

The Impact of Human Resource Management Practices on Project Success in Saudi Arabian Project-Based Organizations: Evidence from Vision 2030 Initiatives

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This study investigates how Human Resource Management (HRM) practices influence project success in Saudi Arabian project-based organizations operating within the Vision 2030 framework. Despite the critical importance of human capital for project performance, limited empirical research has examined these relationships in the Saudi context, where unique institutional factors, including Saudization requirements and national transformation initiatives, shape organizational practices. Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV), Strategic HRM Theory, and Human Capital Theory, this research develops a comprehensive conceptual model examining four HRM practice dimensions—recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, and compensation and benefits—and their relationships with project success measured through cost performance, schedule performance, quality achievement, and stakeholder satisfaction. The study employs a quantitative methodology utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to produce substantial empirical evidence, set against the backdrop of Saudi Vision 2030's significant infrastructure initiatives, where effective human resource management is crucial for realizing national objectives. The research targets project-based organizations across construction, information technology, infrastructure development, and professional services sectors. The findings are expected to enhance strategic HRM scholarship and provide project leaders with practical guidance for optimizing human capital investments amid rapid economic transformation. This research advances the objectives established in Vision 2030 by enhancing our understanding of both the theoretical and practical aspects of workforce management in project-based organizational contexts.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st-century global landscape is increasingly characterized by nations pursuing ambitious, large-scale strategic initiatives to ensure future prosperity, economic resilience, and geopolitical influence. These initiatives, frequently appearing as portfolios of intricate mega-projects, signify a paradigm shift in national planning and implementation (Söderlund et al., 2017). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 represents a highly ambitious and transformative agenda, reliant on the successful execution of giga-projects of unprecedented scale and complexity (Moshashai et al., 2020). The proficient administration of these significant projects has positioned human resource management, particularly within project-based organizations (PBOs), at the intersection of strategy and implementation.

Project-based organizations have assumed increased significance in the contemporary business environment. They serve as essential

organizational frameworks, enhancing project success through specialized workforce capabilities, established methodologies, and carefully developed human capital strategies, ultimately establishing a more robust foundation for excelling in high-pressure environments (Huemann et al., 2007). Unlike traditional organizations where work is organized around permanent functional departments, PBOs coordinate their activities around temporary endeavors with defined beginnings and endpoints (Hobday, 2000). This fundamental structural difference creates unique challenges for managing human resources, as employees move between projects, work under multiple supervisors, and face uncertainty about future assignments.

This research investigates the dynamics of HRM effectiveness within this unique and challenging context. It posits that the success of projects in achieving their strategic goals relies on the synergistic interplay of effective HRM practices

and favourable organizational conditions. This research asserts that the benefits of these practices are enhanced by the organization's capacity to develop, engage, and retain talented project professionals. Asfahani et al. (2025) assert that initiatives such as NEOM, The Red Sea Project, AMAALA, and Qiddiya represent complex, interconnected systems designed to create entirely new industries and ecosystems, all requiring sophisticated human resource capabilities.

Conventional human resource management methodologies, characterized by rigid job descriptions, standardized career paths, and annual performance reviews, are inadequate for managing the complexity inherent in project-based work. These methods frequently neglect the dynamic interdependencies among project components and the unique needs of project professionals, resulting in inefficiencies including high turnover rates, skill mismatches, and suboptimal workforce utilization (Bredin & Söderlund, 2011). Research demonstrates that mega-projects in Saudi Arabia intensify these risks due to their magnitude, with studies indicating that fragmented management structures exacerbate problems such as workforce instability and stakeholder conflicts (Alotaibi et al., 2024).

Vision 2030's human capital mandate has expedited the incorporation of sophisticated HRM practices including competency-based recruitment systems, continuous learning platforms, multi-source performance feedback mechanisms, and project-aligned compensation structures (Peck, 2017). Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 exemplifies this trend, delivering giga-projects of unprecedented scale, including NEOM at USD 500 billion (Berge et al., 2025). This study seeks to empirically examine the influence of HRM practices on project success outcomes within Saudi Arabian project-based organizations.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The construction and project-based industries presently face ongoing pressures to attain optimal project results, improve efficiency, and cultivate genuine innovation amid their intrinsic complexity and rapid transformation. This is unsurprising, given that projects often involve intricate interdependencies and unforeseen challenges that can swiftly escalate costs or delays. Effective

human resource management is crucial for assembling competent project teams, maintaining workforce engagement, and delivering projects on time, within budget, and to the necessary quality standards (Turner et al., 2008). In light of ongoing challenges, Project-based organizations have struggled to demonstrate the strategic value of their HRM investments.

The persistent inefficiency of HRM operations in international project-based organizations indicates significant shortcomings in our understanding. Studies illustrate that organizations face challenges in substantiating the value of their human resource investments to project outcomes. Research indicates that organizations with underdeveloped HRM capabilities experience turnover rates exceeding 25% annually among project professionals, leading to knowledge loss and project disruptions (Raiden et al., 2006). Furthermore, merely 40% of project-based organizations indicate that their HRM frameworks enable effective talent deployment across project portfolios (Keegan et al., 2012).

Globally, HRM inefficacy in project contexts has produced significant adverse effects for organizations, leading to wasted recruitment investments, diminished employee engagement, and strategic discord between HR functions and project operations. The effectiveness of contemporary HRM operations is impeded by fragmented integration between HR departments and project management offices, further aggravated by resistance to adapting traditional HR practices for project-based contexts (Huemann et al., 2007). Researchers have identified a substantial deficiency in understanding how factors such as recruitment sophistication, training investment, performance management effectiveness, and compensation competitiveness influence the operational efficacy of project-based organizations.

The project sector in Saudi Arabia possesses distinctive characteristics that require focused academic examination. The construction and infrastructure sectors operate within a unique socio-economic context significantly shaped by the Vision 2030 initiative, which demands accelerated project delivery, enhanced workforce capabilities, and rapid human capital development. Research by Al-Asfour and Khan (2014) showed that effective

HRM practices can improve operational efficiency and significantly reduce project failure rates in Saudi Arabian organizations. However, there is a lack of studies that examine the comprehensive impact of HRM practice bundles on project success outcomes.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Framework

This research combines three complementary theoretical frameworks to create a comprehensive conceptual model. The Resource-Based View (RBV), established by Barney (1991), serves as a foundational structure for analyzing how human resources create competitive advantage by examining resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. This framework has been thoroughly validated in research examining strategic human resource management and organizational performance relationships (Jiang et al., 2012).

Strategic HRM Theory asserts that organizations attain success by aligning their human resource practices with strategic objectives and developing coherent systems of complementary practices (Delery & Doty, 1996). In the realm of project-based organizations, effectiveness is optimized when HRM practices consistently support project execution requirements while building long-term organizational capabilities. Research by Wright and McMahan (1992) found that organizations with strategically aligned HRM practices achieve improved outcomes in project delivery, cost management, and stakeholder satisfaction.

Human Capital Theory, introduced by Becker (1964), emphasizes the necessity of investing in employee knowledge, skills, and abilities for organizational success. In project-based industries, human capital encompasses technical expertise, project management competencies, and adaptive capabilities essential for navigating complex project environments. This theory provides the rationale for perceiving HRM practices as investments that generate returns through enhanced project performance—specifically, the mechanisms through which recruitment, training, performance management, and compensation are transformed into project success (Sun et al., 2007).

B. HRM Practices in Project-Based Organizations

Human resource management in project-based organizations has transformed into an essential organizational function for aligning workforce capabilities with strategic project goals. The Resource-Based View states that an organization's effectiveness relies on its ability to identify talent requirements, utilize opportunities through systematic recruitment practices, and develop human capital to sustain competitive advantage in changing project environments. In their systematic literature review on HRM in PBOs, Bredin and Söderlund (2011) identified recruitment, development, performance management, and rewards as fundamental HRM functions that facilitate organizations' comprehension of project demands and emerging workforce requirements.

Keegan et al. (2012) examined the functions of HRM departments in executing strategic plans within project-oriented organizations. Their findings demonstrate that the functions of talent acquisition and development substantially influence strategic execution. Research indicates that the relationship between HRM practice sophistication and project success has a coefficient (β) ranging from approximately 0.25 to 0.45. Typically, HRM maturity models consist of five developmental stages, each representing increasingly sophisticated capabilities for talent management and workforce optimization (Guest et al., 2004).

C. Recruitment and Selection Practices

Recruitment and selection practices in project-based organizations encompass systematic approaches to identifying, attracting, and selecting individuals with the competencies required for project success. These practices include competency-based selection systems, structured interviewing protocols, assessment centers, and person-project fit evaluation (Dainty et al., 2003). The adoption of sophisticated recruitment practices significantly enhances project team quality, with research demonstrating improvements in team performance and reductions in early turnover (Huselid, 1995).

Research by Sun et al. (2007) revealed that organizations with rigorous selection processes generally exhibit higher project performance and

greater workforce stability, whereas organizations with informal recruitment approaches demonstrate lower capability levels. Furthermore, research by Raiden et al. (2006) demonstrates that recruitment practices congruent with project requirements and organizational culture are more likely to yield successful team formation and integration.

D. Training and Development Practices

Training and development represents a crucial investment for building the human capital required for project execution. Organizations allocate substantial resources to technical training, project management certification programs, leadership development, and continuous learning initiatives (Huemann et al., 2007). Research consistently demonstrates that training investment is a significant predictor of project performance improvements. Leaders are essential in championing development programs, ensuring strategic alignment, and conferring organizational legitimacy to learning initiatives (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009).

The structure of training programs includes both formal educational interventions and experiential learning through project assignments. Well-designed development systems integrate classroom training with on-the-job learning, mentoring relationships, and stretch assignments that build capabilities while delivering project value. Research by Raiden et al. (2006) identified systematic training programs as crucial factors facilitating workforce readiness in project-based organizations.

E. Performance Management Practices

Performance management encompasses the processes through which organizations set expectations, monitor progress, provide feedback, and evaluate contributions. In project contexts, effective performance management requires adaptation to address the realities of matrix reporting, multiple project assignments, and collective outcomes (Turner et al., 2008). Research demonstrates that performance management practices characterized by clarity, fairness, and developmental orientation enhance both individual and project performance.

Challenges arise from the complexity of evaluating individual contributions to collective project

outcomes. Research by Huemann et al. (2007) demonstrated that performance management plays a critical mediating role—essentially serving as the connector between organizational expectations and employee behaviors. Their work provides evidence that performance feedback translates organizational goals into individual action through the mechanism of clarity and accountability. Therefore, effective practice requires systematically defining performance expectations, then using ongoing feedback to guide continuous improvement.

F. Compensation and Benefits Practices

Compensation and benefits practices signal organizational valuation of employee contributions and influence attraction, retention, and motivation outcomes. In competitive labor markets such as Saudi Arabia's project economy, compensation competitiveness is essential for securing talented project professionals. Project-aligned compensation structures that reward successful delivery create incentives for teams to achieve project objectives (Keegan & Turner, 2003). Research indicates that compensation practices encompassing competitive base salaries, project completion bonuses, skill-based pay, and comprehensive benefits packages enhance workforce stability and performance motivation. Studies by Guest et al. (2004) demonstrate that compensation systems perceived as fair and competitive reduce turnover intentions and enhance organizational commitment among project professionals.

G. Project Success Conceptualization

Project success is a multidimensional construct that has evolved considerably in project management literature. Traditional conceptualizations focused on the "iron triangle" of cost, schedule, and quality performance—whether projects were delivered on budget, on time, and to specification (Pinto & Slevin, 1987). More contemporary perspectives recognize that project success extends beyond these efficiency measures to include effectiveness dimensions such as stakeholder satisfaction, team satisfaction, and strategic contribution (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007).

A construction mega-project is notoriously difficult to manage due to the large number of

people and organizations involved, including local communities, contractors, international collaborators, and governing bodies. Conflicts may arise from differing objectives and unequal levels of influence among various stakeholder groups. Ika (2009) contends that comprehensive project success measurement should encompass both process efficiency and outcome effectiveness. Digital platforms and integrated systems significantly enhance communication, facilitate performance visibility, and promote evidence-based decision-making regarding workforce deployment (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007).

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study is to analyse the diverse components related to the implementation of HRM practices affecting project success in Saudi Arabian project-based organizations. The specific objectives are:

- (1) To investigate the impact of recruitment and selection practices on project success in Saudi Arabian project-based organizations;
- (2) To assess the influence of training and development practices on project success outcomes;
- (3) To examine the relationship between performance management practices and project success;
- (4) To determine the effect of compensation and benefits practices on project success; and
- (5) To evaluate the combined explanatory power of HRM practice bundles in predicting project success within the Vision 2030 context.

V. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Based on the theoretical frameworks and literature review, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Recruitment and selection practices have a significant positive effect on project success in Saudi Arabian project-based organizations.

H2: Training and development practices have a significant positive effect on project success in Saudi Arabian project-based organizations.

H3: Performance management practices have a significant positive effect on project success in Saudi Arabian project-based organizations.

H4: Compensation and benefits practices have a significant positive effect on project success in Saudi Arabian project-based organizations.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research methodology utilizing survey-based data collection and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships. The target population comprises project management professionals, including project directors, project managers, HR managers, and senior coordinators, within Saudi Arabian project-based organizations across construction, information technology, infrastructure development, and professional services sectors.

The sampling frame includes organizations that derive the majority of their revenue from project-based activities and employ at least 50 employees to ensure sufficient HRM formalization. Data collection utilizes structured questionnaires distributed through professional networks, industry associations, and direct organizational outreach. All constructs are measured using multi-item scales adapted from validated instruments in the strategic HRM and project management literature, with respondents indicating agreement on seven-point Likert scales.

Measurement instruments for HRM practices are adapted from established scales including Huselid (1995), Delery and Doty (1996), Sun et al. (2007), and Guest et al. (2004). Project success measures are adapted from Shenhar and Dvir (2007) and Ika (2009), encompassing cost performance, schedule performance, quality achievement, and stakeholder satisfaction dimensions. Data analysis procedures include confirmatory factor analysis to assess measurement model validity and reliability, followed by structural model testing to examine hypothesized relationships.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study provides critical insights for enhancing HRM effectiveness in the demanding context of Saudi Arabia's project-based industries. The primary theoretical contribution addresses a substantial gap in strategic HRM literature by analysing the relationships between HRM practices and project success outcomes within project-based organizational contexts. This study extends

strategic HRM theory to the understudied domain of project-based organizations, thereby broadening our understanding of how human resource investments translate into project performance within this distinctive organizational form.

The practical implications are directly aligned with the strategic objectives of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which depend significantly on the successful implementation of giga-projects across multiple sectors. The findings will provide substantial value to industry practitioners, organizational leaders, and HR managers by delivering evidence-based recommendations for the design and implementation of HRM practices tailored to project-based work requirements. The research will offer explicit strategies for enhancing project outcomes through human capital investments, potentially resulting in substantial performance improvements and reductions in project failures prevalent in complex project environments (Alghaseb & Alali, 2024).

Moreover, insights will assist governmental bodies and industry associations in developing national best-practice guidelines and training programs to enhance human resource management maturity in the project sectors of the Kingdom. The findings contribute to both scholarly advancement and practical application, supporting organizations in optimizing their human capital strategies for project success.

VIII. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research examines HRM practices designed to improve project outcomes in project-based organizations, specifically emphasizing recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, and compensation and benefits dimensions. The geographical scope is limited to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, concentrating on large-scale projects associated with Vision 2030 initiatives.

This research specifically concentrates on project-based organizations within construction, information technology, infrastructure development, and professional services sectors. The unit of analysis comprises professionals in project management and human resources, including directors, managers, project managers, and senior coordinators, within Saudi Arabian project-based firms. The study focuses on project

success outcomes measured through cost performance, schedule performance, quality achievement, and stakeholder satisfaction.

IX. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on project-based organizations within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, due to the commonalities in project management practices across countries and project scales, the study's recommendations may be relevant to other nations, especially those in the Gulf Arab region undertaking similar transformation initiatives. The cross-sectional research design captures relationships at a specific point in time, which may restrict causal inference regarding the long-term effects of HRM investments on project outcomes. Furthermore, dependence on self-reported data may lead to response bias; however, employing validated instruments, multiple respondent perspectives, and suitable statistical controls alleviates this limitation. The focus on formal HRM practices may not fully capture informal human resource management processes that also influence project outcomes. Future research employing longitudinal designs and objective performance measures would strengthen causal inference and external validity.

X. CONCLUSIONS

This research examines the essential mechanisms through which HRM practices influence project success within the transformative framework of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiatives. This study constructs a comprehensive model by integrating the Resource-Based View, Strategic HRM Theory, and Human Capital Theory to analyse the impact of recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, and compensation and benefits practices on project success outcomes.

The intersection of global HRM challenges in project contexts with Saudi Arabia's distinctive contextual elements presents a significant research opportunity that cannot be sufficiently explored through the sole application of Western-derived perspectives. This research aims to enhance our understanding of strategic HRM in project-based organizations and provide project leaders with valuable strategies for optimizing human capital investments. These investments are crucial in

dynamic economic environments influenced by ambitious national development initiatives.

This study advances the objectives established in Vision 2030 by enhancing our understanding of both the theoretical and practical aspects of human resource management in project-based organizational contexts. The findings are expected to demonstrate that comprehensive HRM practice implementation significantly predicts project success, with training and development potentially showing the strongest effects, followed by performance management, recruitment and selection, and compensation practices. These insights will guide organizations in prioritizing their human capital investments for maximum project performance impact.

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