) found that emotionally intelligent leaders foster higher team satisfaction and commitment, while Rezvani et al. (2016) demonstrated that EI indirectly influences project success through trust and satisfaction. In NGOs, where emotional sensitivity is often required in community engagement, EI can determine the effectiveness of project execution and stakeholder collaboration (Sunindijo, 2015).

Project success is more likely when the PM has high emotional intelligence and the strongest result was that having satisfactory and committed workers leads to successful projects (Sajid et al., 2024).

Hypotheses 2:

Project leaders' emotional intelligence has a positive and significant impact on project success.

2.3 Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction (JS) is defined as the level of contentment an individual feels toward their job, influenced by leadership, work environment, and psychological empowerment (Brief & Weiss, 2002). In the context of project management, satisfied employees are more likely to be productive, motivated, and committed (Judge et al., 2001). Leadership styles, particularly transformational, are positively associated with JS through empowerment and trust-building (Walumbwa et al., 2005).

Results pointed to a connection between the way organizations are led and their staff's organizational commitments, where job satisfaction partially stepped in between. Through the use of an importance-performance map, it was clear that someone's willingness to perform on task depends a great deal on their satisfaction with their job (Oyewobi 2024).

Emotionally intelligent leaders contribute to JS by recognizing team emotions, addressing concerns empathetically, and creating a supportive work environment (Sy et al., 2006). As a result, JS plays a critical mediating role, transforming leadership and emotional inputs into tangible project outcomes (Rezvani et al., 2016).

Hypotheses 3:

Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between leadership style and project success.

Hypotheses 4:

Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and project success.

2.4 Mediating Role of Trust

Trust refers to the psychological expectation that another party will act in a fair, ethical, and cooperative manner (Rousseau et al., 1998). In project settings, particularly within NGOs, trust among team members and toward leadership enhances communication, reduces conflict, and improves efficiency (Gillespie & Mann, 2004; McEvily et al., 2003).

The study showed that the model is accurate, as employees showing high mindfulness start displaying

innovative labor behaviors in their projects (khan et al., 2024).

Leadership style plays a significant role in building trust. Leaders who are transparent, supportive, and responsive tend to generate higher levels of trust, leading to more cohesive and high-performing teams (Mayer et al., 1995). Similarly, emotionally intelligent leaders are more attuned to team dynamics and interpersonal signals, fostering psychological safety and trust (Christie et al., 2015).

Hypotheses 5:

Trust mediates the relationship between leadership style and project success.

Hypotheses 6:

Trust mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and project success.

2.5 Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis Code	Statement
H1	Leadership Style significantly and positively influences Project Success
H2	Emotional Intelligence significantly and positively influences Project Success
H3	Job Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Leadership Style and Project Success
H4	Job Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Project Success
H5	Trust mediates the relationship between Leadership Style and Project Success
H6	Trust mediates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Project Success

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

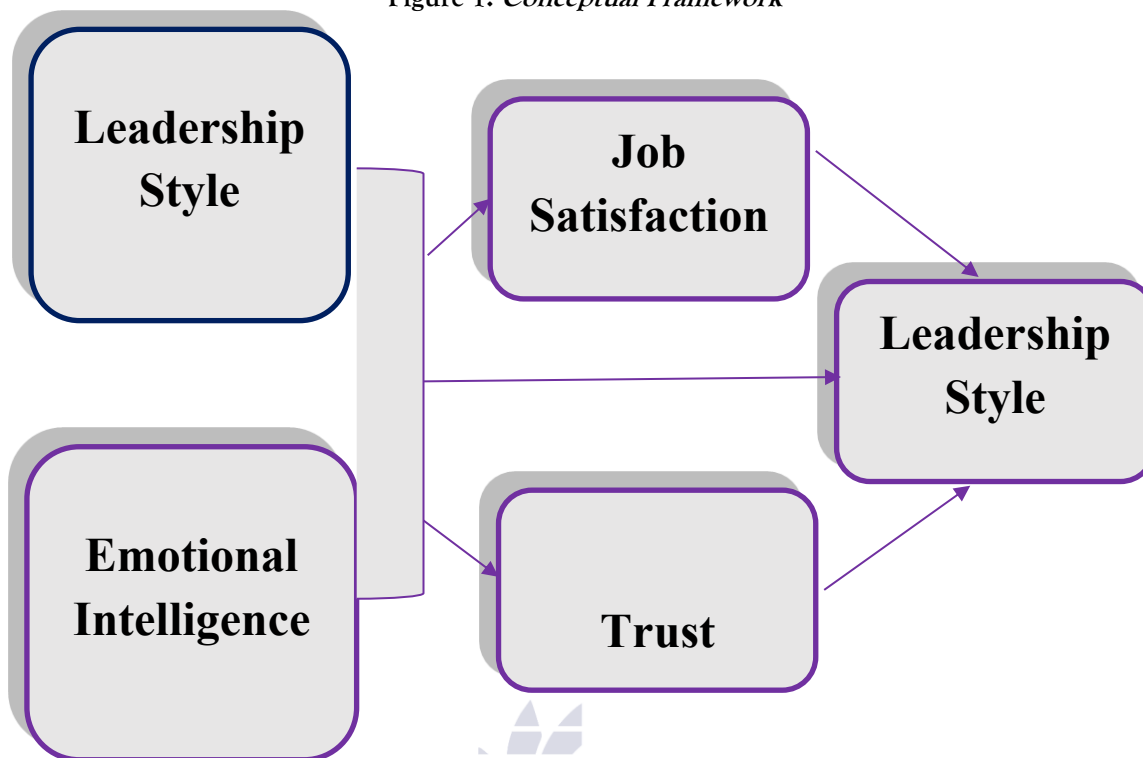
The conceptual framework developed for this study illustrates the direct and indirect effects of leadership styles and emotional intelligence on project success, while also highlighting the mediating roles of job satisfaction and trust.

This model is based on existing theoretical foundations, including the Full Range Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), Emotional Intelligence Theory (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), and Affective Events Theory (AET), which explains how emotional responses at work influence attitudes like

trust and job satisfaction, ultimately affecting performance (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

The framework postulates:

- **Leadership styles (LS)** and **emotional intelligence (EI)** is the key independent variables.
- **Project success (PS)** is the dependent variable.
- **Job satisfaction (JS)** and **trust (T)** serve as mediating variables.

Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

Reference: Adapted from (Maqbool et al, 2017 and Rezvani et al, 2018)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This research adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional design using a survey-based strategy to examine the in the NGO sector in Pakistan. This design is appropriate for exploring cause-and-effect relationships among variables and enables generalization of findings across similar project-based organizations (Creswell, 2014).

4.2 Population and Sampling

The target population consists of project managers, coordinators, and team leaders working in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across Pakistan. A snowball sampling technique was used due to the dispersed and informal structure of NGOs, where access to managerial-level staff is often restricted (Goodman, 1961). The final sample size consisted of 160 valid responses, ensuring statistical reliability.

relationships among leadership styles, emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, trust, and project success. A structured and pre-tested questionnaire was administered to project leaders working

4.3 Data Collection Method

Data was collected using an online questionnaire distributed via email and professional networks. The survey was open for a 4-week period, during which 168 responses were received; after validation and screening, 160 usable responses were retained. Respondents participated voluntarily and anonymously, and ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were maintained throughout the process.

4.4 Measurement Instruments

A structured questionnaire was developed based on previously validated scales. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Construct	No. of Items	Scale / Reference
Leadership Styles	21	Bass and Avolio (2000)
Emotional Intelligence	18	Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2008)
Job Satisfaction	4	Cammann et al. (1983)
Trust	7	Robinson (1996)
Project Success	11	Pinto & Slevin (1987); Jugdev & Müller (2005)

Table 1: Measurement Scale

4.5 Data Analysis Tools and Techniques

Data was analyzed using SPSS (Version 22). The following analyses were performed:

- **Descriptive Statistics** (Mean, Std. Deviation)
- **Reliability Analysis** (Cronbach's Alpha)
- **Correlation Analysis** (Pearson r)
- **Regression Analysis** (Direct and Mediated effects)
- **Mediation Testing** using PROCESS Macro by Hayes (Model 4)

The mediation analysis was applied to test indirect effects of leadership styles and emotional intelligence on project success through job satisfaction and trust. Significance levels were set at $p < 0.05$.

4. Data Analysis

This section presents the findings from statistical analyses performed using SPSS (Version 22). The goal is to assess the direct and indirect effects of leadership styles (LS) and emotional intelligence (EI) on project success (PS), with job satisfaction (JS) and trust (T) as mediators.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and variables. Below are the mean and standard deviation values for each construct.

Variable	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
Leadership Styles	160	3.84	0.61
Emotional Intelligence	160	3.90	0.57
Job Satisfaction	160	3.78	0.66
Trust	160	3.81	0.62
Project Success	160	3.88	0.60

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

5.2 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Reliability of all constructs was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with all scores above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency.

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Leadership Styles	21	0.87
Emotional Intelligence	18	0.89
Job Satisfaction	4	0.81
Trust	7	0.83
Project Success	11	0.86

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

5.3 Correlation Matrix

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine associations between variables.

Variables	LS	EI	JS	T	PS
Leadership Styles (LS)	1	0.58**	0.61**	0.55**	0.63**
Emotional Intelligence (EI)		1	0.64**	0.59**	0.68**
Job Satisfaction (JS)			1	0.66**	0.65**
Trust (T)				1	0.67**
Project Success (PS)					1

Note: $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

5.4 Regression Analysis

To test the direct effects of LS and EI on PS:

Model 1: Leadership Styles $\rightarrow$ Project Success

- $R^2 = 0.40$, $F(1,158) = 106.45$, $p < 0.001$
- $\beta = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$

Model 2: Emotional Intelligence $\rightarrow$ Project Success

- $R^2 = 0.46$, $F(1,158) = 134.72$, $p < 0.001$
- $\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$

Both LS and EI significantly and positively predict project success.

5.5 Mediation Analysis

Hayes PROCESS (Model 4) was used to test mediation by job satisfaction and trust.

Leadership Styles $\rightarrow$ JS $\rightarrow$ PS

- Indirect Effect: $\beta = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.36], **significant**
- Direct Effect: still significant $\rightarrow$ partial mediation

Leadership Styles $\rightarrow$ Trust $\rightarrow$ PS

- Indirect Effect: $\beta = 0.22$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.33], **significant**

Emotional Intelligence $\rightarrow$ JS $\rightarrow$ PS

- Indirect Effect: $\beta = 0.27$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.38], **significant**

Emotional Intelligence $\rightarrow$ Trust $\rightarrow$ PS

- Indirect Effect: $\beta = 0.25$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.36], **significant**

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis Code	Supported
H1: LS → PS	Yes
H2: EI → PS	Yes
H3: JS mediates LS → PS	Yes
H4: JS mediates EI → PS	Yes
H5: Trust mediates LS → PS	Yes
H6: Trust mediates EI → PS	Yes

5. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

This study examined the effects of leadership styles and emotional intelligence on project success in the NGO sector of Pakistan, with the mediating roles of job satisfaction and trust. The findings provide strong empirical support for all proposed hypotheses, reinforcing the importance of soft leadership competencies in achieving successful project outcomes in mission-driven, resource-constrained environments.

Consistent with Bass and Avolio's (1994) Full Range Leadership Model, both transformational and transactional leadership styles demonstrated significant positive influence on project success. Leaders who inspire, guide, and reward their teams are more likely to achieve desired project outcomes, especially within dynamic and people-focused NGO contexts. This supports previous research by Maqbool et al. (2017) and Yang et al. (2011), which emphasized that project managers' leadership behaviors directly influence team coordination and performance.

Similarly, emotional intelligence emerged as a robust predictor of project success. Leaders with high EI were found to enhance project effectiveness through better communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. These findings are aligned with prior work by Goleman (2001), Rezvani et al. (2016) and Müller and Turner (2010), which noted that emotionally competent managers build cohesive teams, particularly in high-stress, goal-oriented environments like NGOs.

Most notably, the partial mediation of both job satisfaction and trust suggests that these two attitudinal variables serve as essential bridges between leadership behaviors and project outcomes. Project leaders who foster a trusting environment and ensure

employee satisfaction can significantly improve team motivation, accountability, and performance. These results align with the Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), where emotional responses shape attitudes and subsequent behaviors at work.

The strong correlation and mediation effects underscore that project success is not only a function of hard skills or technical competence, but also of the leader's ability to engage, support, and emotionally connect with their team.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the growing literature on project management and leadership in NGOs, a sector less represented in existing empirical studies. It integrates multiple theoretical perspectives (e.g., leadership theory, emotional intelligence theory, AET) into a comprehensive model, and provides evidence of the interconnected role of leadership, emotion, trust, and satisfaction in project-based success.

Furthermore, the study validates the mediating mechanism of trust and satisfaction in linking soft leadership traits with organizational outcomes a relatively underexplored area in the NGO context.

6.3 Practical Implications

For practitioners, especially in the NGO sector:

- Leadership development programs should focus not only on technical training but also on emotional intelligence, communication, and relationship-building.
- NGOs should implement employee satisfaction assessments and trust-building initiatives, especially in remote or high-pressure projects.

- Recruitment of project leaders should include EI-based assessments to ensure fit with socially complex project environments.

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6.4 Limitations and Future Research

While the study offers valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:

- The data was collected from a non-random, snowball sample, which may limit generalizability.
- The study is cross-sectional in nature and cannot infer causality.
- Results may not fully apply to non-NGO sectors or outside of the Pakistani context.

The future research should include the following:

- Explore longitudinal designs to observe changes over time.
- Include moderating variables such as organizational culture, team size, or gender.
- Extend the model to different sectors, such as education, healthcare, or government projects.

6.5 Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence that leadership styles and emotional intelligence are vital predictors of project success, particularly in the NGO sector. Moreover, job satisfaction and trust significantly mediate these relationships, reinforcing the need for emotionally attuned, trustworthy, and empowering leadership in project-based organizations.

By acknowledging and investing in these soft leadership competencies, NGOs can improve their ability to execute complex, socially driven projects more effectively – ultimately contributing to greater organizational and societal impact.

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