

Exploring the extent to which SMEs can realize better organizational performance when various project management practices are linked together ¹

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Abstract

Over the years, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have been perceived as one of the key drivers of economic growth and job creation, particularly, in low- and medium-income countries. However, despite the support from international agencies and most governments, SMEs activities in these countries are still limited with resources essential to fortify their organizational performance. There is therefore a need to find ways of managing these limited resources via moderate project management practices that can help bolster the SMEs projects in these countries in terms of the time, cost and quality performances. This study thus attempts to bridge the identified knowledge gap by examining the extent to which SMEs can realize a better organizational performance when various project management practices are linked together in Somaliland. Using a questionnaire survey design that explored the links between six project management practices that mostly have significant impact on the organizational performance of SMEs, data were obtained from 46 SME stakeholders selected based on simple random sampling. SPSS Statistics Software and Microsoft Excel Packages was utilized to compute the Cronbach's Alpha, mean values and Relative Importance Index (RII), respectively, for reliability check and ranking purposes. The results show that linking project cost management and project procurement management (RII = 0.687), linking project scope management and project risk management (RII = 0.683) and, linking project communication management, project procurement management and project schedule management (RII = 0.665) are the three most preferred PM knowledge area links/combinations, respectively, in terms of their level of contribution to the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa. The implications of the results obtained are quite essential to

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the SMEs industry, as they offer creative insights that could guide the development of strategies required for future implementation of project management in the industry. Consequently, the Government of Somaliland are recommended to develop strategies that can support SMEs in terms of project management capacity building.

Keywords: Project Management, Project Management Knowledge Areas, SMEs, Low- and Medium Income Countries, Organizational Performance, Hargeisa-Somaliland

Introduction

Over the past decade, there have been consensus among economic planners on the significance of the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in realizing economic development (Mensah, Domfeh, Justice, & Bawole, 2013; Stimson, Stough, & Roberts, 2006; Zafar & Mustafa, 2017). This has led many governments and development establishments to focus on finding ways to promote SMEs in an effort to encourage an all-inclusive participation in the private sector (Battaglia, Bianchi, Frey, & Iraldo, 2010; Muhammad, Char, Yaso'a, & Hassan, 2009). Consequently, SMEs are perceived as one of the vital sources of entrepreneurial skills, innovation, reduction in poverty level and job creation (Stewart & Gapp, 2014; Zafar & Mustafa, 2017). So, as organizations continue to hunt for novel and improved ways of attaining competitive advantage, it is important for businesses to examine the size of each of their functional areas in order to advance their organizational performance.

Project management (PM) scheme is a keen system that can allow organizations to reach their goals in a timely manner (Badiru, 1999; Kimmons & Loweree, 2017). Meaning that project management involves the application of knowledge, skills, processes and procedures in project settings to effectively, efficiently, and properly attain the project objectives (A. Munns & Bjeirmi, 1996). Project management thus, plays a central role in the variance competitive benefit of organizations and project management knowledge areas helps these organizations to manage the changes that may occur in the business environment (Fashina, Abdilahi, & Fakunle, 2020). Moreover, in recent times, modern approaches to management have continually advanced the influence of project management on the successful execution of projects (Iyer & Banerjee, 2016). This is why more organizations and SMEs are now applying different project management knowledge areas in their projects in an effort to improve their organizational performance which can in turn safeguard a lasting capability in the current technology driven business environment, globally (Abdilahi, Fakunle, & Fashina, 2020; Fashina et al., 2020).

Today, quite a number of successful organizations including SMEs have indicated that managing several projects more tactically via project management processes increases the effectiveness and efficiency of such SMEs and organizations, and in turn improve their organizational performances (Brooks, 2008; Makanyeza & Dzvuke, 2015). In spite of this, public and private organizations and individuals in many low- and medium-income countries have invested enormous financial resources in enterprises in the last decade without yielding the desired outcomes (Ahmad, Ramayah, Halim, & Rahman, 2017; Iftikhar Hussain, 2012; Maarof & Mahmud, 2016). However, observations from practice and findings from prior research studies indicate the need to further

explore the connection between organizational performance and PM, particularly when the PM knowledge areas are linked together (Supyuenyong & Swierczek, 2011).

Although, project management facilitates the proper coordination of project tasks/activities, the potential increase in organizational performance of SMEs can also be linked with the development and applications of various aspects of project management knowledge areas in projects (Blanc Alquier & Lagasse Tignol, 2006; Chandler & Mcevoy, 2000; Turner, Ledwith, & Kelly, 2012). In addition, an improved understanding of how PM can help improve organizational performance of businesses is of paramount importance to SMEs (Lückmann & Feldmann, 2017; Turner, Ledwith, & Kelly, 2010). Since it is thus clear that projects contribute to the strategic direction of organizations including SMEs, integrating a combinations of PM knowledge areas into the coordination of projects appears to be a crucial integral of organizational performance.

However, the links between various PM knowledge areas and organizational performance have not been well-established. This have mostly led to a deprived return on project management investments, despite the huge efforts in developing the proper procedures and approaches to PM in SMEs in recent times (Bouazza, Ardjouman, & Abada, 2015). The issue regarding project management knowledge areas and its perceptible contribution to organizational performance of SMEs motivated this research study.

Within this context, the aim of this study is to explore the extent to which SMEs can realize a better organizational performance if the various project management practices are linked together. Emphasis is given to the impacts of the links between six out of the ten project management knowledge areas on the organizational performance of SMEs. The findings from the research work will thus assist impending researchers and graduate students that might want to conduct related studies in other parts of Somaliland or elsewhere. Moreover, the current study provides evidence-based insights that could guide key SMEs stakeholders, and government agencies and partners in the formulation of novel strategies that are essential for the application of project management in advancing the operation of SMEs in the nearest future.

The first part of this paper presents the background introduction to the application of project management in SMEs. The second part discusses the theory and practice of the project management knowledge areas investigated in this study. Besides, the research methodology adopted in this study is presented in the third part before presenting the results and data analysis in the fourth part. The fifth part elucidates on the findings and implications of the current study. The last part of this paper presents the conclusions and practical recommendations that could guide the successful implementation of future SME projects.

Theory

Project management knowledge areas and practice

Project management practices represents an ideal technique that is presently accepted by project management industry to achieve a definite goal or objective (Movassaghi, 1990). It is also perceived as an idea that claims that there is no process, method or technique that is more productive at delivering a particular outcome when implementing a project than itself (Andersen,

Birchall, Arne Jessen, & Money, 2006; D Anderson, 1992). Aside the five phases of project management set forth by the Project Management Institute in the Project Management Body of Knowledge, the book also comprises of ten knowledge areas that are typically of any project, regardless of the project management methodology used (Project Management Institute, 2017). These knowledge areas characterize the skills that project managers need to develop to be successful (Ramazani & Jergeas, 2015; Thomas & Mengel, 2008). Consequently, a potential project manager that want to be successful will be required to consistently demonstrate his/her competencies in these knowledge areas throughout the phases of any project (Thomas & Mengel, 2008). These knowledge areas include; project integration management, project scope management, project schedule management, project cost management, project quality management, project resource management, project communications management, project risk management, project procurement management and project stakeholder management (Project Management Institute, 2017).

This study however focuses on six of the ten knowledge areas as key project management practices utilized in the current investigation, in terms of their influence on the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, Somaliland. These include project scope management, project risk management, project cost management, project communication management, project procurement management and project schedule management.

Project scope management

Scope simply means what is required to be done while scope management is the process needed in managing what must be done (Nath & Momin, 2014). This implies that the project scope management can be vital to the success of any project than any of the other project management knowledge area (Abdilahi, Fakunle, & Fashina, 2020a; Khan, 2006). Over the past years, it has been established that the scope management can successfully addresses not less than five of the six prevailing factors related to cost overruns and unrestrained project development (Abdilahi et al., 2020; Fashina et al., 2020; Khan, 2006; Nath & Momin, 2014). Scope management in a project consist of the processes that are thoroughly required in order to ensure that the project is streamlined to only the essential works (Atkinson, Crawford, & Ward, 2006). This mostly facilitates the achievements of the required product, services or objectives. Furthermore, the project scope management process comprises of procedures that certify that a project will be finished as planned if it is only include the required work (Project Management Institute, 2017). Moreover, there exist six basic processes of scope management that include scope management plan, project scope definition statement, work breakdown structure, project scope verification, project scope validation and project scope control (Abdilahi et al., 2020).

Project risk management

Project risk management involves the processes that help with the identification, monitoring and controlling, and preparedness against the occurrence of risks in projects (Moran, 2014). The major motive behind this knowledge area is to plan against the possibility of risks in projects (Carbone & Tippett, 2004). This allows the impact of such risks to be minimized in any circumstance. Consequently, managing risks in projects includes a risk assessment process and a mitigation

approach for the identified risks. Risk assessment on one side includes both the identification of possible risk and the evaluation of the likely impact of the identified risks (Akintoye & MacLeod, 1997; Sheikh, Fakunle, & Fashina, 2020). On the other hand, a risk mitigation plan is designed to either eradicate or minimize the effect of the risk events-occurrences on the project (Thamhain, 2013).

Project cost management

Project Cost Management (PCM) is the project management knowledge base area that covers planning, estimating, budgeting, financing, funding, managing, and controlling costs to be incurred in the project (Ahsan & Gunawan, 2010; Bhunia, Sahoo, & Shaikh, 2019; A. K. Munns & Bjeirmi, 1996; Smith, 2016). Project cost management is mostly related to the cost of numerous resources that are needed to finish the project activities. However, it is important to note that cost in project management is often measured in monetary amounts that must be paid to procure the project's goods or services. Moreover, project cost management involves the processes that help the project manager to forecast the project expenses and take financial precautionary actions that are required to ensure that the project is completed within the approved budget (Ahsan & Gunawan, 2010; Atkinson, 1999; Bhunia et al., 2019).

Project communication management

Since excellent and effective communication is a critical to the success of any project, project communication management (PCMGT) ensures the dispensation of information is appropriate and timely to both the stakeholders and other project teams involved in the project (Benita Zulch, 2014; BG Zulch, 2014). In fact, according to the project management institute (PMI), most project failure are due to communication issues (Project Management Institute, 2017). This implies that effective communication can help bridge the gap of cultural and organization difference among various stakeholders who may possess some different levels of expertise, and different perspectives and interests (Ziek & Anderson, 2015; BG Zulch, 2014). Furthermore, PCMGT ensures that the performance of the project is continually reported to the stakeholders in the form of status reports, progress measurement and future forecasts (Ziek & Anderson, 2015). PCMGT therefore, demands that stakeholders must ensure that their impact and impression regarding the project are well-documented (Benita Zulch, 2014). This implies that a communication plan that will take care of the documentation process of all communication and content of communication with stakeholders is required. Nevertheless, a frequent communication with stakeholders to address any occurring issues can help manage their expectations (Benita Zulch, 2014; BG Zulch, 2014).

Project procurement management

Project procurement simply means the finding and gathering of the materials and services needed for the execution of a project while project procurement management (PPM) involves procedures utilized in ensuring that the project procurement is successful (de Araújo, Alencar, & de Miranda Mota, 2017; Sykes, 2007). Procurement management in projects can thus be seen as a technique used to proficiently and productively handle the process of sourcing, requisitioning, ordering, expediting, inspecting involved in the process of procuring materials and services required for

such projects (Sykes, 2007; Walker, 2007). In summary, PPM encompasses all the processes that are considered essential in acquiring project products, services and results by means of purchase outside the project (Oyegoke, Dickinson, Khalfan, McDermott, & Rowlinson, 2009). In practice, the management of procurement throughout a project's lifecycle is vital to the success of such project (Omar, Fashina & Fakunle, 2020). This is because inadequate decision and transaction in this regard can cause project delay (de Araújo et al., 2017; Fashina, Fakunle, & Opiti, 2020; Oyegoke et al., 2009).

Project schedule management

In the world of project management, one could argue that there is no other resource that is as valuable as time, this is because once an activity or event is delayed in a project, it eventually affects the next activities and in some most cases, the entire project (Sanchez, Terlizzi, & de Moraes, 2017). However, project schedule management is most efficient way to avoid the issue of delay in such a project. The project schedule management knowledge area includes the process that are carried out in line with the project timeline in an effort to ensure and smoothen the completion of the project at the specified schedule (Fakunle & Fashina, 2020). Simply put, project schedule management involves the processes that are required to ensure timely completion of each and every activity in a project (Atkinson, 1999). So, since a project is seen as a temporary effort, project schedule management helps to manage who is working on what, and how much time is needed to complete the various tasks and other processes in the other process groups. This is the reason why every project manager must manage their own schedule alongside the team's schedule in order ensure that every schedule is completed within the stipulated timeline (Müller & Turner, 2007). Moreover, an exceptional schedule management in project management involves adequate planning, proper scheduling, constant monitoring and controlling of all project activities (Bhunja et al., 2019).

Research methodology

The research method utilized in this study was the questionnaire survey research design. The research survey covers the collection of data with the aim to describe and analyze the extent to which SMEs can realize a better organizational performance when various project management knowledge areas are linked together. A total of seven suitable combinations of six knowledge areas of project management are investigated in this study. Furthermore, the various combinations of the PM knowledge areas were rated in this study based on the Likert's scale of 5 ordinal measures from 1 to 5, according to the level of contribution (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

The target population consist of employees from six small medium enterprises business in Hargeisa, Somaliland that are involved in the area of projects operations and management. The sample size of 50 respondents from a population of 55 was used in the study, based on simple random sampling. This was achieved by adopting the Krejcie and Morgan's table, as depicted in (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The population size was limited to this number to effectively maximize the time and resource allocated for the research work. In an effort to get real data directly from the respondents, structured questionnaires were employed to acquire primary data in this study through self-administration.

A pilot study was first conducted to confirm that an appropriate level of quality in the research instrument is attained in terms of its reliability and steadiness. This was achieved using a convenience sample of experts in SMEs. Before the distribution of the questionnaires, the questionnaire was presented to two project management consultants to validate the contents of the questionnaire and to ensure that the sentences are clear and precise. Following the distribution of the questionnaires, the questionnaires were collected from the respondents after 5 days to ensure that the questionnaires were appropriately filled.

Before the analysis of the collected data, the responses received from the respondents were filtered, and entered into spreadsheets (Microsoft Excel 2019 and SPSS work area). The reliability of the data obtained from the questionnaire survey was then tested using the Cronbach's Alpha method (Cronbach, 1951). This was accomplished by using SPSS Statistics Software (version 25) to compute the Cronbach's Alpha, and the reliability coefficient was determined to show the internal consistency of the data, using Equation 1 (Cronbach, 1951):

$$\text{Cronbach's alpha, } \alpha = \frac{K}{K-1} \left[1 - \frac{\sum V_i^2}{V_x^2} \right] \quad (1)$$

where K, represents the number of items; V_i represents the variance of scores on each item; and V_x , represents the variance of the observed total test scores.

Relative Importance Index (RII) was picked as a proper analytical method (Doloi, Sawhney, Iyer, & Rentala, 2012) utilized to establish a mean rating point and analyze the ratings received via the questionnaires. Each calculation was computed using RII formula in Equation 2 (Doloi et al., 2012):

$$\text{Relative importance index, RII} = \frac{\sum W}{A \times N} \quad (2)$$

where W, represents the rating given to each factor by the respondents. For instance, 5 is for very high contributing factor, 4 is for high contributing factor, 3 is for average contributing factor, 2 is for low contributing factor and 1 is for very low contributing factor. A is the highest weight (5 for this study) and N represents the total number of samples (46 for this study).

In addition, the study was conducted based on the standard ethical practices required of any reputable academic research. Respondents were informed both orally and in writing about the objective of the study and their consents was established before filling out the questionnaires. The confidentiality respondents were also assured before engaging them.

Results and data analysis

Survey results

Out of the 50 questionnaires randomly administered to the target respondents, 46 questionnaires were returned, as four respondents were unable to provide information. Moreover, all the

responses that were received from the participants as regards the returned questionnaires were deemed valid (See Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of the total numbers of questionnaires distributed and returned, excluded, and valid questionnaires

S/N	Number of questionnaires distributed	Not returned	Number of returned	Valid	Invalid
1	50	4	46	46	0
2	100 %	8 %	92 %	100 %	0 %

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage distribution of the respondents’ education background. As depicted in Figure 1, the respondents with bachelor degrees have the highest percentage (45.6 %). The respondents with diploma certificates are found to have the second highest percentage (19.6 %.) The respondents with master degrees are found to have the third highest percentage (15.2 %). The respondents with technical school certificates are found to have fourth highest percentage (10.9 %). Meanwhile, the respondents with PhD degrees are found to have the least percentage (8.7 %).

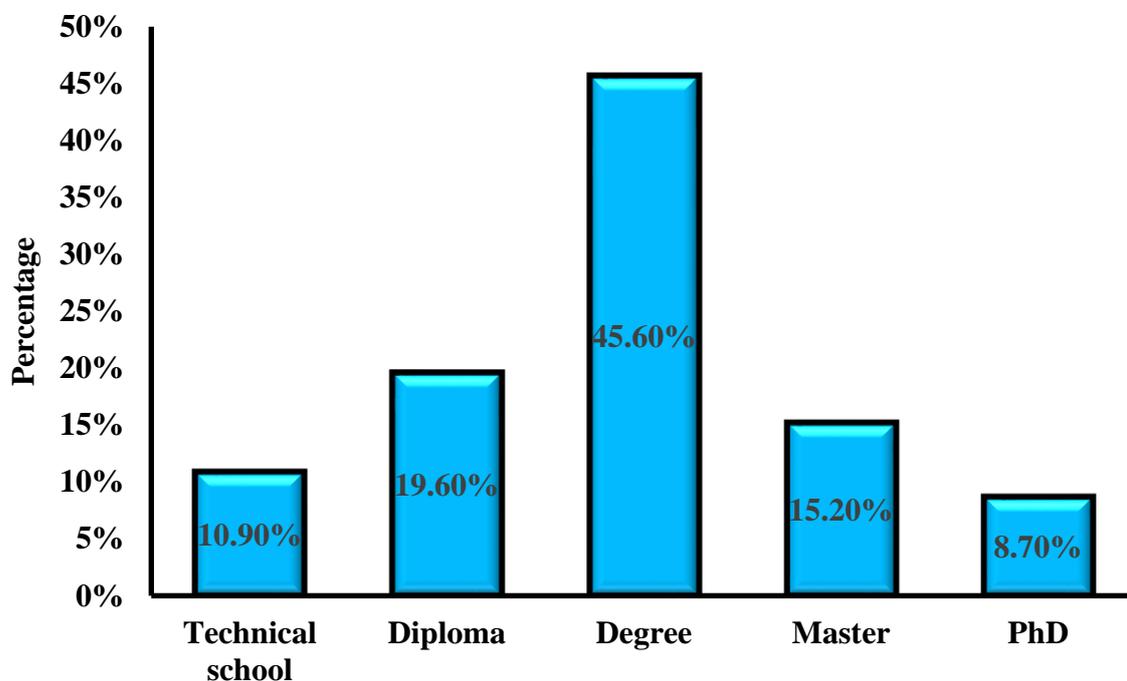


Figure 1: The percentage distribution of respondents’ level of education

Figure 2 presents the percentage distribution of the number of SME projects that the respondents have participated in. Figure 2 show that the respondents' involvement in SME projects are not evenly distributed. This is because over 80 % of the respondents have been involved in more than four SME projects i.e. 17.4 % have been involved in 1-3 projects and another 30.4% have been involved in 4 to 6 projects. However, the remaining 52.2% of the respondents have been involved in 7-10 projects (28.3%) or over 10 projects (23.9%).

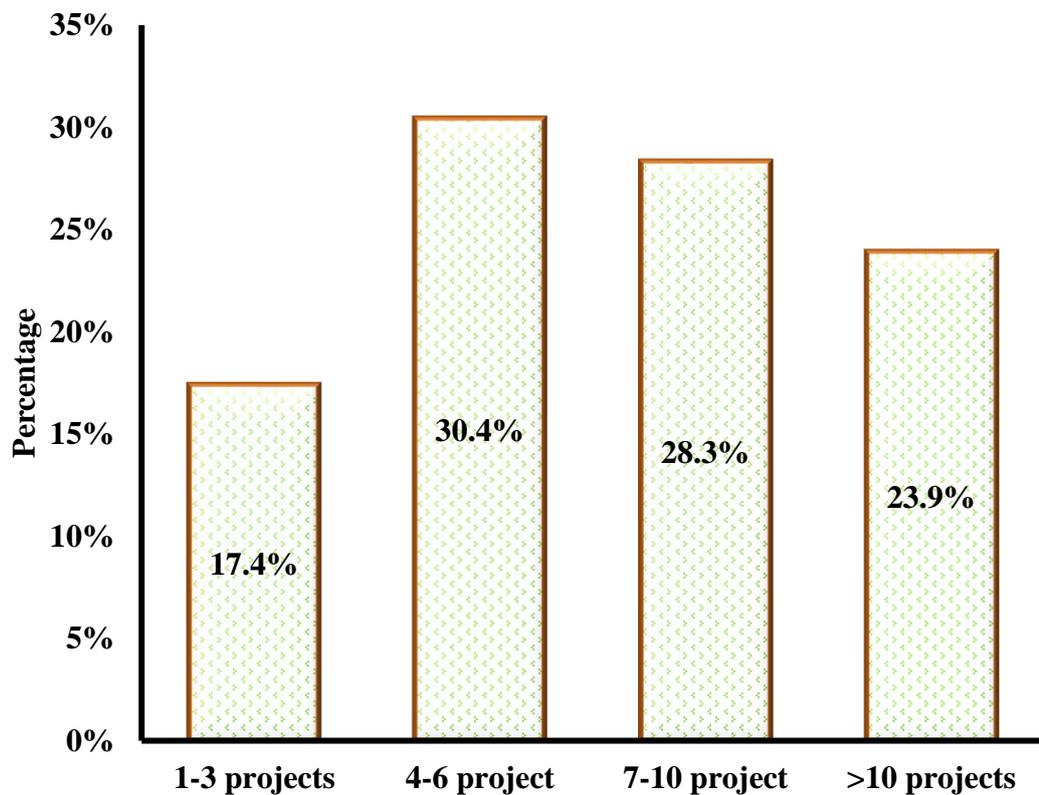


Figure 2: The number of SMEs projects that the respondents have been involved in

Cronbach's alpha data reliability test

Using Table 2, the internal consistency of the answers provided by the respondents was measured based on the range of the Cronbach coefficient obtained (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Furthermore, the results of the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test conducted for the answers received regarding the seven suitable combinations of six knowledge areas of project management examined in this study show that the Cronbach's Alpha values is 0.725. This implies that the internal consistency of the responses established in the current study has a good reliability of 72.5%.

Table 2: Internal consistency of Cronbach’s Alpha

S/N	Cronbach’s alpha, α	Internal consistency
1	$\alpha \geq 0.8$	Excellent
2	$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Good
3	$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Satisfactory
4	$\alpha < 0.5$	Poor

Analysis of the impacts of linking various project management knowledge areas together

The impacts of linking various project management knowledge areas together have been ranked based on Relative Importance Index (RII) and Mean Value. To establish the level of contribution of the different links, the RII and mean value rankings are organized according to the RII classification table presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Classification of RII

Scale	Extent of significance	RII
1	No extent	$0.0 \leq \text{RII} \leq 0.2$
2	Little extent	$0.2 < \text{RII} \leq 0.4$
3	Moderate extent	$0.4 < \text{RII} \leq 0.6$
4	Large extent	$0.6 < \text{RII} \leq 0.8$
5	Very large extent	$0.8 < \text{RII} \leq 1.0$

Table 4 shows the results of the survey analysis of the impact of linking together various project management knowledge areas. Regarding the most significant combination, Table 4 indicates that linking project cost management and project procurement management (RII = 0.687) is the most preferred impact in terms of the level of contribution to managing projects and increasing organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, as perceived by the respondents. Besides that, linking project scope management and project risk management (RII = 0.683) is ranked second position, linking project communication management, project procurement management and project schedule management (RII = 0.665) is ranked third position, linking project scope management, project risk management and project cost management (RII = 0.630) is ranked fourth position, linking project procurement management and project schedule management (RII = 0.600) is ranked fifth position, linking project scope management, project risk management, project cost management, project communication management, project procurement management and project schedule management (RII = 0.591) is ranked sixth position, while linking project communication management and project schedule management (RII = 0.474), is ranked as the least contributing factor.

Table 4: The mean score value and RII ranking for the impacts of linking various project management knowledge areas in SMEs projects in Hargeisa, Somaliland

S/N	Linking Various Project Management Knowledge Areas in SMEs Projects	RII	Mean Value	RII & Mean Value Ranking	Level of Preference
1	Linking project scope management, project risk management, project cost management, project communication management, project procurement management and project schedule management	0.591	2.957	6	Average
2	Linking project scope management, project risk management and project cost management	0.630	3.152	4	High
3	Linking project communication management, project procurement management and project schedule management	0.665	3.326	3	High
4	Linking project scope management and project risk management	0.683	3.413	2	High
5	Linking project cost management and project procurement management	0.687	3.435	1	High
6	Linking project communication management and project schedule management	0.474	2.370	7	Average
7	Linking project procurement management and project schedule management	0.600	3.000	5	High

Discussion and Implications of the study

As perceived by the respondents, the most influential PM knowledge area link/combination that significantly improve the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, Somaliland is the link between project cost management and project procurement management when executing projects. This is however, not surprising because most of the SMEs in Somaliland are involved in trading

businesses. Moreover, the respondents showed their understanding regarding the industry as most of the goods sold in Somaliland are mostly imported from Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, UK, China, Ethiopia etc. Which invariably implies that if procurements of these goods are not properly managed, the sales and capital of the SMEs would be affected and as such the organizational performance in terms of time delivery and quality would also diminish. However, the management of procurement of goods cannot be effective if the cost of the products and goods are not adequately considered using the right project cost management tools. The choice of the respondents is thus justifiable.

Respondents ranked the link between project scope management and project risk management as the second most preferred PM knowledge area combination that significantly improve the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This is to a large extent agreeable because in an effort to ensure that each SME project is streamlined to only the essential works per time and strategize against the potential risks in such projects, it is vital to apply both scope and risk management processes together in trading businesses. This will not only help the SMEs to have significant control over uncertainties but will also ease the accomplishment of the target objectives. This systematic ability will thus assist the SMEs that put it into practice with the timely development of exigence plans required to stop loss of business income and in so doing would continually expand their organizational performance. This shows that most of respondents are knowledgeable about the link between scope and risk management in projects and must have been putting this into practice, which thus justifies their choice here.

In addition, linking project communication management, project procurement management and project schedule management was ranked by the respondents as the third most preferred PM knowledge area combination that significantly improve the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This combination is quite important as successful trading in a place like Somaliland, where there is competition among the SMEs, requires an effective procurement management that is supported with proper schedule management and adequate communication management. This is because a timely procurement and delivery of goods can boost operational performance of SMEs and this isn't achievable without the support of a proper schedule that is communicated appropriately among the SME stakeholders. Moreover, the respondents showed their understanding regarding the importance of procurement, schedule/time and communication in SMEs trading.

Regarding the most preferred links between PM knowledge areas, the respondents ranked linking project scope management, project risk management and project cost management as the fourth most significant link that improve the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The choice of the respondents here is justifiable as it is generally perceived that cost management is a subset of scope and risk management. Meaning that although, costs appreciations in projects can be greatly reduced if project cost management is properly applied, organizational performance can only be heightened when cost management is technically supported with scope and risk management. The link between these three facilitates development and implementation of effective control plans to avert risk occurrence in projects (Fakunle, Opiti, Sheikh, & Fashina, 2020). This is why this combination did not fall within the first three rank positions.

Linking project procurement management and project schedule management was ranked by the respondents as the fifth most preferred PM knowledge area combination that significantly enhance the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This is also not surprising as the concept of managing procurement alongside time/schedule has been well understood by most project managers and SMEs, and it is one of the procedures or technique that appears to be gladly known and accepted by SMEs involved in trading regardless of experience or location as this process just happens to be simple. This is because most project managers and SMEs know the consequences attached and to some extent the combination of the two PM knowledge areas do not really amplify the performance of these SMEs expect being linked with a third PM knowledge area.

Linking project scope management, project risk management, project cost management, project communication management, project procurement management and project schedule management is ranked by the respondents as the sixth most preferred PM knowledge area combination that significantly improve the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This is justifiable because linking six project management knowledge areas together at once in a trading SMEs can be quite complex as such most projects will likely fail within a short period, which will in turn affect the organizational performance of the SMEs.

The results of the current work also disclosed that the respondents ranked linking project communication management and project schedule management as the least preferred PM knowledge area combination that significantly improve the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This can be traceable to the fact that most of these SMEs are involved in trading and as such, the management of communication works individually among team members or collaboratively when communication is combined with schedule management alongside an additional PM knowledge.

In general, the implications of the findings in the current research study are vital to future studies. Owing to globalization and increased competition among SMEs, the findings of the study indicate that the management of SMEs are becoming proactive with the use of PM in execution their projects and most importantly some SMEs now investigates their activities to find out what works and initiate corrective measures when need arises to obtain better outcomes. The successful application of PM in these SMEs cannot be achievable without having the appropriate people in the right places with required skills, positive motive to work and the management capability to harmonize the team efforts. Moreover, future scholars that might need to explore similar studies in other low- or medium-income countries can validate their findings with the outcome of this research work.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the extent to which SMEs can realize a better organizational performance when various project management practices are linked together has been explored in this study. The links between six project management practices that mostly have significant impact on the

organizational performance of SMEs have been examined to successfully realize the objective of the current study. They include project scope management; project risk management; project cost management; project communication management; project procurement management and; project schedule management.

As depicted in Table 4, the findings from the research work indicate that of the seven suitable combinations of the six knowledge areas of project management investigated in this research work, the following are the five combinations that most significantly contribute or improve the organizational performance of SMEs in Hargeisa, Somaliland: linking project cost management and project procurement management (1st); linking project scope management and project risk management (2nd); linking project communication management, project procurement management and project schedule management (3rd); linking project scope management, project risk management and project cost management (4th) and; linking project procurement management and project schedule management (5th).

Besides, the noteworthy contribution of the current study is providing a better understanding on how linking different project management knowledge areas together can better improve the organizational performance of SMEs in Somaliland and elsewhere. The findings from this study are therefore vital as they are expected to provide new insights that could guide policy-makers, decision-makers and stakeholders on how project management practices are vital to the success of SMEs in Somaliland and elsewhere. Most importantly, the finding from this study will show SMEs owners how the application of project management knowledge areas is a crucial management approach that increases organization performance if properly implemented. This study will further provide useful information for impending academicians, researchers and students who may want to use the findings of this research work to support their arguments in related area of study.

Since the findings in the current study have shown that linking various project management knowledge areas together has significant impacts on the success of projects executed in SMEs, it is strongly recommended that SMEs should enforce project management practices in the implementation of all their projects. Nevertheless, this wouldn't be effective except the Government of Somaliland devise ways to continuously support SMEs by organizing project management training activities that will update the knowledge of SMEs workforce to become familiar with the essential project management skills.

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