

A FRAMEWORK FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION
PROCESS FOR IMPROVING THE BUSINESS PERFORMANCE OF SMALL
AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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A thesis submitted in
fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the
Doctor of Philosophy in Technology Management

Faculty of Technology Management and Business
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JULY 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank Almighty Allah for the successful completion of this study for my health, provisions and strength before, during and after this academic journey. My special thanks goes to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rozilah binti Kasim for her professional guidance, constructive criticisms and observation. I thank all my research colleagues for assisting me in various areas during the research and writing of the thesis.



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ABSTRACT

Even though the SME sector in the UAE accounts for 95%, growth of the SMEs faces different issues for the manager to deal with and the majority of SMEs in the country are usually managed by the traditional management techniques. Hence, this study aims to identify the factors influencing the project management process towards the business performance of SMEs, to determine the relationship between these identified factors in the project management process and business performance of SMEs, and to establish an improved framework for project management implementation process with the business performance of SMEs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This research employed the quantitative research design. Also, the SMEs selected for this study are from all the states within the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Since the total population number of SMEs in the UAE is 4000 that comes from the construction industry, the sample size of this study is 260 determined based on the Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) study. The data distribution box plot was checked and 23 outliers were identified from the 391 questionnaires that were distributed. Only 260 respondents (cases) were used for statistical analysis using SPSS version 23 for the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmation factor analysis (CFA) by the practice of AMOS that was embraced. The findings of the research research object led the identification of four project management process factors, which are project risk management, project scope management, project cost management, and project communication management. The findings of the research objective showed that these four independent variables (project risk management, project scope management, project cost management, and project communication management) have a significant effect on the performance of SMEs with P-values 0.003, 0.000, 0.000 and 0.000, respectively. Also, the third research objective led to the framework that utilises project process management factors to enhance the performance of SMEs in the UAE. From the results of this study, the UAE government has several roles to play to assist in the areas of the needed priorities to improve the business performance of SMEs in the UAE.

ABSTRAK

Walaupun sektor PKS di UAE menyumbang 95%, pertumbuhan PKS menghadapi isu yang berbeza untuk ditangani oleh pengurus dan majoriti PKS di negara ini biasanya diuruskan oleh teknik pengurusan tradisional. Justeru, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan pembolehubah yang mempengaruhi proses pengurusan projek berhubung prestasi perniagaan PKS. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan reka bentuk kajian kuantitatif. Selain itu, PKS yang dipilih untuk kajian ini adalah dari semua negeri dalam Emiriah Arab Bersatu (UAE). Oleh kerana jumlah bilangan populasi PKS di UAE adalah 4000 yang berasal dari industri pembinaan, saiz sampel kajian ini adalah 260 ditentukan berdasarkan kajian Krejcie dan Morgan (1970). Plot kotak pengedaran data telah disemak dan 23 outlier telah dikenalpasti daripada 391 soal selidik yang diedarkan. Hanya 260 responden (kes) digunakan untuk analisis statistik menggunakan SPSS versi 23 untuk analisis faktor penerokaan (EFA) dan analisis faktor pengesahan (CFA) oleh amalan AMOS yang diamalkan. Penemuan objek penyelidikan penyelidikan mengetuai pengenalpastian empat faktor proses pengurusan projek, iaitu pengurusan risiko projek, pengurusan skop projek, pengurusan kos projek, dan pengurusan komunikasi projek. Dapatan objektif kajian menunjukkan bahawa empat pembolehubah tidak bersandar ini mempunyai kesan yang signifikan terhadap prestasi PKS. Selain itu, objektif penyelidikan ketiga membawa kepada rangka kerja yang menggunakan faktor pengurusan proses projek untuk meningkatkan prestasi PKS di UAE. Daripada hasil kajian ini, kerajaan UAE mempunyai beberapa peranan untuk membantu dalam bidang keutamaan yang diperlukan untuk meningkatkan prestasi perniagaan PKS di UAE.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are very significant in the global economy and make a major contribution to the expansion of gross domestic products (GDP), the employment rate and the production of countries. In both developed and developing countries, SMEs constitute one of the essential factors of world economic development. SMEs are as well known to be the foundation of the economy.

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have made a significant contribution to economic output, imports and exports in the manufacturing sector, generating job possibilities in the service sector and strengthening the export markets. For several large businesses, they perform the part of key service providers and suppliers (Khan *et al.*, 2010). The importance of foreign participation from SMEs promotes further development efforts to promote SMEs from the Middle East and the United Arab Emirates. There are internal and external challenges increasing that would impede the progress of SMEs internationally. The growing competition includes an uncertain political and economic landscape, which intensified the challenge for SMEs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to reach the global market successfully.

Ultimate project management practice is an imperative tool to assist in any financial decision of a firm (Lunce, 2016). Implementing project management is critical not just to magnify return to the stakeholders, nevertheless it is dynamic to plan a project successfully so that the firm becomes sustainable. Government and government officials are very worried about small and medium-sized enterprises

(SMEs) since they make a significant contribution to the economy, and if the SME industry collapses, they will have a significant effect on the economy. Thus, to help the UAE to prosper, it is important to nourish and assist the SME sector so that it can be improved and made better.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a force for fueling economic competitiveness and creativity and are known in both developed and emerging nations as significant financial lenders. There is indeed, no definition for SMEs that is special or generally acceptable. For each business sector, there are different meanings of SMEs depending on the number of employees, turnover, and valuation of assets. While SMEs are companies that work with a limited number of employees working as formally or informally personnel at the micro scale, they have surpassed their larger corporate counterparts at the macro level with a higher marginal costing. This seems to make SMEs collectively more significant in contributing to the employment creation of a nation (Erick *et al.*, 2014).

Rodrigues and Walker (2016) observed that SMEs can not contend with bigger organisations structured to master cost minimization techniques, including lay-offs, while SMEs can create value for a nation by implementing creative strategies and sustainable practices that can generate new possibilities for jobs. Not only large-scale multinational corporations, and moreover small and medium-sized companies perform a critical function in the global economic environment (Agostini *et al.*, 2015). Nevertheless, beneath the larger business organisations, there is yet another component that, similar to the larger competitors, is comparatively smaller in size and power. In the 'number of firms' as well as the 'real value contribution' to the corresponding Gross Domestic Products, SMEs are greater (Jamali *et al.*, 2015; Mazurkiewicz, 2011). Besides, Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) perform a crucial part in fostering economic development, job possibilities and the transition of technology, according to Benson & Stringer (2015). Small companies, they concluded, were also the drivers of global economic growth. SMEs also play a vital role in equalising the income gap between employees (James, 2015; Alsheikh, 2009). SMEs influence the manufacturing and commercial development of most economies (Dero *et al.*, 2006). These SMEs are small in scale but collectively represent a large proportion of an economy that goes through many phases until they reach stability and success.

This degree of importance that is placed has appeared to be increasing continuously. The impact of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) has been recognised to be for both the national and local economies. The small and medium enterprises would also engage well in the delivery of products and services (Masadeh, 2008). Many parts of the world have recognised the small and medium enterprises, and it has been documented as to be the major sources of employment, generation of revenue, social trend-setting, innovation, and technological advancement (Wang *et al.*, 2015; Masadeh, 2008).

Quite specifically, in encouraging foreign direct investments (FDI) to a region, SMEs serve a valuable part (Kuo & Li, 2003). Numerous economists conclude that the prosperity of countries and the development of their economies rely heavily on the success of their SMEs (Masadeh, 2008). SMEs are the saviours that provide prosperity to the national economy in many developed and emerging nations (such as Korea and Japan). They potentially prevent the disruptions that emerge with economic hyperinflation.

Chinese economic rapid expansion is also related to the emergence in village townships and coastal regions of many new small businesses, mostly in new businesses (Tsai 2015; Babbie, 1995). However, SMEs at the beginning of their research and development activities would always face capital shortages and require proper project management assistance. Small and medium enterprises need input, support, assistance and the guidance of others. This help may freely be available or has to be created and formalized (Mazurkiewicz, 2011; Markatou, 2011, Hamad, 2011; Hamad, 2012; Hua Song *et al.*, 2016), which is mostly identified as a project management process. They highlighted that these support networks facilitate the persistence and progression of small and medium enterprises.

In contemporary times, project management has gained greater acceptance among board industries and companies now identify vast majority their business processes as projects, according to Sdrolias, Sirakoulis, Trivellas & Poulis (2005), so project management (PM) has evolved as an area of practice that organisations are progressively using to gain sustainable competitive advantage. As shown in large-scale industries and organisations, project management (PM) encourages terms of time and cost delivery productivity. Perhaps it profoundly contributes to quality compliance, and that in turn affects company performance. The push for the success of small and medium-sized enterprises is equally related to all the expenditures, time,

and efficiency of their enterprises, which implies that project management is absolutely vital for SMEs' sustainability everywhere in the world. However, there is limited literature that determines the relationship between the success of PMs and SMEs.

Highlighting the nature of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to the development and the myriad challenges limiting the success and sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the modern era, this study aims to investigate how the project management process could impact the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises. Again the research attempts to see technology's mediating impact on the connection among the study's key hypothesised factors. Since there is a lack of research that was carried out in the area, which specifically focuses on the association among the phase of project management and small and medium enterprise (SME) business performance in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In order to fill in this information gap, these problems will be discussed through this research.

In the UAE, there were 350,000 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as of mid-2020. They accounted for over 94% of all businesses in the country, with 73% working in wholesale and retail, 16% in services, and 11% in industry. They employed over 86% of the private sector's workforce and generated over 60% of GDP. Moreover, businesses in the UAE are categorised as micro, small, medium, or big based on the number of employees they employ, as shown in Table 1.1. A micro business has fewer than five employees; a small business has five to nine employees; a medium-sized business has ten to fifty employees; and a large business has more than fifty employees (Oudah *et al.*, 2018).

Table 1.1: Categories of SMEs in UAE

Enterprise Category	Employees Number
Micro	Less than 5
Small	5 to 19
Medium	20 to 49
Large	More than 50

Several variables impacting small and medium-sized enterprises have been intensively studied, but the fewer emphasis has been devoted to how the joint impact

on the relation among the project management process and the business performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and how much it affects small and medium-sized enterprises' performance. Since most of the academic research that was carried out was grounded on the developed countries and only a limited number existed from the developing countries, additionally, these studies have been done in segregation. Accordingly, this research puts emphasis on understanding how the project management process affects SMEs' success in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

1.2 Problem Statement

SMEs are units that revolutionize and commercialize their innovativeness (Meldrum, 2008; Hua Song *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, SMEs are not only important in the economic sense, but this sector also minimizes unemployment, reducing poverty and encouraging innovation. Hence, improving the performance and survival of SMEs is of national importance to any country, particularly the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, SMEs in the UAE hardly survive their first twelve months after starting their business. According to Ahmad (2011), about 30% of these SMEs go out of business in the first year, and more than 50% hardly survive the first five years of business commencement which is due to the issues in project management. The implication of such negative development of project management in SMEs creates issues for society since a lot of people would be out of jobs, the living standard will drop, and poverty will increase among people. The situation can affect government revenue since there would be a drop in taxable income.

The key obstacles for small and medium-sized enterprises in the UAE are the scarcity of skilled and experienced workers, financing constraints, and the prevailing negative economic prospects of SMEs. Kumar *et al.* (2016) noted that company credibility, financial efficiency, corporate social responsibility are connected to the constraints of SMEs in the UAE. These are the main emerging variables for enticing investors and long-term financing, and such factors provoke the need to re-look at the project management process in the UAE.

A variety of plans and practices were instituted by the UAE government to reverse the country's pattern of business closure; however, the problem remains. In

order to resolve the situation, but to no extent, programs including entrepreneurship training, the issuance of financial assistance, and tax exemptions were targeted towards SMEs. In order to gain insights into what drives the sustainability of small and medium businesses, several investigations have been reported over the ages. In the new conception, the presence of a properly organised project management process in small and medium-sized enterprises has been developed to make a considerable impact on the prosperity of the country. The overall output of both financial and business indicators is nevertheless greatly impacted by the project management process of the company. There are management gap circumstances where an organisation is reluctant to safeguard the company, or there is a shortage of appropriate resources even if there is lucrative opportunities given. Ease of access to finance and inadequate resources are major obstacles to the rising economy of micro-enterprises and SMEs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

There have been several studies (Ali, 1989; Abdalla & Al-Homoud, 2001; Abdulkhaleq, 2006; Mello & Flint, 2009; Lotfi *et al.*, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2015; Abdullah *et al.*, 2016) that have identified the limitation and difficulties facing SMEs globally, the Arab constituency and particularly in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Despite numerous policy initiatives, including economic instruments of which the number of academic researches on SMEs in the UAE is still limited. This is why this study wants to focus on the areas of the project management process to help the SMEs in UAE to flourish by identifying the factors that would help to make SMEs a success

Most SMEs in the UAE are first-time entrepreneurs and do not have much business experience, expertise, and knowledge in all the functional areas, especially in the areas of project management. Thus, SMEs have minimal exposure to accessing project management processes available in the market. This is one of the reasons that they face challenges in deciding any project management decisions and shrinking themselves for the opportunity of raising capital for further growth and prosperity.

Despite the fact that the SME sector accounts for 95% of all businesses in the UAE, growth patterns might cause a range of issues for the manager to deal with. Every SME manager's wish is to see their firm grow and prosper for a long period. In contrast, the majority of SMEs in the country are led by their owners/CEOs and employ traditional management techniques (ALAmeri & Musa, 2021). The firm functions are still based on old and traditional management thinking, and the current

marketing project management process is not incorporated in virtually all SMEs' business strategies in the UAE (ALAmeri & Musa, 2021). As a result of inefficient management, SMEs have been forced to wind down operations abruptly, and the UAE has seen many incidents of foreign business owners exiting the country by distributing their losses among creditors and banks (Courrent, 2018).

Numerous small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), particularly in the service segment, do not own any estate, assets, or infrastructure to include a financial institution with any kind of assurance or guarantees for verification. Consequently, because of such limitations, several SMEs find it difficult to get credit facilities from financial institutions. In view of the above, as demonstrated in this instance, there is a void of scientific literature evidence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but some studies by academics in other countries have recognized in relevant fields of research that SMEs play a crucial role in addressing crucial global problems such as gender empowerment, environmental issues and alleviating poverty. Although in the associated fields of science, some findings made by academics in other regions have acknowledged that there is a strong necessity for a study to assess the combined influence of the project management process on the business performance of SMEs in the UAE context.

1.3.1 Research Gap

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are regarded to be the important drivers of economic growth, and time and cost inefficiencies affect the potential of the business to encourage reach the desired growth and ensure operating expenses. In a sequence of observational studies spanning twenty economies throughout five continents, Smith (2010) found that 90% of project management for small companies mostly struggles from cost overruns. Cost overruns seem to be a global issue and manifest in various forms of projects, but it is also more troubling that the cost increase has not been reduced over the past 70 years (Agostini *et al.*, 2015).

The issue of time overlap is of global concern (Hamad, 2007; Agostini *et al.*, 2015). Time overrun contributes to the creation of adversarial relationships, lawsuits, litigation, issues with profitability, and a general impression of anticipation among parties involved in the project. Time overruns in small business ventures have been

one of the industry's most prevalent issues, which could have a variety of detrimental effects on projects (Mazurkiewicz, 2011; Erick *et al.*, 2014).

Small business ventures also encounter project postponements, cost overruns, and quality non-compliance, resulting in poor results and disgruntled parties (Latham, 1994; Agostini *et al.*, 2015). Such enhancements primarily impact cost and time delays in projects. The substantial rise in the increased cost is typically due to costly redesign and can rise to 10-15% of the contract value (Masadeh, 2008; Erick *et al.*, 2014). Even though the topic of PM has attracted the attention of many scholars in different fields, the investigation of PM among SMEs, especially in the context of the UAE, is still under investigation regardless of the huge support from the government for this sector since it has a great contribution to the country economy in terms of employment and GDP.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions from this research are:

- What are the factors influencing the project management process towards the business performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)?
- What is the relationship between the project management process factors and business performance of Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs)?
- What would be the framework of the project management implementation process that can be used to enhance the business performance of SMEs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)?

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

This research aims to institute a framework for project management implementation process for improving the business performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the United Arab Emirates. The specific objectives of this study are addressed as follows:

- To identify the factors influencing the project management process towards the business performance of SMEs.

- To determine the relationship between these identified factors in the project management process and business performance of SMEs.
- To establish an improved framework for project management implementation process with the business performance of SMEs in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is vibrant for the research area because 75% of the United Arab Emirates (UAE)'s labour force is engaged with SMEs, while 85% of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) businesses are SMEs, and finally, more than 50% of the exports by the UAE are carried out by SMEs, and there are more than 120,000 SMEs that are based in the UAE and is from the formal and informal sectors (Ali, 1989; Abdullah *et al.*, 2016).

In developed countries, SMEs are contributing heavily to the national economy. In Australia, more than half of the employment takes place in the SME business segment (Department of Innovation, 2011). While, in developing countries, SME businesses play a similar or even more significant role in the country's economy (World Bank, 2010). Whereas, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), SMEs form an integral part of the country's economy (Abdulkhaleq, 2006; Abdullah *et al.*, 2016). These SME businesses vary in the level of success they reach, and the time they take to reach a given level of success. Numerous elements are paying to SME business performance, and the failure of the SMEs hamper the development and economic goals of countries (World Bank, 2010).

Currently, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there are over 127,000 businesses in the economy, with 91% belonging to the SME sector (Ali, 1989; Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001; Abdulkhaleq, 2006; Abdullah *et al.*, 2016). Although many businesses are forced out of business within the first few years, SMEs were found to be supporting the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of families (World Bank, 2010). Therefore, it is critical to understand the project management process that contributes to the success levels of these SMEs and the pitfalls that would need to be avoided.

Failure to thrive and failure on a permanent level to produce income directly impacts the standard of living of all families participating in the small and medium-sized business segment. The stagnation of small and medium-sized enterprises would raise the jobless rate, thereby exercising additional pressure on the government to compensate the poorest communities with more welfare benefits. The achievement of the SMEs will offer the much-needed income to the families that are dependent on them, provide employment and spread economic development across the country, etc.

Various factors are influencing the level of performance and success of SMEs. Among the reasons that contribute to the success of the SME are the know-how of managing a business, availability of finance, having a good business model, experience being involved with the business, and overall project management process. This study will focus only on the fact that affects the SME's business performance, namely, the project management process. This research model focuses on the above direct variables and moderating variables (based on business types, such as manufacturing and service) to discourse the identified research questions and to meet the research objectives identified earlier in this chapter.

As shown by Vedovello & Godinho (2003), Vedovello & Godinho (2003), Lalkaka (2002), SMEs differ from large organizations in several important aspects such as resource limitations, informal strategies, and mainly, project management process. These differences have created outcomes such as SMEs having a higher failure rate than large businesses. As a result of this, slow growth rates are reported in SMEs. Many SMEs have selected resource pools that provide the foundation for business growth and development.

Since these, research needs to be carried out to recognise the effect of the method of project management impacting the business performance of SMEs. The project management method and business success for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the United Arab Emirates are the subject of this research (UAE). Upon the analysis of the data collected, the research will be provided with recommendations for the decision-makers and other stakeholders.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The scope of this research is limited due to the reasons for practicality and time constraints with limited resources at the disposal of the researcher. Due to the above, the scope of the research is limited to the following specific variables and factors. Besides, the SMEs that will be selected to cover are only coming from the states within the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Since the total amount of construction companies SMEs is 4000 in the UAE, therefore, the sample size of this study will be 351 respondents determined based on Krejcie & Morgan (1970). In addition, the data distribution was checked, and identified 23 outliers were from the 391 questionnaires that were disseminated. Finally, only 260 respondents were used for statistical analysis using SPSS version 23 for the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmation factor analysis (CFA) by employing AMOS.

The scope is to study the association between project management process and business performance for the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE); hence, the other factors that influence the SME's performance are not studied. To address the research questions stated before in an effective manner, the descriptive method has been applied during this research. The research method chapter will examine the study with a more detailed approach to understand the available methods and techniques available to carry out an empirical investigation of the project management process and business performance for the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Therefore, the selected method of research as indicated above is carefully selected to attain the overall objectives of this research.

The study scope in terms of research methodology will be the descriptive method of research, which will be employed while predominantly relying on the quantitative methods but without completely ruling out the qualitative input. The next step will focus on the research strategy to be implemented. The third step is exploring the various sampling methods and selecting the most appropriate method to suit the requirements. For the research scope, the research framework will be defined to capture the essence of the study. Data collection techniques will also be considered to achieve an optimum outcome.

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VITA

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During his professional life he have worked on several projects in the production & corporate sector, he has been the visible face and team leader in the planning, analysis, and procedures, with direct interaction with senior management and directors. The end goal and his primary contribution has been the presentation of results to formulate changes that have made it possible to make timely decisions to strengthen the corporate strategic guidelines by aligning with all business units.

