

Enhancing Project Success through Employee Empowerment and Team Emotional Intelligence: The Mediating Effect of Trust in Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

*Employee Empowerment,
Team Emotional
Intelligence,
Project Success,
Trust in leadership,
Social Exchange
Theory.*

This research investigates the relationship between employee empowerment, team emotional intelligence (TEI), and project success (PS) within Pakistan's telecommunications vendors, emphasizing the mediating influence of trust in leadership. Utilizing social exchange theory (SET), the study posits that employee empowerment and TEI positively affect project success, with trust in leadership acting as a vital mediator in these dynamics. Employing structural equation modeling and bootstrap analysis on a sample of telecommunications vendors in Pakistan, the findings indicate a substantial positive link among employee empowerment, TEI, and project success. The findings indicate that trust in leadership mediates the association between empowerment and TEI with project success, highlighting its essential role in converting employee and team skills into successful project execution. The study offers significant insights for telecom vendors in Pakistan, emphasizing the necessity of cultivating trust via empowerment and emotional intelligence to improve project success in a competitive and intricate sector.

INTRODUCTION

In the current competitive and dynamic economic landscape, project success (PS) has become increasingly vital for enterprises, especially in sectors like telecoms, where swift innovation and technological progress are essential (Shaukat et al., 2022). In the realm of Pakistan's telecommunications vendors, attaining good project success is essential due to fierce rivalry, stringent deadlines, and intricate project environments (Khan, 2023). Successful project delivery continuously relies not only on technical proficiency but also on the organizational context, team dynamics, and leadership style (Watanabe et al., 2024). This research examines

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the influence of employee empowerment and team emotional intelligence (TEI) on project success, emphasizing the mediating function of trust in leadership (Nawaz et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2022). Social exchange theory (SET) serves as the conceptual framework for this study, positing that the reciprocity of trust between leaders and employees is essential for cultivating a productive and engaged workforce, hence enhancing project outcomes (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Although the significance of employee empowerment and team emotional intelligence in facilitating project success is acknowledged, there is a paucity of understanding regarding the interplay between these elements and trust in leadership, particularly concerning project results among telecom vendors in Pakistan (Mayer et al., 2024; Nawaz et al., 2024). Telecommunications projects in Pakistan are intricate and necessitate both technical expertise and robust coordination among teams for success. The absence of trust between personnel and leadership might diminish the advantages of empowerment and emotional intelligence, obstructing project success. The issue is intensified by the lack of empirical studies investigating the mediating influence of trust in leadership within this particular business. Consequently, it is imperative to examine how trust in leadership can amplify the beneficial impacts of employee empowerment and TEI on project success, offering practical insights for telecom vendors in Pakistan to refine their project management strategies and attain superior results.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Project Success (PS)

The notion of project success has been thoroughly analyzed in academic literature, with scholars highlighting its complex and multifaceted nature. The success of a project is generally recognized as not being solely determined by the triple constraint criterion, sometimes referred to as the iron triangle. Shenhar et al. (2002) noted that the conventional approach to evaluating project success relies on the triple constraint framework, encompassing scope, time, and cost. Researchers have explored other methodologies, including the assessment of project success by metrics such as quality, cost, and time (Frefer et al., 2018). Additional components have been identified as crucial for achieving project success, such as client acceptability, stakeholder satisfaction, organizational performance, commercialization, and potential opportunities (Shaukat et al., 2022).

Timely and budget-compliant project execution is essential; however, modern success also hinges on the project's alignment with stakeholder requirements, organizational strategy, and

its ability to create long-term value (Naji et al., 2023). Modern projects are expected to be flexible, incorporating feedback systems and iterative approaches that enable adjustments in dynamic environments (Naji et al., 2023). Furthermore, factors such as innovation, social impact, and environmental sustainability have become essential indicators of a project's success, reflecting the evolving expectations of businesses and society (Naji et al., 2023).

Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment is a fundamental concept in organizational development, emphasizing the provision of authority, autonomy, and trust to employees for decision-making and initiative in their roles (Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2024). It is based on the premise that empowering individuals enhances their engagement, motivation, and productivity, resulting in superior organizational performance (Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2024). Empowerment generally entails equipping employees with essential resources, skills, and information to make autonomous decisions, as well as granting authority to address issues and operate without continuous administrative supervision (Nawaz et al., 2024). Spreitzer (1995) defined empowerment as a multifaceted construct consisting of meaning, competence, self-determination, and influence. These factors empower employees, augmenting their sense of ownership and accountability.

Research indicates that employee empowerment can result in various beneficial effects, such as increased job satisfaction, creativity, and commitment (Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2024). When employees are entrusted with decision-making authority, they are more likely to proactively identify and resolve difficulties, fostering a more dynamic and adaptive company culture (Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2024). Empowerment necessitates a supportive organizational climate, characterized by effective leadership and transparent communication. Leaders are essential in promoting empowerment by offering support, facilitating open communication, and guaranteeing that staff have access to the requisite training and tools for success (Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2024). Ultimately, empowered individuals not only gain individually but also enhance the organization's overall success by fostering creativity, augmenting job performance, and elevating customer happiness (Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2024).

Employee Empowerment and Project Success

The relationship between employee empowerment and project success has garnered considerable interest in organizational and project management studies (Khan et al., 2020). Empowering employees in project environments cultivates ownership, autonomy, and accountability, essential for the successful execution of intricate tasks (Khan et al., 2020).

Empowered team members are more inclined to take initiative, make prompt decisions, and tackle difficulties proactively, hence enhancing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of project results (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Research indicates that empowered personnel demonstrate increased enthusiasm, inventiveness, and problem-solving abilities, resulting in enhanced project performance (Siddiqui et al., 2023). This is especially crucial in dynamic and uncertain project environments, where flexibility in decision-making and reactivity are vital for achieving project objectives (Khan et al., 2020).

Furthermore, empowerment improves communication and collaboration within teams, as empowered individuals are more likely to participate openly in knowledge sharing and foster a healthy team environment (Siddiqui et al., 2023). This collaboration frequently leads to enhanced risk management and expedited conflict resolution, both of which are critical factors in project success. Kirkman and Rosen (1999) discovered that empowered teams exhibited enhanced project performance due to increased cohesion and shared accountability. For empowerment to effectively result in project success, it must be underpinned by an appropriate corporate culture, leadership, and resource allocation (Siddiqui et al., 2023). When employees are granted autonomy and decision-making capacity without adequate support or clarity in their positions, the potential advantages of empowerment may be undermined (Siddiqui et al., 2023). The correlation between empowerment and project performance is significantly influenced by aspects including leadership, resource availability, and effective communication channels (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Based on the above discussion the study's first hypothesis is as follow:

H1: *Employee Empowerment has a positive impact on project success.*

Team emotional Intelligence

Team emotional intelligence (TEI) signifies a group's capacity to identify, comprehend, regulate, and react to the emotions of its members and external individuals (Nguyen et al., 2022). It expands the individual notion of emotional intelligence (EI) to a collective dimension, when team members collaboratively manage emotional dynamics proficiently (Mayer et al., 2024). Research indicates that TEI is essential for promoting collaboration, cohesion, and overall team efficacy (Nguyen et al., 2022). Teams possessing elevated emotional intelligence excel in managing interpersonal connections, thereby improving communication, mitigating conflict, and fostering a more supportive work environment (Nguyen et al., 2022).

The influence of TEI on team results is substantial. Research indicates that teams exhibiting elevated emotional intelligence are more prone to accomplishing their objectives, adapting to changes, and sustaining positive interpersonal interactions among members (Nguyen et al., 2022). Emotional intelligence empowers teams to manage stress, surmount problems, and provide mutual support, particularly in high-pressure or rapidly evolving work settings (Mayer et al., 2024). TEI enhances decision-making and creativity, as emotionally intelligent teams may engage in open discussions of diverse perspectives and effectively resolve disagreements, resulting in more imaginative solutions (Nguyen et al., 2022). Achieving high TEI necessitates deliberate work, encompassing team development initiatives, proficient leadership, and the fostering of trust among team members (Nguyen et al., 2022). When adequately cultivated, TEI emerges as a pivotal catalyst for team efficacy and sustained success (Nguyen et al., 2022).

Team emotional Intelligence and Project Success

The relationship between team emotional intelligence (TEI) and project success has received heightened focus in project management and organizational behavior studies (Watanabe et al., 2024). TEI is crucial in assessing the effectiveness of team members' collaboration, communication, and management of interpersonal dynamics, which are essential for attaining project objectives (Watanabe et al., 2024). Teams possessing elevated emotional intelligence are more adept at maneuvering through the intricate emotional terrains that frequently emerge throughout projects, especially those that are high-stakes or subject to stringent deadlines (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Such teams are more inclined to manage stress efficiently, resolve conflicts constructively, and sustain a healthy group atmosphere, all of which enhance project success (Siddiqui et al., 2023).

Numerous studies indicate that TEI is favorably associated with project success because to its impact on essential team functions, including communication, trust, and cohesiveness (Watanabe et al., 2024). Emotionally intelligent teams typically possess open communication channels, facilitating more effective problem-solving and decision-making (Watanabe et al., 2024). When team members can precisely recognize and respond to one another's emotions, they can more efficiently synchronize their efforts and align their activities towards common project objectives (Watanabe et al., 2024). Clarke (2010) discovered that TEI substantially enhances project success by creating an atmosphere in which team members feel comprehended and supported, hence improving their capacity to work effectively under stress. Moreover, TEI aids in alleviating risks linked to project failure by fostering adaptation

and resilience, essential for surmounting unexpected hurdles (Siddiqui et al., 2023). The emotional dynamics within a team can either enhance or obstruct project outcomes, rendering TEI an essential component of project management that directly influences success (Watanabe et al., 2024). The second hypothesis of the investigation is as follows:

H2: *Team emotional Intelligence has a positive impact on project success.*

The mediating role of trust in leadership between employee empowerment and project success

Trust in leadership is a crucial factor that impacts organizational efficacy and workforce productivity (Zhou et al., 2022). It pertains to the trust that employees have in their leaders' honesty, ability, and motives. Trustworthy leaders inspire loyalty, commitment, and enhanced involvement from their people, hence promoting a healthy work environment (Zhou et al., 2022). Studies indicate that confidence in leadership fosters transparent communication, diminishes ambiguity, and elevates individuals' readiness to exceed their job responsibilities (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). When trust is cultivated, individuals are more inclined to identify with organizational objectives, feel comfortable in their positions, and collaborate efficiently, thus enhancing organizational performance (Zhou et al., 2022). A deficiency of trust in leadership can result in disengagement, diminished morale, and elevated turnover, as employees may feel reluctant to adhere to directives or completely dedicate themselves to their responsibilities (Zhou et al., 2022).

The mediating role of trust in leadership regarding employee empowerment and project success can be analyzed within the framework of social exchange theory (SET). Social Exchange Theory asserts that interactions, whether among individuals or between employees and leaders, are founded on reciprocal exchanges, wherein both parties offer and obtain resources or benefits in return (Ahmad et al., 2023). When employees are empowered, they receive autonomy, authority, and resources to make decisions, indicating trust from leadership (Zhou et al., 2022). This act of empowerment cultivates a mutual connection wherein employees establish trust in their leaders. Trust in leadership is essential, since it assures employees of the support and guidance from their leaders, particularly when assuming increased responsibilities (Zhou et al., 2022). Empowerment devoid of trust may result in perplexity, hesitancy, or resistance, as employees may apprehend adverse repercussions for autonomously made judgments (Zhou et al., 2022).

Trust in leadership serves as a mediating variable that enhances the influence of empowerment on successful project success (Zhou et al., 2022). Employees who are

empowered and trust their leaders are more inclined to take initiative, share ideas, and communicate openly—essential behaviors that contribute to project success. The trust instills confidence in employees that their leaders will assist them during risks or obstacles, so fostering inventive problem-solving and proactive decision-making (Zhou et al., 2022). Research indicates that empowerment alone does not guarantee project success unless accompanied by substantial trust in leadership (Zhou et al., 2022).

Social exchange theory underlies this dynamic by emphasizing the significance of reciprocity between leaders and employees (Ahmad et al., 2023). Leaders empower employees, who, in turn, exhibit commitment, improved performance, and a readiness to contribute more comprehensively to project goals (Ahmad et al., 2023). In this scenario, trust serves as the cohesive element of the reciprocal connection, guaranteeing that empowerment results in favorable organizational outcomes, including project success (Ahmad et al., 2023). The aforementioned literature review presents the third hypothesis of the study as follows:

H3: *Trust in leadership mediates the relationship between employee empowerment and project success.*

The mediating role of trust in leadership between team emotional intelligence and project success

The mediating role of trust in leadership between team emotional intelligence (TEI) and project success is essential for converting emotional intelligence within a team into measurable project results (Watanabe et al., 2024). Teams possessing elevated emotional intelligence are more proficient in comprehending and regulating their own emotions as well as those of others, resulting in improved communication, conflict resolution, and collaboration (Watanabe et al., 2024). Nonetheless, in the absence of trust in leadership, these emotional intelligence competencies may not significantly enhance project success. Trust in leadership serves as the conduit that cultivates a secure and nurturing atmosphere in which teams are assured in articulating ideas, resolving problems, and embracing risks (Watanabe et al., 2024). When team members have confidence in their leader, they are more inclined to utilize their emotional intelligence to freely exchange knowledge, participate in constructive discussions, and collaborate efficiently, all of which are essential for achieving project objectives (Watanabe et al., 2024). This trust guarantees that teams feel confident in their leaders' advice, support, and judgments, hence enhancing the favorable results linked to elevated TEI (Watanabe et al., 2024).

Social exchange theory (SET) elucidates this relationship by conceptualizing trust as a reciprocal process within the leader-team dynamic. SET posits that the trust established between teams and leaders is founded on reciprocal exchanges, wherein leaders offer support, transparent communication, and resources, while teams respond with increased dedication, collaboration, and performance (Ahmad et al., 2023). When teams possess emotional intelligence and trust their leaders, they are assured that their contributions will be appreciated and their efforts endorsed, fostering a beneficial circle of exchange that enhances the entire project (Ahmad et al., 2023). In this setting, TEI enhances project success not only through internal team dynamics but also through the trust and reciprocity cultivated with leadership. Consequently, trust in leadership serves as a vital mediator that enhances the influence of TEI on project success by assuring the comprehensive use of emotional skills in attaining project objectives (Ahmad et al., 2023). The previously cited literature evaluation articulates the study's fourth hypothesis as follows:

H4: *Trust in leadership mediates the relationship between team emotional intelligence and project success.*

The proposed theoretical framework encompasses multiple sub-assumptions alongside its principal hypotheses, outlined as follows:

H5: *Employee empowerment has a positive impact on trust in leadership.*

H6: *Team emotional intelligence has a positive impact on trust in leadership.*

H7: *Trust in leadership has a positive impact on project success.*

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework of the study.

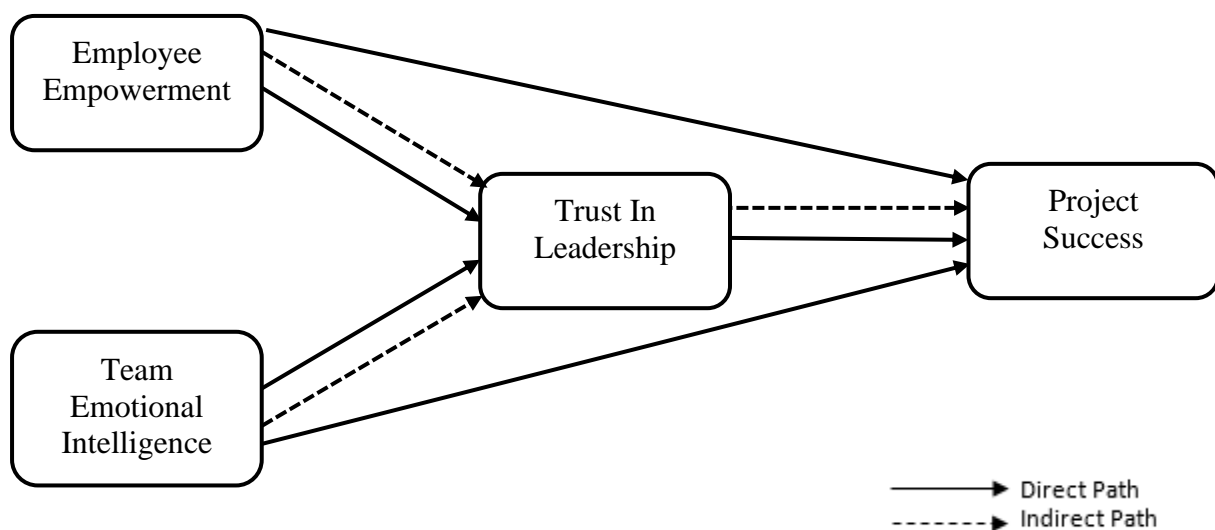


Figure 1: Theoretic Framework

Source: Author's own work

METHODOLOGY

The root of the model lies in the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which is a prominent framework in social psychology and organizational behavior, focusing on the dynamics of human relationships as a series of interactions that generate obligations (Ahmad et al., 2023). Rooted in economic principles, social exchange theory posits that individuals engage in social interactions by weighing the benefits and costs to maximize personal gain and minimize loss (Ahmad et al., 2023). Blau (1964), one of the early proponents of the theory, emphasized that relationships are sustained through reciprocal exchanges, where individuals provide resources (tangible or intangible) with the expectation of receiving benefits in return. In organizational contexts, social exchange theory has been used to explain various workplace behaviors, such as employee commitment, trust, and organizational citizenship behavior (Ahmad et al., 2023). Employees, for example, are likely to be more engaged and loyal if they perceive that their organization reciprocates their efforts with fair compensation, recognition, or opportunities for growth (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Social exchange theory's application in workplace settings also extends to understanding power dynamics and dependence in relationships between employers and employees (Ahmad et al., 2023). In management studies, social exchange theory has been utilized to frame the importance of relational contracts, where employees expect more than formal rewards, seeking intangible benefits like support, respect, and fairness (Ahmad et al., 2023). Recent studies have also expanded the theory by integrating psychological aspects, such as perceived organizational support, to explain employee engagement and retention (Ahmad et al., 2023). This highlights how reciprocity and trust form the foundation of enduring employer-employee relationships in modern workplaces (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Data and methods

This work utilized a quantitative methodology to examine the proposed relationship between the hypothesized model and the common technique for cross-sectional analysis in project management, employing a deductive approach (Joslin & Müller, 2016; Ul-Musawir et al., 2017).

The research was conducted within Pakistan's telecom sector, primarily focusing on telecom suppliers. Given the significant influence of Pakistan's telecommunications sector on GDP, it was selected as a representative sample to investigate the effects of employee empowerment and team emotional intelligence on project success, with trust in leadership serving as a mediating factor. The research employed purposive sampling, drawing on previous empirical

studies carried out in similar contexts (Campbell et al., 2020). The survey instrument was distributed to participants through the authors' social network and personal contacts, utilizing both physical and electronic methods inside the Google Forms platform.

Sample and Procedure

The sample size significantly impacts the research analysis. A power analysis was performed using a cross-sectional design to ascertain the minimal sample size required for obtaining statistically significant results. The survey contained 370 participants and featured statistical metrics like a p-value of 0.05, a statistical power of 0.95, and an effect size of 0.30. The study included at least 189 participants (Cohen, 2016). Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study.

The sample size significantly influences the research analysis. A power analysis was conducted utilizing a cross-sectional design to determine the minimum sample size necessary for achieving statistically significant results. The poll comprised 550 participants and included statistical parameters such as a p-value of 0.05, a statistical power of 0.95, and an effect size of 0.30. The research encompassed to a minimum of 227 participants. Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the research.

Table 1: Demographics

| Measures | Items | Frequency | %age |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------|--------|
| Gender | Male | 133 | 58.59% |
| | Female | 94 | 41.41% |
| Age (years) | 25 – 35 | 95 | 41.85% |
| | 36 – 45 | 79 | 34.80% |
| | 46 and above | 53 | 23.35% |
| Education | MS/M. Phil Degree | 48 | 21.15% |
| | Master's Degree | 138 | 60.79% |
| | Certification holder | 41 | 18.06% |
| Work Experience | Less than 5 years | 33 | 14.54% |
| | 5 – 8 years | 75 | 33.04% |
| | 8 – 11 years | 93 | 40.97% |
| | 11 years and above | 26 | 11.45% |

Measures

The scale included in this study were derived from prior research undertaken in the pertinent field. Participants were instructed to answer questions related to their specific initiatives. The survey utilized a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented strongly disagree and 5 denoted strongly agree.

Project Success (PS): Project success is measured by adopting a 6-item scale from Latif et al. (2020). The Cronbach's alpha is 0.854, indicating the scale is highly reliable.

Employee Empowerment (EE): A 5-item scale of Hayes (1994) was adopted in the present study to measure employee empowerment. The Cronbach's alpha value is 0.735, reflecting the good reliability of the scale.

Team Emotional Intelligence (TE): The 16-item scale of Jordan and Lawrence (2009) was adopted to measure team emotional intelligence. The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale is 0.974, showing the high reliability of the scale.

Trust In Leadership (TL): A 6-item scale of Podsakoff et al. (1990) was adopted to measure the construct. The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale is 0.782 demonstrating the good reliability of the scale. Due to less than 0.5 factor loading, one factor TL6 was not loaded and removed from the analysis.

ANALYSIS

The assessment of the component structure, reliability, and validity of the construct is performed. The research was performed utilizing SPSS version 27. The hypothesis and its indirect effect were examined via mediation analysis utilizing Process Macro Model 4, as established by Preacher and Hayes (2008).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

| | Mean | SD | Data Normality | | Collinearity Statistics | |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|----------------|----------|-------------------------|-------|
| | | | Skewness | Kurtosis | Tolerance | VIF |
| Project Success | 2.808 | 0.767 | 0.374 | 2.031 | - | - |
| Employee Empowerment | 2.826 | 0.674 | 1.170 | 4.263 | 0.490 | 2.039 |
| Team Emotional Intelligence | 3.215 | 0.720 | -0.420 | 1.374 | 0.864 | 1.158 |
| Trust in Leadership | 3.185 | 0.868 | 0.041 | -0.203 | 0.450 | 2.224 |

Dependent variable: Project Success

Table 2 displays the mean, standard deviation (SD), skewness, kurtosis, and multicollinearity metrics of the examined constructs. Table 2 displays the scores given by participants in all categories on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The mean and standard deviation provide critical insights into the average rating and the extent of variation in the responses, respectively. The standard deviation numbers signify the statistical dispersion of responses in relation to the mean.

Skewness and kurtosis were assessed to verify the normality of the data, as per Kline (2023). Data is considered to conform to a normal distribution if the skewness value is within ± 2 and the kurtosis value is within ± 7 , as specified by Hair Jr et al. (2014) and Kline (2023). The data conforms to a normal distribution, as seen by the skewness and kurtosis values shown in Table 2. The variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance were utilized to evaluate multicollinearity. Daoud (2017) defines multicollinearity as the presence of correlation among variables. Daoud (2017) states that a variance inflation factor (VIF) of 1 indicates no correlation, a VIF ranging from 1 to 5 reflects moderate correlation, and a VIF beyond 5 implies a substantial link. A tolerance value under 0.1 indicates the existence of collinearity. The tolerance and VIF values presented in Table 2 demonstrate the lack of multicollinearity within the data.

Reliability and validity analysis

Following the preliminary phase of the inquiry, the latent variables were assessed for composite reliability (CR), convergent validity, and discriminant validity. According to the standards set forth by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the composite reliability (CR) values for all latent variables above 0.89, signifying no internal consistency issues. The assessment of convergent validity was conducted by examining the average variance extracted (AVE) values, considered a vital criterion. Sarstedt et al. (2016) determined a threshold value of 0.5 for average variance extracted (AVE). All constructs in the present study had average variance extracted (AVE) values beyond 0.5, signifying no substantial concerns with convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established in accordance with the criteria established by Fornell and Larcker (1981). According to the previously stated assumptions, the square root of the AVE of all variables must exceed the correlation among all variables. The metrics displayed in Table 3 comprised factor loading, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and the square root of AVE (SQRT of AVE). The discriminant validity of the components was evaluated in Table 4.

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Table 3: Factor loading, CR, AVE, and SQRT of AVE

| Construct | Items | Factor Loadings | CR | AVE | SQRT of AVE |
|-----------------------------|-------|-----------------|------|------|-------------|
| Project Success | PS1 | 0.649 | 0.89 | 0.58 | 0.760 |
| | PS2 | 0.932 | | | |
| | PS3 | 0.665 | | | |
| | PS4 | 0.665 | | | |
| | PS5 | 0.924 | | | |
| | PS6 | 0.664 | | | |
| Team Emotional Intelligence | TE1 | 0.812 | 0.96 | 0.58 | 0.760 |
| | TE2 | 0.832 | | | |
| | TE3 | 0.819 | | | |
| | TE4 | 0.839 | | | |
| | TE5 | 0.870 | | | |
| | TE6 | 0.771 | | | |
| | TE7 | 0.670 | | | |
| | TE8 | 0.765 | | | |
| | TE9 | 0.780 | | | |
| | TE10 | 0.678 | | | |
| | TE11 | 0.679 | | | |
| | TE12 | 0.966 | | | |
| | TE13 | 0.662 | | | |
| | TE14 | 0.675 | | | |
| | TE15 | 0.672 | | | |
| | TE16 | 0.573 | | | |
| Employee Empowerment | EE1 | 0.887 | 0.96 | 0.84 | 0.918 |
| | EE2 | 0.962 | | | |
| | EE3 | 0.901 | | | |
| | EE4 | 0.901 | | | |
| | EE5 | 0.940 | | | |

| Construct | Items | Factor Loadings | CR | AVE | SQRT of AVE |
|---------------------|-------|-----------------|------|------|-------------|
| Trust in Leadership | TL1 | 0.685 | 0.91 | 0.66 | 0.813 |
| | TL2 | 0.882 | | | |
| | TL3 | 0.745 | | | |
| | TL4 | 0.879 | | | |
| | TL5 | 0.852 | | | |

Table 4: Correlation matrix with SQRT of AVE values

| Constructs | PS | EE | TL | TE |
|------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| PS | <i>0.760</i> | | | |
| EE | 0.575** | <i>0.918</i> | | |
| TL | 0.382** | 0.238** | <i>0.813</i> | |
| TE | 0.627** | 0.713** | 0.368** | <i>0.760</i> |

Note(s): PS = Project Success, EE = Employee Empowerment, TL = Trust in Leadership, TE = Team Emotional Intelligence, **.p < 0.01

Upon careful analysis of the statistical data in Table 4, it is clear that the bold and italicized values are arranged diagonally to represent the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE), indicating that all column values are inferior to the square root of AVE, thus suggesting the discriminant validity is held.

Structural Model testing

A comprehensive assessment of the reliability and validity of the constructs in the measurement model was performed in the initial phase. The second stage entailed assessing the predictive accuracy and interconnections among the variables in the structural model posited by Hair Jr et al. (2014). Consult Figure 2 for a visual depiction of the path diagram.

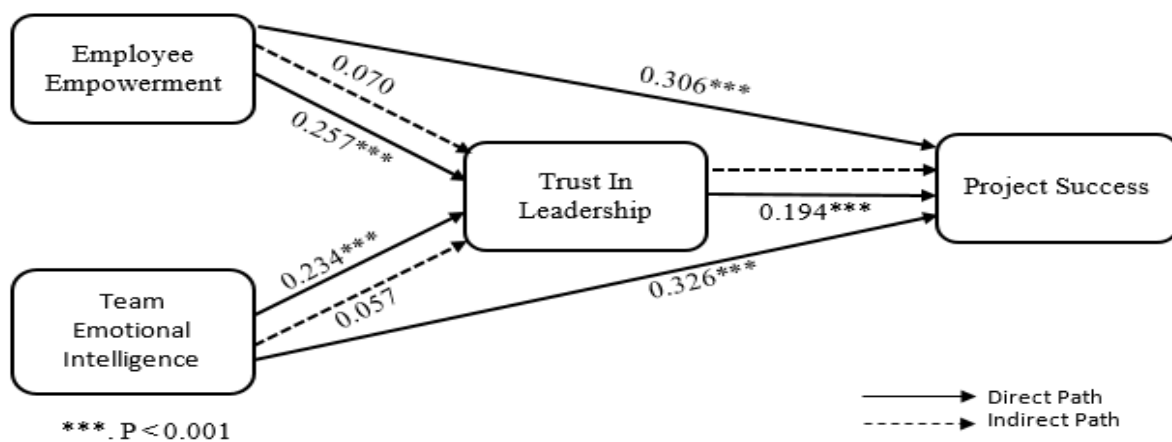


Figure 2: Path Diagram

The standardized coefficient of **H1** ($\beta = 0.306$, $P < 0.001$) signifies a statistically significant and positive correlation between employee empowerment and project success in the structural equation model. Thus, the principal hypothesis (**H1**) of the study has been confirmed. The **H2** was correlated with team emotional intelligence and project success. The results demonstrate a positive and significant connection, as evidenced by ($\beta = 0.326$, $P < 0.001$). Consequently, the hypothesis **H2** of the investigation is affirmed. The sub-hypotheses (**H5**, **H6**, and **H7**) are directly relevant to the trust in leadership and project success analyzed in this study. The study's results confirm the **H5** hypothesis ($\beta = 0.257$, $P < 0.001$), demonstrating a direct relationship between employee empowerment and trust in leadership, thus accepting the hypothesis. The research demonstrates a significant and positive association between team emotional intelligence and trust in leadership ($\beta = 0.234$, $P < 0.001$), hence confirming the **H6** hypothesis. The results of the study's **H7** demonstrate a significant and positive correlation between trust in leadership and project success ($\beta = 0.194$, $P < 0.001$), hence validating hypothesis **H7**.

The study established hypotheses **H3** and **H4** to align with the indirect effect, particularly mediation. The researcher adhered to the methodology outlined by Preacher et al. (2007) and conducted a bootstrap analysis. Wang et al. (2017) demonstrated that the bootstrap method is an effective technique for precisely calculating confidence intervals (CI) to evaluate the indirect effect. The researcher employed a dataset of 5000 bootstrap samples to compute 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals, so assuring the trustworthiness of the estimations. Table 5 displays the findings of the mediation research for additional examination and analysis.

Table 5: Bootstrap results for Indirect effect Process Macro Model 4

| | Total Effect | T | Sig. | Direct Effect | T | Sig. | Path | Indirect Effect | SE | LL 95% CI | UL 95% CI |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------|-------|---------------|--------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| H3: EE → PS | 0.655 | 10.548 | 0.000 | 0.585 | 9.589 | 0.000 | EE → TL → PS | 0.070 | 0.036 | 0.004 | 0.147 |
| H4: TE → PS | 0.555 | 12.080 | 0.000 | 0.498 | 10.288 | 0.000 | TE → TL→ PS | 0.057 | 0.027 | 0.013 | 0.119 |

Note (s): PS = Project Success, EE = Employee Empowerment, TL = Trust in Leadership, TE = Team Emotional Intelligence, SE = Standard Error, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper Limit, CI = Confidence-Interval, Bootstrap Samples = 5000

The bootstrap analysis results reveal that **H3** is significant, as evidenced by the mediating effect of trust in leadership on the connection between employee empowerment and project success ($\beta = 0.070$, $SE = 0.036$, 95% CI [0.004, 0.147]). The bootstrap analysis of **H4** indicates a significant indirect effect of trust in leadership on the link between team emotional intelligence and project success ($\beta = 0.057$, $SE = 0.027$, 95% CI [0.013, 0.119]). Since direct and indirect effects are significant, therefore there is partial mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Zhao et al., 2010).

DISCUSSION

This study's findings offer substantial insights into the correlation among employee empowerment, team emotional intelligence (TEI), trust in leadership, and project success. The validation of hypothesis **H1**, indicating a favorable and statistically significant correlation between employee empowerment and project performance, is consistent with existing literature on empowerment (Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2024). Empowered personnel are more inclined to exhibit initiative, demonstrate ingenuity, and facilitate the effective execution of tasks. Empowering people to make decisions cultivates an environment that enhances motivation and performance, resulting in successful project outcomes (Kyei-Frimpong et al., 2024). The validation of **H2** reinforces the significance of TEI in facilitating project success. The results are aligned with the prior research (Watanabe et al., 2024). Teams with emotional intelligence, due to their ability to regulate emotions and negotiate interpersonal relationships, are more adept at collaborating efficiently, resolving conflicts, and sustaining a productive team environment, all of which are essential for attaining project objectives (Watanabe et al., 2024).

The study's findings underscore the essential mediating function of trust in leadership within the linkages among employee empowerment, TEI, and project success. The findings indicate a significant direct correlation between employee empowerment and trust in leadership (**H5**), as well as between TEI and trust in leadership (**H6**), underscoring that trust is a crucial element that fortifies these connections. These results confirm the previous findings (Watanabe et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2022). Empowered employees are more inclined to trust their leaders, viewing empowerment as an indication of trust and support, which subsequently encourages them to achieve elevated performance levels (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Similarly, teams possessing elevated emotional intelligence are inclined to cultivate trust in leadership, as they adeptly regulate emotions within the group and depend on the leader's assistance to foster a conducive team atmosphere (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Additionally, the validation of **H7**

substantiates that trust in leadership plays a significant role in project success, suggesting that trust is crucial for enabling both empowered employees and emotionally intelligent teams to effectively utilize their capabilities to enhance project outcomes (Zhou et al., 2022).

The mediation analysis results, especially hypotheses **H3** and **H4**, offer profound insights into the indirect impacts of confidence in leadership. The partial mediation of trust in leadership between employee empowerment and project success (**H3**) substantiates that trust serves as a vital intermediate that enhances the beneficial impacts of empowerment on project results (Zhou et al., 2022). The partial mediation of trust in leadership between TEI and project success (**H4**) suggests that trust facilitates the connection between emotional intelligence and project performance (Zhou et al., 2022). The findings align with social exchange theory (SET), which posits that confidence in leadership is established through reciprocal exchanges, wherein empowered or emotionally savvy personnel respond favorably to the trust and support extended by their leaders (Ahmad et al., 2023). This mutual relationship ultimately improves their contributions to project success. The study illustrates that both employee empowerment and TEI directly influence project success, whereas trust in leadership amplifies and partially mediates these effects, highlighting its crucial role in attaining successful project outcomes (Siddiqui et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the correlation of employee empowerment, team emotional intelligence (TEI), trust in leadership, and project success, specifically within Pakistan's telecommunications vendors. The results indicate that both employee empowerment and TEI have a beneficial impact on project success. Empowered individuals possess greater decision-making capabilities and initiative, fostering creativity and improving project effectiveness. Teams possessing high emotional intelligence may navigate interpersonal connections more adeptly, resulting in enhanced collaboration and conflict resolution, which are crucial for successful project execution in intricate and dynamic settings.

The research underscores the mediating role of trust in leadership. Trust enhances the beneficial impacts of both empowerment and TEI on project performance, serving as a conduit that allows employees and teams to fully leverage their potential. In Pakistan's telecommunications sector, characterized by significant project complexity and competitiveness, cultivating trust between leadership and teams is essential. Telecom vendors may enhance project success, adaptability, and overall success in a rapidly evolving sector by fostering empowerment, emotional intelligence, and trust.

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