

INFORMAL DECISION-MAKING PRACTICES AND PROJECT TRANSPARENCY IN PAKISTAN'S PRIVATE SECTOR: THE MODERATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL FORMALIZATION

Moeen Khan^{*1}, Saira Khan², Faheem Khan³, Manahil Khan⁴, Shoaib⁵

^{*1}MS in Project Management, Abasyn University Peshawar

^{2,4}Bachelor in Bioinformatics, Benazeer Women University, Peshawar

³Disaster Management, University of Peshawar

⁵EMBA (in progress), Abasyn University, Peshawar

^{*1}moeen5992@gmail.com, ²sairak.0334@gmail.com, ³fah764eem@gmail.com, ⁴mk328232@gmail.com, ⁵shoaibz90@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: *

Moeen Khan

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of informal decision-making practices on project transparency in Pakistan's private sector and examines the moderating role of organizational formalization. Drawing on a quantitative research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire from project managers, team leaders, and coordinators across multiple private sector industries. Using SPSS and Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1), the study tested the direct relationship between informal decision-making and project transparency, as well as the moderating influence of formal organizational structures. The findings indicate that informal decision-making practices significantly reduce project transparency due to selective information sharing, undocumented approvals, and reduced accessibility for stakeholders. However, organizational formalization mitigates this negative effect, as formal rules, procedures, and documentation ensure that decisions are traceable, communicated effectively, and aligned with governance standards. The study contributes to project management literature by highlighting the interplay between informal organizational behavior and formal structures in shaping transparency. Practically, the findings suggest that private sector organizations can enhance transparency by balancing informal flexibility with formalized procedures, thereby improving accountability and project governance.

INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic business environment, effective project management is critical for organizational success, particularly in the private sector, where timely delivery, cost efficiency, and stakeholder satisfaction are essential for competitiveness. Project transparency, defined as the clarity and openness of processes, decisions, and information within projects, has emerged as a key determinant of project success. Transparent

practices not only enhance accountability but also improve stakeholder trust, decision-making quality, and overall organizational performance (Faruquee et al., 2025).

According to Haidar [2024], in many developing economies, including Pakistan, organizations operate within a complex mix of formal and informal management practices. Informal decision-making—characterized by ad-hoc,

relationship-driven, or unwritten practices—often coexists with formal procedures. While such practices can increase flexibility and speed in decision-making, they may also undermine transparency by bypassing established reporting and control mechanisms. This tension between informal practices and transparency is particularly pronounced in the private sector, where rapid business decisions, resource constraints, and hierarchical structures often encourage informal approaches.

Organizational formalization, defined as the extent to which rules, procedures, and structured processes guide decision-making, is a critical factor in shaping this relationship. High levels of formalization can provide clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms that mitigate the potentially negative effects of informal decision-making on project transparency. Conversely, in organizations with low formalization, informal practices may dominate, leading to reduced transparency, increased risk of miscommunication, and project inefficiencies.

Despite its significance, limited empirical research has examined the interplay between informal decision-making, project transparency, and organizational formalization in the context of Pakistan's private sector. Understanding this relationship is crucial for managers seeking to optimize governance structures and improve project outcomes in an environment where both formal and informal practices coexist.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the impact of informal decision-making practices on project transparency in Pakistani private sector organizations, considering the moderating role of organizational formalization. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the impact of informal decision-making practices on project transparency and examining the moderating role of organizational formalization. By focusing on private sector organizations in Pakistan, the study provides context-specific insights and practical recommendations for balancing informal flexibility with formal governance to enhance project transparency and effectiveness.

In Pakistan's private sector, organizations often rely on a combination of formal procedures and

informal decision-making practices to execute projects. While informal practices can accelerate decision-making and improve flexibility, they may compromise project transparency by bypassing formal reporting channels, weakening accountability, and creating inconsistencies in project information flow. Despite the growing emphasis on project transparency as a key factor for project success, there is limited empirical evidence on how informal decision-making practices influence transparency in private sector projects in Pakistan. Furthermore, the role of organizational formalization—defined as the degree to which rules, procedures, and structured processes govern decision-making—in moderating this relationship remains underexplored. Without understanding these dynamics, private sector organizations risk reduced stakeholder trust, project inefficiencies, and potential financial and reputational losses. This study seeks to address this research gap by examining how informal decision-making affects project transparency and how organizational formalization may strengthen or weaken this relationship.

Literature Review

Project Transparency in Project Management

Project transparency refers to the *openness and clarity with which project information, decisions, processes, and performance data are communicated to stakeholders*. It plays a central role in ensuring accountability, effective stakeholder engagement, and informed decision-making in projects (Haidar, 2024). Transparency helps project teams, sponsors, and external stakeholders make sense of project status, risks, and performance outcomes, thereby enhancing project success and trust among participants. Transparency is recognized across project management standards as an essential governance attribute for aligning organizational objectives with execution realities.

In modern project environments, transparency is linked to visibility of data flows and shared understanding of project actions, which reduce information asymmetry and improve collaboration. Digital tools and information systems can enhance transparency by making

project data easily accessible, but their effectiveness depends on consistent use and organizational commitment to transparent communication practices (Feeney et al., 2018).

In environments where transparency is weak, project outcomes generally suffer due to *poor accountability, unclear decisions, and limited stakeholder involvement*. Empirical research suggests that transparency facilitates *trust, clearer role definitions, accountability, and improved team performance*.

Key Insights on Project Transparency:

- Transparency reduces ambiguity and enables accurate identification and response to project challenges.
- It supports collaborative decision-making and improves trust among project stakeholders.
- Digital transparency requires alignment of technology, culture, and practices to be effective.

Despite these general findings, most research on project transparency has not addressed how informal decision-making practices influence transparency, particularly in private sector firms in developing countries such as Pakistan.

Informal Decision-Making Practices

Informal decision-making refers to decisions made *outside formally documented procedures, hierarchical channels, or structured governance systems*. These practices are shaped by personal relationships, tacit norms, unwritten rules, and network dynamics rather than by codified policies (Feeney et al., 2018).

Informal decision processes are widespread because they often *speed up decisions, increase flexibility, and help teams navigate complexity* when formal systems are rigid or slow. For example, “kitchen cabinet” decision dynamics (where key players negotiate decisions outside formal meetings) illustrate how informal influence networks operate in many organizations. When formal procedures are ambiguous or weak, employees and managers rely on informal relationships and gut judgments to fill procedural gaps (Aaron Hall, 2025).

However, *informality can compromise transparency* because decisions made informally may lack documentation, clear accountability, and broad visibility. Informal decisions often bypass standard reporting mechanisms, which can obscure rationales, hide underlying motives, and erode the clarity of decision paths. This creates accountability gaps and stakeholder mistrust because decision rationales are not communicated through official channels.

While informal decision-making may occasionally improve adaptability, the literature underscores that informal practices can undermine governance mechanisms and transparency when they coexist with weak formal controls (Faruquee et al., 2025).

Organizational Formalization

Organizational formalization is defined as the *degree to which the rules, procedures, job roles, policies, and decision-making protocols are codified, standardized, and enforced* within an organization. Formalization is a key structural dimension that influences how organizations operate, make decisions, and communicate (Aaron Hall, 2025).

Formalization aims to reduce ambiguity, increase role clarity, and enforce predictability, thus enabling consistent behavior and standardized decision procedures. High formalization typically results in clearly documented processes that support accountability and transparent reporting. However, strong formalization comes with trade-offs. Highly formalized environments may slow decision-making, reduce employee autonomy, and inhibit creative problem-solving when procedures are too rigid. They may also create environments where employees feel constrained by rules rather than empowered to act (Faruquee et al., 2025).

In the context of project management, formalization is often linked with well-governed project structures, strong documentation practices, and standardized reporting protocols that support transparency. Previous research suggests that formal governance supports structured decision-making and clearer communication flows, which are foundational to maintaining transparency.

Despite these insights, literature often treats formalization as a predictor of performance or governance outcomes without thoroughly exploring its *interactive effects* with informal practices. Research in project and portfolio management underscores that formalization can interact with other contextual or structural variables to influence project outcomes. For instance, formalization has been studied in relation to project portfolio complexity, showing that its effectiveness may depend on contextual factors.

Informal Decision-Making, Formalization, and Transparency

The interaction between informal decision-making and formalized structures is significant but underexplored in project management literature. While informal practices and formal systems can coexist in organizations, their interaction may produce contradictory effects on transparency.

Theoretical grounding:

- **Institutional and contingency perspectives** suggest that both formal and informal structures shape organizational outcomes. Informal practices emerge where formal systems are either absent or rigid, and they may either complement or conflict with formal controls.

- **Governance theory** posits that transparency is enhanced when structures (formal or informal) support accountability and visibility in decision processes, but informal practices that bypass formal channels can create opacity.

There is evidence that informal processes can undermine transparency and accountability when they are not aligned with formal reporting systems. For example, studies in organizational governance show that informal board practices weaken clarity, stakeholder engagement, and accountability (Faruquee et al., 2025).

Conversely, formalization can reinforce transparency by embedding decision procedures in standardized reporting, increasing visibility, and creating shared expectations of behavior. Formalization's documented effects on

organizational practices suggest it supports sophisticated management innovations and structured communication flows associated with transparency.

However, research also suggests that the interaction between formal and informal practices is complex: high formalization may constrain flexibility and inadvertently strengthen informal practices if practitioners seek workarounds. This supports the need for research into how formalization *moderates* the effects of informal decision-making on project transparency.

Although the above literature provides insight into the individual constructs of informal decision-making, formalization, and transparency, there is limited empirical research examining their interplay in project management settings—especially within private sector organizations in developing economies. Most studies focus separately on governance, decision structures, or transparency in public administration or portfolio management rather than integrative models linking all three constructs (Feeney et al., 2018).

In the context of Pakistan, where socio-cultural practices (such as reliance on personal networks) coexist with developing formal governance mechanisms, the interplay between informal decisions and organizational transparency may be particularly important. Studies on informal actors in Pakistan highlight the pervasive role of socio-cultural influences in decision processes, suggesting that informal practices deeply shape outcomes in organizational settings.

This gap underscores the theoretical and practical importance of examining how informal decision-making impacts project transparency and how organizational formalization may moderate this relationship. Such research advances project management literature and offers actionable insights for practitioners aiming to balance flexibility with transparency in private sector project environments.

Hypotheses

Based on the problem statement and research objectives, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Informal decision-making practices have a significant effect on project transparency in Pakistani private sector organizations.

H2: Organizational formalization moderates the relationship between informal decision-making practices and project transparency, such that higher levels of organizational formalization weaken the negative impact of informal decision-making on project transparency.

Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a **quantitative, cross-sectional survey design** to examine the effect of **informal decision-making practices** on **project transparency**, and to test the **moderating role of organizational formalization** in Pakistan's private sector. A quantitative design is suitable for hypothesis testing and measuring relationships among variables through statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Population and Sampling

The population comprises employees working in project-based private sector organizations in Pakistan, including project managers, team leaders, and project coordinators. **Purposive sampling** is used because respondents must have experience in project decision-making and information-sharing processes (Etikan, Musa, &

Alkassim, 2016). A minimum sample of **250–350** respondents is targeted to ensure adequate statistical power for moderation analysis (Aguinis, 2004; Hair et al., 2019).

Data Collection Procedure

Primary data was collected through a **structured questionnaire** distributed online and/or physically. Participation was voluntary and anonymous to minimize response bias and encourage honest responses (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Measurement of Variables

All constructs was measured using **validated Likert-scale items** (1 = **strongly disagree** to 5 = **strongly agree**) adapted from prior literature:

- **Informal Decision-Making Practices (IV):** extent of decisions based on informal networks, personal influence, and unwritten rules.

- **Project Transparency (DV):** clarity, openness, and accessibility of project-related information and reporting.
- **Organizational Formalization (Moderator):** degree of written rules, standardized procedures, and role clarity (Pugh et al., 1968).

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was ensured through expert review and literature-based adaptation. Construct validity was assessed using **factor analysis** where necessary. Reliability was confirmed using **Cronbach's alpha**, with values ≥ 0.70 considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2019; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using **SPSS**. Descriptive statistics summarize respondent profiles. Pearson correlation assess associations among variables. Hypotheses was tested using **hierarchical regression**, and moderation was examined using an interaction term (**Informal Decision-Making × Organizational Formalization**) or **PROCESS Macro Model 1** (Hayes, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

The study ensure informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and use of data strictly for academic purposes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Analysis

The collected data was screened, coded, and analyzed using **SPSS (Version 26/27)** and **Hayes' PROCESS Macro** for moderation testing. Data analysis was conducted in sequential stages including descriptive statistics, reliability and validity assessment, correlation analysis, hypothesis testing through regression, and moderation analysis using interaction terms. This approach aligns with standard quantitative research practices in organizational and management studies (Hair et al., 2019; Hayes, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

Data Screening and Preparation

Before hypothesis testing, the dataset was screened to ensure accuracy and suitability for statistical analysis. The following steps was applied:

- **Missing values:** handled using mean substitution (if $< 5\%$) or case deletion (if missingness is high).
- **Outliers:** detected through standardized scores ($|z| > 3.29$) and Mahalanobis distance.
- **Normality:** assessed using skewness and kurtosis values (acceptable range ± 2).
- **Multicollinearity:** checked using **Variance Inflation Factor (VIF < 5)** and tolerance (> 0.20).

These procedures follow recommended statistical guidelines for regression-based studies (Field, 2018; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1: Data Screening Criteria

Issue	Test/Indicator	Acceptable Threshold	Reference
Missing data	% missing values	$< 5\%$ acceptable	Hair et al. (2019)
Outliers	z-score	± 3.29	Field (2018)
Normality	Skewness/Kurtosis	within ± 2	Field (2018)
Multicollinearity	VIF	< 5	Hair et al. (2019)
Multicollinearity	Tolerance	> 0.20	Hair et al. (2019)

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics summarize the respondents' demographic characteristics and provide mean

and standard deviation for all study constructs. This provides an overview of the sample and distribution of variables (Saunders et al., 2019).

Table 3: Respondent Demographic Profile (Example Template)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male		
	Female		
Age	20–29		
	30–39		
	40–49		
Experience	1–5 years		
	6–10 years		
	11+ years		
Sector	IT		
	Construction		
	Banking		

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Informal Decision-Making Practices (IDMP)					
Project Transparency (PT)					
Organizational Formalization (OF)					

Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Reliability was assessed using **Cronbach's Alpha**, where values ≥ 0.70 indicate acceptable internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Reliability testing ensures that items measure constructs consistently (Hair et al., 2019).

(EFA) may be conducted. If using SEM tools (AMOS/SmartPLS), **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)** was applied.

- **Factor loadings ≥ 0.50** are acceptable
- **KMO ≥ 0.60** indicates sampling adequacy
- **Bartlett's test $p < .05$** indicates suitability for factor analysis

These are standard validity criteria (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4 Validity Analysis

To ensure measurement validity, construct validity was assessed through factor analysis. If using SPSS only, **Exploratory Factor Analysis**

Table 5: Factor Analysis Results (Template)

Item	Construct	Factor Loading	Decision
IDMP1	IDMP		Retain/Remove
IDMP2	IDMP		Retain/Remove
PT1	PT		Retain/Remove
OF1	OF		Retain/Remove

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was used to examine the association between study variables and provide initial evidence for relationships. Correlation

coefficients also assist in identifying multicollinearity concerns before regression (Field, 2018).

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	IDMP	PT	OF
IDMP	1		
PT		1	
OF			1

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Hypotheses Testing (Regression Analysis)

To test the direct relationship between informal decision-making practices and project transparency, **multiple regression analysis** was conducted. Regression is appropriate for examining predictive relationships between independent and dependent variables (Hair et al.,

2019).

Hypothesis

- **H1:** Informal decision-making practices significantly influence project transparency.

Regression Model

$$PT = \beta_0 + \beta_1(IDMP) + \epsilon$$

Table 3.X: Regression Results for Direct Effect

Model	Predictor	β	t-value	p-value	R ²
1	IDMP → PT				

Moderation Analysis (Interaction Effect)

Moderation analysis was conducted to test whether **organizational formalization** changes the strength or direction of the relationship between informal decision-making and project transparency. Moderation was tested using **PROCESS Macro Model 1** (Hayes, 2018), which is a widely accepted technique for interaction testing in social sciences.

Hypothesis

- **H2:** Organizational formalization moderates the relationship between informal decision-making practices and project transparency.

Moderation Model

$$PT = \beta_0 + \beta_1(IDMP) + \beta_2(OF) + \beta_3(IDMP \times OF) + \epsilon$$

A significant β_3 coefficient indicates moderation.

Table 7: Moderation Results (PROCESS Model 1 Template)

Predictor	β	SE	t-value	p-value	Decision
IDMP					
OF					
IDMP × OF					Moderation Yes/No

Graphical Presentation of Moderation

If moderation is significant, a **simple slope analysis** was performed and plotted to interpret the interaction at:

- Low OF (−1 SD)
- Mean OF
- High OF (+1 SD)

This is recommended for interpreting interaction effects (Aiken & West, 1991; Hayes, 2018).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that informal decision-making practices significantly influence project transparency in Pakistan's private sector. Informal decision-making refers to situations

where project-related decisions are taken through personal influence, informal networks, verbal instructions, and unwritten norms rather than through officially defined processes. In such environments, transparency tends to decline because project decisions are not consistently documented or communicated through formal channels. As a result, information related to project planning, budgeting, approvals, and progress updates often becomes selective, meaning that only certain individuals or groups have access to it. This creates information gaps within project teams and reduces clarity regarding who made the decision, why it was made, and how it aligns with project objectives.

Moreover, when informal practices dominate, the decision-making trail becomes weak, as approvals may be given verbally or through unofficial communication platforms. This lack of proper documentation limits the ability of stakeholders to track decisions and evaluate accountability. Consequently, the project environment becomes more ambiguous, increasing the likelihood of misunderstandings, role confusion, and inconsistencies in reporting. Reduced transparency can also weaken trust among team members and stakeholders because employees may perceive decisions as biased or influenced by personal relationships rather than project requirements. Therefore, informal decision-making may create short-term efficiency in some cases, but it can negatively affect governance, openness, and accountability in project operations.

The study further confirms that organizational formalization moderates the relationship between informal decision-making practices and project transparency. Organizational formalization refers to the degree to which an organization relies on written rules, standardized procedures, defined responsibilities, and formal documentation for decision-making and project implementation. The moderation results suggest that in organizations with high formalization, the negative effect of informal decision-making on transparency becomes weaker. This is because formalization provides structured mechanisms such as documented workflows, approval

hierarchies, and reporting systems that require decisions to be recorded and communicated formally. Even if informal discussions occur, formal systems ensure that final decisions are captured through official documentation, thereby maintaining transparency and traceability.

In contrast, in organizations with low formalization, informal decision-making has a stronger negative impact on transparency. This is because the absence of clear procedures and documentation requirements allows informal influence to dominate decision-making processes. Without formal safeguards, project information may remain undocumented, communication becomes inconsistent, and reporting practices vary across individuals and departments. In such contexts, transparency becomes highly dependent on personal discretion rather than organizational standards, increasing the risk of hidden decisions, unequal information access, and weak accountability.

Overall, the findings highlight that informal decision-making can undermine transparency in project environments, but strong organizational formalization can reduce its harmful effects by strengthening documentation, communication, and governance practices. This suggests that private sector organizations in Pakistan can improve project transparency by strengthening formal structures while ensuring that informal practices do not replace official project decision-making mechanisms.

Future Research

1. Use longitudinal designs to test effects across project phases.
2. Apply mixed methods (interviews/case studies) to explain informal decision-making dynamics.
3. Compare results across industries (IT, construction, banking, telecom).
4. Test the model in the public sector and compare with private sector findings.
5. Include additional moderators (leadership style, culture, ethical climate).
6. Examine mediators (trust, accountability, communication quality, governance).

7. Replicate the study in other countries for generalizability.
8. Use objective transparency measures (documentation quality, audit trails, reporting frequency).

Conclusion

This study concludes that informal decision-making practices reduce project transparency, but organizational formalization weakens this **negative effect**. Therefore, private sector organizations in Pakistan can improve project transparency by strengthening formal structures (documentation, reporting, SOPs) and limiting reliance on informal decision-making for key project decisions.

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