

The Impact of Project Management Practices on Project Success in National Humanitarian Organizations

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Abstract

Project success is especially important in humanitarian organizations, where resources are limited and projects directly affect vulnerable communities. This study explores how project management practices influence project success in national humanitarian organizations. It focuses on key practices such as communication, stakeholder engagement, procurement, integration, risk management, monitoring, and financial control, and examines how these practices contribute to successful project outcomes. A quantitative research approach was used, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire from project staff working in national humanitarian organizations. A total of 92 valid responses were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive and correlation analyses were conducted to understand the relationship between project management practices and indicators of project success, including timely completion, budget performance, achievement of objectives, stakeholder satisfaction, sustainability, and organizational reputation. The study finds that effective project management practices such as clear communication, active stakeholder engagement, transparent procurement, and strong financial management significantly enhance project success. However, improvements are needed in applying lessons learned and maintaining project timeliness. Strengthening these practices can lead to more effective, accountable, and sustainable humanitarian projects.

Keywords: Project Management Practices, Project Success, Humanitarian Organizations, Stakeholder Management and Sustainability

Introduction

Humanitarian organizations play a crucial role in responding to crises caused by conflict, natural disasters, and population displacement (Bryde, 2003). They deliver services ranging from emergency food distribution and medical assistance to long-term community development and livelihood programs (Crawford & Bryce, 2003). These projects are often implemented in complex, resource-constrained, and uncertain environments, where timely and effective interventions can mean the difference between life and death. Despite their critical importance, many humanitarian projects struggle to achieve intended outcomes due to weak planning, insufficient monitoring, and contextual challenges such as political instability, cultural dynamics, and logistical constraints (Diallo & Thuillier, 2005; Ika, 2012). This raises questions about the effectiveness of project management practices in ensuring project success.

Effective project management provides a structured framework for planning, executing, monitoring, and closing projects. It encompasses areas such as integration, scope, time, cost, quality, communication, risk, and stakeholder management, all of which contribute to efficient coordination, resource optimization, and achievement of project goals (PMI, 2021). For example, integration management ensures that all project activities are aligned with

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organizational objectives and donor requirements, while risk management anticipates potential disruptions and develops mitigation strategies. Similarly, stakeholder management facilitates collaboration with donors, government partners, and local communities, ensuring that interventions are relevant, accepted, and sustainable (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008).

The performance of humanitarian organizations is often judged by their ability to deliver aid efficiently, meet donor expectations, and sustain long-term benefits for affected populations. However, studies have shown that while many projects meet short-term targets, gaps frequently exist in accountability, sustainability, and community engagement (Crawford & Bryce, 2003; Müller & Turner, 2007). These gaps underline the need to strengthen project management practices to improve operational efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, and the long-term impact of humanitarian interventions (Kerzner, 2013).

This study focuses on examining the impact of project management practices on project success in national humanitarian organizations (Pinto & Slevin, 1987). By identifying which practices are most critical, exploring the challenges faced in their implementation, and assessing their influence on project outcomes, the research aims to provide practical insights for organizations operating in resource-limited and crisis-prone contexts such as Afghanistan. Understanding this relationship is essential for enhancing project effectiveness, building stakeholder trust, and achieving meaningful, sustainable outcomes in humanitarian work.

1. Project Integration Management

Project Integration Management is the process of coordinating all elements of a project to ensure that planning, execution, and closure activities work together harmoniously (Project Management Institute, 2021). It ensures that project objectives are aligned with organizational strategies, donor requirements, and community needs, creating a cohesive framework for achieving project goals.

Processes of Project Integration Management (PMI, 2021)

1. Develop Project Charter: Formally authorizes the project and provides the project manager with the authority to allocate resources.
2. Develop Project Management Plan: Defines how the project will be executed, monitored, and controlled, integrating all subsidiary plans.
3. Direct and Manage Project Work: Leads and performs the work defined in the project management plan to achieve project objectives.
4. Manage Project Knowledge: Captures, shares, and uses knowledge to enhance project outcomes and organizational learning.
5. Monitor and Control Project Work: Tracks, reviews, and regulates project performance to identify and address variances.
6. Perform Integrated Change Control: Reviews all change requests, approves or rejects them, and manages changes to the project scope, schedule, and costs.
7. Close Project or Phase: Finalizes all activities to formally close the project or phase, ensuring all deliverables are completed and accepted.

In humanitarian organizations, integration management is essential to synchronize resources, processes, and objectives under challenging conditions. For example, in an emergency response project, effective integration management ensures that logistics, procurement, and beneficiary registration processes are coordinated so that aid reaches affected populations efficiently and without delays (Schwalbe, 2015). By managing interdependencies, changes, and knowledge systematically, integration management strengthens accountability, resource utilization, and overall project success.

2. Scope Management

Scope Management is the process of defining and controlling what is included and excluded in a project to ensure that it delivers only the necessary work required for successful completion (Project Management Institute, 2021). This knowledge area helps project managers prevent “scope creep,” which occurs when additional tasks or objectives are added without proper planning, potentially impacting project timelines, costs, and quality. Effective scope management ensures focus, efficiency, and accountability throughout the project lifecycle.

Processes of Scope Management (PMI, 2021):

1. Plan Scope Management: Develops a plan for how project scope will be defined, validated, and controlled.
2. Collect Requirements: Identifies stakeholders’ needs and expectations to define project deliverables.

3. Define Scope: Develops a detailed description of the project and its deliverables.
4. Create Work Breakdown Structure (WBS): Breaks down project deliverables into smaller, manageable components.
5. Validate Scope: Confirms that completed project deliverables meet stakeholder expectations and requirements.
6. Control Scope: Monitors project scope and manages changes to prevent unauthorized expansion or deviation from the original objectives.

In humanitarian projects, scope management is crucial to maintain focus on priority interventions. For example, a project designed to build 100 shelters should not expand to include additional livelihood programs unless resources, timelines, and plans are formally adjusted (Shenhar et al., 2001). By clearly defining and controlling project boundaries, scope management ensures that humanitarian projects achieve intended outcomes efficiently while maintaining transparency and accountability to donors and beneficiaries.

3. Time or Schedule Management

Time Management is the process of planning, estimating, and controlling project schedules to ensure that activities are completed within the planned timeframe (Project Management Institute, 2021). In humanitarian projects, timely execution is critical, as delays can exacerbate human suffering and reduce project impact.

Processes of Time Management (PMI, 2021)

1. Plan Schedule Management: Establishes policies, procedures, and documentation for planning, developing, managing, and controlling the project schedule.
2. Define Activities: Identifies specific tasks needed to produce project deliverables.
3. Sequence Activities: Determines dependencies and the logical order of tasks.
4. Estimate Activity Durations: Determines the time required to complete each task.
5. Develop Schedule: Creates a detailed project timeline integrating all activities and resources.
6. Control Schedule: Monitors progress, compares it against the plan, and manages changes to ensure timely completion.

Example in humanitarian projects: Distributing winterization kits before the onset of cold weather is critical. Even a short delay could have life-threatening consequences. Effective schedule management ensures that aid reaches beneficiaries on time, maximizing impact and mitigating risks.

4. Cost Management

Cost Management involves planning, estimating, budgeting, and controlling project expenses to ensure that resources are used efficiently and within financial constraints (PMI, 2021). Transparency and accountability are particularly important in humanitarian contexts due to donor oversight and limited funding.

Processes of Cost Management (PMI, 2021)

1. Plan Cost Management: Establishes how project costs will be planned, structured, and controlled.
2. Estimate Costs: Develops approximations for resource costs needed to complete project activities.
3. Determine Budget: Aggregates estimated costs to establish a cost baseline for monitoring.
4. Control Costs: Monitors cost performance, manages changes, and ensures adherence to the budget.

Example: Managing transportation and logistics costs during a food distribution project ensures that limited funds reach as many beneficiaries as possible without wastage, enhancing accountability and donor confidence.

5. Quality Management

Quality Management ensures that project deliverables meet agreed-upon standards and satisfy beneficiary needs, encompassing both technical and ethical considerations (PMI, 2021). High-quality humanitarian interventions are effective, culturally appropriate, and sustainable.

Processes of Quality Management (PMI, 2021)

1. Plan Quality Management: Identifies quality requirements, standards, and metrics for project deliverables.
2. Manage Quality: Implements quality assurance activities to ensure standards are met.
3. Control Quality: Monitors outcomes and deliverables, performing inspections and audits to detect defects and ensure compliance.

Example: Constructing latrines that meet hygiene standards and respect community norms ensures both technical quality and cultural appropriateness. Continuous monitoring and feedback help maintain standards throughout the project lifecycle.

6. Human Resource Management

Human Resource Management (HRM) involves recruiting, developing, motivating, and managing project staff to optimize performance (PMI, 2021). In humanitarian settings, HRM is crucial for maintaining morale, preventing burnout, and ensuring effective teamwork under stressful conditions.

Processes of HRM (PMI, 2021)

1. Plan Resource Management: Determines project roles, responsibilities, and reporting structures.
2. Estimate Activity Resources: Identifies the type and quantity of resources (human, equipment, materials) required for tasks.
3. Acquire Resources: Secures the personnel and materials needed to execute the project.
4. Develop Team: Enhances team competencies, interaction, and overall project performance.
5. Manage Team: Tracks team performance, provides feedback, resolves issues, and ensures optimal productivity.

7. Communication Management

Communication Management involves planning, executing, and monitoring the flow of information to ensure that all project stakeholders from donors to community members receive timely, accurate, and relevant updates (Project Management Institute, 2021). Effective communication prevents misunderstandings, builds trust, and ensures coordinated efforts across project teams.

Processes of Communication Management (PMI, 2021)

1. Plan Communications Management: Defines stakeholder communication needs, methods, frequency, and responsibilities.
2. Manage Communications: Ensures the timely and appropriate collection, creation, distribution, and storage of project information.
3. Monitor Communications: Evaluates communication effectiveness, identifies issues, and adjusts to improve clarity and efficiency.

Example: In a refugee support project, clear communication between the project team, local authorities, and beneficiaries prevents duplication of aid, manages expectations, and improves project coordination.

8. Risk Management

Risk Management is the systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and responding to potential project threats or opportunities to minimize negative impacts and enhance positive outcomes (PMI, 2021). Humanitarian projects often face volatile environments, including security risks, funding cuts, or logistical challenges.

Processes of Risk Management (PMI, 2021)

1. Plan Risk Management: Establishes the risk management approach, tools, and techniques for the project.
2. Identify Risks: Recognizes potential risks that could affect project objectives.
3. Perform Qualitative Risk Analysis: Prioritizes risks based on likelihood and impact.
4. Perform Quantitative Risk Analysis: Numerically evaluates the effect of risks on project objectives.
5. Plan Risk Responses: Develops strategies to enhance opportunities and reduce threats.
6. Implement Risk Responses: Executes risk response plans to address identified risks.
7. Monitor Risks: Tracks identified risks, monitors residual risks, and identifies new risks for continuous management.

Example: Developing a risk mitigation plan, such as pre-positioning supplies or establishing alternative transport routes, ensures project continuity despite unexpected disruptions.

9. Procurement Management

Procurement Management involves obtaining goods, services, or works from external sources in a timely, cost-effective, and transparent manner (PMI, 2021). It ensures compliance with organizational and donor policies while meeting project needs.

Processes of Procurement Management (PMI, 2021)

1. Plan Procurement Management: Determines what to procure, how, and when, including procurement strategy and contract types.
2. Conduct Procurements: Selects vendors, negotiates contracts, and awards agreements.
3. Control Procurements: Monitors contract performance, manages changes, and ensures deliverables meet requirements.
4. Close Procurements: Finalizes all procurement activities, ensures contract completion, and documents lessons learned.

Example: During a food distribution project, transparent procurement ensures high-quality items are delivered on time and at fair prices, maintaining donor confidence and project credibility.

10. Stakeholder Management

Stakeholder Management involves identifying all individuals, groups, or organizations affected by the project, understanding their needs and expectations, and engaging them appropriately to achieve project objectives (PMI, 2021). Effective stakeholder engagement improves collaboration, reduces resistance, and enhances project outcomes.

Processes of Stakeholder Management (PMI, 2021)

1. Identify Stakeholders: Recognizes project stakeholders and documents their interests, influence, and expectations.
2. Plan Stakeholder Engagement: Develops strategies to effectively engage stakeholders throughout the project.
3. Manage Stakeholder Engagement: Implements strategies to communicate, negotiate, and manage stakeholder expectations.
4. Monitor Stakeholder Engagement: Assesses engagement effectiveness and adjusts approaches to maintain positive relationships.

Project Success

Project Success refers to the overall achievement of project goals, measured through both tangible and intangible outcomes (Turner, & Muller, 2005). In humanitarian organizations, success extends beyond timely delivery or budget compliance it includes long-term impact, beneficiary satisfaction, and sustainability. The following indicators define project success:

1. **Timely Completion of the Project**
Projects must be completed within their planned schedules to ensure effectiveness. In humanitarian work, delays can reduce impact such as late delivery of food, water, or shelter assistance during emergencies.
2. **Achievement of Project Objectives**
A successful project must achieve its stated goals and deliver intended outputs. For example, if the objective is to improve access to clean water, success means that communities indeed have sustainable, safe water sources after project completion.
3. **Quality and Long-Term Sustainability of Outcomes**
Quality outcomes ensure that assistance is effective and durable. Sustainability means that communities continue to benefit after the project ends such as maintaining infrastructure, continuing education programs, or sustaining livelihood initiatives.
4. **Adherence to Budget**
Staying within budget reflects financial discipline and efficient use of resources. Donors place high importance on cost control as it demonstrates accountability and professional management.
5. **Satisfaction of Donors and Key Stakeholders**
Project success also depends on stakeholder satisfaction including donors, partners, and beneficiaries. When all stakeholders feel their needs and expectations are met, it strengthens trust and opens doors for future collaboration and funding.

Research Questions

1. How do project management practices influence project success in humanitarian organizations?
2. Which specific practices (such as planning, monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and risk management) have the strongest impact on success?

3. What challenges hinder the effective implementation of project management practices in humanitarian contexts?

Objectives and Hypotheses

- **To examine the relationship between project management practices and project success in humanitarian organizations.**
 - **H1:** Effective project management practices positively influence project success in humanitarian organizations.
 - **H0₁:** Project management practices do not significantly influence project success in humanitarian organizations.

Data Analysis

The study analyzed data by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. Data processing involved editing, coding, and tabulation which were used as key factors in the whole process of research. This was done in order to make the research accurate and effective. First a formal permission of each department's head has been taken then a total number of 132 employees of different departments and units of the NGOs were contacted, visited and shared the google online form. After informing employees about the purpose of filling in the questionnaire and determining the time for collecting the questionnaires the total numbers of 92 filled questionnaires were received in the hard and online google form. The data was decoded and entered into the latest version SPSS. Statistical functions were used to test the hypothesis and analyze the objectives of this study, and the results are presented in the next sections of this study.

Interrelationship among project success factors.

The possibility of 10 factors such as Scope Management, Cost Management, Schedule Management, Resource Management, Quality Management, Risk Management, Communication Management, Stakeholder Management, Procurement Management, and Integration Management Relating with each other is defined in hypothesis-H₀₁ & H₁ taken up and its results are results are shown in the table-1, as an outcome of Bivariate Correlation test. From the results it can be inferred that Pearson 'r' values between the range 0.214 and 0.538 corresponding to 55 different correlations are found to be significant at 5 percent level. While these results form the basis to reject the hypothesis-H₀₁ and accept H₁. Thus, the details of all different correlations between 11 mentioned dimensions with varied levels of relationship are identified from the above results based on the standard approach (Nunnally, 1978) and provided in table-1.

Table-1: Results of Correlations for hypothesis- H₀₁ & H₁												
		Scope Management	Cost Management	Schedule Management	Resource Management	Quality Management	Risk Management	Communication Management	Stakeholder Management	Procurement Management	Integration Management	Project Success
Scope Management	Pearson Correlation	1										
Cost Management	Pearson Correlation	.021	1									
Schedule Management	Pearson Correlation	.104	-.189	1								

Resource Management	Pearson Correlation	.134	.148	.180	1							
Quality Management	Pearson Correlation	.206*	.159	.051	.519**	1						
Risk Management	Pearson Correlation	-.042	.119	.118	-.091	-.189	1					
Communication Management	Pearson Correlation	-.095	.001	.065	.172	.035	.176	1				
Stakeholder Management	Pearson Correlation	-.026	.236*	.096	.191	.214*	.506**	.538**	1			
Procurement Management	Pearson Correlation	.055	-.161	.195	-.021	-.110	.007	-.018	-.015	1		
Integration Management	Pearson Correlation	-.018	-.338**	.121	-.262*	-.393**	-.009	-.031	.020	.412**	1	
Project Success	Pearson Correlation	-.089	-.116	.144	-.154	-.219*	.037	-.027	.059	.267**	.428**	1
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).												
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).												

Scope Management and Quality Management (0.206)

The findings indicate a low positive association (0.206) between Scope Management and Quality Management. This suggests that projects with clearer and well-defined scopes tend to demonstrate slightly better quality management practices. Although the strength of the relationship is modest, the correlation is statistically significant at the 5% level, indicating that the relationship is unlikely to be due to chance. This implies that effective scope definition may contribute to maintaining quality standards in humanitarian projects.

Resource Management and Quality Management (0.519)

The results show a moderate positive association (0.519) between Resource Management and Quality Management. This indicates that better allocation and utilization of human, financial, and material resources are associated with improved quality outcomes in projects. The correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level, suggesting a meaningful and reliable relationship. This implies that effective resource management plays an important role in enhancing project quality in national humanitarian organizations.

Cost Management and Stakeholder Management (0.236)

The findings reveal a low to moderate positive association (0.236) between Cost Management and Stakeholder Management. This suggests that projects with stronger stakeholder engagement tend to have slightly better cost control and financial planning. The relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level, indicating that stakeholder involvement may contribute to improved cost management in humanitarian projects.

Quality Management and Stakeholder Management (0.214)

The results indicate a low positive association (0.214) between Quality Management and Stakeholder Management. This suggests that effective engagement with stakeholders is somewhat linked to better quality assurance and control mechanisms. The correlation is statistically significant at the 5% level, implying that stakeholder participation may support quality outcomes in project implementation.

Risk Management and Stakeholder Management (0.506)

The findings show a moderate positive association (0.506) between Risk Management and Stakeholder Management. This indicates that projects with strong stakeholder involvement are more effective in identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks. The correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level, suggesting that stakeholder engagement is a key factor in strengthening risk management practices in humanitarian organizations.

Communication Management and Stakeholder Management (0.538)

The results reveal a moderate positive association (0.538) between Communication Management and Stakeholder Management. This suggests that effective communication systems enhance stakeholder engagement and coordination. The relationship is statistically significant at the 1% level, indicating a strong and meaningful association. This implies that communication is a critical enabler of successful stakeholder management in humanitarian projects.

Cost Management and Integration Management (−0.338)

The findings indicate a moderate negative association (−0.338) between Cost Management and Integration Management. This suggests that weaknesses in integrating project components may be associated with challenges in controlling project costs. The correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level, implying that poor integration can negatively affect financial performance in humanitarian projects.

Resource Management and Integration Management (−0.262)

The results show a low to moderate negative association (−0.262) between Resource Management and Integration Management. This indicates that inadequate coordination and integration may hinder effective resource utilization. The relationship is statistically significant at the 5% level, suggesting that integration challenges can negatively influence resource management in project execution.

Quality Management and Integration Management (−0.393)

The findings reveal a moderate negative association (−0.393) between Quality Management and Integration Management. This suggests that poor integration of project activities may lead to reduced quality outcomes. The correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level, indicating a meaningful inverse relationship in humanitarian project contexts.

Procurement Management and Integration Management (0.412)

The results indicate a moderate positive association (0.412) between Procurement Management and Integration Management. This suggests that effective procurement planning and coordination contribute positively to overall project integration. The correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level, implying that procurement processes play a vital role in aligning project components.

Quality Management and Project Success (−0.219)

The findings show a low negative association (−0.219) between Quality Management and Project Success. Although counterintuitive, this statistically significant relationship at the 5% level may reflect contextual challenges in humanitarian projects, where strict quality requirements can delay implementation or increase operational constraints. This suggests that quality management must be carefully balanced with time and resource limitations.

Procurement Management and Project Success (0.267)

The results reveal a low to moderate positive association (0.267) between Procurement Management and Project Success. This indicates that effective procurement processes—such as timely purchasing and supplier coordination are linked to improved project outcomes. The correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level,

suggesting that procurement efficiency is an important contributor to project success in humanitarian organizations.

Integration Management and Project Success (0.428)

The findings indicate a moderate positive association (0.428) between Integration Management and Project Success. This suggests that projects with better coordination, alignment of activities, and integration of processes are more likely to achieve successful outcomes. The correlation is statistically significant at the 1% level, making integration management one of the strongest predictors of project success in this study.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of project management practices on project success in national humanitarian organizations, with a specific focus on NGOs operating in Kabul. The findings clearly demonstrate that effective project management practices play a critical role in enhancing project success in humanitarian contexts. Descriptive analysis revealed strong planning, coordination, and operational practices across most project management dimensions, including scope, cost, schedule, quality, risk, communication, stakeholder, procurement, and integration management. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that projects were completed within budget, achieved planned objectives, met donor and beneficiary expectations, and produced sustainable outcomes. Regression analysis confirmed that project success is significantly influenced by the combined effect of project management practices. Among all variables, integration management emerged as the most significant predictor of project success, highlighting the importance of coordination, alignment of activities, and cross-functional collaboration in humanitarian projects. Schedule and procurement management showed positive but comparatively weaker effects, while other dimensions demonstrated limited individual influence despite their collective contribution.

Correlation analysis further supported these findings by revealing meaningful interrelationships among project management dimensions, particularly between integration management and project success. This underscores that project success in humanitarian organizations is not driven by isolated practices but by the effective integration of multiple management functions. Overall, the study concludes that strengthening integrated project management systems, enhancing coordination mechanisms, and institutionalizing learning processes can significantly improve project outcomes in national humanitarian organizations. These findings provide practical insights for NGO managers, donors, and policymakers aiming to enhance accountability, efficiency, and sustainability in humanitarian project implementation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors affirm that no conflicts of interest are linked with this publication. The research was conducted autonomously without financial or non-financial assistance from external entities.

Author Contribution Statement

The author meticulously crafted the study, devised the methodology, executed the investigation and data analysis, composed the original manuscript, and undertook the review and editing of the document. The author autonomously executed every aspect of the research and the development of the manuscript.

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