

TEAM EMPOWERMENT AND PROJECT SUCCESS: SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ENABLER MECHANISM

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Abstract

Project success has long been a central theme in information systems research, with customary methods emphasizing cost, technical knowledge and scheduling adherence. However, modern-day researchers increasingly stress the function of psychological enablers that shape team behaviors and collective performance outcomes. Accordingly, this research is designed to address this serious concern. Grounded in the principles of Social Identity Theory and by investigating how team empowerment can impact project success through mediation mechanism of team identity, we filled this unmapped study gap. Overall, 350 responses were collected from IT professionals working in Pakistan. Through rigorous PLS-SEM method, the outcomes affirm the mediating role of team identity in the relationship between TE and PS. By focusing on the emerging economy context, this research contributes to addressing the scarcity of empirical evidence on how TE influences PS through TI. As such, it offers a preliminary yet important step toward understanding the complex interactions between psychological enablers and performance outcomes.

Key Words: Team Empowerment, Project Success, Social Identity Theory, Psychological Enabler Mechanism, SEM

Introduction

The present day vigorous and collaborative work environments, primarily within the rapidly changing sector of Information Technology, realizing project success (PS) be contingent to technical competences as well as on social and psychological dynamics within project teams. IT project managers often adopt empowerment initiatives, expecting that superior autonomy and decision-making capacity will translate into improved outcomes. Team empowerment (TE) is the degree to which members are established sovereignty, prompt decision-making and resource provision, has grown broader attention for its role in enhancing creativity, adaptableness and shared

performance upshots (Seibert et al., 2011; Siddiqui & Ali et al., 2023). While team identity (TI) is defined as a shared sense of belonging to achieve objectives, has also been known as a key enabler of cooperation, teamwork and enduring PS in uncertain situations (Heere & James, 2007; Lock et al., 2012). Complementary research highlighted that while empowerment nurtures initiative and concern, its influence is fully realized when teams own a shared identity aligning individual efforts with project intents (Siddiqui & Shaukat et al., 2023). Hitherto, notwithstanding this credit, empirical research into how TI mediates the empowerment and success linkage remain embryonic, in IT sector of Pakistan where operational, cultural and contextual dynamics may yield distinctive intents (Shahid et al., 2024).

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) positions a compelling framework to comprehend the mediating role of TI. SIT posits that individuals internalize a sense of self centered on team associations and that such social identification brings up coordinated behavior and configuration with overall team goals (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). A recent study of Siddiqui and Shaukat (2024) applied SIT framework and found that strong team identification enables them to work collectively and collaboratively and continue when facing hurdles within the IT sector. Empowerment initiatives that instill a shared purpose and recognize individuals as integral contributors to team development are likely to reinforce this sense of identity, leading to higher project intents. Based on SIT framework, this study forms several hypothesized linkages including, a. TE contributing to PS, b. empowerment fostering TI, c. TI predicting PS, and d. TI mediating the empowerment-success link.

Although TE and TI gain growing recognition, though the literature highlighted several research gaps First, a large number of the existing research on PS elements has been conducted in Western based industries, offering inadequate acumen into project-based knowledge industries including IT sector of Pakistan (Shahid et al., 2024). Second, SIT theory has been widely applied to elucidate leadership, social cohesion and shared identification, it's prospective to brighten how empowerment translates into project consequences through TI remains immature (Arshad et al., 2022). Scholar like Stahl and Maznevski (2021) emphasized that cultural context is a pivotal factor in determining identity-based team processes, yet most research lack of care collectivist-based surroundings where team belongingness exerts robust impact. Khan (2020) found that psychological parameters like TI and cohesion play a vital role in the working environment of country like Pakistan. They further stated that empirical evidence testing mediating mechanisms of psychological parameters remains uncommon. Based on these literature support, there is a dire need to investigate SIT-mediated mechanisms within IT sectors in culturally distinct economy like Pakistan. The highlighted gaps suggested incorporating SIT framework as a success mechanism in project-driven industry settings and investigating the team dynamics with technology driven IT sector.

Apart from these broader gaps, the study also developed specific theoretical and empirical gaps. Despite the fact that TE has been linked with positive project consequences, literature highlighted a lack of clarity on how empowerment nurtures stronger TI in hi-tech driven IT sector. While TI has been recognized as a predictor of

teamwork and collaboration, the direct relationship between TI and project performance in dynamic IT projects remains less explored (Litchfield et al., 2018). The direct linkage between TE and PS has been established in generic project management literature, but the nuanced function of team identification as an intervening mechanism is not sufficiently examined (Siddiqui & Shaukat, 2024). Prior research, explicitly investigating the mediating role of TI between empowerment and project performance is fragmented to a larger extent, with calls for mediating mechanism that integrate SIT theory into IT project management (Shahid et al., 2024). By addressing of these potential gaps, this research will advance both theoretical precision and practical understanding of how psychological processes shape PS in IT sector of Pakistan.

Finally, the literature also reflected that empowerment does not act in isolation but interacts with social processes of team cohesion and identification to shape performance outcomes (Shah et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the mediating role of TI has rarely been empirically tested, without this empowerment failing to deliver expected benefits. Consequently, the core problem lies in the absence of empirical evidence on the relationship among empowerment–TI–success mechanism within the IT sector of Pakistan. Keeping in view of the highlighted problem, the current research seeks to uncover how empowerment translates into project outcomes through the mechanism of TI. The following research questions are addressed:

How critical is TE for enhancing IT project performance outcomes?

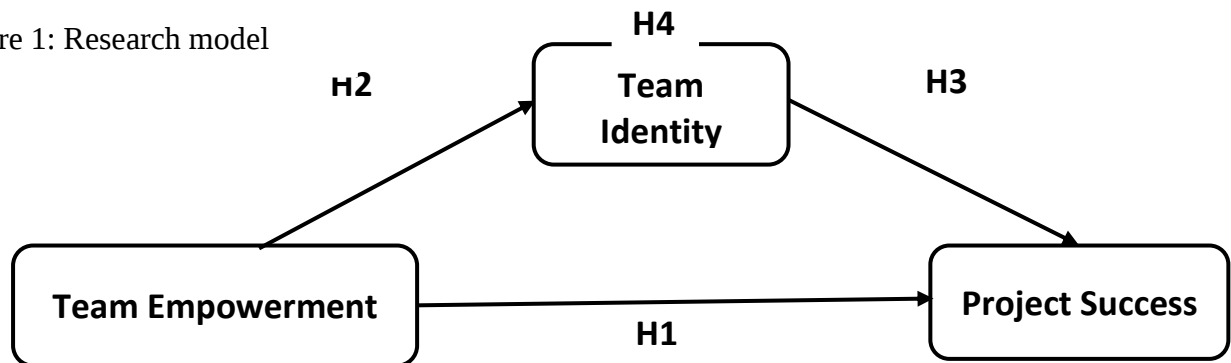
To what extent does TI mediate the relationship between TE and PS in IT project teams in Pakistan?

This research offers several core significances. First, it advances theoretical knowledge by introducing Social Identity Theory as descriptive pathway linking empowerment to PS, filling an important gap in leadership and project management literature. In addition, it offers empirical confirmation from IT sector of Pakistan, where such relational dynamics remain less explored, inspiring the global discourse on cross-cultural project perspectives. Finally, the study outcomes will inform organizational strategies for team building and empowerment, demonstrating that nurturing TI can strengthen the positive effects of empowerment, thereby refining project outcomes in competitive and fast-paced IT sector. This acumen will facilitate project managers in investing not only in structural empowerment but also in interventions meant at strengthening the shared identity and consistency of project team members.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

The literature review has been structured to address the proposed hypothetical relationship as reflected in the given figure.

Figure 1: Research model



The extant body of literature has linked empowerment to higher project and organizational performances. Both, at the individual and team levels, empowerment boosts intrinsic motivation, proactivity and efficiency, which translate into two important pillars of PS including coordination and superior role performance (Seibert et al., 2011). When project teams are empowered, they exhibit greater level of discretion over task methods and sequencing, allowing prompt response to resolve issues and improved schedule adherence particularly salient in IT projects where requirements and constraints evolve rapidly. Archetypal project team-level evidence demonstrated that structurally empowered teams report greater process quality and stakeholder need fulfillment (for instance, Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). From the viewpoint of project management, leadership that elucidates purpose of the project and authorize respected responsibilities tends to advance the traditional success criteria of scope, cost, schedule and stakeholder need fulfillment (Müller & Turner, 2010). Moreover, scholar like Siddiqui & Ali et al. (2023) examine the relational impact of TE on PS and found substantial. Collectively, this stream of evidence backings H1 hypothesis reflecting as: empowered teams are in good positioned to learn rapidly, make timely decision and maintain stakeholder alignment, central to PS in IT projects.

Likewise, empowerment does not maneuver only itself sufficiently, it also shapes the behavior of the people how they relate themselves into team. According to SIT theory team member feel more empowered and psychologically strengthen when they experience genuine influence over team goals in spite of individual goals. Present day research focusing on empowering leadership style exhibited that information dissemination, yielding discretion and developing confidence in followers promote a mutual sense of agreement, enhanced perceived respect and work engagement (Joo et al., 2016). Whereas team identification characteristics of leadership reflected that those leaders who develop a communal social identity, motivate subordinates and raise identification (Wang et al., 2025). The extant body of knowledge grounding on theoretical prospective links empowering leadership and team identification through collectivism and cooperative culture with team (Zhao et al., 2024). Empowered teams who experience voice and task significance are more likely to internalize the

objective of team as self-relevant, reinforcing team identification. Accordingly, H2 hypothesis reflects as: empowered teams substantially influence team identification. Identification can be defined as the capability of team members predicting themselves into collective efforts, coordination and motivation under pressure. The past literature showed that TI is strongly allied with performance improvement including desirable outcomes (Lock et al., 2012; Litchfield et al., 2018). Identity aligns individual aims into collective endeavor, reducing social apprehension, civilizing information sharing factors to improve team and performance effectiveness in project-based settings. A robust shared identification nurture knowledge integration, stakeholder satisfaction and higher quality deliverables in IT project management team environment, where mutual coordination and swift problem solving are the norm (Siddiqui & Shaukat, 2024). Similarly, TI upholds norm internalization around quality and continuous improvement, help in managing project work in accordance with established goal (Litchfield et al., 2018). This mechanism 'identifying as a team' aligning with SIT theory synchronized project management activities and augmenting superior PS. Accordingly, H3 hypothesis reflecting as: team identification substantially influences PS.

SIT theory guides a coherent mediating mechanism, suggesting that empowerment fosters robust team identification, which then mobilizes collected effort and diligence augmenting PS. Literature offers valuable insight. For instance, scholar like Cheng et al. (2022) stated that empowering leader influence performance outcomes through identity-oriented pathways rather than influencing alone. Structured identification translates autonomy into joint ownership of deliverables, strengthening quality assurance and meeting stakeholders' needs. The study of Burhan and Khan (2024) further validated that identification mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and firm performance outcomes. Therefore, TI is a theoretically driven mechanism that explains how TE translate into PS. This stream of evidence backings H4 hypothesis reflecting as: empowered teams through mechanism of identification improve PS in IT projects.

On the whole, the available literature revealed that TE and TI are noteworthy yet too little integrated constructs in translating PS. TE directly facilitates creativity and trust within teams in such that higher identity augmenting superior performance.

Methods

This study adopted a quantitative research approach to access the role of TI in the relationship between TE and PS with the Pakistan's IT sector. This approach enables systematic hypotheses testing offering valid conclusions between variable associations, deemed fit for this study (Varshney & Varshney, 2025). In addition, cross sectional design allowed data collection from broader range of participants at a single point in time, suitable for dynamic project-based settings (Shaukat & Alam, 2023).

IT projects are characterized by complexity; time bound and coordinated teamwork, suitable to study empowerment and TI dynamics. Past literature accentuated that empowerment intervention may produce different consequences depending upon

socio cultural background (Khan, 2020). Accordingly, this study filling the contextual gaps focusing on Pakistan's IT projects by offering pragmatic insight for a rapidly growing knowledge economy. The employees of the IT firms have been chosen as target population. The selection of IT sector depends on its project-oriented structure and strategic importance for the economic development of Pakistan, which profoundly grounded on software development projects and exports of various IT services. Data was collected through purposive sampling technique from individual involved in various roles including project leads, developers and team members. This technique assists the researchers to approach respondents that are most relevant to the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020), thus deemed logical for the current study. Overall, 350 responses were collected, meeting PLS-SEM sample size requirements. Hair et al. (2021) suggested that suggests that the study sample size should be at least 10 times the maximum number of inner/outer model paths, thus the current study ensuring adequate stability and statistical power.

Data was gathered by disseminating questionnaire both electronically and in paper form to IT experts working in various cities of Pakistan. The official channels were utilized to contact the IT experts and permission was also sought from HR departments before disseminating the questionnaire. All respondents were assured confidentiality and response rate were maximized through follow up patterns. Participants were also informed that data would be used for academic purposes solely. After screening for incomplete response, 350 responses were finalized and utilized for analysis. The questionnaire was **pre-tested** among IT experts to check clarity and typographical errors. Slight adjustments were made before full-scale administration. For pre-testing overall 30 experts were contacted for questionnaire pre-testing. The respondents' demographic breakdown includes respondents from managerial and technical roles having vast experience in IT projects.

The study variables were measured using **authenticated scales from extant knowledge** with minor contextual rephrasing were also made relevance to IT projects for better comprehension. The questionnaire established sturdy content validity as scale were drawn from earlier research focused on project management. The items of variables were rated on a three-point **likert scale**. **PS operationalized by means of 14 items** adapted through the work of (Aga et al., 2016). TE operationalized by means of 6 items adapted through the work of (Tomasi et al., 2015), whereas TI operationalized by means of 4 items adapted through the work of (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Overall items formed the constructs involved in the current study framework.

The gathered data was examined through PLS-SEM employing **Smart-PLS tool**. PLS-SEM is mostly suitable for predictive research frameworks, theory testing and multipart relationships among variables (Hair et al., 2021). Moreover, this research compliance the standard ethical principles In doing so, prior consent was obtained from all participants and responses confidentiality was also assured. No personal identifiers were documented, confirming anonymity of participants. Ethical approval to conduct the research was attained by the university IRB. The procedural adoptions, appropriate sampling, instrumentation and analysis for this study are aligned with

organizational best practices and project management research to ensure reliability and precision.

Results

The analysis is divided into two steps, including evaluation of measurement and structural components of the model. Measurement model has been assessed through various techniques. Starting with loadings, alpha and composite reliability statistics Gefen and Straub (2005) stated that $>.5$ loadings are deemed suitable, whereas Alpha's acceptable limit is greater than equal to $.7$, while composite reliability value should also be greater than equal to $.7$. The findings of the study demonstrated that the study data meet the acceptance requisite. Similarly, AVE has also been established. The values of AVE for each construct is greater than $.5$, meeting the standard acceptance criteria (e.g. Shaukat et al., 2022).

In addition, discriminant validity for the current study has also been sorted. In doing so, two major analyses have been performed including Fornell-Larcker and HTMT ratio. Both of these are widely applicable technique in literature to establish data validity. According to Fornell-Larcker principles, each construct must reflect more variation with its own indicators, and the square root of the AVE for each construct must be greater than its highest correlation with any other construct (Sarstedt et al., 2021). Whereas we also evaluated HTMT ratio with standard acceptance criteria of $<.9$ as suggested by (Henseler et al., 2015). The study findings are consistent with the suggested guidelines. The details of both analyses are appended separately below (table 2, 3).

The predictive performance of the proposed model was estimated using structural equation modeling. Suitable approach to access causal relationship. Hypotheses testing have been performed subsequently. H1 proposed that TE influences PS, and the findings exposed that t value and p values lies within tolerable limit, accepting H1. H2 proposed that TE influences TI, and the findings exposed that t value and p value lie within tolerable limit, accepting H2. H3 proposed that Ti influences PS, and the findings exposed that t value and p values lie within tolerable limit, accepting H3. We also accessed mediating role of TI between TE and PS. The findings exposed that indirect influence of TE by means of TI remain positive, total effect also significant and with the inclusion of TI, the effect remain satisfactory, accepting H4. The details of hypotheses testing are appended below (table 4, 5).

Table 1: Reliability/validity statistics

	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
PS1	0.74	0.94	0.94	0.56
PS2	0.74			
PS3	0.68			
PS4	0.71			
PS5	0.77			
PS6	0.76			
PS7	0.73			
PS8	0.74			
PS9	0.67			
PS10	0.75			
PS11	0.81	0.86	0.86	0.59
PS12	0.76			
PS13	0.81			
PS14	0.78			
TE1	0.74			
TE2	0.80			
TE3	0.81	0.83	0.83	0.66
TE4	0.72			
TE5	0.77			
TE6	0.74			
TI1	0.84			
TI2	0.83			
TI3	0.77			
TI4	0.80			

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker criteria

	PS	TE	TI
PS	0.75		
TE	0.67	0.77	
TI	0.65	0.67	0.82

Table 3: HTMT ratio

	PS	TE	TI
PS			
TE	0.74		
TI	0.73	0.78	

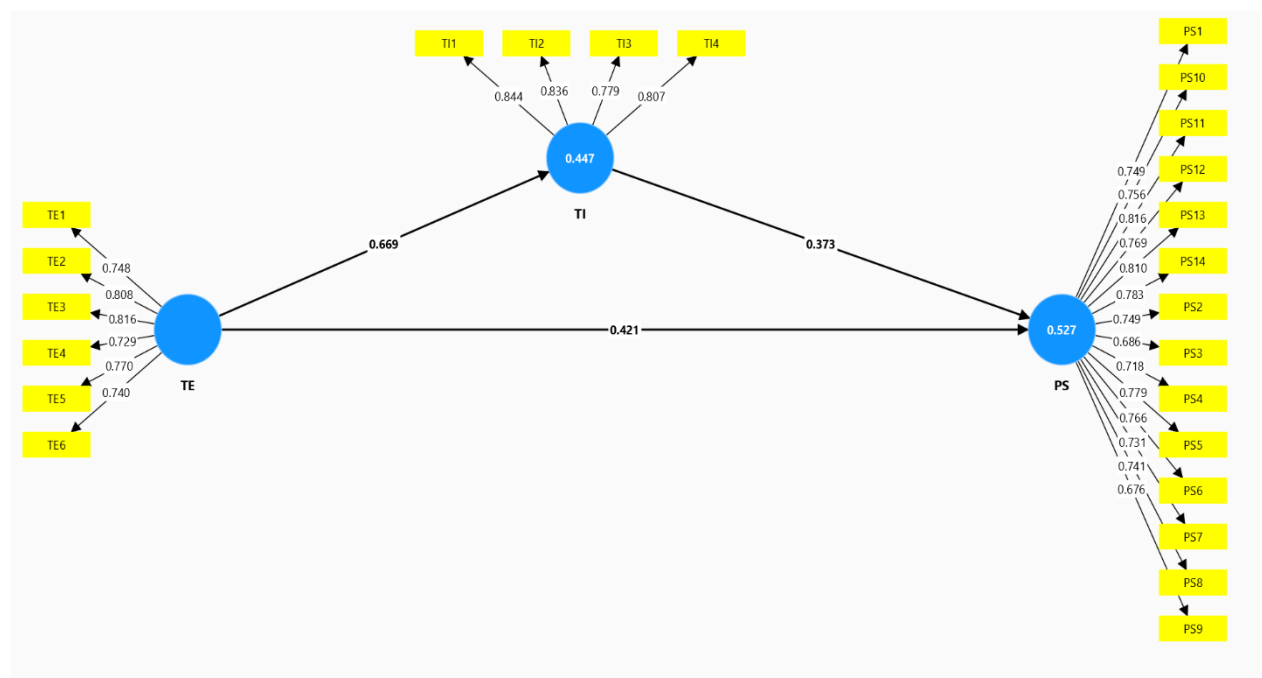
Table 4: Direct effect

	B	SD	T	P	Decision
H1	0.42	0.07	5.94	0.00	Supported
H2	0.67	0.03	18.53	0.00	Supported
H3	0.37	0.08	4.66	0.00	Supported

Table 5: Indirect effect

	Total effect			Direct effect			Indirect effect		
	B	T	P	B	T	P	B	T	P
H4	0.67	16.41	0.00	0.42	5.94	0.00	0.25	4.49	0.00

Figure 2: Measurement model



The findings accentuate the importance of psychological enabler's mechanisms in translating TE into tangible project outcomes. Particularly, the mediating role of TI highlights the relevance of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), emphasizing the motivational power of belongingness in team settings. Nevertheless, the mediating role of TI has rarely been empirically tested, without this empowerment failing to deliver expected benefits. The distinctive outcomes of the current research extend existing body of research that largely focused on Western perspectives (e.g. Shahid et al., 2024) by signifying their applicability in the Information Technology sector of emerging economy Pakistan. This study also addresses the core problem that lies in the absence of empirical evidence on the relationship among empowerment–identity–success mechanism, offering a collectivist-oriented viewpoint where identity–

based processes may be particularly influential. The adopted PLS-SEM analysis confirmed the hypothesized relationships between TE, TI and PS. TI function a significant mediating role, thereby offering empirical support for Social Identity Theory within the IT sector of Pakistan.

Likewise, findings suggested that PS in IT settings is best achieved when empowerment initiatives are coupled with team identification. It is further advisable to project managers that empowerment alone is insufficient; promoting TI is equally essential for sustainable project performance.

The current research makes important contributions for practitioners in project management and academic scholars. Theoretically, it expands SIT theory application by empirically testing the mediating role of TI. The SIT theory has been widely accredited in organizational behavior context, its relevance to project-oriented settings in emerging countries has been less examined. The current research offers a superior knowledge to identity-based mechanisms in IT project teams, by integrating empowerment initiatives. Practically, findings suggested that TE becomes more impactful when coupled with identity-building processes, strengthening team shared goals and teamwork. By validity the achievement of PS through empowerment and identity initiatives, this research suggested a roadmap for practitioners to manage project work efficiently. It is advisable for practitioners to develop empowerment programs that integrate collective goal settings and identification with team-based project environment. Apart from these two important contributions, this research extends mythological contributions. AS PLS-SEM has been utilized as advanced analytical technique, this research also sets a methodological benchmark for upcoming project seeking to discover similar psychosocial constructs in developing economy.

Future Research Direction

This research applied cross-sectional design, deemed fits to investigate psychological interventions however, longitudinal design should also employ to see variation in cost and effect relationships of the current research model. TI is a shared sense of belonging to achieve objectives, and considered as a key enabler of cooperation, teamwork and enduring PS (Heere & James, 2007). Similarly, team performance is the outcome of a dynamic process of member interaction (Kim et al., 2020), an important psychological factor impacting PS. Therefore, researchers suggested that team performance' as mediator variable in their research model

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