

## THE EFFECT OF PROJECT MANAGERS' PERSONALITY ON PROJECT SUCCESS: A META-ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** The present study aims to provide a comprehensive meta-analysis of the impact of project managers' personality traits on project success. In this regard, five personality traits from the Five-Factor Model—extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness, and neuroticism—were examined, and the effect of each trait on project success was analyzed. Based on a systematic review of studies published between 2010 and April 2025, this research synthesized 35 effect sizes derived from nine different studies, analyzing data from a sample of 1,409 individuals. The findings indicate that project managers' traits of extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness have a significant positive impact on project success, whereas neuroticism has a significant negative impact. These results underscore the critical role of project managers' personality traits in determining project success and can serve as a robust foundation for future research in this field. Furthermore, the findings offer valuable insights for the selection and development of project managers within organizations.

**Keywords:** Meta-analysis; Five-factor personality model; Project managers; Project success.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive world, businesses face numerous challenges and opportunities that require constant changes within organizations. Projects are one of the key means to implement and respond to these changes. Therefore, the importance of successful project management becomes evident (Castro et al., 2022).

In recent decades, researchers have sought to understand project management as both a practical process and a knowledge-based discipline. This field has become increasingly complex as many organizations have transitioned to project-based operations (Dwivedula et al., 2016). In other words, projects have been used by various organizations as a driving force to achieve their goals (Ameer et al., 2022).

Naturally, when organizations adopt a project-oriented approach, they aim to ensure the

successful completion of their projects (Hair & Sarstedt, 2021). Various factors, including project size, organizational structure, and the characteristics of project managers, influence project success (Hermano, 2021).

Given the growing attention to the study of project success, in addition to technical issues, understanding the nature of employees in order to gain their commitment has become important. Hence, focusing on how managers' behavior influences project success has become a significant topic in the field of project management (Ameer et al., 2022). Some studies have indicated that project managers' characteristics are one of the key factors contributing to project success (Chandler & Krajcsák, 2021).

Traditional project success criteria have focused on time, cost, and quality; however, more recent studies emphasize the multi-dimensional nature of project success,

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considering factors beyond technical performance (Shenhar et al., 2001; Turner, 2014). However, the significance of project managers' personality traits is an aspect that is frequently overlooked (Kai, 2024).

These contemporary perspectives - including stakeholder satisfaction, long-term organizational value, and sustainability - are discussed in detail in the following section.

The literature has examined the impact of personality on job performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and related variables. One area that requires further investigation is the effect of project managers' personality on project success (Hussain et al., 2021).

As contemporary notions of project success increasingly emphasize behavioral and relational factors, the responsibilities of project managers have broadened from a predominantly technical focus to include leadership capabilities, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and judgment-based decision-making in uncertain environments (Müller & Lecoeuvre, 2014). Consequently, individual differences among project managers - particularly stable psychological characteristics such as personality traits - have attracted growing scholarly attention as potential drivers of project success, especially from a human resource management perspective (Bredin & Söderlund, 2013).

Several empirical studies have identified and tested the influence of project managers' personality traits - extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness, and neuroticism - collectively known as the Five-Factor Personality Model, on project success (Hassan et al., 2017). Despite numerous studies examining these relationships, their results are still varied and sometimes contradictory. These differences stem from variations in research design, measurement instruments, contextual settings, and sampling, resulting in inconsistent effect sizes and limiting the generalizability of individual study results.

Therefore, to address these inconsistencies and to provide a more comprehensive and evidence-based understanding, the present study conducts a meta-analysis of empirical research examining the relationship between project managers' personality traits - based on the Five-Factor Personality Model - and project success.

## **2. BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH**

### **2.1 Measurement of project success**

Throughout history, projects have existed in various forms, as evidenced by numerous historical structures developed through organized project activities (Seymour & Hussein, 2014). However, project management as a formal discipline emerged in the late 1950s, primarily emphasizing task sequencing, cost estimation, and efficient resource utilization (Crawford, 2005).

Early approaches to project success measurement focused predominantly on technical performance and business objectives (Turner & Müller, 2005). Traditional project management theories largely emphasized hard skills - such as planning, scheduling, and resource allocation - while paying limited attention to behavioral, interpersonal, and emotional factors (Kerzner, 2017). Accordingly, project success was primarily evaluated using technical indicators.

### **2.2 Traditional and modern perspectives on project success**

The Iron Triangle represents the most established conventional model for evaluating project success, assessing outcomes primarily through adherence to schedule, budget, and quality requirements (Pinto, 2020). For several decades, this model has functioned as a foundational reference point in both scholarly investigations and managerial practice (Pinto & Slevin, 1987).

While the Iron Triangle remains widely applied, it has been extensively critiqued for privileging short-term performance and internal efficiency, thereby overlooking strategic considerations and longer-term outcomes (Shenhar et al., 2001; Samset & Volden, 2016). In response, an expanding body

of scholarship conceptualizes project success as a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond traditional metrics to incorporate factors such as stakeholder satisfaction, organizational learning, and the generation of sustainable value (Shenhar et al., 2001; Basten et al., 2011).

An exclusive focus on conventional success metrics can result in ineffective managerial judgments, especially within complex and rapidly changing project contexts (Zwikael & Meredith, 2019). Accordingly, recent scholarly perspectives place growing emphasis on soft performance criteria associated with the human and social aspects of project management (Davies et al., 2018).

### **2.3 Human and behavioral perspective in project management**

Recent scholarly work highlights that project success is increasingly contingent upon interpersonal and behavioral capabilities rather than solely on technical proficiency (Skulmoski & Hartman, 2010). While technical skills remain an essential foundation, the capacity of project managers to lead teams, communicate effectively, and manage relationships has become a central determinant of project outcomes (Kerzner, 2017).

This transformation underscores the increasing importance of human resource management and organizational behavior lenses within project management scholarship, especially in relation to enduring individual attributes such as personality traits (Anantatmula, 2010).

### **2.4 Five-factor model**

The Five-Factor Personality Model is one of the fundamental theories in personality psychology, first proposed by Digman in 1990. This model was operationalized and popularized as the “Big Five Personality Traits” by McCrae and John in 1992, comprising extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Hassan et al., 2017). Based on numerous studies, these five factors are widely recognized as the most robust and validated personality model in psychology (Migliore, 2011).

Furthermore, this model has been shown to comprehensively capture the core dimensions of human personality (Barańczuk, 2019). In a subsequent study conducted in 2013, these traits were firmly classified and established as the “Big Five” forming the foundation of numerous investigations in personality psychology since then (Goldberg, 2013). The following section introduces the dimensions of the Five-Factor Model.

### **2.5 Extraversion**

Extraversion refers to characteristics that reflect an individual's tendency toward social interaction, assertiveness, activity, warmth, excitement-seeking, and experiencing positive emotions (Ling et al., 2020). Research has shown that extraversion is directly associated with creativity (Chiang et al., 2015) and can significantly influence managerial performance (Deinert et al., 2015). Extraverted managers often interact more persuasively with subordinates, effectively address problems, and foster motivation within their teams (Bevilacqua et al., 2014).

A review of the literature highlights the particular significance of extraversion in leadership and project management. This trait enhances effective communication and the ability to express ideas freely, positioning managers to achieve positive outcomes in project management (Hassan et al., 2017). In contrast, introversion represents an individual's inclination to focus inwardly and derive energy from solitude or limited social interactions. Eysenck posits that extraversion and introversion lie at opposite ends of a spectrum, with individuals exhibiting varying degrees of these traits (Eysenck & Eysenck, 2013). While introverts may spend more time reflecting on their thoughts and emotions rather than engaging extensively with others, this attribute can benefit projects requiring deep focus and contemplation. Introverts often excel in work environments demanding high levels of independence and concentration (Schat, 2012).

### **2.6 Conscientiousness**

Conscientiousness can be defined as an individual's full commitment and comprehensive engagement in their work

(Organ & Lingl, 1995). Conscientious individuals typically exhibit traits such as discipline, reliability, which reflect their dedication, trustworthiness, and strong will to fulfill responsibilities (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

In project management, conscientious managers tend to organize tasks systematically and meticulously review plans to mitigate unforeseen circumstances (Thal Jr & Bedingfield, 2010). Their focus and precision in planning and executing projects enhance their ability to control environmental factors and manage subordinates effectively. Consequently, teams under their leadership are better equipped to manage their environments and achieve their designated objectives (Peterson et al., 2003).

Moreover, conscientiousness is positively correlated with job performance and occupational commitment. Research indicates that this personality trait is associated with increased organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and work engagement, all of which play a pivotal role in an organization's overall success (Masood et al., 2018).

### 2.7 Openness to experience

Openness to experience, a type of openness, is a double-edged sword that heightens an individual's sensitivity to both positive and negative aspects, significantly influencing emotional reactions (Masood et al., 2018). Often referred to as "wisdom", this trait encompasses characteristics such as imagination, intellectual independence, and curiosity (Shahzad et al., 2020). Managers with high levels of openness tend to adopt innovative and unconventional solutions to address team challenges. In other words, the stronger this trait is in a project manager, the more likely they are to encourage the use of creative and novel ideas within their project teams (Aretoulis et al., 2017).

Previous studies, have identified openness to experience as a critical indicator of project manager success (Thal Jr & Bedingfield, 2010). Project managers exhibiting this trait often excel at proposing innovative solutions

and are more inclined to explore and experiment with new approaches.

Although this trait may not be essential in all professions, it holds particular importance in project management, where success often hinges on high levels of innovation and adaptability. In project-driven environments, openness to experience serves as a key factor in advancing project objectives and addressing complex challenges.

### 2.8 Agreeableness

Agreeableness encompasses a set of traits such as warmth, kindness, altruism, and trust. Individuals with high levels of this trait are typically honest, compassionate, and reliable, often prioritizing the interests of others over their own (Ersoy-Kart et al., 2018). In the workplace, such individuals foster positive team interactions and enhance cohesion due to their collaborative and harmonious nature - qualities particularly significant in project-driven environments where teamwork is essential.

Project managers characterized by agreeableness often exhibit kindness toward team members and excel at interpersonal interactions (Ling et al., 2020). Projects led by agreeable managers tend to benefit from more harmonious and unified teams, fostering team cohesion and collaboration more effectively. These managers encourage team members to work with greater understanding and empathy, thereby cultivating a supportive and healthy work environment (Halfhill et al., 2005).

Additionally, an agreeable manager's engagement with team members strengthens the emotional connection between employees and the organization. This contributes to a more positive work atmosphere and enhances organizational commitment, as employees feel secure, respected, and valued. Consequently, such managers create a conducive workplace where individuals are more motivated and enthusiastic about achieving project and organizational goals.

## 2.9 Neuroticism

Neuroticism refers to a set of traits such as emotional instability, irritability, and nervousness, which are considered negative personality characteristics (Fong et al., 2021). These traits encompass melancholic moods, anger, depression, fear, and anxiety, often manifesting in various behavioral patterns (Lauer & Lauer, 2021). Generally, neuroticism reflects the negative dimensions of an individual's personality and profoundly impacts how they interact with others and handle challenges (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Individuals with high levels of neuroticism typically avoid social interactions due to inner fears and anxieties and are more prone to perceiving negative reactions from others (Watson & Clark, 1997). Research indicates that neuroticism is associated with low self-esteem and diminished self-efficacy, meaning these individuals often lack inspirational thoughts and the ability to positively influence others. Consequently, they are less inclined to assume Managerial roles or take on significant responsibilities (Noor & Esa, 2021).

In project environments, neuroticism can adversely affect team performance, as project

management requires emotional stability and confidence. Managers scoring high in neuroticism may struggle to lead their teams effectively due to their lack of emotional resilience and self-assurance, ultimately reducing team productivity (Deinert et al., 2015). Therefore, traits such as emotional calmness and strong self-confidence are critical for success in managerial and leadership roles, qualities often lacking in individuals with high levels of neuroticism (Thal Jr & Bedingfield, 2010).

Based on the literature review and the Five-Factor Model of Personality, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Project managers' extraversion affects project success.

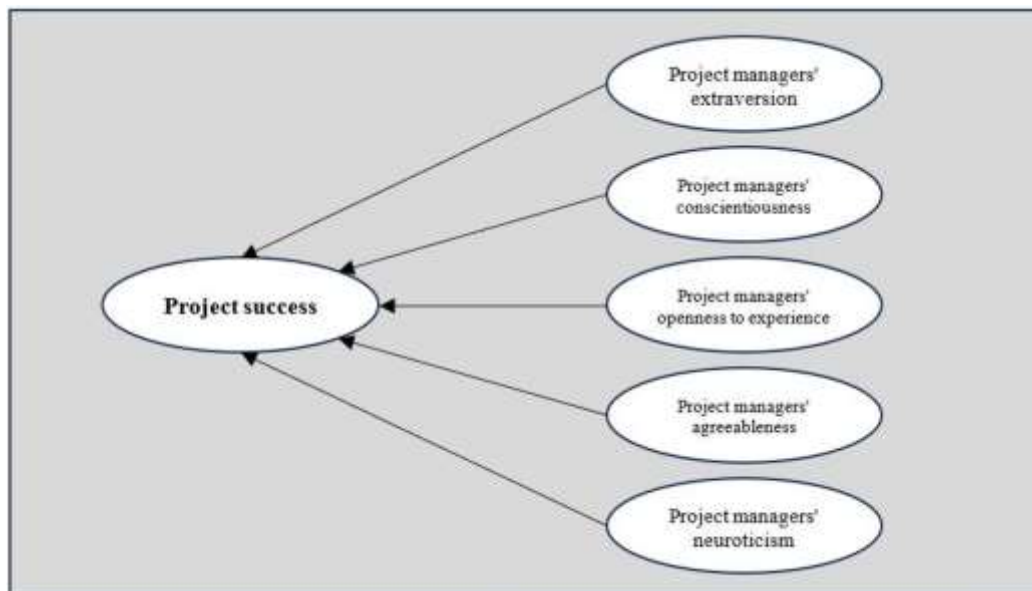
**H<sub>2</sub>:** Project managers' conscientiousness affects project success.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Project managers' openness to experience affects project success.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Project managers' agreeableness affects project success.

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Project managers' neuroticism affects project success.

Based on the proposed hypotheses, the conceptual model of the study is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework of the study

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The rapid growth in academic publications has made it more difficult for researchers to remain

updated with the literature and clearly define the boundaries of specific scientific fields (Basilio et al., 2022).

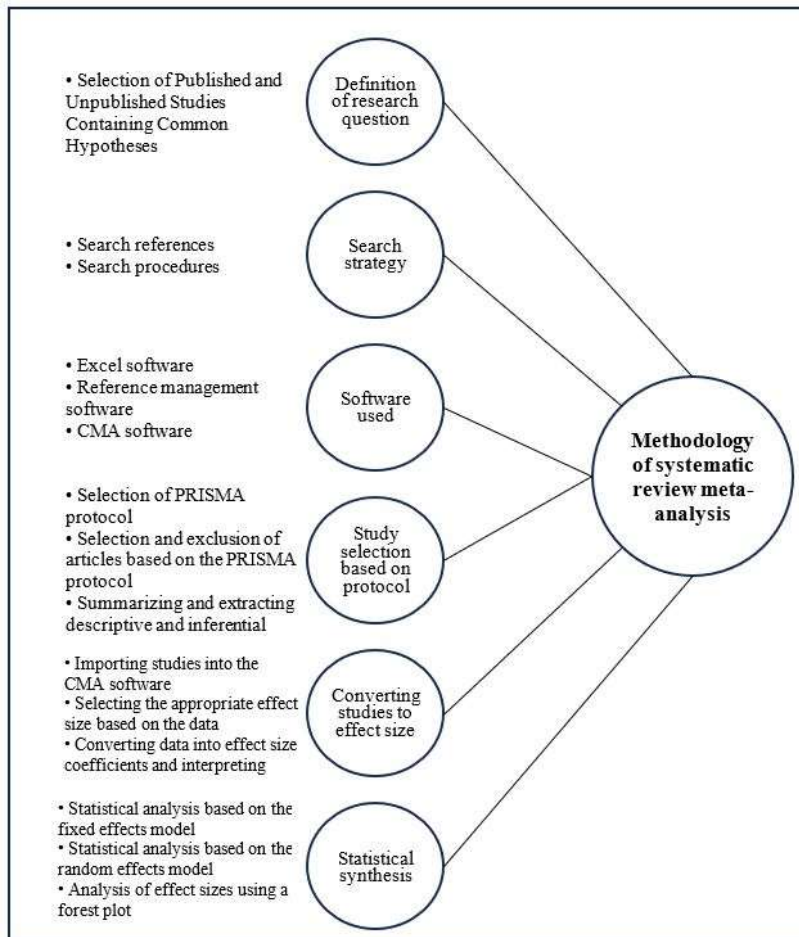
For this reason, systematic reviews and meta-analyses are increasingly recognized as rigorous approaches for integrating dispersed evidence, particularly when conducted using transparent, replicable, and structured procedures (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Gurevitch et al., 2018).

Accordingly, this study adopts a systematic quantitative review approach followed by a meta-analysis, which is widely recognized as one of the most robust methods for integrating empirical findings across independent studies (Aguinis et al., 2011). Meta-analysis is a widely used approach to synthesize evidence across many scientific disciplines, yet its growing use continues to raise challenges

related to the development of consistent and standardized research methodologies (Hansen et al., 2022).

The primary objective of this meta-analysis is to synthesize existing quantitative evidence on the relationship between project managers' personality traits and project success, an area characterized by accumulated yet often inconsistent findings in prior research.

The systematic methodological framework adopted in this study, which encompasses the research stages from initial search strategy to final statistical synthesis, is illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Methodology of systematic review meta-analysis (Moradi & Miralmasi, 2020)

#### 4. SEARCH STRATEGY AND DATA SOURCES

Replicability is a defining characteristic of systematic reviews. It requires a transparent and standardized search strategy. Such a strategy ensures comprehensive coverage of

studies relevant to the research question (Fisch & Block, 2018; Hansen et al., 2022). Based on this principle, a structured search strategy was developed. This constituted the second phase of the research methodology (Cantu-Ortiz, 2017).

The aim of the search process in a meta-analysis is to identify independent quantitative studies. These studies may be published or unpublished. They empirically test the hypotheses under investigation (Moradi & Miralmasi, 2020). In this study, Scopus and Web of Science were selected as the primary databases. This choice reflects their broad coverage, reliability, and extensive indexing of peer-reviewed social science literature. The literature search included studies published up to December 2024. It was performed using predefined keywords related to project management, project managers' personality traits, and project success.

#### 4.1 Time span of the literature search

To ensure comprehensive coverage of both foundational and recent empirical studies, the systematic literature search included publications released between January 2010 and December 2024. This period reflects the maturation of research on project managers' personality traits within modern project management contexts. It also captures the most recent empirical evidence available at the time of data collection. Only studies published within this time frame were considered. Eligible studies were required to report sufficient quantitative data for effect size calculation and inclusion in the final meta-analytic sample.

#### 4.2 Study selection and screening procedure

All retrieved records were exported and organized using spreadsheet software, such as Microsoft Excel. A standardized preprocessing and screening procedure was then applied in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure methodological rigor and transparency (Page et al., 2021). The screening process involved duplicate removal, followed by title, abstract, and full-text screening based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only studies meeting all PRISMA eligibility requirements were retained. These studies were also required to report sufficient quantitative data for effect size calculation. As a result, only high-quality and relevant studies were included in the final meta-analytic sample.

#### 4.3 Effect size models and heterogeneity assessment

Meta-analytic effect sizes can be aggregated using fixed-effects or random-effects models (Langan, 2022). The fixed-effects model assumes a single true effect size shared across all studies. It attributes observed variation solely to sampling error. This assumption implies homogeneity among studies. In contrast, the random-effects model allows true effect sizes to vary across studies. It explicitly accounts for between-study heterogeneity.

To determine the most appropriate aggregation model, the homogeneity of effect sizes was assessed. The Q-statistic was used as the primary test of heterogeneity. Although its values lack direct substantive interpretation, the test provides an essential statistical indication. It evaluates whether the observed variation among effect sizes exceeds that expected by sampling error alone (Langan, 2022).

Based on the heterogeneity assessment, the appropriate meta-analytic model was selected. The study's hypotheses were then tested using the aggregated effect sizes. They were subsequently supported or rejected according to the synthesized results.

### 5. FINDINGS

To identify all studies examining the impact of project managers' personality traits on project success, the following search query was used:

(project manager personality OR project manager trait OR Project manager feature OR project manager soft skill) AND (project success OR project performance OR project management performance OR project management success OR project outcomes OR project management outcomes)

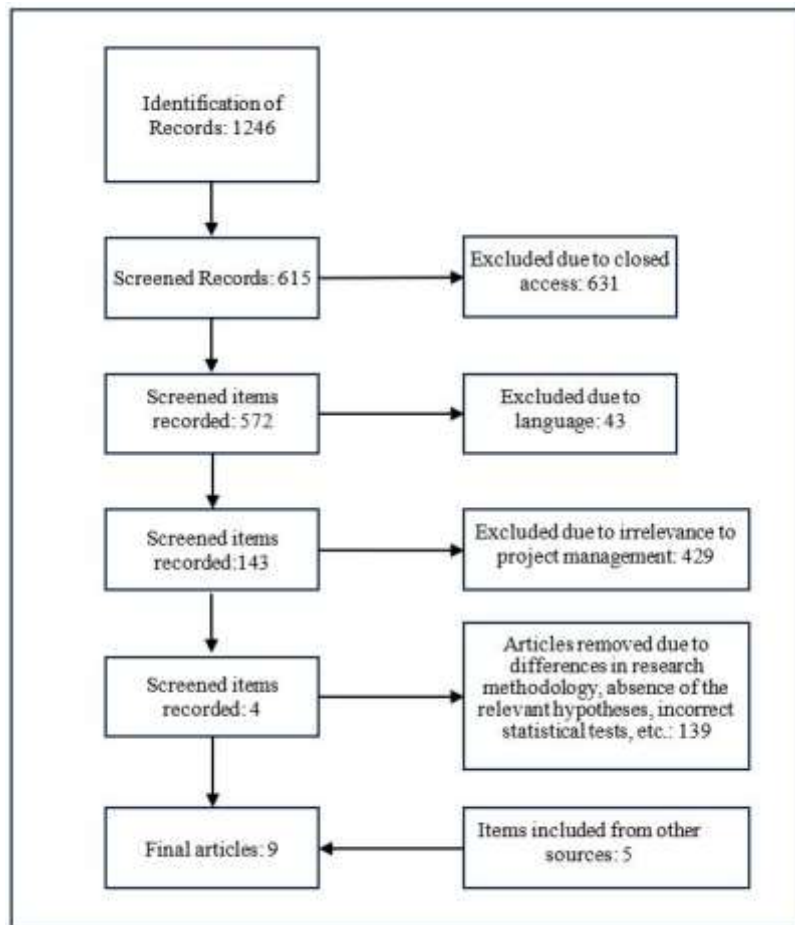
This query was executed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, yielding a total of 1,246 studies. The following screening process was applied:

1. Accessibility: 631 studies were excluded due to restricted access (non-open access).
2. Language: Studies not written in English (43 studies) were removed.
3. Relevance to Project Management: Studies unrelated to project management (429 studies) were excluded.

After these filtering steps, 143 studies remained for detailed review. Upon closer examination, only studies directly related to the

research topic were retained, reducing the final dataset to four studies.

Additionally, five relevant studies were identified from other bibliographic sources and added to the final dataset. This brought the total number of studies included in the meta-analysis to nine. The step-by-step process of identifying, screening, and selecting the studies included in the meta-analysis, along with the number of records removed at each stage, is presented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Steps of the PRISMA Algorithm

Table 1 shows the final information of the extracted studies:

**Table 1:** Final studie information

No	Research title	Document type	Authors/Year	Journal/Institution name
1	Project Managers' Personality and Project Success: Moderating Role of External Environmental Factors	Article	Hussain et al., 2021	SUSTAINABILITY
2	Relationship between Project Manager's Personalities and Small Public Construction Project Success in Malaysia	Article	Noor & Esa, 2021	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

3	The impact of manager's personality traits on project success through effective professional commitment: the moderating role of organizational project management maturity system	Article	Ameer et al., 2022	JOURNAL OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT
4	The Impact of Project Managers' Personality on Project Success in NGOs: The Mediating Role of Transformational Leadership	Article	Hassan et al., 2017	PROJECT MANAGEMENT JOURNAL
5	Impact of Personality traits of Project Manager on Project Success	Article	Massod et al., 2018	Journal of Business Strategies
6	Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Project Success: Does Emotional Intelligence Matter?	Article	Zia et al., 2019	PESHAWAR JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES
7	Impact of personality traits of manager on the performance of project	Conference paper	Salaria and Jamil, 2015	. 13th International Conference on Statistical Sciences
8	Predicting Project Success by Project Manager Competencies and Personality Traits Moderated by Work Experience	Thesis	Kirby, 2023	Walden University
9	Personality and Project Management Success	Thesis	Douglas et al., 2020	Reykjavik university

In table 2 the final meta-analysis results for these five hypotheses are presented.

**Table 2:** Final meta-analysis results

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Number of studies	Meta-analysis sample size	Effect size	Q-Value significance	P-VALUE	Studies containing hypothesis
H1	Project managers' extraversion	Project success	9	1409	0.196	0.001	0	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8
H2	Project managers' conscientiousness	Project success	8	1409	0.131	0	0.015	1-2-3-4-5-6-8
H3	Project managers' openness to experience	Project success	6	880	0.309	0.001	0	1-2-4-5-8-9
H4	Project managers' agreeableness	Project success	6	880	0.189	0.001	0.008	1-2-4-5-8-9
H5	Project managers' neuroticism	Project success	6	880	-0.21	0.004	0.001	1-2-4-5-8-9

The meta-analysis for Hypothesis H<sub>1</sub>, examining the effect of project managers' extraversion on project success, was conducted using the random effects model. The results indicated that the effect size for this hypothesis is 0.196, suggesting a relatively small impact of extraversion on the success of various projects.

Additionally, the significance level was reported as zero, indicating significant differences between the studies included in the analysis. This result confirms that the

calculated effect size is statistically significant and cannot be attributed to chance.

Therefore, it can be concluded that extraversion has a meaningful but limited influence on project success.

The meta-analysis for Hypothesis H<sub>2</sub>, assessing the impact of project managers' conscientiousness on project success, was conducted using the random effects model. The results indicated that the effect size for this hypothesis is 0.131, suggesting a relatively

small influence of conscientiousness on the success of various projects.

Furthermore, the significance level was calculated as 0.015, indicating significant differences among the studies included in the analysis. This finding confirms that the observed effect size is statistically significant and cannot be attributed to random chance.

In conclusion, while conscientiousness has a measurable and statistically significant impact on project success, its overall effect remains relatively limited.

The meta-analysis for Hypothesis H<sub>3</sub>, evaluating the impact of project managers' openness to experience on project success, was conducted using the random effects model. The results revealed that the effect size for this hypothesis is 0.309, indicating a relatively substantial influence of openness to experience on the success of various projects.

Moreover, the significance level was calculated as 0.000, demonstrating significant variability among the included studies. This finding confirms that the observed effect size is statistically significant and not due to random chance.

In summary, openness to experience is a significant predictor of project success, with a considerable and meaningful effect across the analyzed studies.

The meta-analysis results for Hypothesis H<sub>4</sub>, which examines the impact of project managers' agreeableness on project success, using the random-effects model, indicated that the effect size for this hypothesis is 0.189. This effect size reflects a relatively significant influence of project managers' agreeableness on the success of various projects.

Additionally, the calculated significance level was 0.008, demonstrating a significant difference among studies. This finding confirms that the obtained effect size is statistically significant and cannot be attributed to chance.

Thus, project managers' agreeableness, as one of the personality traits, plays a meaningful and notable role in determining project success.

The meta-analysis results for Hypothesis H<sub>5</sub>, which examines the impact of project managers' neuroticism on project success, using the random-effects model, indicated that the effect size for this hypothesis is -0.21. This effect size reflects a relatively significant influence of project managers' neuroticism on the success of various projects.

Additionally, the calculated significance level was 0.001, demonstrating a significant difference among studies. This finding confirms that the obtained effect size is statistically significant and cannot be attributed to chance.

Thus, project managers' neuroticism, as a negative personality trait, has a considerable and inverse effect on project success.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this meta-analysis have investigated the impact of project managers' personality traits on project success and provided significant findings. Overall, personality traits such as extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness positively influenced project success. This indicates that managers possessing these traits are more likely to lead and achieve success in their projects. These findings underscore the importance of selecting and developing project managers based on these personality traits.

Conversely, neuroticism, as a negative personality dimension, showed a significant and considerable effect on project success. The negative and statistically significant effect size of 0.001 suggests that this personality trait plays a key role in reducing project success. Unlike positive personality traits, neuroticism is explicitly associated with lower performance and overall project success, making it a potential risk factor in project-oriented environments.

As previously mentioned, various factors such as characteristics of project managers, organizational structure, external environmental factors, project size, team composition, knowledge management, and organizational project management support, mechanisms, and finances play a vital role in

project success. In addition, the personality of project managers plays a significant role in the successful achievement of project outcomes (Hussain et al., 2021).

These findings have crucial implications for human resource management and development. Organizations should strive to cultivate positive personality traits in project managers, as these traits can directly contribute to project success. Focusing on extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness during the selection and training process for project managers can improve project performance and enhance the likelihood of achieving project goals. At the same time, organizations should be cautious about neurotic tendencies and prioritize managers with emotional stability.

Ultimately, this study highlights that project success depends not only on technical skills and process management but also on the personality traits of project managers. The results of this meta-analysis serve as a valuable guide for organizations and project managers, enabling them to select and develop managers with suitable personality traits. By doing so, organizations can increase the likelihood of successful projects and achieve their strategic objectives.

#### DISCLAIMER

The authors used an AI tool exclusively for language editing and grammar refinement in this article.

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