

Career Development as a Bridge Between Project-Based Structures and Effective HRM Practices

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Abstract

The globalization of markets, the intensification of competition, and rapid technological advancements have prompted the emergence of new organizational structures centered on project-based approaches. These shifts have significantly impacted how companies operate, compelling them to reassess and redesign their human resources management systems to align better with the dynamic demands of project environments. In such settings, career development emerges as a critical aspect of HRM, playing a pivotal role in supporting employees' growth and ensuring the organization's adaptability and success. This study sought to examine the role of career development in bridging the relationship between project-based organizational structures and effective HRM practices. To achieve this, a qualitative research approach was employed, involving 31 in-depth interviews with Libyan project managers. The findings revealed significant insights into the challenges and dynamics of career development within project-based organizational contexts. A prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was the limited availability of structured career development opportunities for project managers. This lack of opportunities is largely attributed to the temporary and transient nature of project-based roles, which often focus on short-term objectives rather than long-term career trajectories. Many participants expressed concerns about the absence of clear pathways for career advancement and professional growth, emphasizing the need for organizations to address these gaps proactively. The study highlights the importance of self-directed career development in project environments. Given the temporary and dynamic nature of their roles, project managers often bear the responsibility of managing their career trajectories. This involves taking proactive steps to enhance their competencies, maintain their relevance in the field, and seek out opportunities for skill development. The findings suggest that project managers who actively invest in their personal and professional growth are better positioned to navigate the challenges of project-based work and achieve career satisfaction. The results also underscore the need for organizations to implement HRM strategies that support career development in project-based settings. This includes providing training programs tailored to the unique demands of project management, facilitating mentorship and networking opportunities, and creating mechanisms for recognizing and rewarding contributions to projects. By fostering a culture that values and invests in career development, organizations can not only enhance employee satisfaction and retention but also strengthen their capacity to adapt to the evolving demands of a project-driven marketplace. This study highlights the critical role of career development in the context of project-based organizations. While the temporary nature of project roles poses challenges for traditional career progression models, it also offers opportunities for individuals to shape their career paths actively. Organizations must recognize the importance of supporting career development as an integral part of their HRM strategy, ensuring that project managers have the tools and resources needed to thrive in a competitive and rapidly changing environment. By addressing these issues, companies can better align their human resources practices with the realities of project-based work, fostering a more resilient and adaptable workforce.

Keywords: Project-Based Organizations, Career Development, Human Resource Management, Project Managers

JEL Codes: M12, J24, O15

1. INTRODUCTION

The globalization of markets, intensified competition, and rapid technological advancements have catalyzed the emergence of new organizational forms centered around projects. These changes have fundamentally altered the landscape of work, leading organizations to shift from traditional hierarchical structures to more fluid, project-based models. However, the distinctive characteristics of projects—namely their temporary and often unstable nature, alongside the dynamic and ever-changing work environment—pose significant challenges for human resources management (HRM). Research by Bredin and Söderlund (2011), Keegan et al. (2018), and Loufrani-Fedida (2019) highlights that these project-specific features have profound effects on HRM practices, creating a need for organizations to rethink and adjust their HRM systems to effectively support project-based work. Projects, by definition, are finite endeavors with a defined beginning and end. This temporality brings with it challenges such as uncertainty and the constant need to adapt to evolving environments. In project-based organizations, the conventional HRM practices tailored to long-term, stable employment may not be as effective. Project work often requires specialized skills that can fluctuate based on the project's demands, necessitating flexibility in workforce management, recruitment, and training strategies. Moreover, the instability of project-based roles—where employees are often brought on

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board for specific tasks with no guarantee of long-term employment—further complicates HRM strategies.

Given these challenges, organizations are compelled to rethink their HRM strategies to effectively manage and support employees within project-based structures. Huemann et al. (2007), Bredin (2008), Turner et al. (2008), and Keegan et al. (2018) emphasize the need for HRM systems that align with the fluid, evolving nature of project environments. Traditional HRM practices that focus on long-term career progression may not always apply, and HR professionals must adopt more flexible and adaptive strategies to meet the unique demands of project work. This includes redefining roles, skill development programs, career paths, and performance management systems that can accommodate the transient nature of projects and ensure the effective deployment of talent at every stage of a project. By understanding the intersection of project-specific characteristics and HRM practices, organizations can better design systems that support their employees' career development, motivation, and performance in the context of projects. The ability to attract, retain, and manage talent in such a dynamic environment is critical to maintaining competitiveness in the rapidly changing business landscape. Ultimately, HRM systems must evolve to offer more customized, project-oriented solutions that foster flexibility, skill development, and collaboration, ensuring that organizations can thrive in an increasingly project-based world.

Career development has long been recognized as a central component of human resource management (HRM) and is crucial for both employee satisfaction and organizational success (Demilliere, 2014; Rui et al., 2015). Traditionally, career development has been viewed through a linear, hierarchical lens, where employees progress along a predefined path within an organization, moving from entry-level positions to more senior roles (Crawford et al., 2013). In this traditional model, the organization plays a significant role in shaping and facilitating the career development process. It provides employees with the necessary support systems, resources, and opportunities to advance within the company (Welch and Welch, 2015). In the traditional career model, HRM practices are designed to nurture the individual's career growth through a structured framework. Organizations establish programs that focus on skill enhancement, leadership development, and internal mobility, providing employees with clear promotional pathways (Hölzle, 2010). These programs, which are often aligned with the company's organizational goals, allow employees to improve their competencies and gain new skills while being positioned for upward mobility within the company. A key aspect of this model is the promotion system, which serves as a mechanism to recognize employee potential and reward them for their contributions to the organization. As Zika-Viktorsson and Ritzen (2005) note, employees develop and refine their skills through these internal promotion systems, which prepare them for advancement to higher hierarchical levels within the company.

This linear and hierarchical view of career development assumes that employees will have long-term careers within the same organization, advancing through various stages as they acquire new skills and demonstrate competence. The company, in turn, benefits from the investment in its employees' development by cultivating a skilled, loyal workforce. This model works well in more stable and predictable environments, where employees are expected to stay with one organization for an extended period, and the company's growth is tied to the continuous professional development of its employees. However, as work environments evolve, especially with the rise of project-based and gig-oriented organizational structures, this traditional view of career development may no longer be fully applicable. The increasing prevalence of temporary, project-based, and freelance work requires a shift in how career development is conceptualized and managed. In such contexts, employees may no longer follow a linear path within a single organization, and HRM systems need to adapt to these new realities by offering more flexible and dynamic career development opportunities that support a broader range of career trajectories (Bredin and Söderlund, 2011).

The traditional career model, which has long been based on hierarchical, linear progression within a single organization, is increasingly being questioned in light of changes in the modern work environment, particularly within project-based organizations. Several scholars argue that the conventional career logic, which assumes stable, long-term employment and a clear upward trajectory within a company, is no longer sufficient to motivate employees or support their professional development in the dynamic, often unstable, context of project work (Whitley, 2006; Hölzle, 2010; McKeivitt et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2019). The rise of project-based organizations, characterized by their temporary and cross-functional nature, requires new ways of understanding career development that differ from traditional paradigms. In project-based organizations, careers are often less predictable, and individuals may work on multiple projects across different companies or industries. This model challenges the idea of a linear career path and emphasizes the need for flexibility and adaptability in career development. As a result, scholars have highlighted the necessity of reevaluating career development structures to align with the unique characteristics of the project-based work environment (Larsen, 2002; El-Sabaa, 2001; Crawford et al., 2013; McKeivitt et al., 2017; Loufrani-Fedida, 2019; Huemann et al., 2019). In such environments, career development is no longer solely about moving up within a single organizational hierarchy, but also about acquiring diverse skills, building a broad professional network, and successfully navigating different projects with varying objectives and teams.

Given the dynamic and temporary nature of projects, the responsibility for career development often shifts from the organization to the individual. Project-based workers are required to take a proactive approach to their professional growth, focusing on skill development and continuously seeking new opportunities that enhance their employability and career prospects. This shift places significant pressure on individuals to be self-driven in their career planning, often requiring them to manage multiple career tracks simultaneously, as they juggle various project-based roles, different organizations, and potential career paths. This study aimed to explore how career development functions within the context of project-based organizations and its impact on human resource management (HRM). To gain a deeper understanding of these dynamics, a

qualitative approach was employed, involving 31 interviews with project managers in Libya. These interviews provide valuable insights into how career development is perceived and managed within the project environment, shedding light on the challenges faced by employees in navigating their careers in such contexts and the role of HRM in supporting their professional growth. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of more effective career development strategies tailored to the project-based organizational structure, offering recommendations for HR practitioners and organizations seeking to optimize career development initiatives in this increasingly common work environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The project-based organization (PBO) has emerged as a key organizational model, particularly within knowledge-intensive industries, where flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness to changing market conditions are critical. The recognition of projects as the primary business mechanism for capturing new opportunities has made PBOs a preferred structure for firms that aim to deliver customized solutions and respond effectively to client demands. The concept of PBO has been widely studied, but its exact definition and the distinctions between various related organizational forms have been the subject of ongoing debate in the literature. A number of terms have been used to describe organizations that operate primarily through projects, including "project-based organization" (Hobday, 2000), "project-oriented organization" (Gareis and Huemann, 2000), "project-based firm" (Lindkvist, 2004; Whitley, 2006), and "project-based company" (Koskinen, 2010), each of which emphasizes different aspects of the project-driven nature of these organizations. For instance, Whitley (2006) discusses the differences between various forms of project-based organizations, particularly in terms of the uniqueness of objectives and outputs, and the stability of roles within the organization. These distinctions help highlight the nuanced nature of organizations that work with projects and underscore the need to understand their specific organizational characteristics.

Whitley (2006) suggests that project-based organizations (PBOs) are distinct from project-oriented organizations (POOs), where the latter's core revenue-generating activities are based on permanent structures and processes, while the former generates returns directly from the successful execution of projects. This distinction is important because it underscores the variety of ways in which organizations may approach their operations and business models when using projects as the central mechanism for organizational coordination. Hobday (2000) defines the project-based organization as one where the project itself serves as the primary mechanism for coordinating and integrating all the essential business functions of the firm. In this model, there is typically no formal coordination across different project lines. The defining feature of a PBO is its ability to integrate various types of knowledge and skills effectively while managing the inherent risks and uncertainties that come with executing complex projects. The PBO structure allows for high adaptability to client needs, often providing bespoke solutions tailored to specific requirements. The organization's ability to respond flexibly to diverse demands is one of the key factors contributing to its success in knowledge-intensive sectors.

On the other hand, the project-oriented organization (POO), as defined by Gareis and Huemann (2000), represents a more structured approach to managing projects. In POO, "Management by Projects" is not just a method but an organizational strategy. POOs operate with a portfolio of different types of projects and employ temporary organizational structures for the execution of complex tasks. They also rely on permanent structures for integrative functions such as support services and administrative tasks. The POO model is based on the concept of a "New Management Paradigm" that encourages a project management culture, which is considered integral to the organization's identity. The key benefits of the POO model include enhanced organizational focus, a clear delegation of managerial responsibilities, and the promotion of quality control through group work. Moreover, POO emphasizes learning and development through projects, which further enhances organizational differentiation and innovation. Both PBO and POO are designed to handle the complexities and dynamics of the project environment, although they do so in slightly different ways. While PBOs are characterized by their focus on projects as the primary driver of business activity and revenue generation, POOs integrate projects within a broader framework of permanent organizational functions and a strategic management approach. The understanding of these organizational structures is crucial for companies operating in industries where project execution is central to success. This includes industries such as construction, consulting, research and development, and information technology, where project-based work often drives business outcomes. Given these distinctions, the project-based organization model offers important insights into how firms in knowledge-intensive sectors can manage their human resources, develop leadership strategies, and foster collaboration across functional boundaries to successfully navigate the complexities of project work.

The project-based firm operates in a highly dynamic and project-driven mode, where its activities are organized around producing multi-faceted solutions and innovative assignments designed to meet client needs. These firms often engage in collaborations, not just internally but also with external partners, and rely heavily on the effective support and coordination of functional units to deliver value. This organizational structure is particularly suited for industries that deal with complex, one-off projects that demand bespoke solutions (Lindkvist, 2004). In a project-based firm, the organization typically emerges as a distinct legal and economic entity that often dissolves after its project objectives have been achieved. This transient nature of project-based firms is consistent with the findings of scholars who explain that these firms exist to fulfill specific objectives, and once those objectives are accomplished, they tend to disband or transition into new forms (Whitley, 2006). Project-based companies (PBCs) are often defined as organizations where the majority of the output is customized to client specifications, either as self-contained entities or as parts of larger corporations (Koskinen, 2010). These companies are highly responsive to client demands but also function in environments marked by constant change and uncertainty. The preference for project-

based work has increased over time, especially in industries facing rapid organizational and environmental changes. Project work is unique, temporary, and often operates in a highly dynamic environment, which creates specific demands on both organizational processes and human resource management (HRM) (Gemünden et al., 2018). These characteristics—such as the temporary nature of the teams, the one-off nature of tasks, and the rapid pace of change—require organizations to develop a flexible and adaptive approach to HRM, which is crucial for their success. Traditional HRM models, which were designed for permanent organizational structures with stable roles and positions, are increasingly inadequate for managing human resources in project-based organizations (Packendorff, 2002). The need for flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness in project-based firms requires a shift in HRM approaches, moving away from the static, hierarchical systems often found in traditional firms (Huemann et al., 2007).

Research has identified five key features of project-based organizations (PBOs) that significantly impact HRM. The first feature is the alignment of HR practices with the specific needs of each project. In a PBO, HRM must support the decentralization of decision-making, skill development, and the differentiation of roles specific to each project's requirements (Turner et al., 2008). The second feature of PBOs is their temporary nature. With each new project, there is often a reorganization of the human resources configuration, which requires HR strategies to be adaptable to the specific needs and timeframes of each project (Keegan et al., 2018). The third feature is the dynamic environment in which projects are conducted. Projects may vary in size, scope, and complexity, making it difficult to predict future human resource requirements (Zannad, 2009). This uncertainty calls for a flexible HRM approach that can quickly adapt to the evolving needs of each project. The fourth feature is the management of a portfolio of projects, where employees may be responsible for several projects simultaneously, leading to potential conflicts and role ambiguities (Loufrani-Fedida, 2019). This requires HRM to develop specific policies that ensure resource allocation is done effectively across different projects. Lastly, the management culture in PBOs is one of empowerment, autonomy, and collaboration. Employees are given significant control over their work and encouraged to take initiative, which fosters a culture of continuous change and customer satisfaction. HRM practices must therefore support this collaborative, flexible approach and help employees navigate the shifting dynamics of project work (Huemann et al., 2007).

Given these challenges, career development in project-based organizations requires a fundamentally different approach from traditional HR practices. In PBOs, career paths are often less linear and more flexible, requiring employees to adapt to diverse roles and responsibilities across various projects. Career development strategies in these organizations should focus on skill diversification, adaptability, and the development of competencies that align with the specific needs of different projects (McKevitt et al., 2017). Employees in PBOs must continuously develop and refine their skills to remain competitive and successful in a dynamic work environment. Traditional career development programs that are focused on hierarchical progression are less relevant in project-based firms, where roles are more fluid and project-oriented (Crawford et al., 2013). Career development in such organizations should also include opportunities for employees to take on diverse roles, work with cross-functional teams, and engage in continuous learning to enhance their value both to the organization and to the client.

The key to effective HRM in project-based organizations lies in designing systems that support the dynamic, temporary, and multi-dimensional nature of project work. This requires a shift away from traditional, stable HR models and toward more flexible, adaptive strategies that can quickly respond to the changing needs of each project (Whitley, 2006). With the right HRM systems in place, project-based organizations can optimize their human capital and sustain competitive advantage in an increasingly complex and volatile business environment (Turner et al., 2008).

Huemann (2007) introduces a model of human resource management (HRM) tailored specifically for project-based organizations (PBOs), emphasizing three key processes that align with the unique challenges and dynamics of such organizations. The first process is the assignment to project, which parallels the recruitment process in traditional functional organizations. This process occurs not only at the project's inception but throughout its life cycle as roles evolve. It involves planning and allocating human resources to various units, determining roles, responsibilities, and potential reporting relationships within the project. A critical aspect of this process is the careful selection of the project manager, who bears full responsibility for the project's success. The second process is employment on project, which focuses on the ongoing development and improvement of the project team's skills. Continuous training and feedback are integral, ensuring that the project manager actively supports team members throughout the project. Responsibilities include performance evaluation, skill management, career development support, conflict resolution, feedback provision, and coordination of change management. This process fosters a culture of learning and adaptability, enhancing the team's overall performance and alignment with project goals.

The third process, dispersement from project, addresses the individual's status upon project completion. This phase requires organizations to evaluate the future role of team members, considering reassignment, employability, and potential career transitions. The challenge for project actors lies in maintaining their competitiveness in the job market, which necessitates proactive planning for reassignment and skills development to navigate an uncertain future (Forrier et al., 2018). Traditional HR policies, grounded in scientific management principles, are increasingly unsuitable for the unique demands of PBOs. Scholars such as Huemann et al. (2007), Bredin (2008), and Bredin and Söderlund (2011, 2013) argue for revised HR practices that address the fluid and project-oriented nature of these organizations. Career development plays a pivotal role in this transformation, with Simonsen (1997) defining it as an ongoing process of planning and taking deliberate actions toward achieving personal and professional goals. It encompasses continuous skill acquisition and growth, blending individual career

planning with organizational support and opportunities in a collaborative manner. The new career models emerging within PBOs challenge traditional notions of career progression. These models no longer rely on gradual promotions or linear paths (Bredin and Söderlund, 2011; Hölzle, 2010). Instead, they prioritize acquiring diverse experiences (Keegan and Turner, 2003) and fostering skill development among project managers (Azmi, 2010). PBOs must actively offer appropriate career opportunities to their employees, including skill recognition (Calamel et al., 2012), tailored training programs (Palm and Lindahl, 2015), and job rotation initiatives (Alaei and Shahezai, 2015). These strategies address employee expectations and prepare them for varied project demands (Turner et al., 2008; Alaei and Shahezai, 2015). Career success in PBOs is shaped not only by organizational structures but also by individual initiative. Larsen (2002) emphasizes that project actors themselves are key players in their career development, taking responsibility for enriching their professional experiences over time (El-Sabaa, 2001; Packendorff, 2002; Bredin and Söderlund, 2011, 2011; Crawford et al., 2013; Welch and Welch, 2015; Lloyd-Walker et al., 2016). This evolving form of career management allows individuals to strategically plan their future by identifying and developing the skills necessary for sustaining their career trajectory (Huzoore and Ramdoo, 2015). El-Sabaa (2001) underscores that project managers must actively shape their careers by taking a more engaged role in defining their professional journey, adapting their skills to new challenges, and embracing change. This shift toward dynamic, skill-focused career models reflects the unique requirements of PBOs. These organizations must create an environment where both individuals and the organization can thrive, balancing flexibility, continuous learning, and proactive career development. This approach ensures that employees are well-equipped to handle the complexities of project-based work while achieving personal and professional fulfillment.

3. METHODOLOGY

For this research, a qualitative approach was chosen, which included a series of in-depth investigations conducted with Libyan project managers. The researchers opted for non-directive interviews, which are well-suited to gathering rich, qualitative data, as they provide participants with the freedom to express their thoughts and experiences more spontaneously within a clearly defined topic (Baumard et al., 2014). This type of interview encourages open dialogue and allows for a deeper understanding of the subject matter, facilitating the collection of valuable insights. The interviewees were selected from two Libyan cities. To contact potential participants, the researchers utilized LinkedIn as a platform, which proved effective for reaching the appropriate professionals. The number of participants was not predetermined but instead was based on the principle of semantic saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). This approach was adopted to ensure that interviews continued until no new information or themes emerged, signaling that the data collection process was sufficiently comprehensive. As a result, a total of 31 Libyan project managers were interviewed. The final sample consisted of 5 women (16.13%) and 26 men (83.87%), with an average age of 39 years, ranging from 28 to 53 years. On average, the participants had approximately 7 years of experience as project managers. This mix of gender and professional experience allowed for a diverse range of perspectives to be captured, which provided a more comprehensive understanding of the role of career development in project-based organizations.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study highlight the challenges that project managers face when working in temporary organizations, particularly regarding career development. Many interviewees expressed a preference for remaining in functional organizations, where career paths tend to be more structured and predictable. This finding contrasts with the assertions made by Dubreil (1993), who suggested that while project structures hold potential for the future, they also carry the risks of uncertainty for their members, as opposed to the more stable prospects associated with business structures. Several studies have pointed to the fact that the lack of career development opportunities in project-based organizations (PBOs) can lead to job insecurity for project managers (El-Sabaa, 2001; Bredin and Söderlund, 2013; McKeivitt et al., 2017; Lloyd-Walker et al., 2018). This aligns with the interviewees' views, who highlighted the challenges of navigating a career in an environment marked by temporary assignments and shifting roles. Further, the study affirms that traditional career models are not entirely applicable within PBOs. Authors such as Hölzle (2010), McKeivitt et al. (2017), and Chen et al. (2019) contend that the career trajectory of a project manager is fundamentally different from that of a functional manager. In functional organizations, career paths tend to follow a linear, hierarchical progression, whereas in PBOs, career development is often fragmented and shaped by project-based assignments. This underscores the necessity to rethink traditional career management models to better suit the dynamic and fluid nature of project-based work (El-Sabaa, 2001; Crawford et al., 2013; McKeivitt et al., 2017; Loufrani-Fedida, 2019; Huemann et al., 2019).

There is a growing recognition of the need to establish career paths tailored specifically to project managers. Authors such as Hölzle (2010), Bredin and Söderlund (2013), and Savelsbergh et al. (2016) suggest that career development frameworks for project managers should be adapted to acknowledge the distinct nature of project-based work. Engwall et al. (2003) also point out that project work offers an alternative career trajectory, one that links individual professional goals with the unique demands of project-based organizations. This idea is corroborated by some interviewees, who noted that careers in PBOs are increasingly viewed as horizontal and multifaceted, with varied and overlapping roles across different projects. This perception aligns with the concept of the "spiral career path" proposed by Keegan and Turner (2003). According to this view, career development in a PBO is not a straight line but rather a journey of continuous learning and skill development through

successive projects. As modern-day "nomads," project managers often move from one project to another, with each assignment offering an opportunity for growth and expanding their competencies. This flexibility allows project managers to accumulate diverse experiences, enhancing their capabilities and career prospects in ways that traditional career models do not. The transient nature of projects compels project managers to be proactive in developing their career paths, rather than relying solely on their organizations for career advancement (Bredin and Söderlund, 2013; Savelsbergh et al., 2016). Project managers are required to plan their own future development by identifying the skills necessary to advance in their careers (El-Sabaa, 2001; Crawford et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2019). As Larsen (2002) asserts, it is crucial for individuals to "create their own career path" based on their knowledge, initiative, and ability to employ themselves. This view reflects the idea that, in a project-based organization, career development is not predetermined by the company but is an ongoing, self-directed process driven by the project manager's own actions and aspirations. Interviewees in the study confirmed that continuous skill development is a vital part of their career progression. The need to constantly acquire new knowledge and refine existing skills was emphasized as a key strategy for distinguishing themselves from others and achieving professional success. El-Sabaa (2001) supports this notion, suggesting that project managers must focus on maintaining both interpersonal and technical skills in order to thrive in their careers. These competencies, according to the findings, act as foundational elements for career development in project-based environments. As skills are critical for distinguishing a project manager in a competitive field, they provide the necessary basis for career opportunities and advancement within PBOs. Marion et al. (2014) argue that an evaluation system capable of identifying skill gaps is essential to guide project managers in their career development by enabling them to target areas for improvement and growth.

While project managers are encouraged to take charge of their career paths, some interviewees acknowledged that organizations still play an important supportive role in career development. This finding aligns with previous research by Granrose and Portwood (1987), Turner et al. (2008), Huemann (2010), and Hölzle (2010), who underscore the role of organizations in facilitating the career growth of their employees. Turner et al. (2008) argue that career development is not only crucial for the individual project manager but is also beneficial for the organization as a whole. Hölzle (2010) stresses that organizations must continue to motivate their staff by providing clear opportunities for career advancement. This involves assisting employees in clarifying their career goals, identifying skills gaps, and improving performance through targeted training and development programs. Additionally, Huemann (2010) emphasizes that career development opportunities serve as a key management tool for attracting and retaining talented project managers, making the retention of skilled workers more feasible in a competitive project-based environment. Granrose and Portwood (1987) further support the idea that organizational involvement in career planning can reduce uncertainty among employees, which in turn fosters job satisfaction and greater organizational commitment. By offering structured career development support, organizations can build trust and loyalty, ensuring that employees are more likely to remain committed to their roles and the company. Thus, while project managers are primarily responsible for charting their own career trajectories, the organization's role in providing career development support remains an essential factor in career satisfaction and retention within PBOs.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research sought to explore the role of career development within the context of Project-Based Organizations (PBOs) and its relationship with Human Resource Management (HRM). Through qualitative research based on 31 interviews with Libyan project managers, the study reveals that the temporary nature of project-based work limits career development opportunities. Consequently, project managers must take an active role in maintaining and developing their skills throughout their career path. This finding highlights the critical need for project managers to adopt a proactive approach to career management, given the uncertainty and transience associated with PBOs. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its enhancement of the literature on career management within the specific context of PBOs. By highlighting the unique challenges faced by project managers, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how career paths are structured and managed within these types of organizations. This work also adds to the literature on HRM by demonstrating the importance of career development as a key factor in project-based work environments, emphasizing how project managers themselves must assume responsibility for their professional development. From a managerial perspective, this research provides valuable insights that can help project managers better understand how to navigate career growth in the often-fluid PBO context. However, the study does have some limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small, consisting of only 31 Libyan project managers, which may limit the external validity of the results. This small sample size means that the findings may not be fully representative of the broader population of project managers in PBOs. Second, the research focused exclusively on project managers, and it would be useful to extend the investigation to include other roles within PBOs, such as line managers or project team members. A more comprehensive approach could provide a fuller picture of career development within these organizations. Third, the study used a static approach, as the interviews were conducted at a single point in time. To gain a deeper understanding of how perceptions of career development evolve in PBOs, a longitudinal qualitative study could track changes over time. Finally, the research was conducted in a single country, Libya, which limits the generalizability of the findings across different cultural and organizational contexts. Despite these limitations, the findings offer several avenues for future research. For example, conducting a comparative study between Libyan and foreign project managers could help identify cultural differences and similarities in how career development is managed in PBOs. Furthermore, the research could be extended by including project managers from other countries to explore whether these career development challenges are universal or context-dependent.

Finally, conducting a quantitative study with a larger sample size would allow for broader generalization of the findings and could offer more robust insights into the dynamics of career management within PBOs. In conclusion, this research contributes to the understanding of career development in PBOs and highlights the importance of a proactive, self-directed approach by project managers in managing their career paths. It also calls attention to the challenges posed by the temporary nature of project-based work and underscores the need for HRM strategies that support continuous learning and career advancement in such environments.

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