



Strategic and Transformational Leadership Styles & Project Success - Mediating Role of Change Management

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Owais Tahir¹,  Iram Tahir²,  Sobia Shujaat^{3*} 

Abstract

This paper has attempted to study the role of strategic and transformational leadership and its effects on project success in the context of effective change management. The population for this study includes people involved in the IT industry in Pakistan ensuring that most relevant and pertinent population for data collection is engaged for the study, leading to generation of relevant research findings. A total of 155 completed questionnaires were received, resulting in a response rate of 51.6 percent. The study is quantitative, based on deductive approach with interpretive philosophy. Data analysis for this study was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Analysis include Cronbach alpha, regression analysis, one-way ANOVA, regression, Durbin Watson test and some other important tests. The findings suggest that there exists a direct relationship between strategic leadership, transformational leadership and project success. The mediation analysis of regression has been done using Preacher and Hayes model and it is concluded that change management mediates the relationship between project success and independent variables.

Keywords: strategic leadership, transformational leadership, project success, change management, IT industry.

Author's Affiliation:

Institution: SZABIST Islamabad Campus¹, University of Central Lancashire²,
Bahria university, Islamabad³,

Country: Pakistan

Corresponding Author's Email: * sobia@bahria.edu.pk

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(1) INTRODUCTION

The IT industry is prone to frequent change as it is a dynamic industry with short product lifecycles, improving and competing technology and technological advances, fast changing trends and fashions. All these factors make the industry very dynamic and open to change. This philosophy needs to be incorporated in all the mechanics of industry working to ensure that the working processes and products and services offered are up-to-date and relevant.

In Pakistan, while the IT sector makes up a significant industry, there is still a lack of an effective change management process that can track and manage the impending changes in the industry. This results in projects deviating from scope, failing to meet requirements, scope creeps, wastage of organisational resources, conflicts with customers and failure of delivery and acceptance. A proper change management system therefore needs to be enforced, even though it risks bureaucratic hurdles and monotonous routines which might hinder effective completion of projects. However, without a formal system that tracks and manages these multiple changes, the management and effective and efficient completion of overall project objectives is not possible. Leadership steps in at this point to ensure that such a process is not only installed but also provides the required direction and strategy to project success as well.

The objective of this study is to identify the role that effective leadership plays in successful project change management, and the benefits that project success gains from leadership attributes. This study aims; to establish the role of leadership in project change management; to assess the nature of strategic and transformational leadership and their relationship to change management; to assess the benefits that a project may gain due to an improved and well established change management process. Based on these aims and objective the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

Does strategic and transformational leadership improve chances of project success?
Do strategic and transformational leadership styles in turn help in better implementation and understanding of the change management process?
Does the presence of a properly implemented change management process help improve chances of project success?

(2) LITERATURE REVIEW

Change management is a complex and elaborate process that is a pertinent reality most modern organisations need to adapt to and address at one point or the other (Hussain et al., 2018). Change as a process was first conceptualized by Lewin (1947), whereby change was segmented in three different phases, comprising of unfreezing - creating a readiness for change in organisational settings through preparation and a challenging of the status quo; moving- moving towards a new setup and going through the change process to achieve this; and refreezing- the stage at which the new processes and cultures are absorbed by organisational entities in order to ensure that these are consolidated as a new organisational reality.

The moving stage, in particular, is characterised by uncertainty and resistance to change. Armstrong (2003) suggests that for effective change management to take place, it is essential that a complete assessment of the existing situation is undertaken which then facilitates the beginning of the change process and its subsequent implementation in the organisation. Galpin (1996) has suggested some strategic steps that leaders might take in change situations which could facilitate the overall process. The first step in this process involves defining the need for change, and hallmarks the requisite factors that call for any change procedure to be initiated and installed in organisations. The second step involves the development of a strategic vision of how the change process would affect an organisation in the future, and the consequences of the change process. The third step involves the use of organisational teams to design, test and implement changes, not only leveraging the knowledge of teams but also creating the opportunity to garner support from organisational members for the process. The fourth step involves addressing the cultural aspects of an organisation that would help to sustain the change, including identifying future roles and responsibilities and organisational relationships.

(3) LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Various leadership attributes, particularly in the realm of soft skills, have been linked to successful change management processes in organisations. Fincham and Rhodes (2005) suggest that there are four elements that play a very important role in successful change management, and all of these involve the people of an organisation in one way or the other. The role of leaders is therefore indisputable in this context. Leaders invest in and enable the training and development of people and their mind sets through conducive organisational cultures and structures that allow for effective change management processes and procedures to be adopted and institutionalised. The commitment of organisational leadership to this process helps to keep it on track. Information and knowledge sharing are closely linked to successful change management in any organisation, and in this area as well, leadership plays an important role in the acquisition and distribution of this knowledge to relevant organisational functions and departments. Robbins (2008) also maintains that for any change management initiative to be successful, employees of an organisation need to be active participants. The ability of employees to assimilate information and giving them the opportunity to reflect upon the change process is critical to the success of any change process. This is where leadership provides the space for employees to not only understand the change and its reasons, but also the time to accept the change process. Participative leaders allow employees to have a say in the process which helps in internalising the process for them, reducing friction and uncertainty, thereby leading to success. An appropriate organisational culture and structure is also imperative for such initiatives to foster in, and leadership sets the tone in this context as well. Leaders play the role of change sponsors and change champions and also enable employees to act as change players through the adoption of required organisational and management attributes (Gilgeous, 1997; Hamlin, Keep & Ash, 2001). For successful change management, there needs to be a commitment to the change process, and this comes from leaders in the form of sponsoring change and then implementing it through adequate support and championship, which then allows other people in the organisation to successfully

understand and adopt it. Senior (2002) maintains that the roles leaders play in organisations need to be seen in the context of change management in order to fully appreciate the effects of leadership faculties on the process.

(4) STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

West, Young and Quillien (2012) suggest that through this process, leaders are able to work in collaboration with employees and non-managerial staff in an organisation, contributing towards the development of a workplace culture that is built upon and values strong interpersonal working relationships, information and knowledge sharing, open communication and trust building activities, considerably reducing the friction between leadership and employees that would invariably arise due to the change process. Reece (2008) also suggests that leadership needs to display tolerance for ambiguity and effective and calculated risk-taking tendencies in such scenarios. A flexible leadership style helps in the achievement of this end. This model of leadership also enables the development of an organisational focus that accepts and adopts change, thereby making the process smoother and less resistant than the one that takes place in the absence of such leadership attributes. Tavakoli and Lawton (2005) state that such processes allow each member of an organisation to be a part of the team that brings in and supports change, thereby having a clear picture of the entire process as well as their role in it, reducing uncertainty and anxiety. This also helps in the creation of an appreciation of the change process and its necessity for organisational survival and growth. Similarly, successful leaders also have the ability to focus on organisational change and growth, and this helps in the development and incorporation of multiple perspectives in organisational working, which eases change management processes. Leaders also help in the development of a strategic vision that enables the adoption of change initiatives in organisations. This enables the appropriate and adequate alignment of the multiple organisational entities that need to be streamlined for successful organisational change and success (Pang & Pisapia, 2012). Leaders act as counsellors and facilitators of ideas in such organisations, achieving success through the employment of personal faculties of rationality, logic and the use of intuition. Handy (1993) maintains that these attributes allow for the growth and development of existing as well as potential leaders in organisational settings by providing a learning environment. Bruner, Eaker, Freeman, Spekman, Teisberg, & Venkataraman, (2003) maintained that effective leadership is always able to suggest ways to make organisational change more effective and less uncertain.

H1: Strategic Leadership has a positive relationship with project success.

(5) TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

An important contributor to this faculty also lies in the transformational leadership paradigm, whereby leadership is based on the tenets of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, all of which serve as tools that enable leaders to engage their followers, inspire them towards new challenges, enhance their creativity and innovation, engage them emotionally and develop an understanding of their individual needs that are then aligned with organizational requirements to ensure individual and collective

achievement and satisfaction (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformational leadership is highly amenable to the changing requirements of modern day work environments, and enable the working of leaders in boundary less and fluid organizational structures, developing and maintaining employee relationships (Bruner et al. 2003), ensuring stability and continuity in whilst catering to dynamic business environments (Shamir, 1999), exercising decentralized leadership styles (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992), enabling successful change management in organizations by identifying and removing human and organizational inertias (Fincham & Rhodes, 2005), etc.

H2: Transformational Leadership has a positive relationship with project success.

(6) CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Wanner(2013)describes change management as an organized, systematic application of the knowledge, tools, and resources of change that provides organizations with a key process to achieve their business strategy. Hence, change management is a process consisting of some integral inputs which, when applied effectively, can have far reaching effects on the project and its deliverables. Levasseur (2010) considers change management processes as one of the most important aspects of any strategy that aims to ensure project success. He believes that a properly formulated and implemented change management process can dramatically improve the odds of project success. In successful project management and the imperative change initiatives required within it, the leaders need an effective alignment of the various team attributes, and soft skills and such other qualities are critical to this process. Project change management also requires a clear vision, clarity in reasons, ability to connect with the right people who have the potential to carry a project to success on the basis of their skills and competencies, and effective scheduling, which are all faculties that an effective leader can successfully manage and process. Moreover, the leadership style required in such cases needs to be flexible, inclusive and innovative so as to ensure that project success is ensured. Consecutively, the need to engage the efforts of a diverse team and motivate them accordingly can also be secured through effective leadership in project change management (Chittoor, 2012).

Pinto and Slevin (1988) have defined project success as being based on the four fundamental factors of any project. These factors are budget, schedule, performance and client satisfaction. These four elements need to be met or satisfied if the project is to be considered successful. Hence, a change management system or process that aims to improve the odds or chances of project success needs to improve any one or all four of these parameters if it is to be accepted as truly working.

H3: Change Management mediates the relationship between strategic leadership and project success.

H4: Change Management mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and project success.

(7) THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this research is informed through the qualities espoused in strategic as well as transformational leadership, particularly in the context of soft skills. Literature cites certain significant attributes in strategic leaders, all of which fall under the category of soft skills. These include developing a focus on organisational problems and direction (Tavakoli & Lawton, 2005; Tyler, 2007), the ability to create long- term organisational vision (Duane & Hitt, 1999), a high degree of risk tolerance (Reece, 2008; Hargrove, 2001), flexibility (West, Young & Quillien, 2012), exercise of patience and less deliberate behaviours (Fullan, 2004), trust, ethics and personal integrity (Radcliffe, 2008; Cohen, 2008), knowledge acquisition and sharing (Millof & Zachary, 2012), and change management (Dumais, 2010).

Transformational leadership places employees at the centre of the organisation and its processes by ensuring that there is a close contact between the leader and the people of the organisation, reducing alienation and uncertainty during times of

change. This is in line with the principles of intellectual stimulation, which caters to employee engagement and also provides necessary counseling by leaders to the employees during times of change, which is critical to the success of any change process and its adoption by organizational entities. This also allows employees to take ownership and responsibility of their roles in organizational change outcomes (Mintzberget al., 1998). Organizational processes based upon the tenets of transformational leadership also encourage integrity, partnership, information sharing, communication, trust building, employee involvement and team work, all of which are essential to the process of effective change management.

Based on the knowledge obtained from the review of literature and previous works conducted in this field, the following theoretical model has been devised for the purpose of this study.



Figure- 1 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical model as shown in Figure-1 conceptualize that strategic leadership and transformational leadership are two independent variables that have a direct relationship with the success of the project in a project environment. The model

further proposes that change management is a vital element in the successful completion of a project and acts as a mediator in this relationship, meaning that the two IV's impact change management which in turn helps achieve project success.

(8) RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population for this study includes people involved in the IT industry in Pakistan ensuring that most relevant and pertinent population for data collection is engaged for the study, leading to generation of relevant research findings. Unit of analysis is employees working on different management levels in IT industry, mainly Islamabad, Pakistan. Convenience based non-probability sampling is used for the study mainly relying on personal contacts for the data collection process. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to the sample population through the use of electronic media as well as through personal administration. A total of 155 completed questionnaires were received, resulting in a response rate of 51.6 percent. The study is quantitative, based on deductive approach with interpretive philosophy. The research strategy is survey questionnaires. The quantitative nature of the study has been chosen due to the application of risk management matrices and the resultant questionnaire that has been developed based on the variables identified in the study. In terms of time horizon, the study is cross sectional. For data collection regarding strategic and transformational leadership, the items have been adopted from Bass and Avolio (1990) multifactor leadership questionnaire and for change management process from Varajao et al., (2014). The questionnaire for determining and measuring project success has been adopted from the works of Akintoye and MacLeod (1997). Data analysis for this study was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Analysis include Cronbach alpha, regression analysis, one-way ANOVA, regression, Durbin Watson test and some other important tests. The mediation analysis of regression has been done using Preacher and Hayes model. All measures were undertaken to ensure anonymity of the participants.

(9) FINDINGS OF STUDY

The respondents came from a variety of backgrounds and experience levels. The major part of respondents were 30-55 age brackets meaning they were junior to medium level managers. There was a perfect 50/50 representation of male and female respondents, showing that opinion of both genders and all education levels has been recorded. Table-1 displays the mean, range and standard deviation of all the responses. The mean value for all variables lies somewhat in the centre point, signalling overall neutrality in the responses of the participants. Also, the standard deviation for all variables is not very significant, meaning that responses of the participants were somewhat similar. Also included in the table are skewness and kurtosis, which signal the normality of the data set obtained.

Table-2 displays the values of Cronbach Alpha as a result of the reliability test. For this questionnaire items, the value of two variables is greater than 0.9 and two variables is greater than 0.8. Hence, it can safely be said that the questionnaire used in this research is very reliable in terms of the context of the research and the

research objectives and there is a great deal of consistency. It is measuring what it claims to be measuring and it can measure that on a consistent basis.

Table-2 : Cronbach Alpha scores for reliability test of all variables

Variable	Cronbach Alpha score
Strategic Leadership	0.912
Transformational Leadership	0.901
Change Management	0.842
Project Success	0.865

In order to ensure that the demographic variables are not acting as covariates, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted on SPSS, results are mentioned in Table-3.

Table-3: Results of One Way ANOVA test performed on demographics

Demographic	F value	Significance Value
Age	0.926	0.430
Gender	1.172	0.281
Qualification	0.835	0.436

Significance levels: *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$, $p \leq 0.1$

The results of the one way Anova test prove that none of the significance values lies within the significance range hence they are not significant and it can safely be assumed that the demographics are not acting as covariates in this data set. This further adds to the validity of the data set and hence, to the results it will produce in the end.

Table-4: Pearson co-efficient value for correlation

	Age	Gender	Qualification	SL_M	TL_M	CM_M	PS_M
SL_M	0.073	-0.08	0.05	1	-	-	-
TL_M	0.008	-0.109	-0.064	0.824	1	-	-
CM_M	-0.02	-0.154	-0.07	0.688	0.811	1	-
PS_M	0.059	-0.087	-0.104	0.61	0.744	0.713	1

Since the Pearson value for the relationship between strategic leadership (SL_M) and Transformational Leadership (TL_M) is greater than 0.8, and the value between Transformational Leadership (TL_M) and Change Management (CM_M) is also

greater than 0.8, there is chance of multicollinearity and a multicollinearity test has to be performed.

Table 5: VIF values for multicollinearity test with dependent variable (PS_M)

Variable	VIF value
SL_M	3.131
TL_M	4.819
CM_M	2.934

From the above VIF values, it is clear that the issue of multicollinearity is not present in this data set. In order to ensure that there is no auto-correlation present in the data set, a Durbin Watson test is conducted. For our data set, the value of the Durbin Watson coefficient is 1.816, as can be seen from Table-6 below. Although auto correlation is ruled out when the Durbin Watson coefficient is greater than 2, a value of 1.816 shows a very weak auto correlation present in the data set which can be ignored since its effect is marginal or minimum to say the least.

Table-6: Results of the Durbin Watson test

Model	R	R squared	Adjusted R squared	Std. Error	Durbin Watson
1	0.768	0.589	0.581	0.4846	1.816

Regression analysis was run for the data set of this research and the results were tabulated.

Table-7: Results of Simple Regression Analysis (Total Effect Model)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	0.69	0.167	4.150	0.0000
SL_M	0.5242	0.551	9.51	0.0000
TL_M	0.7458	0.0541	13.77	0.0000

According to the results of the total effect model in Table-7, B_0 is equal to 0.69 which signifies that when all other variables are kept at 0, project success is 0.69. However, beta value for Strategic leadership is 0.5242. This value signifies two things. Firstly, it signifies that the relationship between strategic leadership is directly proportional. Secondly, one unit increase in strategic leadership results in an increase of 0.5242 units in project success. Hence, the strength of the relationship is also explained. The significance value for strategic leadership is 0.0000 which is within the significance range. Beta value for transformational leadership is 0.7458 this signifies that one unit increase in transformational leadership leads to a 0.7458

unit increase in project success. Hence, the relationship is positive and stronger than the relationship with strategic leadership. R squared for this data set is 0.589 which is a very high value for a model trying to explain behaviour. Therefore, it can be considered a well explanation of the respondent data and a true depiction of their opinion. The final step involved the analysis of the mediated regression, in order to comment on whether change management is acting as a mediator between strategic leadership and transformational leadership and project success. Mediation analysis using Process Macro by Andrew F. Hayes has been used. Table-8 displays the results of the mediation analysis.

Table-8: Results of Preacher and Hayes mediation analysis

Variable	Project Success(DV)	
	Coefficient	Significance
SL_M	0.1938	0.0036
CM_M	0.5288	0
TL_M	0.4849	0
CM_M	0.3041	0.0004

The coefficient value for the relationship between strategic leadership and project success is 0.1938 and it is significant. Since both total effect and direct effect are significant, it means that partial mediation is taking place. Hence, mediation has been found and change management is acting as a mediator between strategic leadership and project success. The coefficient value for the relationship between transformational leadership and project success is 0.4849 and it lies within the significance range. Here also, the beta value for the direct effect model is less than the beta value for the total effect model mentioned in table 10 above, which was 0.7458. And since the relationship is significant in both the total effect model and the direct effect model, there is partial mediation.

(10) RESULTS

The aims of the study were to find out the relationship between these two leadership styles and project change management. This research has revealed that the target audience linked project success directly with strategic leadership. Respondents of this research strongly believed that transformational leadership is critical for project success. This is because projects run into trouble in the face of uncertainty. Transformational leaders work best in uncertain times, they shine brightest when the environment is evolving and dynamic, and are able to become champions of change and have the will power to face uncertainty and work under pressure. These are qualities that help any individual gather support and admiration in the workplace, thus resulting in a renewed motivation that when directed can significantly improve

the performance of individuals as well as that of the whole team. The results of the quantitative methods used in this research show that change management is acting as a mediator between strategic leadership and project success. Hence, respondents believe that strategic leadership can help improve the change management process which eventually leads to project success. Mediation analysis of the data set shows that respondents have agreed to this principle in theory, that transformational leadership helps in better handling of the change management process which in turn increases the project success factors such as cost, time and quality.

(11) CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic and transformational leadership are two leadership styles which provide the right atmosphere in any organizational setting to encourage and motivate employees to accept and cultivate change, which in turns makes it easier for project to prosper and meet their goals. These soft skills are not documented in any financial statements, but their role in ensuring continued business growth is imperative. Both the leadership styles under study are very promising and encouraging for organizations facing constant change who are looking for ways to cater to dynamic and uncertain environments without compromising on project goals. This study is an eye opener for the middle and top level management of information technology firms in Pakistan. These firms are continuously fighting with time and resources to finish project successfully since they are constantly struggling with change due to the nature of the industry and the evolving technology market. However, with all these factors kept in mind, leadership is one of the key areas where work needs to be done in order to face these issues. Simply putting in more money is not going to be enough. Middle and top level employees of these companies need to show leadership in times of crisis, because ownership, communication, mentorship, motivation and confidence enable the employees to believe in a goal and provide them with the spirit to work towards that goal. Technology companies should invest resources in developing leaders within the organization who are able to steer the employees through times of change and uncertainty, because project success can be not guaranteed unless change management mechanism are not tightened and that is not possible without strong leadership.

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