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Exploring Factors of Project Failure: A Qualitative Study of Development Projects of Pakistan

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Abstract

Development projects were the key initiatives that effectively addressed and countered the current/future issues as well as development requirement of a country socially and economically. Pakistan had established appropriate administrative bodies, i.e., ministries/divisions, institutes, autonomous bodies for effective and efficient development of the country and nation. Pakistan always planned and executed huge and minor initiatives (projects) beyond the available financial, technical, human resources. Research study appraises the all-inclusive causes/factors of projects failure that were categorically responsible for projects failure. Pakistan's projects are mostly failed or having limited impact or verse impact. There were many and six all-inclusive factors which are broader responsible for failure of the projects. The actual causes were identified by conduction an open-ended interview from experienced concerned representatives of projects comprising from executing ministries/divisions and controlling ministry. The respondents expressed their feeling accordingly due to already established excellent liaison with respondents. Pakistan and almost whole society had badly developed especially in socially, economically and Islamically Developing of society on true footage as per Islamic principles is the solution. The selection, appointment, specific development (intrinsic and extrinsic) of politicians, civil servants, project's officials and assigning duties to rights person at right place

in true meaning. There is dire need of accountability with true letter & spirit of every action and every individual (all those involved) there must be shifting of responsibility accordingly and there must be an excellent mechanism for rational shifting accordingly of all individuals, departments, ministries with appropriate ratio.

Keywords: Factors, Project Failure, Qualitative, Development, Projects

Introduction

Since Pakistan achieved independence, many of these development projects had taken place in sectors such as infrastructure, energy, and socio-economic developments. Many of the projects have outgrown the available financial resources. According to the Project Management Institute (PMI), project success is meeting particular requirements such as quality, scope, schedule, budget, and stakeholder expectations. Unfortunately, many of the development projects failed to meet the criteria and 71% of them end up being failures (Papanek d, 2024). Such failures are caused by many factors, notably restrictions in cost, time, scope, quality, resources, and risk management. In addition to these factors, there exist political, bureaucratic, and organizational problems together with problems in funding, execution, and planning which threaten to undermine the success of a project (Janjua & Naeem, 2023). Alhamdulillah Islamic teachings encourage sustainable development for the benefit of human beings, but Pakistan's efforts have been quite opposite from such ideals. According to the Qur'an (2:208; 15:27-39; 35:6) and Hadith, development should focus on actual benefits to society and proper moral governance. Even after the implementation of different strategic policy initiatives, human development capital and institutional effectiveness are underdeveloped (Khan et al., 2021). Major challenges include poor human resource management, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as Islamic financial system dependency, that translates into malpractice with public money and weakness in project sustainability Mian (2009). The requirement for robust development in the public sector, as the protocols of the Planning Commission suggest, means that both international standards, like PMI's, and indigenous frameworks should be aligned in the execution of projects to have an influence on the development outcomes in Pakistan (Qureshi et al., 2020).

Development plays an important role in the economic and social prosperity of a country, and in Pakistan, the federal level has constitutional frameworks known as Public Sector Development Projects (PSDP) and at the provincial level Annual Development Programs (ADP) that aim at initiating growth nationally.

The Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives (PD&SI) is an enabler in the proper planning, implementation, and monitoring of all such projects to ensure that each meets sustainable goals on the socio-economic front. However, a low success rate and limited impact of development projects suggest that the existing monitoring and evaluation practices have gaps. The need for this study stems from the necessity of bridging those gaps and enhancing project management efficiency, taking into account Islamic principles and national interest.

Research Objective

To highlight the causes of development projects failure and having no impact or further deteriorate of successful projects of the crippled country/nation.

Literature Review

Political/Bureaucratic/Organizational Factor

The success of development initiatives largely depends on the political, bureaucratic, or organizational structures of leadership. Effective decision-making heads of institutions are essential to clear, maintain, and brainstorm new projects. However, a lack of commitment and insight into strategy most often leads to project failure, reported elsewhere, for example by Jamil (2015), Ahmed (2017), and Antony & Gupta (2019). A very apt leadership model is viewed in Islamic governance through the leadership by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his companions, particularly the Khulafah Rashideen رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ, while executing and maintaining programs for total social and economic development (Abu Dawud:4647). Their adherence to the principles of Islamic leadership regarding accountability and justice provides a basic working model for effective leadership across the sands of time.

This Islamic model is reflective of the governance philosophy of Hazrat Abu Bakkar Siddiq (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ). When Hazrat Abu Bakkar became Khalifa, he conceived his role to be of a responsible leader, open to correction by public if ever he made a mistake while performing his duties. His assertion that "Help me if I do well, and set me right if I do wrong" brings home the point that leadership is nothing but a public servant and not a supreme ruler. The ideals that he enunciated-justice, responsibility, and accountability-have remained the baits for good governance (Zamziba et al., 2024).

Hazrat Umar al-Khattab was much on the same lines in his values; he is remembered for his justice and it was his strength, plus fairness. The devil himself, so to say, reportedly avoids passing through where he might have to go by Hazrat

Umar al-Khattab sides (I. Bukhari:3683). This underlines the kind of leadership that is not only effective but also inspires awe of injustice and holds an unshaken commitment to the welfare of the people. Principles like these of Islamic leadership would provide a template for a proper political and bureaucratic development that modern governance structures could do well to emulate, if they only keep ethical direction and accountability paramount.

Intention for Development Factor

It is the intentions behind development efforts which determine the impact of those efforts. According to Hazrat Abu Bakkar Siddiq (رضي الله عنه), actions must be devoid of motives so that the work done in the pursuit of serving others does not look to reap rewards but only for the sake of Allah. This has been repeated in today's writings where it has been mentioned that there is a defined purpose, and an honest intention does make the work of such development projects last long. Such is not the case with today's developments, which are sometimes carried out under motives other than philanthropic, hence lacking the ethical motives behind development results. Therefore, all such development projects without a genuine intention for development show a difference between leadership motives and the actual needs of the people (Zamziba et al., 2024).

Moreover, new efforts are more and more global agendas, for example, United Nations' sustainable development goals, with priorities then driven more by donors instead of the needs locally. This does very frequently bring about short-term remedies that lack sustainability because the funding or influence disappears. The role of intention and commitment is obvious: only proper intent that matches with local values and needs can lead to real impact and sustainable development (Wiegant et al., 2024).

Financial Source Factor

Another crucial variable would be the financing structure that supports development programs. In Islam, the procurement of financing for development programs is to be righteous, for the Qur'an states, "Consum' not to injustice on earth, nor walk about aiming men's fraith (and possessions) Allah loves not any ingrmdious wretch".4:29 Consuming of what is forbidden harms one's heart and affects the power of one's prayers. Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has told, "Consumption of unlawful things destroys the heart, and consumption of unlawful things ruins the prayer". Muslim, Tirmidhi, Hanbal.

Therefore, financial integrity forms the underlying and sustaining force of development projects because dependence on unethical and unsustainable sources

might undermine it. The Qur'an reveals that dealings in interest produce economic bondage and ruin morality. Higher foreign loans and interest-based systems cause vulnerabilities that compromise the sustainability of development projects (Jeeva, 2020). In the case of Islamic countries, these monetary dependencies upon non-Islamic economic systems pose an ethical dilemma because dependency on interest-based loans is against the teachings of the religion. However, most countries, including Pakistan, are highly dependent on foreign funding from institutions like IMF, World Bank, and ADB, which creates a vicious cycle of dependency and curtails their economic independence (Cheema, 2004; Yasin, 2023).

Muslim values encourage prudence that emphasizes that *riba* or interest is haram, and, in order to avoid exploitative financial dealings, people along with countries should concentrate more on business and honest transactions rather than exploitative financial dealings. The Prophet (ﷺ) says, "One has nothing to do with *riba* either directly or indirectly for it is indeed the thing forbidden." Therefore, capital independence and reliance on principles-based sources of finance are crucial to the building of an economically strong nation based on justice and fairness (Bayindir & Ustaoglu, 2018).

Work Ethics and Norms Factor

Work ethics constitute honesty, integrity, and dedication to service, forming the core of any development program. The teaching of Islam is that for one to actually perform as one ought, honesty and service in good causes should characterize the individual. Indeed, the Qur'an at (68:4) states: "And you were truly tolerant and generous and do apologize much". Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) possessed all those characteristics that mark great leaders and a successful organization.

More importantly, the Islamic work ethic stipulates the proper alignment of the intentions and the means of one's work with moral values and accountability to Allah. This stands in sharp contrast to some situations in the contemporary world, where work ethics are compromised at individual or organizational levels for personal gain. In such considerations, the Islamic teaching would remind leaders and workers of the importance of justice and fair dealing in the heart of dealings and must evoke the creation of values eliciting trust and respect in a community.

Political and bureaucratic factors drive the success of a development project, led by ethical leadership with a genuine intent. Financial integrity and a set of work ethics further polish this framework to yield sustainable and

meaningful results. This Islamic guidance gives both leadership ethics and financial and work ethics a wholesome approach; it therefore strongly roots the foundation of development for truly effective and sustainable development.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research makes use of an exploratory research design to identify the underpinning problems of challenges associated with public sector development projects in Pakistan, through the philosophy of pragmatism. The method of data gathering is determined to be diverse and includes interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and content analysis within various public sector development projects. A cross-section approach is taken with this study utilizing a multi-method strategy focused primarily on surveys and deductive analysis. The research covered several groups of participants, including the representatives of the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, line ministry focal persons, and project officers along with other experts. Convenience sampling gave importance to the selection, targeting high impact development projects. Thematic analysis is applied for interviews, and content analysis is applied for analyzing the data from each project, since it is archived data. An open-ended questionnaire allows for structured interviews that provide in-depth insight into what caused a project to succeed or fail. The targeted population for the research includes professionals and intellectuals from relevant government agencies and development sectors culled from insights from over 100+ PSDP projects. The results shall provide actionable recommendations for improving the project outcome and minimizing common barriers in development initiatives.

Findings

The outcome of the open-ended interviews is critical knowledge in respect to effectiveness, difficulties and structural requirements for development projects in Pakistan. There is emphasis on the demand for a more robust Islamic, socially conscious and strategically driven governance model. It was pointed out that reformations should be taken at both civil and non-civil sectors but with an Islamic approach under the leadership of principled behavior. This development coupled with social and economic reforms are said to be significant for the optimum growth and stability of the nation.

There is also a huge gap in terms of the capabilities, strength, and standing of project officials in monitoring and overseeing PSDP projects. Hefty development of the skill sets of such officials is urgently required for proper

monitoring and evaluation. As part of the same goal, accountability at all levels of project execution was highlighted and brought nearer such that responsibility was not left to the Project Director only but was distributed among many officials and stakeholders who became involved in various ministerial and executive ranks. This is deemed very important to address failures and, by which means, enhance overall project accountability.

The other conclusion made is the fixing of clear and defined assignments concerning responsibility, specifically among the officials who participate right from project inception to the completion of development projects. Ministries and divisions must constantly build their Planning and Development (P&D), Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), and Project Management Units (PMU) to ensure rigorous oversight and control of projects. Leaders in these areas should be competent, vigilant, and have very high Islamic values, distinguished for foresight and ethical leadership rather than superficial rites of power.

In addition, the interviews showed a great need of strategic ability and coordinated efforts on the part of all the top management officials with a clear awareness of what initiatives suit in the best interest of the country and from an Islamic point of view as well. Reflecting on Malaysia's model, it proposed that Pakistan must clearly adhere to its stance of which policies and projects benefit it and those act like antibodies. It has been observed that the nation tends to uncritically emulate development models borrowed from developed countries; this has, at times, spawned adverse effects.

The highly unsustainable and complex structure of Pakistan's allocations of its financial resources to non-productive projects has led to having a financial burden on the nation's human resources and workforce morale. Additional pitfalls associated with them include hypocrisy, lack of commitment, and a weak evolutionary drive within society, which are manifested in a verbal commitment toward reform but without genuine commitment and action. Some ministries and divisions seem to work under the influence of social as well as economic interests of the developed nations, putting Pakistan on a detour from its independent developmental path.

A constant theme running through all the interviews was the general ineptness in all departments and at all levels of officials-the controllers, consultants, experts, etc., all of whom impact the output of projects. There are large gaps in all line employees and within all those of the external P&D and M&E compartments which adversely impact efficiency. It was emphasized that, had the

principles and values of Islam been there to provide a basis against less-than-beneficial influences, it would be noted that they are actually relatively absent in all spheres of governance and society. The disconnection, even in mundane life domains, has compounded the failure of development projects, hence the urgent need for a values-driven approach toward national development, one with resilience.

Discussion

The research findings shed light upon the primary reasons behind the failure of development projects in Pakistan by calling for a broad, principle-based approach as believed to be grounded in tenets of Islam. Indeed, those suggested shortcomings, including principled leadership and poor governance arrangements, are consistent with previous studies that pointed out inefficiencies in governance to be among the principal reasons why projects fail in developing countries (Shakir et al., 2024). Strengthening the institutional capacity and promoting ethical leadership is essential to tackle such challenges. Focus on an Islamic governance model resonates with the Malaysian experience whereby strategic alignment with the values of Islam has been viewed as an enabler for sustainable development (Yap & Al-Mutairi, 2023). Similar would be the impact in Pakistan; it will provide a social conscious framework-there will be accountability, and then long-term achievements of projects.

The other is the capacity and lack of accountability of project officials that undermined the PSDP. The aforementioned finding is reinforced by literature, which deems there to be a need for programs in building capacity among officials to hone their skills on monitoring and evaluating tasks assigned to them (Boni & Adeney, 2020). The focus on fixed responsibilities and higher levels of supervision perfectly aligns with global best practices in support of clear lines of authority to guarantee the transparency of project implementation (Huemann & Turner, 2024). Besides, achieving such integration of the Islamic principles into leadership and project management can minimize accountability gaps and promote responsibility at all levels of governance, as depicted in the results of the study.

Lastly, the paper mentions the unsustainable allocation of financial means and external influence where majority development ventures go astray. The results revealed that there is a misalignment in the national priorities as oppose to the priority and needs in socio-economic development; thus, leading to waste of resources. This is in line with the observations of (Conteh & Huque, 2014), wherein most of the developing nations cannot harmonize the interests of local

development needs with sources of exogenous funding. On the contrary, it would contain critical lessons of having an imperative to initiate strategic policies according to Pakistan's socio-economic and Islamic framework, rather than blindly emulating the models developed in more advanced nations. Such a paradigm shift, besides strategic competence and ethical foresight, would be capable of dynamically changing the developmental scenario of Pakistan with prospects for successfully completing its project with national autonomy.

Conclusion

These root causes of failure will be addressed only if Pakistan's public administration at all tiers follows a holistic approach, driven by the principles of Islam. Institutional capacity building, building accountability, and strategic, visionary leadership are vital elements in optimizing the usage of public funds and in fostering sustainable development. It has been construed that there is a need for a project management system with well-defined roles and responsibilities from the start to the end of the project to ensure adequate oversight and accountability mechanisms. All initiatives must be guided by principles based on Islamic thought for better coordination with national interest and community ethos and less dependence on foreign models, as they might not harmonize with Pakistan's socio-economic context. In addition, there needs to be a culture of commitment, integrity, and resilience against no-beneficial influences while empowering the decision-makers to take informed, beneficial actions for the country. Overall, these recommendations are to address and mitigate failures, spur societal growth, and enable a nation to move forward in an economically beneficial but spiritually fulfilling direction.

Recommendations

1. Institutional responsibility and transparency strengthened at every stage of the project to ensure accountable spending of public funds.
2. Principles of Islam can be integrated as essential guiding rules for project initiatives to seek refuge in national and cultural considerations.
3. Strengthen and build up the skills and capacity of the officials who are involved in project management toward leading to higher levels of monitoring, evaluation, and execution efficiency.

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