SILESIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY PUBLISHING HOUSE

SCIENTIFIC PAPERS OF SILESIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY 2025
ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT SERIES NO. 239

PROJECT SUCCESS OR PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUCCESS – DISCUSSION ON TERMINOLOGY

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Purpose: The aim of the article is to conduct an analysis of the literature from 2015-2024 in the field of evolution of the definition of project success and project management success. Also helps in identifying the key conceptual distinctions between them.
Design/methodology/approach: The study is based on a mixed approach. In the quantitative part, a bibliographic review was carried out in selected international databases, identifying publications that meet the inclusions and exclusions. In the qualitative part, an analysis of the content of a deliberately selected sample was used.
Findings: The analysis highlights four key dimensions distinguishing project success from project management success. It also reveals a clear evolution in the conceptualization of both project success and project management success over the past decade.
Research limitations/implications: The limitation of the study is the selectivity of the publication sample and the focus on English-language sources. It is worth expanding the analysis to include local and comparative perspectives, taking into account cultural differences in understanding project success.
Practical implications: Separating project success from project management success allows for better alignment of evaluation metrics with the nature of the venture, which is important for project portfolio management and stakeholder communication.
Social implications: Understanding the evolving definitions of project and project management success underscores the human dimension of success—emphasizing collaboration, trust, and shared learning as key elements of sustainable project outcomes.
Originality/value: This study value lies in clarifying the hierarchical and multidimensional relationship between project success and project management success, offering a coherent framework for future empirical and theoretical research.
Keywords: project success, project management success, analysis.
Category of the paper: Literature review.

1. Introduction

The complexity and ambiguity surrounding the definition of success remains one of the most important issues in the field of project management (Murphy, Cormican. 2015). In the literature on the subject, there is still a gap in terms of an unambiguous definition of what we can describe as a successfully completed action. The use of this term, in many cases, depends on the author and his perspective on the issue discussed (Davis, 2017). Some researchers use the above terms to refer to activities in selected aspects of project management, such as leadership, communication, project teams, experience (Müller, Jugdev, 2012; Mullaly, 2014). R. Joslin and R. Müller (2016) use these terms in the context of project management methodologies. Often in the literature on the subject, the term i.e.; "success" is used interchangeably with effectiveness or efficiency, suggesting the need to analyze existing definitions and organize the terminology regarding the meaning of "success" in project management.

Project success and project management success are two different, albeit interrelated, concepts. Confusing them leads to wrong judgments and decisions. While both terms refer to the evaluation of project results, they focus on different dimensions of performance. According to the Project Management Methodology (EU, 2018), project success is achieved when goals are achieved and all end products are developed and accepted by the project client. Turner and Xue (2018) believe that a project is successful when there are appropriate benefits, based on the end products and on schedule and budget.

In contrast, project management success refers to traditional performance measures such as cost, time, and quality that determine the success of project management (Svejvig et al., 2019; Scheffer, Soares, 2023). In other words, the term "project success" is broader and often evaluated by stakeholders after its completion (Silvius, Schipper, 2016), while "project management success" refers to how the project was delivered against established criteria such as cost, time, and scope (Scheffer, Soares, 2023). This distinction has been widely discussed in the literature, with bibliometric analyses confirming the diversity and evolution of success definitions over time (Machado, Martens, 2015).

Despite the growing number of publications on this topic, the project management literature still lacks a systematic analysis of the evolution and demarcation of the two concepts. Existing research typically focuses on single aspects of design success (Joslin, Müller, 2015) or presents fragmentary shots without a deeper analysis of the conceptual difference between the two categories (Serrador, Turner, 2015).

The aim of this article is to conduct a systematic analysis of the literature from 2015 to 2025, aimed at identifying the evolution of definitions and a clear conceptual demarcation between project success and project management success. The study focuses on two research questions: (RQ1) How have the definitions of both terms evolved over the past decade?

and (RQ2) What are the key conceptual differences between project success and project management success in the context of the contemporary theoretical framework?

2. Methods

The study used mixed methods of data collection, i.e. quantitative methods were used, i.e. a review of bibliographic data in selected databases and a qualitative method of a purposefully selected sample (Fig. 1). In the first stage, a list of keywords and phrases was compiled, according to which databases were searched and scientific publications were collected. The database search uses the keyword strings: "project success" and "project management success".

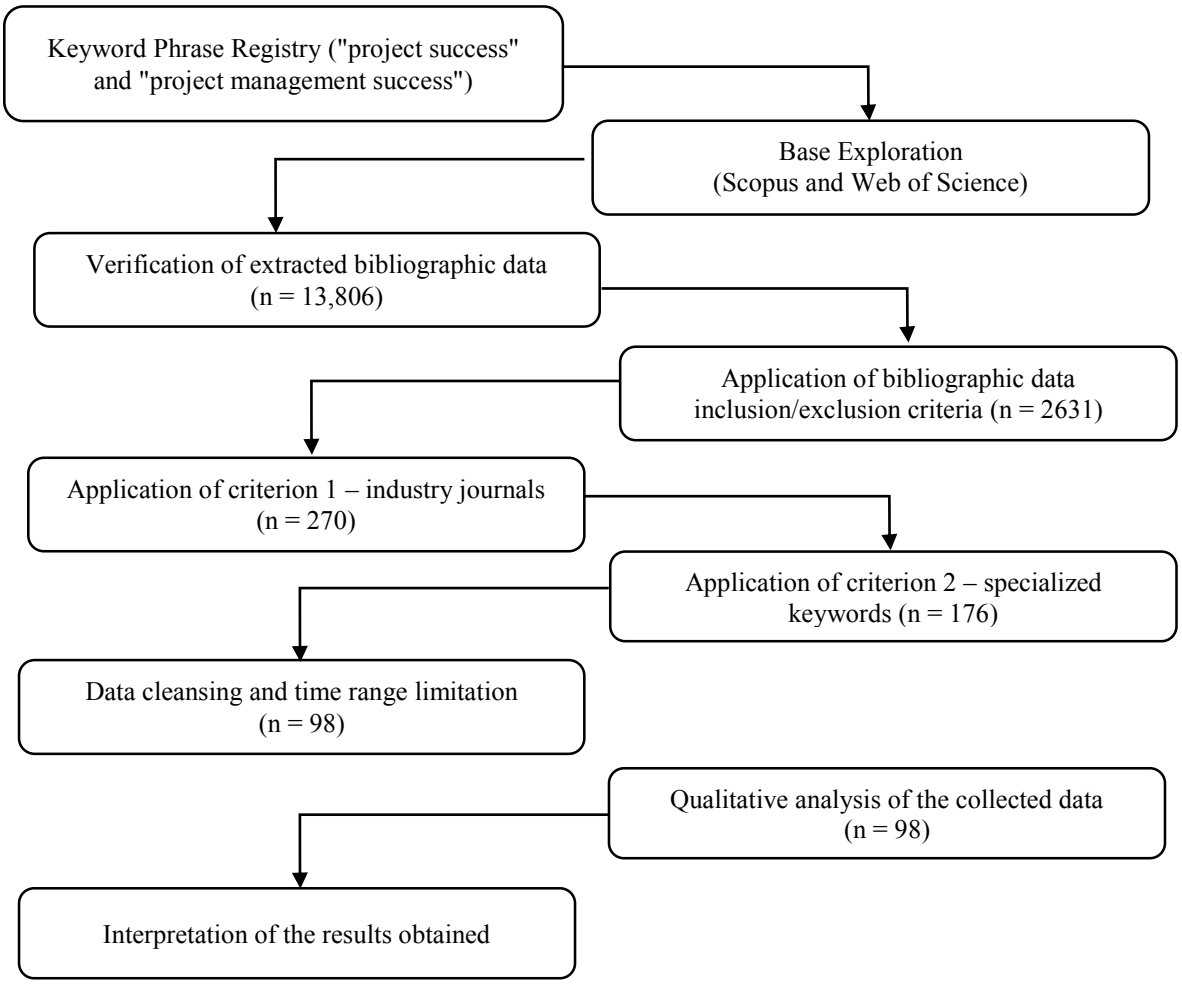

Figure1. Systematic literature review.

Source: own elaboration.

The next step was to identify subsets of potentially relevant articles from the available resources of individual databases that addressed issues related to project success and project management success. For this action, it was necessary to use selection using the following inclusion/exclusion criteria:

- Only materials in Open Access are included.
- Only English language materials are included.
- Only articles, book chapters, books are included.
- No exclusion was made due to the year of publication.

Exploration of selected databases with the use of specific keywords confirmed that the topics related to project success and project management success are widely described in the literature and are the subject of numerous scientific papers (Table 1).

Table 1.
Summary of the results of the review of selected databases

Base	Keywords	Lack Exemptions	Exclusions applied	Criterion 1	Criterion 2
Web of Science	"Project success"	4740	1104	84	56
	"Project Management Success"	169	49	30	15
SCOPUS	"Project success"	8406	1420	138	94
	"Project Management Success"	491	58	18	11
Total number of publications		13,806	2631	270	176

Source: own elaboration.

Criterion 1 was then applied, accepting only publications from journals that had the word "project" in the title. This criterion was intended to ensure that the literature analyzed comes from journals directly related to the field of project management, and not from general management journals, where project management can only be one of many topics. Subsequently, Criterion 2 was applied, concerning the content of the articles, accepting only publications that had the keywords "project success" or "project management success". This allowed us to narrow down the collection to articles that directly and principally referred to the examined issue. In this way, a collection of 176 publications was obtained. After removing duplicates and narrowing the study period to 2015-2024, 98 publications were obtained for research.

3. Results

The analysis included 98 scientific articles published in project management journals. The distribution of publications by source reveals a clear dominance of several key journals in the field (Table 2).

Table 2.
Distribution of publications in selected journals

Name of journal	Number of publications
International Journal of Project Management	20
Journal of Engineering Project and Production Management	15
Journal of Project Management Canada	6
International Journal of Information Technology Project Management	5
Other	52

Source: own elaboration.

The International Journal of Project Management *had the largest share*, with 20 articles. The next positions were taken by the *Journal of Engineering Project and Production Management* with 15 publications and *the Journal of Project Management Canada* with six articles. *The International Journal of Information Technology Project Management* ranked fourth with five publications, while the remaining 52 articles came from a wide range of other specialist journals, where the number of publications in each of them did not exceed three articles.

The timeline of the publication reveals an interesting dynamic of interest in the topic. After a relatively high level in 2015 (n = 9), there was a decline in 2016-2018, when the number of articles oscillated between 3 and 6 per year (Table 3).

Table 3.
Dynamics of publications in the analyzed period

Year of publications	Number of publications
2024	17
2023	14
2022	12
2021	12
2020	13
2019	6
2018	6
2017	3
2016	6
2015	9

Source: own elaboration.

Since 2020, we have seen a clear increase in interest, with the number of publications in 2020 at 13 to 17 publications in 2024. This growing trend suggests that the topics of project success and project management success are gaining importance in the context of increasing project complexity, digital transformation and changing stakeholder expectations.

Contemporary literature challenges the traditionally narrow approach to defining success, pointing out that what constitutes "success" itself remains contested and subject to ongoing debate (Korhonen et al., 2023). For this reason, researchers increasingly distinguish between two related but distinct dimensions: Project Management Success, usually a narrower concept focused on process efficiency, and Project Success, a broader, multidimensional concept related to organizational goal achievement and stakeholder satisfaction (Korhonen et al., 2023).

Understanding this distinction has become crucial for grasping the tensions between operational efficiency and the strategic value that projects deliver.

Contemporary literature challenges the traditionally narrow approach to defining success, pointing out that what constitutes "success" itself remains contested and subject to ongoing debate (Pinto et al., 2022). For this reason, researchers increasingly distinguish between two related but distinct dimensions: Project Management Success, usually a narrower concept focused on process efficiency, and Project Success, a broader, multidimensional concept related to organizational goal achievement and stakeholder satisfaction (Korhonen et al., 2023). Similarly, Pinto and co-authors (2022) argue that project success remains a contested and evolving concept, shaped by contextual, symbolic, and stakeholder-driven factors. Understanding this distinction has become crucial for grasping the tensions between operational efficiency and the strategic value that projects deliver.

3.1. The Evolution of Project Success

The literature reveals considerable diversity in how authors conceptualize both project success and project management success, with definitions varying across time periods and project contexts. Aldayondri and co- authors (2015) defined project success primarily through parameters such as time, cost, and quality, complemented by achieving strategic goals set at project initiation. Abdulla and Al-Hashimi (2019) indicated that decision-makers in high-risk sectors understood success through two core components: efficiency and effectiveness. Their research emphasized that achieving project success required systematic use of tailored methodologies, team integration and precise definition of the scope of work. Serra (2015) linked project success to the realization of benefits and the effective implementation of business strategies, though this still operated within a relatively conventional framework. Authors made little conceptual distinction between managing a project well and achieving project success, with both assessed primarily through delivery metrics.

Similarly, Samimpay and Saghatforoush (2020) reinforced this practical perspective in their study of infrastructure projects, demonstrating that success meant reducing errors, costs and time, as well as improving integration and communication. Sandsto and Reme-Ness (2021) took a slightly different angle, pointing to the Agile framework as a response to the unpredictability of project environments, enabling better control over timeliness, cost control and quality. Obondi (2022) contributed a structured framework by identifying four components of project success: schedule results, cost outcomes, customer satisfaction, and business success. The study showed a positive impact of risk audits and reserve analysis on all four components.

However, around 2020-2022, a notable shift occurred. Researchers began moving away from unidimensional metrics toward more nuanced, multidimensional frameworks that acknowledged the complexity of modern projects. Harwardt (2020) was among the first to propose a three-dimensional model that disaggregated project success into three distinct

elements: project management success, perception success, and outcome success. In his conceptualization, project management success referred to the subjective perception that planning was successful, management was highly effective, and that the project was carried out without major incidents. Perception success captured the satisfaction of all stakeholders and their positive outlook on the project, while outcome success meant a positive evaluation of the result and its compliance with the objectives (Harwardt, 2020).

Building on this momentum, Sajid and co-authors (2021) proposed a model that integrated three complementary dimensions: execution efficiency, customer satisfaction, and strategic value for the organization. The first one refers to the completion of the project according to the set schedule and budget. Customer satisfaction reflects their satisfaction with the results of the project. The last dimension, the added value for the organization, includes the long-term benefits of the project, through the development of competencies and experience in building a position on the market (Sajid et al., 2021). Zaman and co-authors (2021) pushed the boundaries even further by expanding the understanding of success to include social and psychological aspects, pointing to the influence of leadership style and team communication as critical, yet often overlooked, factors.

This period also saw researchers explicitly acknowledging that success criteria could not remain static. Pinto and co-authors (2022) called for continuous updating of success criteria in response to changing social and organizational conditions. Their argument reflected a growing recognition that projects were becoming increasingly complex, stakeholders were diverse, and expectations went beyond traditional parameters (time, cost, schedule). Volden and Welde (2022) translated this insight into practice by developing an ex-post model for the evaluation of public projects that includes six dimensions: efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, other impacts, sustainability, and cost-benefit efficiency.

The most comprehensive reconceptualization emerged in 2023 with Varajão and co-authors' introduction of "Success Management" where success was defined as the realization of values valued by stakeholders and evaluated after the completion of the project. But Varajão and co-authors (2023) went further, arguing that truly understanding project success required analyzing multiple, interconnected aspects: project proposals success, project benefits success, project management success, project outcomes success, project related-operations success.

Liedtka and Locatelli (2023) argued that humans, not technology or mathematical models, shape project success, especially for complex projects with diverse stakeholders. Golomezić and Obradović Posinković (2024) noted that in the context of Industry 4.0 and digital transformation, project success increasingly depended on the organization's ability to integrate and use advanced digital technologies. Kumar and co-authors (2023) highlighted the need for multidimensional and locally tailored models of critical success factors, particularly in developing economies.

Ariffin and co-authors (2024) broadened the definitions of project management success to include organizational and competency aspects, encompassing effective teamwork, skillful task selection, resource calculation and results presentation. Importantly, some authors positioned assessment itself as a strategic tool - assessing project success became not just retrospective evaluation mechanism for on monitor progress against objectives, identifying risks early, and make adjustments for better results (Varajão et al., 2023). In this way, project success volved from a simple verdict into a holistic, dynamic concept encompassing both operational and strategic perspectives.

Recent contributions have continued to broaden the concept. Pirotti and co-authors (2022) note that the project success is a broad concept and difficult to define unambiguously. They point to a set of critical success factors—such as leadership support, clear mission, team competency, communication, and planning—whose presence increases the likelihood of success. Crucially, their work emphasizes that success goes beyond classical criteria and also includes the social dynamics of the team (Zaman et al., 2021).

3.2. Project Management Success

While the concept of project success has expanded dramatically, project management success has retained a more focused, process-oriented character—though its boundaries have also evolved. The success of project management is traditionally defined by the achievement of the project according to certain predetermined metrics (Korhonen et al., 2023). Historically, it appeared less as a standalone concept and more as a precondition or mechanism supporting broader project success.

It this classical form, exemplified by early literature, project management success was understood through the prism of achieving goals related to completion time, costs and other operational indicators. This view reflected a reductionist view of projects as closed technical structures in which success was equated with adherence to a schedule, budget, and procedures. Varajão and co-authors (2021) indicate this distinction clearly: project management success focuses on the management process and, above all, on the successful implementation of the project in terms of scope, schedule and costs, which translates into the degree of efficiency and effectiveness of project implementation. Hussain (2015), Hoxha and McMahan (2019) also emphasize this operational definition, that project management success is measured using time, cost and specifications. Importantly, several authors have noted a potential paradox here: project management success can actually jeopardize the project success, as it is one of the categories of project success (Kumar et al., 2023).

Macheridis (2022) makes this tension explicit, observing that project management success does not necessarily mean the success of the project and vice versa. Project management success criteria focus on efficiency in project work, implementation, monitoring, and project control (Macheridis, 2022). A project can meet all project management success criteria—

delivered on time, within budget, according to specifications—yet still fail to deliver value to stakeholders or achieve strategic objectives.

More recent work has begun to expand the traditional boundaries of project management success, Ariffin and co-authors (2024) extend the definitions of project management success to include organizational and competency aspects. In their view, this reflects an increased recognition of effective teamwork and skillful selection of tasks, calculation of resources and the ability to present results as integral to management success.

Context also matters significantly in how project management success is understood and measured. In the context of IT projects (IS), Varajro and co-authors (2021) note that frequent changes in scope, schedule or costs do not significantly affect the perception of project management success. In such cases, more importance is given to flexibility, adaptability of the team and stakeholder satisfaction than to rigid implementation of the original assumptions. Conversely, in industrial projects, the success of project management is assessed not only through the prism of time and cost, but also through the operational and maintenance efficiency of the completed unit. This means that success metrics extend to the post-implementation stage, taking into account the durability, reliability and operating costs of the project product.

What emerges from this literature is a clear conceptual distinction between two related but separate constructs. The literature also highlights an important paradox: a project can be well managed in terms of time and cost, and thus meet the criteria for project management success, but at the same time fail to achieve broader goals relevant to stakeholders, such as business value, social impact or innovation. This situation points to the need to distinguish between the success of project management and the success of the project itself, which is crucial for further research into the effectiveness of projects in different sectors.

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates a marked conceptual differentiation between project management success and project success. While the former remains rooted in process efficiency and delivery performance, the latter has evolved into a multidimensional, value-oriented construct reflecting organizational strategy, stakeholder expectations, and contextual adaptability.

4. Discussion

The findings from this systematic review reveal a field undergoing significant transformation. Over the past decade, our understanding of what constitutes project success—and how it differs from project management success—has evolved from relatively simple, operationally focused definitions to complex, multidimensional frameworks that acknowledge the inherently contested and context-dependent nature of success**.**

4.1. Evolution of the definition of project success and project management success

The analysis of the collected literature allows to identify four distinct phases in which the importance of project success and project management success takes on a new meaning. In the first phase, covering the years 2015-2017, the traditional approach, based on the classic "golden three", dominated. Aldayondri et al. (2015) defined project success mainly by parameters such as time, cost, and quality, complemented by the achievement of strategic goals set at the beginning of the project. Abdulla and Al-Hashimi (2016), while studying the oil and gas industry in Bahrain, pointed out that companies must complete projects according to scope, schedule, cost, and quality as classic dimensions of success. During this period, the success of project management was mainly defined by operational efficiency.

The next phase, 2018-2019, was characterized by the transition from one-dimensional to multidimensional definitions of success. Pinto and co-authors (2018) observed that the concept of project success has evolved from one-dimensional, simplified, and reductive calculus to multivariate, holistic, and dynamic models. Davis (2017) drew attention to the problem of different interpretations of success criteria by different stakeholder groups, pointing out the lack of a coherent theory determining the success of a project that would take into account the perspective of multiple groups.

The third phase, 2020-2022, saw a shift towards value orientation and value delivery. Sajid and co-authors (2020) proposed a multidimensional approach to project success covering three dimensions: efficiency (completing the project on time or early, within budget), customer impact (customer satisfaction and meeting their requirements), and preparation for the future (contributing to future projects, new products, and opportunities). Harwardt (2020) introduced a particularly interesting three-dimensional model of IT project success, which clearly separates project management success (subjective perception of the effectiveness of planning and management), perception success (satisfaction of all stakeholders) and outcome success (positive evaluation of the result and its compliance with the objectives). In contrast, Varajão and co-authors (2023) introduced the concept of success management, which focuses on defining, leveraging, and securing the success of ventures at the maximum level through a comprehensive awareness of what is valued by stakeholders.

The last, fourth phase, the years after 2023, is characterized by a holistic and contextual approach to success. Liedtka and Locatelli (2023) argued that humans, not technology or mathematical models, shape the success of a project, especially for complex projects with diverse stakeholders. Golomezić and Obradović Posinković (2024) pointed out that in the context of Industry 4.0 and digital transformation, the success of a project is increasingly dependent on the organization's ability to integrate and use advanced digital technologies. Kumar et al. (2023) highlighted the need for multidimensional and locally tailored models of critical success factors, particularly in developing economies. In relation to the success of project management, the evolution took place in parallel. From focusing on process efficiency

in the early period, to recognizing the importance of methodologies and standards (Pirotti et al., 2017), to integration with broader concepts of value management and realization of benefits later on.

The picture emerging from the literature suggests a hierarchical relationship in which the success of project management is a necessary but insufficient condition for the success of the project. Harwardt's model, which treats project management success as one of the three dimensions of project success, illustrates this hierarchy (Harwardt, 2020). This can be thought of as a set of concentric circles: the success of project management is an inner circle, an essential foundation, but the success of a project requires more, it encompasses broader dimensions of perception and outcome. This layered view is echoed by Serrador and Turner (2015), who distinguish between efficiency (time, budget, scope) and strategic success, and by Pinto and co-authors (2022), who call for a multidimensional understanding of success that includes symbolic and contextual factors. Serra and Kunc (2015) similarly emphasize that effective project management should be judged by its ability to deliver strategic benefits, not just plan compliance.

What emerges across these four phases is not replacement but accumulation—each phase retained insights from previous ones while adding new layers of sophistication. The golden triangle hasn't been abandoned; it's been recognized as necessary but insufficient. Process efficiency remains important; it's simply no longer conflated with overall project success

4.2. Key conceptual differences between project success and project management success

Literature analysis identifies four fundamental dimensions in which project success differs conceptually from project management success: temporal orientation, scope of assessment, measurement criteria, and hierarchical relationship. But these dimensions also reveal deeper tensions in how we think about and practice project management (Figure 2).

The first dimension concerns temporal orientation. The project management success is short-term and process-oriented, focusing on the project implementation period and immediately after its completion. Harwardt (2020) defines it as the subjective perception that project planning is successful, project management is highly effective, and that the project is conducted without major incidents. On the other hand, the success of the project is long-term and result-oriented. Varajão (2018) refers to the success of a project after its completion (post-project), which implies a perspective beyond the period of formal implementation. Pinto and colleagues (2018) emphasize that project success should be viewed through the prism of repeated dynamism, which means that the assessment of success can change over time**.**

The second dimension is the scope and perspective of the assessment. The scope dimension, as articulated by Davis (2017), Bosch-Rekveldt et al. (2023), and Volden and Andersen (2022), points to the inherently political nature of success assessment. The project management success is assessed from an internal, operational perspective. Bosch-Rekveldt et al. (2023) indicate that

project management performance refers to the internal efficiency of processes and the ability to deliver results in an optimal way. On the other hand, the success of a project requires a broad, multi-stakeholder perspective. Davis (2017) highlights the key problem of different interpretations of success criteria by different stakeholder groups. Volden and Andersen (2022) propose a general model of six criteria for the success of a public project, which includes three analytical levels (delivery, goals, impact) and different evaluation perspectives (client, citizen, taxpayer), which illustrates the multidimensionality of assessing project success.

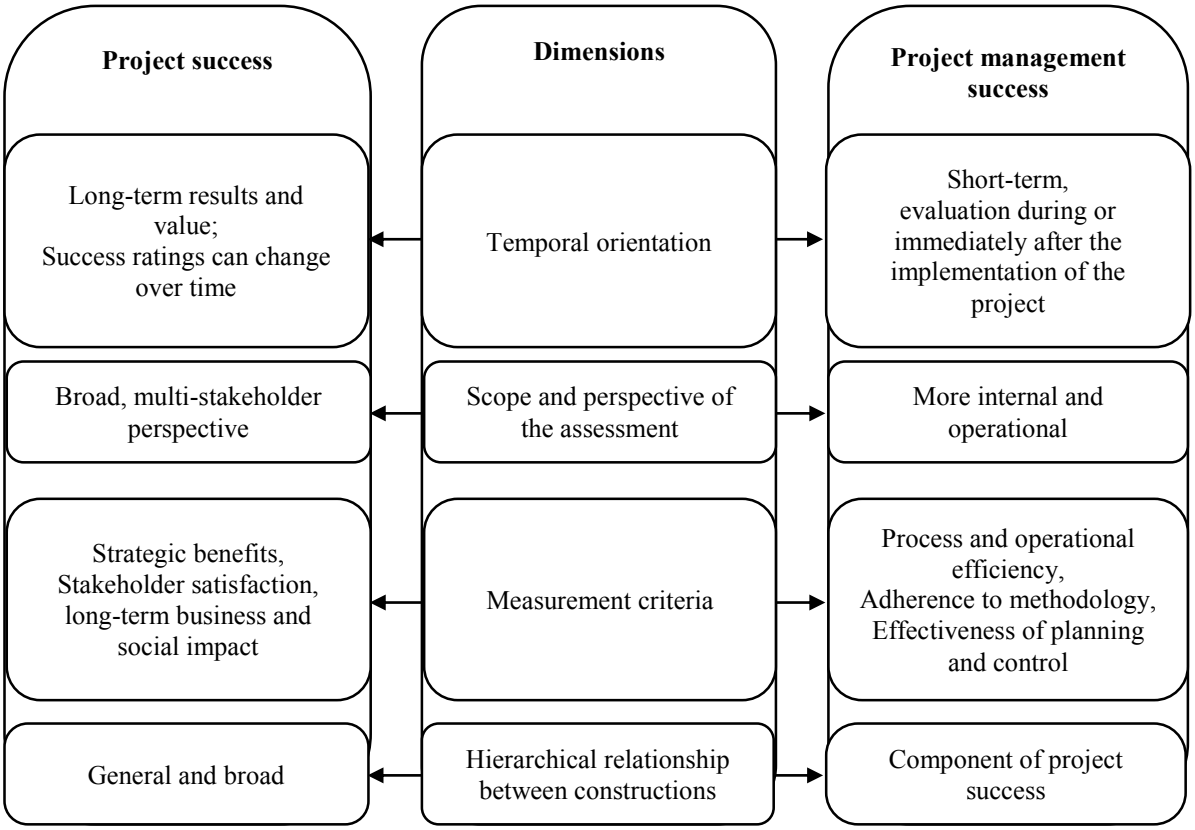

Figure 2. Four dimensions which differ project success and project management success.

Source: own elaboration based on Davis, 2017; Volden, Andersen, 2022; Harwardt, 2020; Sajid et al., 2020; Serra, Kunc, 2015; Pinto et al., 2018; Korhonen et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2023; Pirotti et al., 2017; Macheridis, 2022.

The third dimension is the measurement criteria. The project management success is measured by the adherence to methodologies (Pace, 2019), the effectiveness of planning and control, and operational efficiency. These are mainly objective, measurable and operational measures. The success of a project, on the other hand, is measured by the realization of strategic benefits (Serra, Kunc, 2015), stakeholder satisfaction (Harwardt, 2020), long-term business and social impact, and the organization's preparedness for the future (Sajid et al., 2020). These criteria are often more subjective and manifest themselves in the long run. At the same time, it points to the need for two-track measurement systems that separately assess the success of project management and the implementation of broadly understood project success.

The fourth and last dimension is the hierarchical relationship between the two constructions. The literature suggests that the success of project management is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the success of a project. Harwardt (2020) explicitly treats project management success as one of the three dimensions of overall project success (alongside perception success and outcome success), which indicates the relationship of parts to the whole, rather than synonymy of concepts.

This hierarchical relationship has important theoretical and practical implications. First, it is possible to succeed in project management without achieving project success - a project can be perfectly managed from a technical point of view (on time, on budget, according to specifications), but still fail to achieve success if it does not provide value to stakeholders or achieve strategic goals (Serrador, Turner, 2015; Pinto et al., 2022). Second, as Korhonen and co-authors (2023) show, a project can achieve organizational success despite difficulties in implementation if it delivers strategic value, which illustrates the opposite situation. The contextual variation noted by Varajão and co-authors (2021) - where IT project stakeholders tolerate scope and schedule changes but industrial project stakeholders don't—suggests that the importance of project management success varies by project type.

In some contexts, project management success matters greatly because stakeholders expect predictability. In others, flexibility and value delivery trump process adherence. Yet most organizations apply standardized project management methodologies across all projects, failing to calibrate project management rigor to actual needs (Joslin, Müller, 2016; Varajão et al., 2021). The cases identified by Korhonen and co-authors (2023) where projects achieved organizational success despite implementation difficulties are particularly instructive. They suggest that in some situations, organizations should be willing to tolerate project management "failure" if it enables project success. A research project that goes wildly over budget but yields breakthrough insights. A product development project that misses deadlines but creates an unexpectedly valuable new capability. These aren't failures—they're examples of organizations correctly prioritizing project success over PM success. But most organizations lack frameworks for making such tradeoffs explicit and legitimate.

5. Summary

The evolution documented in this review and the four dimensions of distinction have several important implications.

First, the field needs clearer and more consistent terminology. Using "project success" to mean both the broad concept and one of two distinct subconcepts creates confusion. Some authors have tried "project management performance" or "project delivery success" as alternatives to "project management success", but no consensus has emerged. Clearer

terminology would help both researchers and practitioners think more precisely about what they're trying to achieve and measure.

Second, project governance structures need redesign. If project success only becomes apparent years after completion, governance can't end at project closure. Organizations need post-project review mechanisms that assess whether anticipated benefits were realized and feed learning back into future project selection and design. Some authors touched on this, but it remains underdeveloped in practice.

Third, the profession's emphasis on methodology and certification may be misplaced—or at least incomplete. Project management certifications almost exclusively focus on PM success dimensions: planning, execution, monitoring, control. They largely ignore the strategic, stakeholder, and value dimensions that define project success. This creates professionals highly skilled at delivering projects but less equipped to ensure those projects deliver value.

Fourth, the research reviewed here comes predominantly from certain regions and project types. Kumar and co-authors (2023) call for locally tailored success models in developing economies highlights that our understanding of success may be culturally bounded. What constitutes success in Western, developed-economy contexts may differ from success in other contexts. More research is needed on how cultural and institutional contexts shape success definitions.

This review has several limitations. The focus on academic journals may have missed important practitioner perspectives. The dominance of certain journals in the results (20 articles from a single journal) raises questions about whether we're seeing a comprehensive picture or the perspective of particular research communities. The four-phase periodization proposed here is interpretive—other scholars might parse the evolution differently. The phases overlap in time, and not all authors fit neatly into one phase or another. This is less a clean progression than a messy evolution with multiple threads developing simultaneously. Future research should explore several questions:

1. How do organizations actually use success criteria in practice? The literature documents increasingly sophisticated frameworks, but do organizations employ them?
2. What happens when PM success and project success conflict—how do organizations make tradeoffs? The cases identified by Korhonen et al. deserve deeper investigation.
3. How can we better measure project success given the temporal and subjectivity challenges?
4. Are organizations getting better at achieving project success, or just better at talking about it?

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