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Research Article

A Descriptive Analysis of Project Management Success

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Abstract: Success in project management remains a relevant and evolving topic, with numerous academic publications offering insights from various perspectives. A comprehensive understanding of these perspectives is crucial for grasping both the development of the literature and potential future trends. This study aims to bridge a significant gap by analyzing forty years of articles on project management success indexed in major databases. Through a bibliometric analysis, we highlight key trends and patterns that shape the field, providing valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners. The analysis sheds light on critical success factors, including time, cost, scope, stakeholder satisfaction, and long-term impacts, illustrating the multifaceted nature of project success. Additionally, the findings underscore the importance of efficient risk management, communication, and the evolving criteria for measuring project outcomes. Based on the results, this study offers recommendations for future research, particularly the need for interdisciplinary approaches and in-depth examinations of project management across various sectors. Ultimately, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how project management practices can be enhanced to meet the growing demands of complex, modern projects.

Keywords: Project Management, Project Success, Bibliometrics, Critical Success Factors

1. Introduction

Project management is essential for achieving successful project outcomes, characterized by the effective coordination of resources, time, and goals. Success in project management is typically defined by completing projects on schedule, within budget, and meeting quality standards. The ability to anticipate risks and ensure effective communication among team members also plays a crucial role in enhancing project outcomes (Arabacı & Akıllı, 2019). As project studies advance, understanding the evolving criteria for project success has become increasingly important in ensuring that projects meet their objectives.

A comprehensive review of the literature on project management success reveals a progression from traditional measures like time, cost, and scope—often referred to as the "Iron Triangle"—to a more nuanced understanding that includes stakeholder satisfaction and long-term impacts. Recent studies have emphasized the need for a multidimensional approach to evaluate project success, considering immediate outputs and longer-term benefits (Venczel, Brenyi, & Hriczo, 2021). However, existing research has not thoroughly explored the interconnections between these dimensions and their implications for future project management practices.

Despite the significant body of work, gaps remain in the literature concerning the specific factors that contribute to project success across different industries and contexts. Many studies focus on individual success factors in isolation rather than examining their systemic relationships. This research aims to address these gaps by analyzing scholarly works on project management success from a broader perspective, identifying critical themes and areas that require further exploration.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the prevailing trends in project management success literature from 1983 to 2023. This analysis will employ bibliometric methods to map the academic landscape, highlighting key contributions and revealing underexplored areas. Research questions will focus on identifying critical success factors, understanding their interrelations, and evaluating their impact on project outcomes across various domains.

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This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of project management success, synthesizing findings from diverse contexts. It aims to offer insights that can inform academic research and practical project management applications. Additionally, the findings will facilitate the identification of future research directions in the field, helping to bridge existing knowledge gaps.

The article is structured as follows: First, the methodology used for the bibliometric analysis will be outlined. Next, the findings will be presented, detailing key trends and themes identified in the literature. Finally, the implications of these findings for project management practice and future research will be discussed.

2. Data and Methodology

The research started with a review of the literature, and then the academic articles on "Project Management Success" published in the WoS database were analysed using bibliometric analysis. Bibliometric analysis studies have a systematic that is carried out in stages. According to this systematics, the purpose and scope of the study are determined at the first stage. Afterwards, it is determined which concepts such as document, author, article, journal, and word will be studied within the scope. The data to be focused on are selected from the data obtained in line with the concepts, and studies are carried out for the purpose as a result of the collection and analysis of the data obtained (Yalçın, 2022).

Within the framework of the study, firstly, the academic articles to be analysed were identified using the studies indexed in the WoS base. For this purpose, the article titles under the English language option in the WoS base were scanned with the term "project success". Project success (Title) and 6.3 Management (Citation Topics Meso) and Article (Document Types) and English (Languages), a total of 1398 articles were reached between 1983-2023. The articles were analysed individually and those unrelated to the field of study were weeded out. At the end of the sorting, 641 articles were reached for study. The bibliographic details of these articles were analysed and visualised using the Biblioshiny package, the bibliometric database of the R program.

3. Results

In this section, the results of the bibliometric analysis of the studies conducted in the field of project management success between 1983-2023 May and obtained from the WoS database are shared. General information about the research is shown in the table below.

Table 1

Main Information About Data

Timespan	1983:2023
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	242
Documents	641
Average years from publication	8,1
Average citations per documents	35,09
Average citations per year per doc	3,517
References	24067

Tablo 1 (Continued)

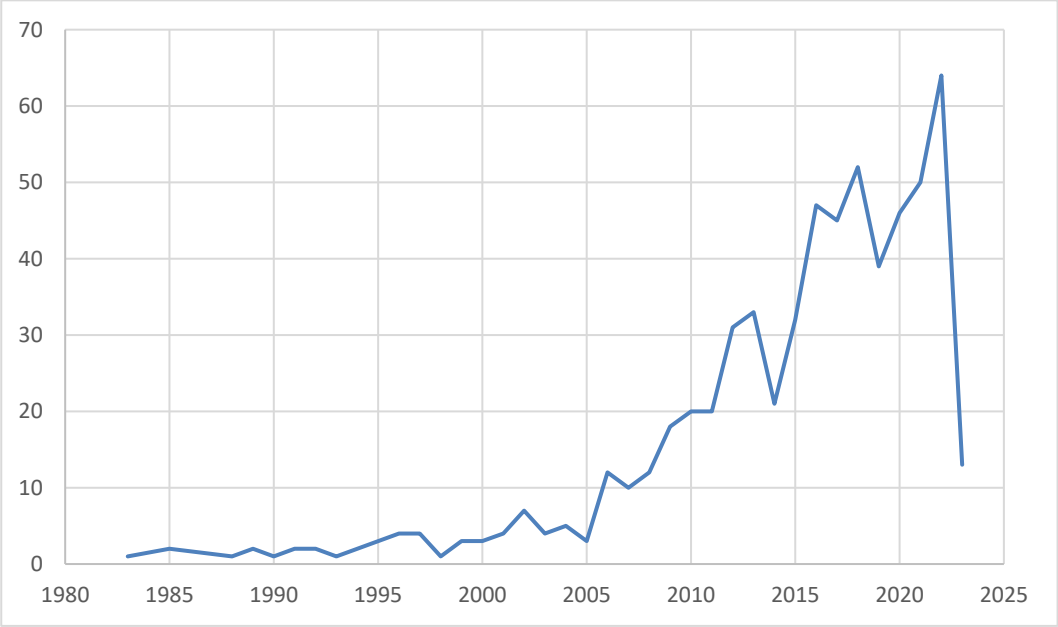
Document Types	
article	609
article; early access	26
article; proceedings paper	6
Document Contents	
Keywords Plus (ID)	798
Author's Keywords (DE)	1559
Authors	
Authors	1502
Author Appearances	1883
Authors of single-authored documents	57
Authors of multi-authored documents	1445
Authors Collaboration	
Single-authored documents	64
Documents per Author	0,427
Authors per Document	2,34
Co-Authors per Documents	2,94
Collaboration Index	2,5

It is seen that a total of 641 studies were published in 242 different journals in the period between 1983 and 2023 May and that the documents in the dataset were published at an average interval of 8.1 years. When the table is analysed, it is concluded that the documents are taken into consideration intensively by researchers conducting academic studies with an average of 35.09 citations. On an annual basis, the average number of citations per document is 3.517, indicating that the documents are continuously cited, and 24067 references indicate that the study has a solid structure. In terms of document types, 641 articles were identified in the table, which includes conference proceedings and current research consisting of academic articles in terms of its basic structure. Regarding the document contents showing that the study has a comprehensive subject network, 798 "Key Words" and 1559 "Author's Keywords" are seen as data in the table. In terms of authors, it has been determined that 1502 different authors contributed to the study, appearing 1883 times in the documents. There are 57 single authors and 1445 multiple authors. This shows that the study generally adopted a collaborative approach and more than one researcher participated. There are a total of 64 single-authored documents in the data. On average, each author contributed to 0.427 documents. On average, each document has 2.34 authors and 2.94 co-authors. The cooperation index was calculated as 2.5, indicating that the authors are prone to cooperate

and collaborate on their work. A total of 641 academic articles subject to the research were published between 1983 and May 2023, and the distribution of the articles by year is shown below.

Figure 1

Number of Publications



3.1. Author impact

The following table was created as a result of the analysis of the most productive author in the field of project method success. The table shows the authors' h, g and m index values, total number of publications, total number of citations and the year of publication of their first publication.

Table 2

Most Relevant Authors

Element	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC	NP	PY_start
Chan Apc	16	18	0,696	1694	18	2001
Dvir D	10	11	0,357	1555	11	1996
Osei-Kyei R	10	12	1,429	404	12	2017
Kock A	6	6	0,545	425	6	2013
Muller R	6	6	0,5	502	6	2012
Zuo J	6	7	0,429	320	7	2010
Chan Dwm	5	5	0,25	454	5	2004
Ika La	5	5	0,333	671	5	2009
Jha Kn	5	5	0,385	185	5	2011
Shen Gq	5	5	0,333	168	5	2009

Tablo 2 (Continued)

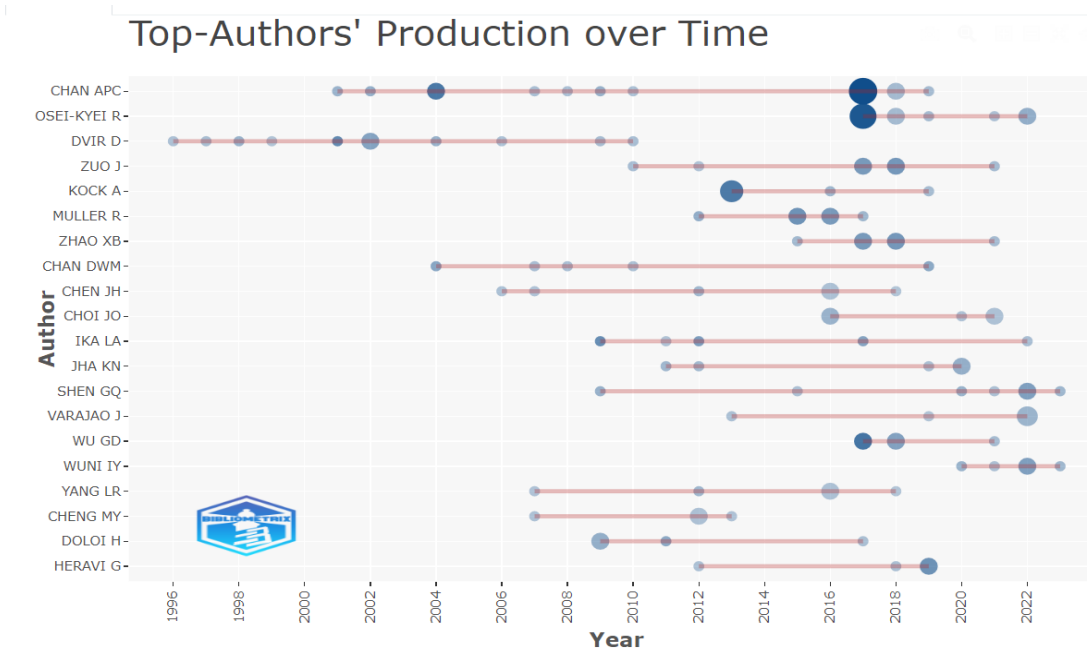
Wu Gd	5	6		344	6	
Wuni Iy	5	5	1,25	75	5	2020
Zhao Xb	5	6	0,556	307	6	2015
Choi Jo	4	5	0,5	76	5	2016
Doloi H	4	4	0,267	319	4	2009
Heravi G	4	4	0,333	154	4	2012
Lipovetsky S	4	4	0,143	522	4	1996
Shenhar Aj	4	4	0,174	931	4	2001
Steyn H	4	4	0,308	89	4	2011
Tishler A	4	4	0,143	522	4	1996

TC: Total Citations, **NP**: Number of Papers, **PY_start**: year of first paper

The authors and related articles in Table 4.2. represent the researchers and studies that played an important role in the focus of the study. According to these data, Chan is the author with the highest number of articles, citations and index values. He is followed by Dvir and Osei-Kyei. Again, according to the table, it is understood that the pioneering works in the field were published separately by Dvir and Tishler in 1996. In order to understand the productivity of the authors over time, the figure below is given. The horizontal bars in the figure represent the years the authors were active in the field. The bubbles represent the number of articles of the authors, and the colour of the bubbles indicates the number of citations.

Figure 2

The Most Prolific Authors Over Time



The figure, which shows that the research intensified significantly in the 2010-2020 period, can be considered an important visual tool that researchers can benefit from in terms of presenting the data obtained in the period starting from 1996 until 2022. In the figure, it is observed that Chan, who ranks the highest in terms of the number of studies and citations, has been active for many years and has exhibited a continuous continuity of work from the early 2000s to 2020. It is reached that he carried out the most studies from 2016 to 2018 and received a large number of citations in this period. In addition, according to the data in the table, it is seen that Osei-Kyei R. conducted the most studies between 2016-2018. It was determined that Dvir, who carried out pioneering studies in the field, conducted studies between 1996 and 2010 but did not continue his studies afterwards. It is concluded that all academicians show an intense tendency to increase their studies, especially from 2014 to 2022.

3.2. Affiliations

The following table was created by taking into account the institutions where the authors of the articles published in the field of project management success.

Table 3

Most Relevant Affiliations

Affiliations	Country	Articles
Hong Kong Polytech Univ	Hong Kong	30
Univ Teknol Malaysia	Malaysia	13
Natl Univ Singapore	Singapore	12
Tech Univ Berlin	Germany	11
Univ Pretoria	South Africa	11
Univ Tehran	Iran	9
Natl Cent Univ	Taiwan	8
Norwegian Univ Sci and Technol	Norway	8
Univ Johannesburg	South Africa	8
Univ Malaya	Malaysia	8
Univ Malaysia Pahang	Malaysia	8
Univ Melbourne	Australia	8
Univ Minho	Portugal	8
Ben Gurion Univ Negev	Israel	7
Cent Queensland Univ	Australia	7
Natl Taiwan Univ Sci and Technol	Taiwan	7
Northumbria Univ	UK	7
Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz Univ	Saudi Arabia	7
Qatar Univ	Qatar	7
Univ Adelaide	Australia	7

The universities in Table 4.6. are important institutions that contribute to publications that are considered reputable in their fields. Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the Malaysian University of Technology and the National University of Singapore are universities located in the Far East and have a very important place in the literature in terms of their contributions to the field of project management.

Considering the country of origin of the institutions, the weight of the Far East geography draws attention.

3.3. Country scientific production

In this section, the total number of citations and an average number of citations for the countries that are most active in the international arena in the field of project management success is presented in the table below.

Table 4

Most Cited Countries

Country	Total Citations	Average Article Citations
USA	5726	67,36
China	3352	37,24
Australia	2245	46,77
United Kingdom	1566	34,80
Germany	1219	60,95
Canada	927	51,50
Malaysia	775	20,95
Singapore	649	72,11
U. Arab Emirates	414	59,14
Israel	409	58,43
Brazil	405	28,93
Netherlands	384	38,40
Norway	348	31,64
France	337	67,40
India	327	19,24
Thailand	303	43,29
Iran	281	14,79
Korea	209	26,12
Italy	196	49,00
South Africa	194	12,12
Sweden	151	75,50
Serbia	143	47,67
Lithuania	142	71,00

When the table is analysed, it is understood that the top five countries according to the highest number of citations are USA, China and Australia, and according to the average citation per article, Sweden, Singapore, Lithuania, France and USA.

Table 5

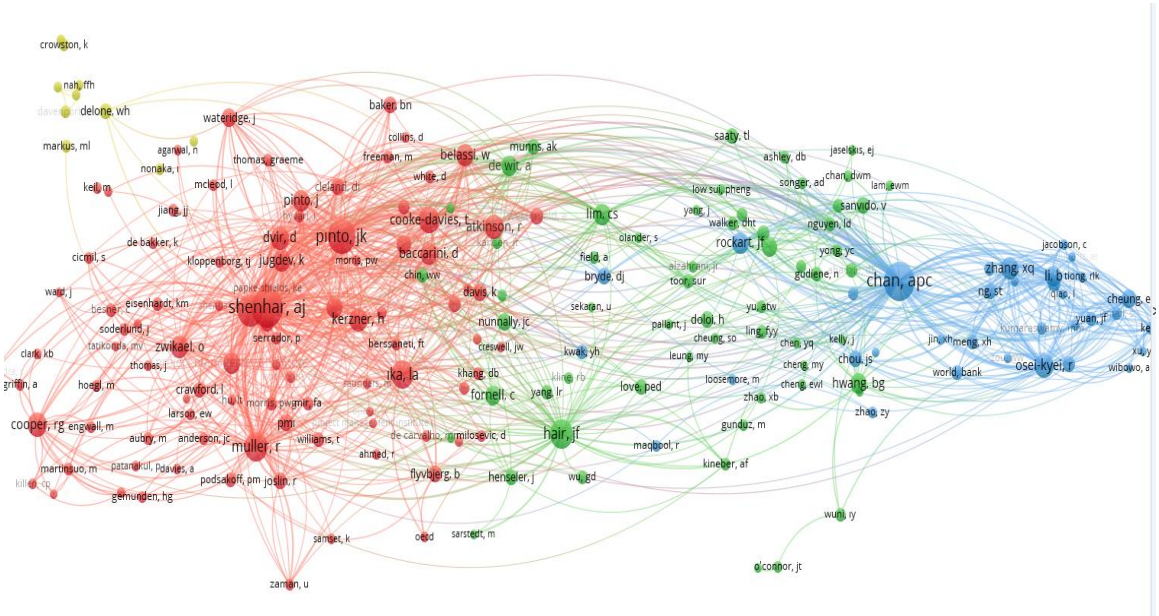
Most Global Cited Documents

Paper	DOI	Total Citations	TC per Year
Shenhar Aj, 2001, Long Range Plann	10.1016/S0024-6301(01)00097-8	569	24,73
Griffin A, 1996, J Prod Innovat Manag	10.1016/S0737-6782(96)00052-5	492	17,57
Li B, 2005, Constr Manag Econ	10.1080/01446190500041537	440	23,15
Chan Apc, 2004, J Constr Eng M Asce	10.1061/(ASCE)0733-9364(2004)130:1(153)	387	19,35
Tatikonda Mv, 2000, IEEE T Eng Manage	10.1109/17.820727	365	15,20
Balachandra R, 1997, IEEE T Eng Manage	10.1109/17.618169	365	13,51
Ika La, 2009, Proj Manag J	10.1002/pmj.20137	354	23,6
Pinto Jk, 1988, J Manage	10.1177/014920638801400102	341	9,47
Chua Dkh, 1999, J Constr Eng M Asce	10.1061/(ASCE)0733-9364(1999)125:3(142)	325	13
Grewal R, 2006, Manage Sci	10.1287/mnsc.1060.0550	285	15,83

The figure below shows the most cited authors and the collaboration between these authors in the form of a coloured map. According to the figure, authors are clustered under four different colours.

Figure 3

Collaboration Between the Most Cited Authors



In the studies written in the field of project management success, it can be said that the cluster of authors shown in red colour is in intense cooperation in terms of citation. The names Shenhar, Chan, Pinto, Ika can be stated as the prominent active authors in the red cluster, Chan in the blue cluster and Hair in the green cluster.

Table 6

Most Local Cited Documents

Document	DOI	Year	LC	GC	LC/GC Ratio (%)
Shenhar Aj, 2001, Long Range Plann	10.1016/S0024-6301(01)00097-8	2001	87	569	15,29
Ika La, 2009, Proj Manag J	10.1002/pmj.20137	2009	72	354	20,34
Chua Dkh, 1999, J Constr Eng M Asce	10.1061/(ASCE)0733-9364(1999)125:3(142)	1999	61	325	18,77
Chan Apc, 2004, J Constr Eng M Asce	10.1061/(ASCE)0733-9364(2004)130:1(153)	2004	60	387	15,50
Li B, 2005, Constr Manag Econ	10.1080/01446190500041537	2005	58	440	13,18
Sanvido V, 1992, J Constr Eng M Asce	10.1061/(ASCE)0733-9364(1992)118:1(94)	1992	54	241	22,41
Pinto Jk, 1988, J Manage	10.1177/014920638801400102	1988	50	341	14,66
Davis K, 2014, Int J Proj Manag	10.1016/j.ijproman.2013.02.006	2014	40	254	15,75
Chan Apc, 2002, J Manage Eng	10.1061/(ASCE)0742-597X(2002)18:3(120)	2002	39	212	18,40
Mir Fa, 2014, Int J Proj Manag	10.1016/j.ijproman.2013.05.012	2014	38	278	13,67

The article by Shenhar (2001) titled "Project Success: A Multidimensional Strategic Concept" has the highest value regarding local and global citations. The article titled "Project Success as a Topic in Project Management Journals" by Ika (2009) has the second highest value in terms of local citations, and the article titled "Critical Success Factors for Different Project Objectives" by Chua (1999) has the third highest value. The LC/GC ratio of Li's (2005) article titled "Critical Success Factors for PPP/PFI Projects in the UK Construction Industry" is low, which means that the global impact of this article is more than its local impact.

3.4. Most frequent words

According to the analysed data, attention was paid to the frequency of use of certain words in the study. These words reflect the main focal points of the study, research topics and terms. The table below has been prepared by considering "keyword plus".

Table 7

Frequent Words

Words	Occurrences
performance	170
management	128
model	91
impact	83
framework	53
implementation	44
construction	41
construction projects	35
criteria	31
innovation	31
systems	29
perspective	26

Firstly, the word "performance" is mentioned 170 times. This indicates that the study focussed on issues such as performance measurement, performance management or performance improvement. Performance is a concept that is assessed at the organisational or system level, and it can be considered that the study addresses strategies, processes or methods related to performance. The word "management" was used 128 times. This indicates that the study provides information on management processes, strategies or practices. Management is a concept used for effective and efficient use of resources, decision-making processes and achieving organisational goals. The word "model" appears 91 times and indicates that the study deals with theoretical or analytical models. Other important words include "impact" (83 times), "framework" (53 times), "implementation" (44 times), "construction" (41 times) and "construction projects" (35 times). "Impact" indicates that the study focussed on a particular event or practice's results, effects or consequences. "Framework" indicates that the study builds on a specific theoretical or conceptual framework or addresses a topic. "Application" emphasises how the study applies or evaluates a theory or method in the real world. The terms "construction" and "construction projects" indicate that the study addresses issues, management or practices related to the construction industry. In addition to these words, concepts such as "criteria", "innovation", "systems", "perspective", "design", "technology", "identification", "industry", "product development", "knowledge" and "selection" also play an important role in the study. "Criteria" implies that the study focussed on a specific evaluation or selection process and that specific criteria were used. "Innovation" indicates that the study focuses on the development, implementation or evaluation of new ideas. "Systems" indicates that the study focuses on the analysis or management of a specific system or process. "Perspective" indicates that the study addresses a particular point of view or approach. The words "design" and "technology" indicate that the study addresses design processes or the use of technology. "Identification" means the definition or specification of a particular concept or element, while the term

"industry" indicates that the study focuses on a particular industry or sector. Finally, "product development" indicates that the study focuses on the creation, development or management of new products. Below, the most frequently used words in the titles of the articles cited in the studies written in the field of project management are shown in the word cloud. When the figure is analysed, it is seen that the most frequently used words or phrases in the titles of the studies cited by the authors are words such as "management", "model", "impact" and "construction". Since the words in the titles give clues about the content of the study, they can provide preliminary information about the study to the candidate researchers or current researchers. It is seen that the words in the titles are in parallel with the words in the studies and abstracts.

Figure 4

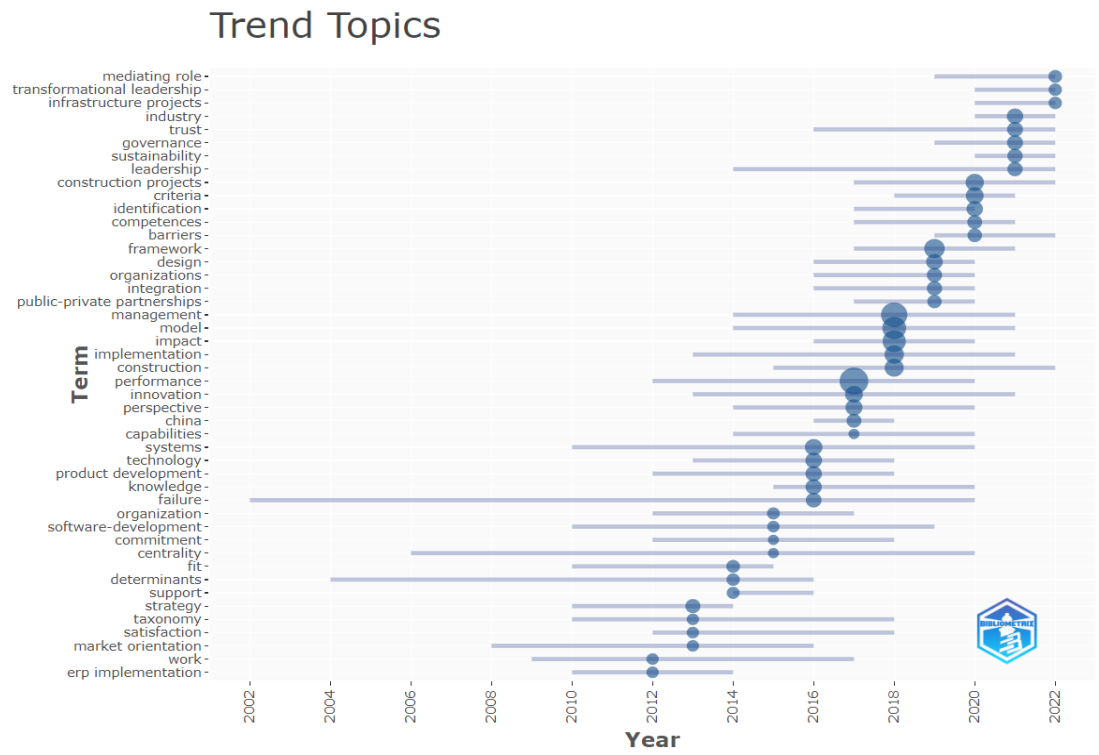
Frequent Word Cloud in Headings

3.5. Analysing trending topics

Conceptual structure analysis and mapping is one of the important analyses in bibliometric research. Conceptual structure analysis and mapping reveals the conceptual structure dynamics and conceptual building blocks in the literature by performing factor analysis between concepts. The figure below shows the conceptual structure map of the trending topics in the field of project management over the years. The figure shows the years in ascending order on the horizontal axis. The vertical axis shows the trending topics. The circle shapes in the figure indicate in which year the topics received the most citations. The increase in the width of the circle means that the number of citations related to the subject also increases. In the figure, the topics increase their trending status from bottom to top, towards the present day. Again, according to the figure, the number of citations of the subjects increases from top to bottom, from the past to the present.

Figure 5

Trending Topics



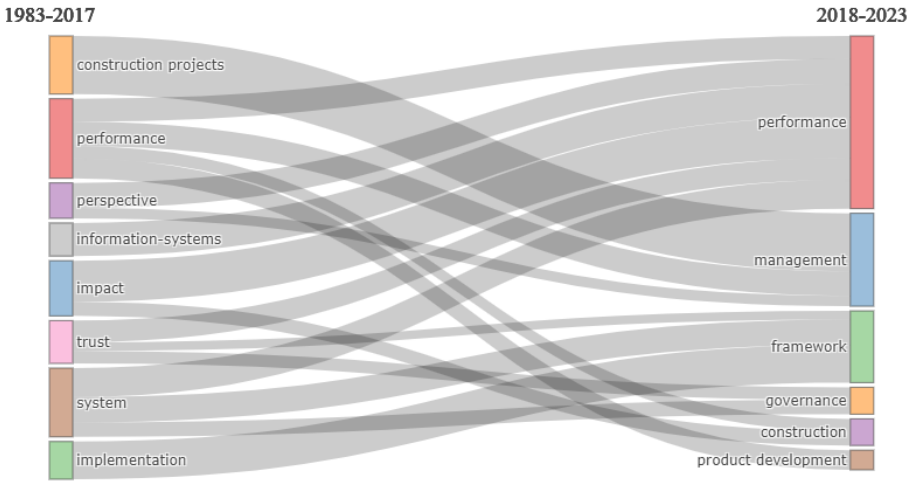
In the figure, there is a graph with the trending keywords by years from 2002 to 2022. When the figure is analysed in detail, it can be seen that "failure" is the trending topic from 2002 to the early periods of 2020 and has the most prolonged time interval among other words. In the 2016-2020 period, some words such as "performance", "innovation", "impact", "model" and "management" come to the fore. When it comes to the 2020-2022 date range, it is seen that the words "intermediary role", "transformational leadership", "infrastructure projects", "industry", "trust", "governance", "sustainability", "leadership", "construction projects", "criteria", "definition", "competences" and "barriers" are trending. As a result, it can be determined that there is a significant increase in the citation status of the trending words from time to time, while some words have a periodic trend and lose their effect completely after a while. As mentioned at the beginning of the section, the topics in the figure are cited more recently from bottom to top. For example, the top-ranked topics such as "mediation role" and "transformational leadership" have been trending in 2022 and more recently, and it is also understood from the figure that these topics were heavily cited in 2022.

3.6. Thematic evolution

Thematic analysis in bibliometrics is a method used to examine publications or sources on a particular topic to identify the main themes, trends or research trends of these publications. This analysis can be used to understand the focal points and changes in research on a topic, identify gaps in the scientific literature and provide clues for future research.

Figure 6

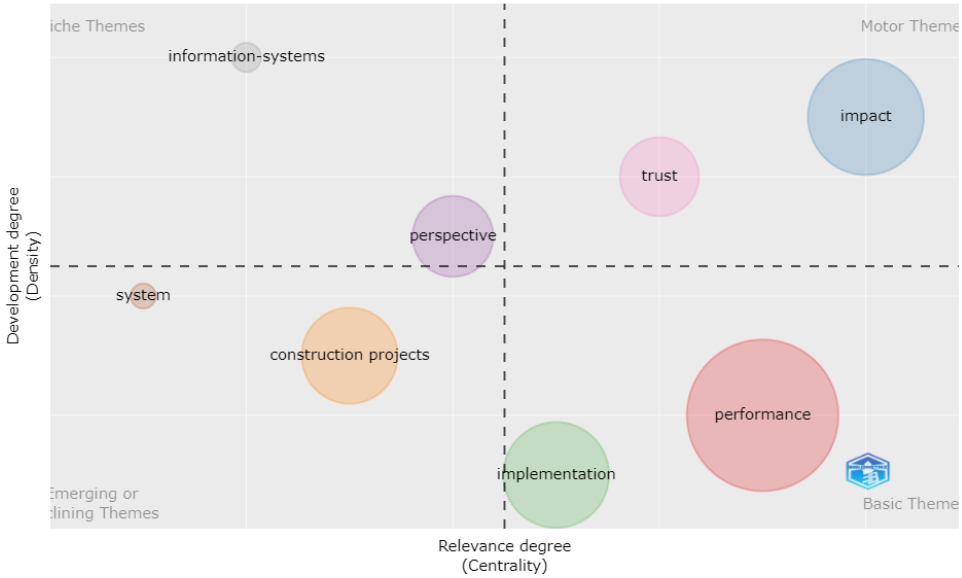
Thematic Evolution of Studies (1983-2023)



As a result of the thematic analysis, the above visual was created. When the visual is analysed, there is a distinction between two periods (1983-2017 and 2018-2023 periods). In the first period, construction projects and performance were the main focus, while in the second period, it is understood that the research area has evolved into management in a more generalised way, and the focus on performance has also expanded. The visualisations of these two defined periods in terms of density and centrality are shown below.

Figure 7

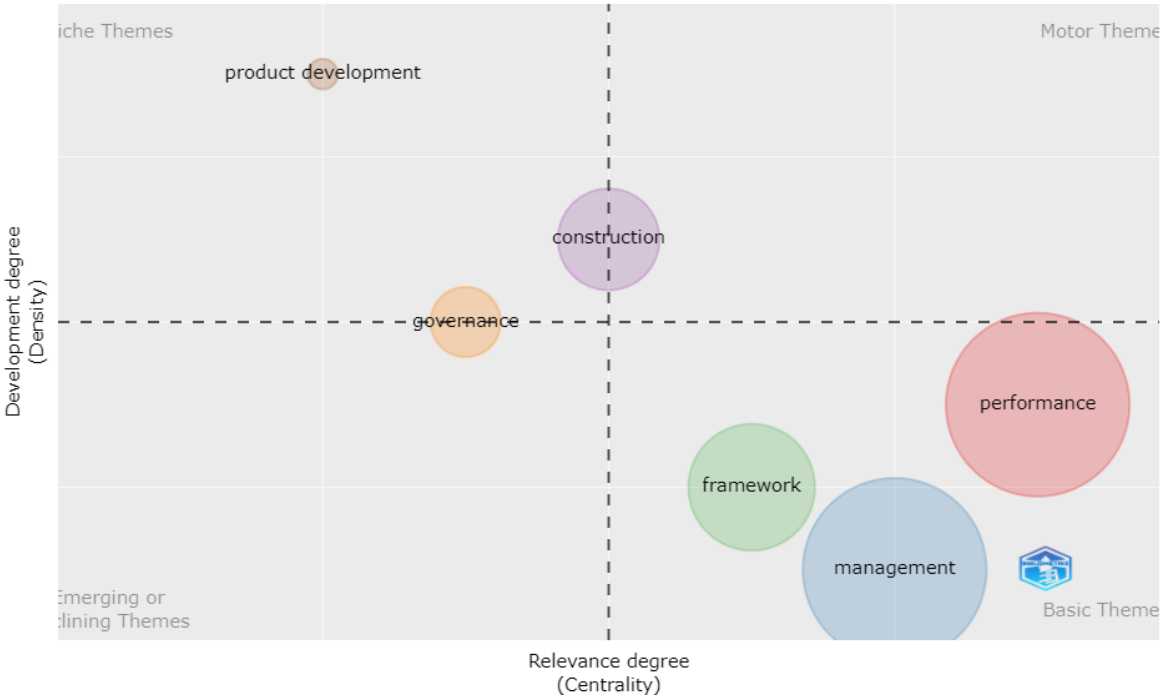
Thematic Map (1983-2017)



In the first period (1983-2017), it was observed that there were publications centred on performance and implementation, especially construction projects, and the impact was prominent.

Figure 8

Thematic Map (2017-2023)



In the second period covering the years 2018-2023, it can be stated that the topics evolved into a managerial field of study, and the construction sector-centred project management success research tended to create a theoretical framework in the field of management.

4. Conclusion

It is seen that different topics are addressed in the literature in the field of Project Management. One of the studies considered in this field consists of studies centred on the success of project management. This research aims to provide a perspective on how the literature on project management success has developed and how it can evolve. For this purpose, academic articles related to project management success in the WoS database were collected, and a bibliometric analysis was carried out. The data set of the study is limited to a total of 641 academic articles published between 1983 and 2023 in 242 sources indexed in WoS.

The keywords describe the subject area and research foci of the studies in more detail. These data show that the study has a comprehensive subject network and combines research from different disciplines. It shows that cooperation between authors plays an important role and that academic work is often carried out as a team effort. It is thought that cooperation between the authors will enable different perspectives to be combined, more comprehensive studies to be carried out, and scientific production to be increased.

When the findings are evaluated in general, a dataset in which authors and countries working in the field of project management success are more effective has been obtained.

While the USA and China are considered the most effective countries, it has been determined that the University of Hong Kong stands out with its numerous studies. Again, it is understood that Far Eastern countries (ex., China, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, India, Thailand) contribute the most to the literature on project management success. It has been observed that the previous studies are concentrated especially in the field of civil engineering (ex. Chan et al., 2004; Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2017), but the subsequent studies are shaped around the general title of management (ex. Hashfi & Raharjo, T., 2023; Sunny et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2020).

5. Recommendations

This bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of research on project management success. Researchers can use the findings from this analysis to contribute to the literature, understand existing research and provide a basis for new studies. The WoS database used in this thesis represents a limited data source. Therefore, future researchers can access a more comprehensive dataset by including different databases (e.g. Scopus, PubMed). This will enable different studies to be found by covering a broader literature and will provide a stronger basis for project management success. Furthermore, future research could conduct more focused analyses using more specific search criteria or more filtering. For example, focusing on a particular geographical region or specific sector can narrow the scope of the study and provide a more in-depth examination. In addition, conducting analyses over different periods would also provide opportunities to fill research gaps and obtain original results. Finally, future researchers could focus on interdisciplinary studies and complex relationship analyses where different factors that influence project management success are examined. For example, examining the effects of factors such as leadership, communication, and resource management on project management success can provide a more comprehensive understanding.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is limited to bibliometric analysis based on data from the WoS database, which may not fully represent the breadth of research in project management. Future research should consider expanding the dataset by incorporating additional databases such as Scopus or PubMed. This could enhance the understanding of project management success across diverse disciplines.

Based on the current bibliometric analysis of project management success, several research questions can be formulated for future studies. First, it would be beneficial to investigate how the collaboration patterns identified in this study influence project outcomes. Specifically, what role does co-authorship play in enhancing the quality and impact of project management research? Additionally, given the prominence of the USA and China in this field, future research could explore the cultural factors influencing project management practices in these countries. How do these cultural contexts shape the approaches to project success, and what lessons can be drawn for international project teams?

Moreover, since the existing literature has focused predominantly on civil engineering, examining project management success across other sectors, such as healthcare or information technology, would be valuable. How do success criteria vary between these fields, and what unique challenges do they present? Another area for exploration is the impact of technological advancements on project management. What specific technologies have proven to be the most beneficial for enhancing project success, and how can organizations best integrate these innovations into their project management practices?

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of interdisciplinary research; future studies could address the interplay between project management success and factors such as leadership, team dynamics, and stakeholder engagement. What specific leadership styles contribute to project success in different contexts, and how can effective stakeholder communication be fostered? Lastly, examining the effects of sustainability practices within project management is crucial. How do sustainable practices influence project success, and what frameworks can be developed to integrate sustainability into project management methodologies? These questions will deepen the understanding of project management success and pave the way for a more comprehensive body of research in this evolving field.

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