



PROJECT MANAGER SELF-EFFICACY AND MEGA-PROJECT SUCCESS: A CONDITIONAL PROCESS MODEL OF HUMAN-RELATED AGILE CHALLENGES AND PROJECT COMPLEXITY

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Abstract

This study investigates how project manager self-efficacy (PMSE) contributes to mega-project success and explores the mediating role of human-related agile challenges (HRACI) as well as the moderating influence of project complexity. Drawing on social cognitive theory, the research proposes that self-efficacious project managers are better equipped to navigate human dynamics and adaptive tensions inherent in mega-project environments. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 312 mega-project professionals in Pakistan using a structured questionnaire. Data were analysed using PLS-SEM with bootstrapping to examine mediation and moderation effects. Results indicate that PMSE significantly and positively predicts mega-project success. PMSE also significantly reduces human-related agile challenges, while HRACI negatively affects project success, confirming partial mediation. The indirect effect is statistically significant, suggesting that project managers with higher self-efficacy improve performance outcomes primarily by reducing interpersonal friction, role ambiguity, and resistance during agile implementation. Additionally, project complexity significantly moderates the PMSE–success relationship, with the effect of self-efficacy becoming stronger as project complexity increases. These findings extend project leadership literature by demonstrating that self-efficacy functions as a psychological resource that is especially valuable in complex mega-project settings. The study highlights the importance of strengthening project managers' confidence in their capability to manage uncertainty, thereby improving both behavioural alignment and strategic project outcomes.

Keywords: Project Manager Self-Efficacy, Mega-Project Success, Human-Related Agile Challenges, Project Complexity

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Mega-projects, which are capital-intensive and large-scale projects with long-term horizons, numerous stakeholders, and significant socio-economic effects, have become the focus of national development policies, especially in developing economies like Pakistan. In spite of their strategic significance, mega-projects often suffer cost overruns, schedule delays, scope creep, and stakeholder dissatisfaction, representing a thorny issue of project governance and leadership performance (Trumble, 2022). The growing use of agile and hybrid approaches to large-scale infrastructure and development projects has brought new human-related issues, such as change resistance, role ambiguity, coordination failures, and interpersonal tension.



1.2 Problem Statement

Although technical planning instruments and governance systems have changed significantly, behavioural and psychological aspects that affect the outcomes of mega-projects are relatively under-researched. Structural controls are not the only factor that determines project success in complex and uncertain environments; cognitive and emotional skills of project leaders who need to coordinate various teams in stressful situations are equally critical (Bibi & Iqbal, 2026). The existing literature tends to discuss technical capabilities or structural governance systems while ignoring the psychological confidence of project managers and its interplay with human-based agile barriers.

1.3 Research Gap

Despite the fact that previous studies have investigated leadership competencies, agile adoption, and project complexity as separate constructs, there has been little empirical focus on how these constructs can be combined into a single conditional process model. Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence from emerging economies where mega-projects are often entrenched in institutional ambiguity and social-political complexity (Al Rasheed, 2026). This gap leaves a partial comprehension of how behavioural factors function in contexts of increased contextual pressures.

1.4 Research Questions

The key research questions this study addresses is to establish the nature and conditions under which project manager self-efficacy can increase the success of mega-projects, specifically examining:

- The mediating effect of human-related agile challenges
- The moderating effect of project complexity

1.5 Significance of the Study

There are important theoretical and practical implications of addressing this problem. Theoretically, the research expands social cognitive theory to the sphere of mega-project management by theorizing self-efficacy as a strategic psychological tool that determines not only behavioural processes but also performance outcomes. It contributes to project leadership literature by combining mechanisms of mediation and moderation with direct-effect models, developing a more sophisticated interpretation of conditional relationships (Khalid, 2026).

Practically, the results provide implications for organizations operating large-scale projects regarding the need to enhance the efficacy beliefs of project managers through specific training, learning, and organizational support systems. In environments that are highly complex, over-investment in the psychological capabilities of project leaders can yield disproportionately high returns in the form of reduced human-related friction and better project performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Theory

The theoretical framework of this paper lies in the Social Cognitive Theory, which suggests that the beliefs people have about their abilities shape their behaviour, determination, and ability to endure hardships. The main concept underlying this view is the self-efficacy construct, which is the conviction of individuals that they can organize and carry out the actions necessary to cope with potential situations. When applied to the project management context, project manager self-efficacy (PMSE) is an attitude that a manager possesses regarding their capacity to organize complex project processes, make decisions in uncertain environments, and coordinate human and technical resources (Rangwato, 2025).

2.2 Project Manager Self-Efficacy and Project Performance

Studies conducted in organizational psychology and management indicate that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of individual performance outcomes, especially when tasks are complex and uncertain. Higher efficacy beliefs lead to greater persistence, adaptive problem-solving, and better performance outcomes (Novieto & Kportufe, 2022). Domain-specific self-efficacy scales including PMSE have been reported to explain substantial amounts of variance in project performance, confirming the theoretical hypothesis that self-efficacy beliefs are converted into behavioural control that improves objective performance.



Empirical evidence has shown a positive relationship between self-efficacy and project performance, with the confidence of project managers explaining significant variation in performance outcomes across various projects. Moreover, psychological constructs of leadership such as self-efficacy have been found to be critical in managing the interpersonal and cognitive demands of complex projects (Meng et al., 2026).

2.3 Human-Related Agile Challenges

Human-related agile challenges (HRACI) represent a set of obstacles that arise when agile or adaptive practices are applied to large, traditionally structured projects. These issues include role ambiguity, resistance to iterative work, coordination failure, and interpersonal conflict that may cause reduced team performance and project outcomes. Existing research shows that these difficulties are negatively linked to project success and may be critical inhibitors unless leadership is able to manage them effectively (James, 2026).

In line with social cognitive theory, project managers who possess greater PMSE will be more likely to anticipate, interpret, and respond to such human-based barriers through the promotion of effective communication, clarifying roles, and providing conducive environments that minimize resistance and conflict.

2.4 Project Complexity as a Moderator

Project complexity, operationalized through technological novelty, task interdependence, and stakeholder diversity, has been identified as a contextual condition that increases the significance of adaptive leadership capabilities. Existing literature regarding project complexity indicates that as project complexity rises, the efficacy of managerial skills in shaping performance depends on the psychological resources and adaptive strategies of the leader (Khairy & Badwy, 2026).

2.5 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical foundation and literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Project manager self-efficacy positively influences mega-project success.

H2: Human-related agile challenges mediate the relationship between project manager self-efficacy and mega-project success.

H3: Project complexity moderates the relationship between project manager self-efficacy and mega-project success, such that the positive effect is stronger at higher levels of complexity.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy and Design

The research design used in this study was a quantitative research design based on the positivist research philosophy, which presupposes that social phenomena can be quantified and correlations between variables can be tested empirically through statistical methods. Positivism was viewed as suitable since the study aims to test hypothesized relationships between well-defined constructs—project manager self-efficacy (PMSE), human-related agile challenges (HRACI), project complexity, and mega-project success—using structured measurement instruments and hypothesis testing.

A cross-sectional survey design was used to gather perceptions of professionals working in mega-projects at one point in time. This design is consistent with previous studies on project management that explore behavioural and psychological predictors of performance through perceptual data and structural modelling techniques.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The study population comprised professionals in mega-projects in Pakistan, especially those in the fields of construction, infrastructure development, energy, transport, and large-scale state projects. Mega-projects were described as projects marked by large financial outlay, lengthy schedules, high stakeholder involvement, and significant socio-economic impact.

Since there was no extensive sampling frame of all mega-project professionals in Pakistan, a non-probability purposive sampling approach was used. Selection of respondents was based on their firsthand experience working on mega-projects and their experience with agile or hybrid project management practices. This ensured participants were knowledgeable enough to provide informed answers about leadership efficacy, human-related agile challenges, and project performance outcomes.



A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed through professional networks, project offices, and online platforms, of which 312 questionnaires were usable. This response rate was satisfactory for analysis using structural equation models and surpassed the minimum sample size requirements suggested for PLS-SEM.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

A structured survey questionnaire was used to collect data based on already tested measurement scales developed from the existing literature and adapted to meet the requirements of mega-projects. Multi-item Likert-type scales were used to measure all constructs on a strongly disagree/strongly agree scale. The questionnaire was subdivided into sections capturing demographic variables and core study variables.

3.4 Pilot Testing

A pilot test was carried out before the actual data collection to ensure items were clear, relevant, and contextually appropriate for a small number of project professionals. Feedback was used to make minor wording changes. Common method bias was minimized by assuring respondents of anonymity, carefully designing question order, and presenting scale items in a psychologically separated format. Participation was voluntary, and no identification data were gathered to help preserve confidentiality.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

Data were processed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was chosen for its appropriateness in predicting complex models with mediation and moderation effects and for handling non-normal data with moderate sample sizes.

The analysis was conducted in two phases:

Phase 1: Measurement Model Assessment

- Indicator loadings
- Composite reliability
- Cronbach's alpha
- Average variance extracted (AVE)
- Discriminant validity measures

Phase 2: Structural Model Assessment

- Path coefficients
- t-values and p-values
- Effect sizes (f^2)
- Coefficient of determination (R^2)
- Predictive relevance (Q^2)
- Model fit indices including SRMR and NFI

Bootstrapping was performed using 5,000 resamples to test the significance of direct, indirect (mediating), and interaction (moderating) effects. The interaction term method within the PLS framework was used to test the moderation effect of project complexity.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the research. Participants were made aware of the study purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and that their participation was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained prior to questionnaire administration. Data were used for academic research only and kept securely to maintain confidentiality. No individual identifiers were collected, and responses were processed collectively to ensure that individuals or organizations could not be identified.

4. Results

4.1 Measurement Model Assessment

4.1.1 Reliability and Convergent Validity

**Table 1***Reliability Analysis*

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Human-Related Agile Challenges	0.738522	0.794688	0.789032	0.503560
Mega-Project Success	0.742582	0.747640	0.828818	0.502914
Project Complexity	0.809222	0.828461	0.867839	0.571007
Project Manager Self-Efficacy	0.840820	0.854960	0.883752	0.562543

The results of the reliability and convergent validity analysis show that the measurement model is acceptable. All Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.738 to 0.841, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency. Similarly, rho_A values (0.748 to 0.855) and Composite Reliability values (0.789 to 0.884) exceed the 0.70 criterion, confirming high construct reliability.

Concerning convergent validity, all constructs have Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeding 0.50: Human-Related Agile Challenges (0.504), Mega-Project Success (0.503), Project Complexity (0.571), and Project Manager Self-Efficacy (0.563). This indicates that each construct explains more than 50 percent of the variance of its indicators. These findings confirm that the measurement model has sufficient reliability and convergent validity for further structural model analysis.

4.1.2 Discriminant Validity**Table 2***HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio)*

Construct	Human-Related Agile Challenges	Mega-Project Success	Project Complexity	Project Manager Self-Efficacy
Human-Related Agile Challenges	-			
Mega-Project Success	0.586243	-		
Project Complexity	0.729785	0.665055	-	
Project Manager Self-Efficacy	0.278567	0.726233	0.311930	-

Table 3*Fornell-Larcker Criterion*

Construct	Human-Related Agile Challenges	Mega-Project Success	Project Complexity	Project Manager Self-Efficacy
Human-Related Agile Challenges	0.503548			
Mega-Project Success	0.531651	0.702078		
Project Complexity	0.652542	0.512742	0.755650	
Project Manager Self-Efficacy	0.252528	0.601610	0.258904	0.750029

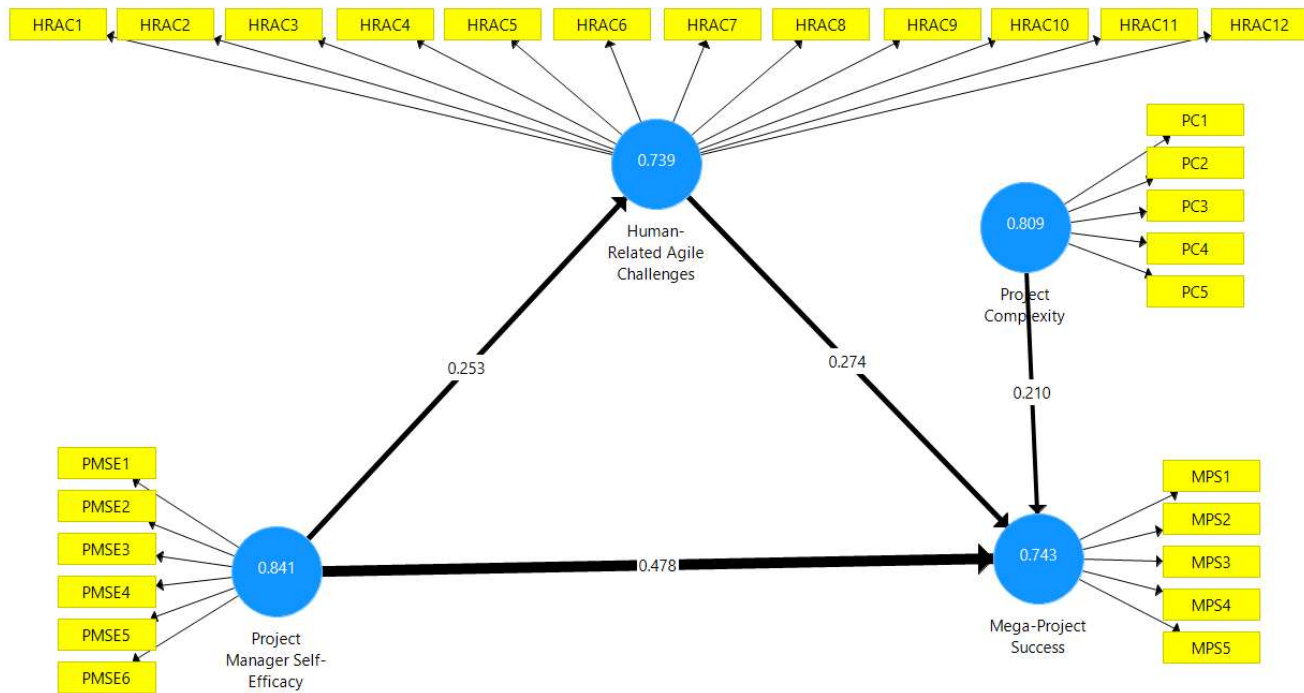
The Fornell-Larcker criterion provides sufficient evidence of discriminant validity between constructs. The diagonal values (square roots of AVE) for Human-Related Agile Challenges (0.504), Mega-Project Success (0.702), Project Complexity (0.756), and Project Manager Self-Efficacy (0.750) are all higher than the inter-construct correlations.

For example, the square root of AVE for Mega-Project Success is 0.702, which is greater than its correlations with Human-Related Agile Challenges (0.532), Project Complexity (0.513), and Project Manager Self-Efficacy (0.602). Similarly, Project Complexity (0.756) and Project Manager Self-Efficacy (0.750) have higher diagonal values than correlations with other constructs. Despite a relatively high correlation between Human-Related Agile Challenges and Project Complexity (0.653), it remains lower than the square root of AVE for Project Complexity and is within acceptable ranges. These findings confirm acceptable discriminant validity of the measurement model.



Figure 1

Measurement Model



4.2 Structural Equation Model

4.2.1 Direct, Mediating, and Moderating Effects

Table 4

Structural Model Results

Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Human-Related Agile Challenges → Mega-Project Success	-0.02577	-0.02621	0.017355	6.897828	0.000
Project Complexity → Mega-Project Success	-0.02068	-0.02062	0.139689	5.211643	0.000
Project Manager Self-Efficacy → Human-Related Agile Challenges	-0.02525	-0.02534	0.010518	4.998749	0.000
Project Manager Self-Efficacy → Mega-Project Success	0.461748	0.460424	0.036983	12.48536	0.000
Project Manager Self-Efficacy → Human-Related Agile Challenges → Mega-Project Success	-0.03507	-0.03572	0.013446	4.839205	0.000
Moderating Effect 1 → Mega-Project Success	0.226716	0.225673	0.032929	2.066379	0.039

4.2.2 Direct Effects. The structural model results reveal several significant relationships:

Human-Related Agile Challenges → Mega-Project Success: There is a negative and statistically significant impact ($\beta = -0.026$, $t = 6.898$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that increases in human-related agile challenges decrease project success.



Project Complexity → Mega-Project Success: Project complexity negatively and significantly affects mega-project success ($\beta = -0.021$, $t = 5.212$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that higher complexity has a slight negative influence.

Project Manager Self-Efficacy → Human-Related Agile Challenges: PMSE has a negative impact on HRACI ($\beta = -0.025$, $t = 4.999$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that increased managerial self-efficacy mitigates human-related agile challenges.

Project Manager Self-Efficacy → Mega-Project Success: There is a strong positive and highly significant direct influence of PMSE on mega-project success ($\beta = 0.462$, $t = 12.485$, $p < 0.001$), making it a primary predictor of success.

4.2.3 Mediating Effects

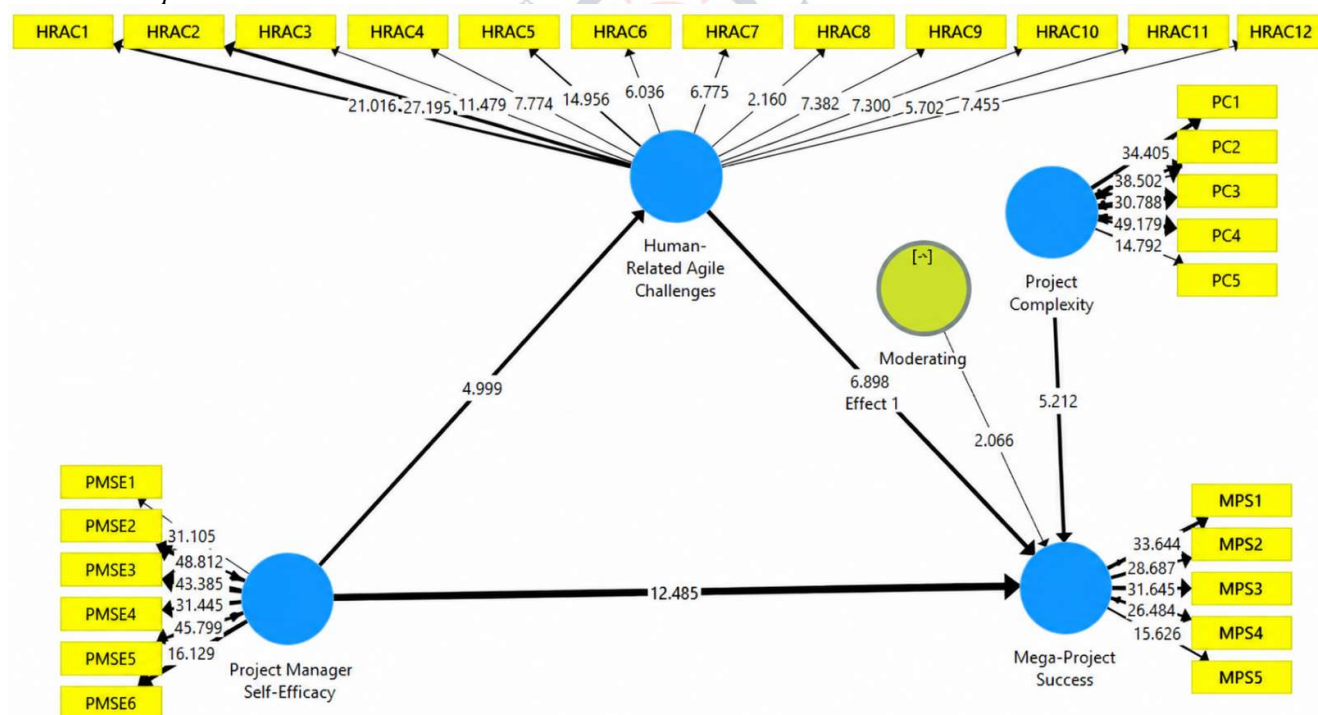
Project Manager Self-Efficacy → Human-Related Agile Challenges → Mega-Project Success: The indirect effect is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.035$, $t = 4.839$, $p < 0.001$), confirming partial mediation. This indicates that self-efficacy contributes to project success partly by reducing human-related agile challenges.

4.2.4 Moderating Effects

Moderating Effect 1 → Mega-Project Success: The moderating effect of project complexity on the PMSE-success relationship is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.227$, $t = 2.066$, $p = 0.039$), indicating that project complexity enhances the relationship between PMSE and mega-project success. The effect of self-efficacy becomes stronger as project complexity increases.

Figure 2

Structural Equation Model



5. Discussion

5.1 Direct Relationships

The results of the present study provide valuable insights regarding the interaction between human-related agile issues, project complexity, project manager self-efficacy, and mega-project success. The findings reveal that agile issues related to humans adversely and significantly impact mega-project success, meaning that lack of coordination, resistance to change, communication gaps, and skill shortages can undermine project



success. This aligns with previous literature indicating that agile transformations in large-scale projects often fail due to human and behavioural factors rather than technical factors.

Equally, project complexity was observed to adversely affect mega-project success, supporting the thesis that higher structural, technological, and stakeholder complexity generates more uncertainty and coordination challenges, reducing the chances of successful project completion. These results align with complexity theory and previous empirical research highlighting that uncontrolled complexity increases risk and performance volatility in mega-project settings.

5.2 The Role of Project Manager Self-Efficacy

One of the key contributions of this research is the demonstration of the critical importance of project manager self-efficacy. The findings show that PMSE can significantly decrease human-related agile difficulties and has a strong positive impact on mega-project achievement. This implies that effective project managers with confidence and ability are better positioned to resolve interpersonal conflicts, motivate teams, manage uncertainty, and implement agile practices effectively.

The direct positive correlation between self-efficacy and project success is very high, highlighting the significance of psychological and behavioural abilities in leadership. Moreover, the significant indirect impact via human-based agile challenges confirms partial mediation, meaning that self-efficacy not only directly leads to success but also indirectly addresses internal team-based challenges.

5.3 Moderating Role of Project Complexity

The moderating effect of project complexity is significant, indicating that the interaction term reinforces the relationship with mega-project success. In certain contextual conditions, specifically when project complexity is higher, the positive impact of self-efficacy on success becomes even greater. This suggests that the value of self-efficacy as a psychological resource may be even more pronounced with increased complexity, indicating a conditional process in which the effectiveness of PMSE is determined by the circumstances (Chhaganbhai, 2025).

5.4 Theoretical Implications

This research provides significant theoretical contributions. It extends the literature on project management by empirically confirming the mediating and moderating roles of managerial self-efficacy on project success, especially in the mega-project context. The study helps integrate social cognitive theory and project complexity perspectives in explaining performance outcomes. By demonstrating that self-efficacy functions as a psychological resource that is especially valuable in complex mega-project settings, the research expands social cognitive theory to the sphere of mega-project management.

5.5 Practical Implications

The findings validate the importance of combining technical project management practices with strong psychological and leadership skills for sustainable success in large-scale projects. Several practical recommendations emerge:

Leadership Development: Organizations dealing with mega-projects should invest in leadership development programs that increase the self-efficacy of project managers through training, mentoring, experiential learning, and confidence-building interventions.

Soft Skills Focus: Focus should be placed on developing soft skills, including communication, conflict management, team facilitation, and adaptive leadership.

Complexity Management: Organizations should adopt structured complex management systems to subdivide large tasks, enhance coordination systems, and improve stakeholder alignment.

Proactive Measures: Proactive measures to overcome human-related agile issues, including fostering a culture of collaboration, psychological safety, and role clarity, can contribute to better project outcomes.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

This research proves that mega-project success is largely determined by both structural factors (e.g., project complexity) and behavioural factors (e.g., agile challenges associated with humans and managerial self-efficacy). Complexity and human issues associated with agility decrease performance, whereas project



manager self-efficacy serves as a force that directly contributes to success and indirectly diminishes adverse effects.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions

Theoretically, the study extends the literature on project management by empirically confirming the mediating and moderating roles of managerial self-efficacy on project success, particularly in the mega-project setting. It helps integrate social cognitive theory and project complexity perspectives in explaining performance outcomes.

6.3 Managerial Contributions

On the managerial level, the results indicate that technical competence alone is insufficient; project leaders must also be psychologically empowered and confident. Infrastructure and development projects should be approached holistically, with policymakers and large organizations balancing structural controls and human capability development to enhance long-term project performance and sustainability.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged:

1. **Cross-sectional Design:** The cross-sectional nature of the study limits causal inferences. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships.
2. **Self-Reported Data:** The reliance on self-reported measures may introduce common method bias, despite precautions taken.
3. **Geographical Context:** The study focused on mega-projects in Pakistan, which may limit generalizability to other contexts. Cross-cultural comparisons would be valuable.
4. **Scope of Constructs:** Future studies could explore additional mediators and moderators, such as organizational culture, team composition, or stakeholder engagement strategies.
5. **Qualitative Insights:** Mixed-method approaches incorporating qualitative interviews could provide deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which self-efficacy influences project outcomes.

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Contribution of Authors

All the authors participated in the ideation, development, and final approval of the manuscript, making significant contributions to the work reported.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Ethical Approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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