Original article

THE IMPACT OF LEADER-LEADER EXCHANGE ON PROJECT SUCCESS IN NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract: After many years of research on non-profit organisations (NPOs), the success rate of the projects they manage remains low. This is particularly due to the fact that the awareness of the need for project management competences to achieve project success is poor. This paper aims to close this awareness gap. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationships between leader-leader exchange (LLX), sharing values, result orientation and personal communication as critical project management competences and their impact on project success in NPOs. The research which is based on social exchange and leadership theories, includes a testing of the research model and hypotheses using the structural equation modelling and bootstrap method. Data were collected during a survey organized in March-May 2023 that targeted more than 100 NPOs in order to apply the quantitative research method. The research findings indicate that the mediating variable "Result-Orientation" has a stronger impact on project success than the positive effect "leadership" and "sharing values" have on project success. However, the significance of leadership and sharing values for project success is increased by personal communication as an important moderating variable. The contribution to the science of this paper lies in the fact that the quantitative method was applied for the first time for the impact study with the chosen project management competences on project success. The practical relevance of the research is to encourage the adoption of social exchange and leadership theories in NPOs, to increase project contribution to civil society.

Keywords: Non-profit organisation; Personal Communication; Project leadership; Project success; Sharing values; Result-orientation.

1. INTRODUCTION

From the literature review, we learn that "a non-profit organization (NPO) is a legal entity organized and operated for a collective, public or social benefit" (Dubois et al., 2003, p. 717). NPOs use projects to realize this benefit and thereby improve life for billions of people across the world. In the meantime, NPOs undertake projects to organize work between various project stakeholders. Project managers with their teams and project sponsors or NPO boards are key stakeholders in this project environment. The repeated question derived from social exchange theory is related to why project managers with their teams make their projects succeed (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004) and what kind of determining factors impact project success in the relationship between the two types of project stakeholders.

While personal communication of the project leader and the result orientation of the project team have been researched in the context of project leadership as critical factors in influencing project success (Anantatmula, 2010; Chen & Lin, 2018; Müller & Turner, 2010; Turner et al., 2009), sharing values and Leader-Leader-Exchange (LLX) as critical elements in leadership were poorly studied. The concept of sharing values is closely linked to the one of authentic leadership. The concept of authenticity suggests the importance of aligning with the project leader's values and was examined at the organizational level. (Lloyd-Walker & Walker, 2011), but not yet in an NPO context.

One aspect of this research is to confirm that sharing values of the project manager and project team members is a determining factor for project success in an NPO context. The second aspect that is addressed in this research is the LLX of project managers and how this aspect of leadership affects project success. "LLX is the exchange relationship between the project manager and a supervising role" (Chen & Lin, 2018, p. 717). One could assume if LLX is practised in a healthy manner, the project manager's influence on the project team will be positive, which in turn positively impacts overall project success. When reviewing the literature on transformational leadership, sharing values is mentioned as a fundamental basis in a general organization context. To our knowledge, this aspect has not yet been scientifically proven. Sharing values was introduced as an aspect of leadership in a research model related to NPOs with the aim of understanding how it relates to project success.

Certainly, the significance of sharing values, including intercultural ones, increases in the context of leadership, and it can be hypothesized that they have a notable influence on the overall success of a project. This is what this research tries to address a fill a research gap from the literature.

After many years of research on non-profit organisations (NPOs), the success rate of the projects they manage remains low (Lannon, 2018). This is particularly due to the fact that the awareness of the need for project management competences to achieve project success is poor (Laurett & Ferreira, 2018). This paper aims to close this awareness gap. The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationships between leader-leader exchange (LLX), sharing values, result orientation and personal communication as critical project management competences and their impact on project success in NPOs.

The paper is structured as follows: the first part covers the literature review, which includes some basic elements of social exchange theory and the links to the tested hypothesis. Second, the paper describes the methodology used to analyze the different variables that determine project success. Thirdly, the main findings and results are discussed, and limitations are outlined.

Lastly, the paper comes up with conclusions and provides an outlook for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Research background

According to some authors, "Social exchange theory is among the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behaviour" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 874). Viewed through the lens of social exchange theory, a project manager maintains a distinct social exchange connection with their supervisor. (Gong et al., 2013, p. 27; Huang, 2012, p. 2127; Mehta et al., 2009, p. 1027-1028). In many non-profit organisations, it is generally a board member or NPO director who sponsors projects. Once the projects are assigned to project managers and their teams, the social exchange theory helps to better understand the exchanges that take place between the previously mentioned stakeholders. Social exchange theory has some limitations when it comes to explaining moderating and mediating factors in the relationship between the project manager, project sponsor, and team members.

Referring to leadership theory (Northouse, 2021) helps to get insights into the previously mentioned relationships that the author describes in different case studies and projects including the non-profit sector. These case

studies cover the spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), discursive leadership (Fairhurst, 2008), authentic leadership (George, 2003), ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005), humble leadership (Owens & Hekman, 2012) and inclusive leadership (Shore et al., 2018). Another form of leadership that is addressed in this paper is the one that covers LLX and the sharing of values.

2.2 Leader-leader exchange, sharing values, result orientation, personal communication and project success

Leader-leader exchange (LLX). LLX is considered as "the exchange relationship between the project manager and a supervising role" (Chen & Lin, 2018, p. 717). One could assume if LLX is done in a healthy manner, then the influence of project managers on the project team will be positive, which in turn positively impacts overall project success. To our knowledge, this aspect has not yet been scientifically proven in a project context.

Sharing values (SV). It is another component of leadership in projects. The importance of sharing values, including intercultural ones, increases in the context of leadership. (Whyte et al., 2022). The term 'sharing values' is often utilized to address "guiding principles and normative values that are shared by groups and refer to cultural values more generally" (Kenter et al., 2015, p. 86).

Result-orientation (RO). An important factor of this study is the result orientation of the project team as a mediating factor between leadership and project success. Following the IPMA Individual Competence Baseline ICB4 "result orientation is when an individual concentrates intensively on the outcomes of the project in the long run". "Measuring result orientation can be done by addressing a person's ability to communicate, take decisions and show leadership" (IPMA, 2015, 20 ff.). "Result orientation, together with trust and taking ownership are an important part of companies corporate culture and values" (IPMA, 2015, 20 ff.) RO of the project team has been therefore integrated into the research model. "Part of result-orientation is also the ability to make establish the right priorities in project-oriented teams" (IPMA, 2015, 20 ff.)

Personal Communication (PC). It plays a critical role in robust leadership in projects. It serves as a cornerstone for building trust, fostering collaboration, inspiring action, setting expectations, and achieving organizational goals (Koester & Lustig, 2012). Some key reasons why communication is essential for effective leadership are the following: vision and direction (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), collaboration and teamwork (Feilhauer & Hahn, 2019), employee engagement (Yusrisal & Heryanto, 2019) and conflict resolution (Huang, 2012).

Project success (PS). Success factors in the project are numerous (Radujković et al., 2021; Radujković & Sjekavica, 2017; Radujković et al., 2010). With regard to NPOs that foresee strategic goals and objectives related to their mission, success can be measured these goals and objectives are achieved. In the literature review done by this author, five aspects of project success are frequently quoted: business performance, managerial and organizational implications (mainly customer satisfaction), technical performance, personal growth, the efficiency of execution and manufacturability. Some of them will be found in the research model of this paper. In a more recent publication, (Ika & Pinto, 2022) the authors propose a four-dimensional model of success to assess which includes benefits realisation, stakeholder perception, issues of timing and sustainability. This model of success will essentially be used in the proposed study.

2.3 The research Model and research hypothesis

Taking into consideration the various positions in the literature review, a research model was defined (see Figure 1), including one independent variable (PS) and four dependable variables (LLX, SV, PC and RO). The main research question is as follows: "How do *LLX and values sharing directly and indirectly (with results orientation as mediator) impact the overall project success in NPOs"*. The following hypotheses were considered for testing:

H1: LLX is positively related to PS
H2: SV is positively related to PS
H3a: RO positively mediates the relationship between LLX and PS
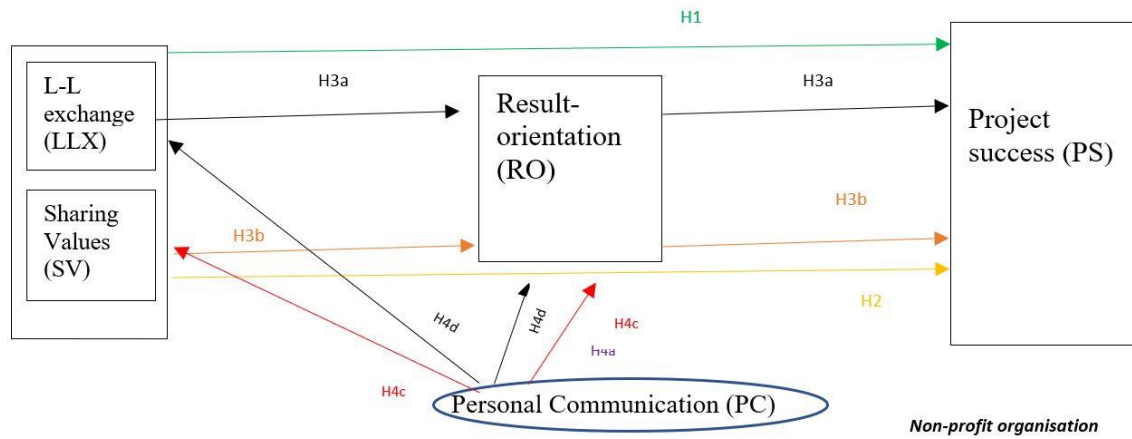H3b: RO positively mediates the relationship

between SV and PS
H4a: PC positively moderates between LLX and PS
H4b: PC positively moderates between SV and PS

H4c: PC positively moderates between SV and RO
H4d: PC positively moderates between LLX and RO.

Figure 1: The research model (adapted from Chen & Lin, 2018)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The survey was organized based on a questionnaire designed for the project team members and the project manager in NPOs, including 50 questions. The targeted NPOs were professional associations, associations working in the humanitarian sector, non-governmental organisations or education organisations which are part of government institutions or government-funded organisations. Most of these NPOs were collaborators of the authors. But also, some NPOs were identified based on social media Linked In and subgroups of professional associations (IPMA, PMI, Prince 2), non-governmental organisations (ex. WHO, UN, UPU, ITU, ILO) and universities.

The questionnaire was sent to approximately 600 persons from 34 countries, with leading roles (CEO, top management), middle management (head of departments, PMOs, head of smaller business unit), project managers or staff/volunteers with both operational and project tasks.

The sample consists of key informants in NPOs who are knowledgeable about the research

topic. All respondents were contacted personally by email, social media and telephone. Some admitted not having enough knowledge about the subject and declined therefore to respond. This way accurate inferences about the studied population can be extracted from the study sample.

During the period 21 March 2023 to 30 May 2023, 242 responses were collected, but only 211 responses were validated. In order to analyze the relationships included in the research model, the SEM (structured equation modelling) with the bootstrap sampling method (Kline, 2010) was applied.

3.2 The respondents' demographics

The gender distribution of the respondents indicates that 60% were males. 50,7% were working in professional organisations, 23,4% in charities and 24,9 % in other types of NPOs. One-third of them work at regional, one-third at national and one-third at international levels. Most of the projects are related to professional organisations (43%), some in the field of humanitarian projects (22,4%) and other types of projects represent 23%. Among the respondents, 33% confirmed the had more than 20 years of working experience in their role (either team member or project manager), 24%

between 10 and 20 years, 19% up to 3 years and 11% between 5 and 10 years and 10 % between 3 and 5 years.

3.3 Measurements scales

All measures used to address the measurement items of the questionnaire are a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from " I strongly disagree" (1) to "I strongly agree" (7). In the following section we will describe the different measurement items used in the survey questionnaire.

Result-orientation of the team. Multi-item scales to measure result orientation were used with four-item scales based on (Chen & Lin, 2018). The acronym "PM" stands for "Project Manager" and the acronym "TM" stands for "Team Member" in this paper. For a result-orientation and project success result-orientation, the measurement items were "PM (Project Manager)/TM (Team Member)_RO1: a tough project is very satisfying for the project team", "PM (Project Manager)/TM (Team Member)_RO2: an important part of being a good project team is continually improving our project management skills, "PM/TM_RO3: Making mistakes when doing the project is just part of the learning process for the team", "PM/TM_RO4: it is important for the project team to learn from each project experience", "PM/TM_RO5: it is important that the project manager sees us as a good project team".

Leader-Leader Exchange. The following measurement items for LLX were taken from Chen and Lin (2018). The Cronbach α equals 0,88. The items are the following: "PM_LLX1: my supervisor would personally be inclined to help me solve problems in my work, "PM_LLX2: my working relationship with my supervisor is effective", PM_LLX3: I have enough confidence in my supervisor that I would defend and justify his decisions if he were not present to do so ", "PM_LLX4: my supervisor considers my suggestions for change", "PM_LLX5: my supervisor and I are suited to each other, "PM_LLX6: my supervisor understands my problems and needs", and "PM_LLX7: my supervisor recognizes my potential" (Chen & Lin, 2018, pp. 721-722).

Shared values. The following measurement items for sharing values taken from Ahmed and Philbin (2022) are used: "PM/TM_SV1 provides an environment of empowering to enhance efficiency, trust and vision of the team", "PM/TM_SV2 encourages the team to cope with challenges of existing practices and policies in a broader perspective", "PM/TM_SV3 encourages teamwork for the successful accomplishment of the project", "PM/TM_SV4 shares knowledge and expertise with his project staff" and "PM/TM_SV5 stimulates and energizes the team to achieve project objectives" (Mahmood et al., 2022).

Personal Communication. The following measurement items for personal communication were used: "PM/TM _PC1: I tailored the communication to the team members according to my interest and one of the other team members", "PM/TM _PC2: I employed communication for coaching and mentoring the project team", "PM/TM _PC3: I communicated a clear vision of the project's future direction to meet organisational needs".

Project Success. The following measurement items for project success were taken from (Ahmed & Philbin, 2022): "PM/TM_PS1: The project was completed on time or earlier", "TM/PM_PS2: The project was completed within or below budget", "PM/TM _PS3: The project had only minor changes in scope", "PM/TM_PS4: The customer was satisfied with the deliverables", "PM/TM_PS5: The project met the customers technical and functional requirements", "PM/TM_PS6: The project team was highly satisfied and motivated".

4. RESEARCH RESULTS/FINDINGS

4.1 The constructs' validity and reliability

The validity is the extent to which the study correctly measures the construct (Hair et al., 2021). The validity of the data was checked with the coefficient of reliability (or consistency) test Cronbach α (see annexe). For the individual variables, all presented a Cronbach α test higher than 0.7. For the project managers-related questions, the Cronbach α test equals 0,876 revealing a strong correlation between constructs. For the project team-

related questions, the Cronbach α test equals 0,792 revealing a medium. This means that in total, project managers plus project team members, the Cronbach α test equals 0.926. Table 1 summarizes the values of the different statistics obtained from the survey.

Table 1: Description of composite reliability, correlations, statistics, average and variance extracted

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
LLX	2.16	0.76	**0.74**				
Sharing Values	1.83	0.63	0,712**	**0.78**			
Result-Orientation of TM	1.85	0.53	0,479**	0,550**	**0.79**		
Personal Communication	2.03	0.59	0,496**	0,658**	0,388*	**0.85**	
Project success	2.58	0.94	0,427**	0.224	0.164	0,356*	**0.72**
Cronbach's α			0.88	0.86	0.70	0.93	0.93
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)			0.54	0.61	0.62	0.72	0.52
Composite reliability			0.75	0.89	0.83	0.84	0.86

Note: N=205   The square root of the AVE is on the diagonal
* <0,5** p <0,01 SD= standard deviation; p= significance

The Cronbach α and CR for LLX, SV, RO, PC and PS are all above 0.7, which indicates a reasonable convergence of all the constructs. Moreover, the table indicates that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct falls within the range of 0.52 to 0.62, exceeding the threshold of 0.5. This confirms a satisfactory level of convergence for all the constructs. To evaluate discriminant validity, which assesses how distinct a construct is from others, we examined the square root of the AVE of each construct alongside its correlation with all other constructs. In Table 3 we see that the square root of the LLX is 0,74 (on the diagonal) which is higher than the correlation estimates between LLX and any of the other constructs. The square root of the SV of the project manager is 0,78 (on the diagonal), which is higher than the correlation between SV of the project manager and other constructs. In the same way, the square root of the AVEs of RO, PC and PS is all higher than their respective correlation evaluation. These contrasts proves the discriminant validity among those constructs. The result of the measurement items used was also made with over 1000 bootstrap tests. The result shows a reasonable fit with the information obtained.

4.2 Hypotheses testing

The Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the collected data does not show a normal distribution as in the last column (Sig) the numbers are not close to zero. Therefore we use the bootstrap sampling method for the mediation and moderation tests (Hayes, 2012). This is an established technique employed when dealing with non-normally distributed data.

Tables 2 and 3 summarize the results of the eight hypotheses H1, H2, H3a, H3b, H4a, H4b, H4c, and H4d in the research model (figure 1). As we have indicated in table 2, the total effect of the significance is at level P<0.001 (see Hypothesis H3a and H3b). The outcome of the test for H1 demonstrates that LLX has a noteworthy influence on the success of the project.

In the same manner, as P<0.001 (Hypothesis H3b) shows the test result for H2: sharing values significantly affects project success. Finally, the significance of total effects reveals that mediation definitively exists. What Table 2 also indicates is the significance of the indirect impact of H3a, with a significance level of P < 0.001, suggesting that LLX serves as a mediator in the connection between LLX and project success. Considering the

bias-corrected 95% CI and percentile 95% CI, both of which exclude zero, we can confidently assert that the indirect effect is significant, thereby confirming H3a – that result orientation positively mediates the relationship between LLX and project success (see Figure 2).

Similar conclusions may be drawn from the significance of the indirect effects at P<0.001, acknowledging H3b: RO of the project team positively mediates the relationship between SV of the project manager and PS. Furthermore, the significance of the direct effects on P<0.001 (H3a, H3b, H1, H2) shows that result orientation partially mediates the relationship between sharing values and project success.

5. DISCUSSION

The awareness about the criticality of project competences at both project manager and project team level in NPOs to achieve project success remains low. In particular, the relationship between LLX and PS is not yet well-researched. This research closes that gap. It also addresses the fact why result-orientation impacts the relationship between LLX and project success. This research develops and confirms the idea that LLX and SV motivate project managers to develop high-quality RO of project team and their own project sponsors. This in turn helps the project teams to increase the project success. The quantitative method applied to understand the different significant impact of project management competences on project success in NPO is a modest scientific contribution to social exchange theory and leadership theory.

Table 2: Bootstrap-based method results for LLX and PS

		Product of coefficients				Bias-corrected 95% CI		Percentile 95% CI	
		Estimate	SE	t	Z	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Mediation: Result-orientation (hypothesis 3)									
Between leader-leader exchange and project success (Hypothesis 3a)									
	Total effect	0.483	0.201	2.409		0.267	0.821	0.267	0.821
	Direct effect	0.487	0.198	2.462		-0.008	0.982	-0.008	0.982
	Indirect effect	-0.004	0.129		0.027	-0.717	0.695	-0.192	0.316
Between shared values and project success (Hypothesis 3b)									
	Total effect	0.375	0.238	1.579		-0.176	0.926	-0.176	0.926
	Direct effect	0.332	0.402	0.825		-0.337	1.002	-0.337	1.002
	Indirect effect	0.043	0.258		0.150	-0.694	0.878	-0.293	0.774

Note: 1000 bootstrap items. Z= z Score based on the Sobel test, SE standard error, t = student t-statistics, CI=confidence interval

**Table 3:** Results of the bootstrap method for testing moderation by RO

Variables and sources	Products of coefficients			Bias-corrected 95% CI	
	Estimate	SE	t	Lower	Upper
Intercept					
Leader-leader exchange	2,705	0.660	4,100	1,364	4,046
Shared values	2,413	0.719	3,354	0.949	3,876
Leader-leader exchange x result orientation	1,839	0.082	22,446	1,673	2,006
Shared values x result orientation	1,837	0.087	21,132	1,660	2,013
Independet variables					
Leader-leader exchange	0.254	0.121	2,103	0.009	0.498
Shared values	0.412	0.169	2,442	0.069	0.755
Moderating effects					
(Hypothesis 4a)					
Personal communication x leader-leader exchange	-0.393	0.279	1.409	-0.960	0.174
(Hypothesis 4b)					
Personal communication x shared values	-0.431	0.392	-1.099	-1.229	0.367
(Hypothesis 4c)					
Personal communication x leader-leader exchange x result orientatic	0.059	0.136	0.438	-0.216	0.335
(Hypothesis 4d)					
Personal communication x shared values x result orientation	0.102	0.177	0.576	-0.258	0.463
R-square (%)					
Leader-leader exchange	15.9%				
Shared values	21.6%				
Leader-leader exchange x result orientation	31.1%				
Shared values x result orientation	26.4%				
Improved R-square (%)					
Leader-leader exchange	12.1%				
Shared values	7.8%				
Leader-leader exchange x result orientation	21.9%				
Shared values x result orientation	26.4%				
F-value					
Leader-leader exchange	1,561				
Shared values	2,338				
Leader-leader exchange x result orientation	5,112				
Shared values x result orientation	4,178				

Note: 1000 bootstrap samples. SE standard error, t = student t-statistics, CI=confidence interval, p <0,001, p<0,01, p<0,05

The research findings reveal that the project team's Result Orientation (RO) acts as a partial mediator in both the connection between LLX and PS and the connection between SV and PS.
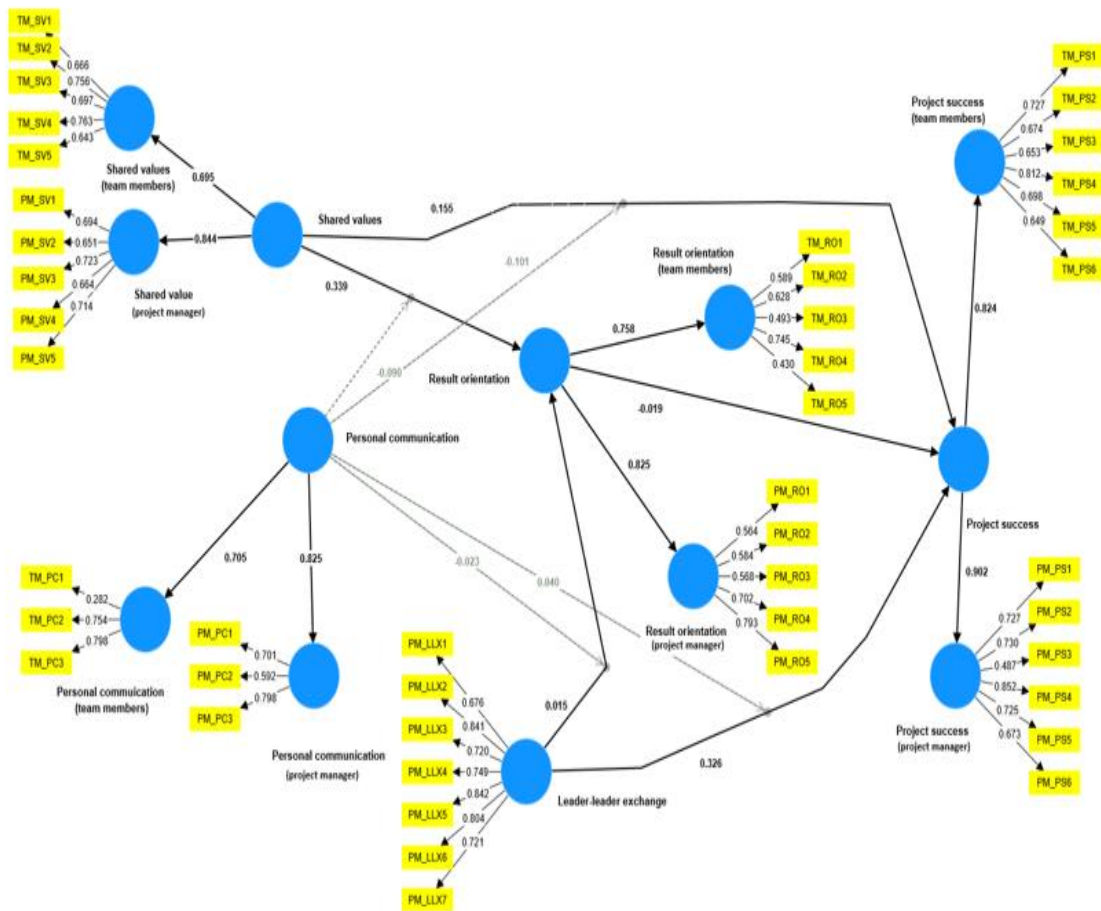
Figure 2: Results of the research model with 1000 bootstrap samples in the relationships

This research also underlines that the relationship between LLX and PS is stronger when the level of communication is high, as shown in Figure 3.
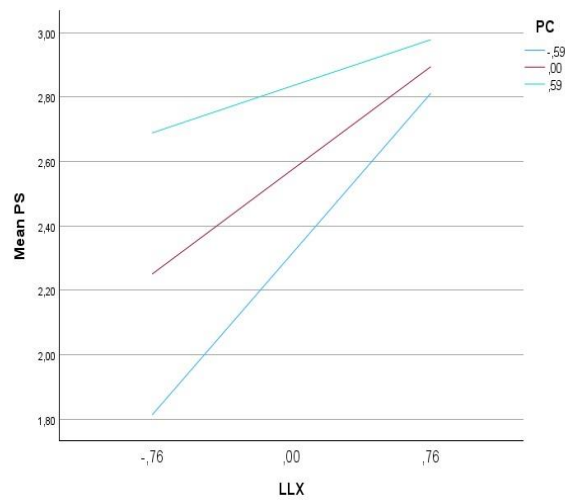
Figure 3: Relationship between LLX and PS, for different levels of PC

Table 4 compiles the quantitative results derived using the bootstrap method, and these results were integrated with Sequential Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis to assess the marginal effects (MEs). These MEs are defined as the percentage change within the proposed model that leads to a quantitative change in project success. Expressed more precisely, this is a critical contribution to practice as 1% increase in LLX results in 0,015 result orientation, leading to a 0,326 increase in project success. In the same manner, we can say that a 1% increase in sharing values results in a 0.339 increase in result orientation, which in turn incurred a 0,32 increase in project success.

The analysis indicates that LLX exerts the most significant direct influence (ME=0.326) on project success, with sharing values having the second most substantial impact on project success. This result shows that the relationship between project managers and their supervisors are definitively strong mediators.

They are also important components for project success.

Table 4: Results of the bootstrap-based method integrated with the SEM (Structural Equation Modelling) analysis for direct, indirect, and total marginal effects (MEs)

Variable	Shared Values				Leader-leader exchange				Result orientation		
	DE	IE	TE		DE	IE	TE		DE	IE	TE
Result orientation	0.339	-0.019	0.320		0.015	-0.019	-0.004				
Project success	0.155		0.155		0.326		0.326		-0.019		-0.019

Note: 100 bootstrap samples: DE= direct effect, IE=indirect effect and TE= Total effect

The study presents a series of limitations. This study does not consider the impact of sponsors on the project's success, which is often described in some studies (Bryde, 2008; Bucero & Englund, 2015; Kloppenborg & Tesch, 2015). Secondly, this research does not consider the impact of project complexity (ex. fact, structure or task complexity) on the sharing values, LLX and result orientation, as some studies see complexity as a determining factor in project success (Luo et al., 2020). Finally, this research analyses the research model via a cross-sectoral analysis of 211 nonprofit participants from 100 NPOs where the number of volunteers varies a lot. While some NPOs have only volunteers working in the organisations, others have essentially paid staff carrying out the mission of the NPO. However, future research could focus on studies where the informants work mainly as paid members of staff and on the other side work on studies where the NPOs are only working with volunteers.

6. CONCLUSIONS

As confirmed by the literature review on NPOs, the success rate of the projects in these type of organisations remains low. This is partly due to a low level of awareness about the importance of project management competences to achieve project success. This paper aimed to close this awareness gap and examined the relationships between leader-leader exchange (LLX), sharing values, result orientation and personal communication as critical project management competences and their impact on project success in NPOs.

The study reveals that result orientation has the most important direct impact on project success, which highlights the criticality of the relationship between project managers and their supervisors in project success. According to some previous studies conducted in a non-project-based company context (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004; Shamim et al., 2017) the findings suggest that LLX affect project success more than sharing values-oriented team members do. Project teams with LLX learn proactively, focus their endeavours in order to achieve goals of their team and intensively exchange with their project leaders. These are competences needed to achieve success in a challenging project context that is often affected by political tensions between the supervisors of the projects. As a contribution to practice, effective project managers are invited

to find team members with strong LLX orientation for positions and roles which evolve in a complex political NPO context for achieving the NPO's mission and objectives. The findings of this research show that sharing values has more impact on the quality of personal communication than LLX. Project managers should reward the project success achieved by their teams thanks to their relationships with their supervisors who are often the project sponsors and holders of the budget.

The quantitative approach employed to explore the varying, meaningful effects of project management competences on project success within Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) represents a humble scientific contribution to both social exchange theory and leadership theory.

The study fills the gap found after the literature review and helps to better understand how sharing values, through result orientation and personal communication affect project success. However, the direct effects of sharing values and LLX are significant and show that other possible mediators exist. Hence, further research in the future should address other possible mediating factors in the relationship between LLX and project success, also taking into consideration the limitations such as the impact of project sponsors, and project complexity.

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