

IMPLEMENTAÇÃO BEM-SUCEDIDA DE PROJETOS UTILIZANDO METODOLOGIAS HÍBRIDAS EM PMES: UMA REVISÃO DE ESCOPO

*Successful project implementation utilizing hybrid methodologies within SMEs: a scoping
review*

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Comunicação:

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Objetivo do estudo

O objetivo é sintetizar como o "sucesso de projetos" é definido e mensurado na literatura, diferenciando o "triângulo de ferro" dos modelos multidimensionais que consideram a eficiência da gestão e o impacto nos resultados no setor de Pequenas e Médias Empresas (PMEs).

Relevância/originalidade

Este artigo de revisão explora a gestão de projetos híbridos (GPH) no setor de Pequenas e Médias Empresas (PMEs).

Metodologia/abordagem

Revisão bibliográfica.

Principais resultados

Analisar a definição e a mensuração do sucesso em projetos híbridos no setor de PMEs, examina-se a relação causal entre hibridização e sucesso, bem como os fatores de sucesso inerentes a esse ambiente.

Contribuições teóricas/metodológicas

Exploram-se lacunas de pesquisa, com foco no desenvolvimento conceitual, na validação empírica em PMEs, na pesquisa causal e no estudo da interação de fatores contextuais.

Contribuições sociais/para a gestão

A análise revelou lacunas críticas e significativas na literatura acadêmica, particularmente na intersecção de metodologias híbridas de gerenciamento de projetos e no contexto de pequenas e médias empresas.

Palavras-chave: PMEs, Gestão de Projetos Híbridos, Fatores de Sucesso, Lacunas de Conhecimento, Revisão

Successful project implementation utilizing hybrid methodologies within SMEs: a scoping review

Study purpose

The objective is to synthesize how "project success" is defined and measured in the literature, differentiating the "iron triangle" from multidimensional models that consider management efficiency and the impact on results in the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sector.

Relevance / originality

This review article explores hybrid project management (HPM) in the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sector.

Methodology / approach

Bibliographic review.

Main results

To analyze the definition and measurement of success in hybrid projects in the SME sector, the causal relationship between hybridization and success is examined, as well as the success factors inherent to this environment.

Theoretical / methodological contributions

Research gaps are explored, focusing on conceptual development, empirical validation in SMEs, causal research, and the study of the interaction of contextual factors.

Social / management contributions

The analysis revealed critical and significant gaps in the academic literature, particularly at the intersection of hybrid project management methodologies and in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Keywords: SMEs., Hybrid Project Management, Success Factors, Knowledge Gaps, Review

Successful Project Implementation Utilizing Hybrid Methodologies within SMEs: A Scoping Review

1 Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, organizations seek project management methodologies that offer a balance between structure and adaptability. As a pragmatic response to this need, hybrid project management (HPM) has emerged and gained notable popularity. This approach seeks to synthesize the predictability of traditional methodologies (like Waterfall) with the flexibility and responsiveness of agile approaches (Serrador & Pinto, 2015; Sibiya, Sibiya, Jordaan, & Mahosi, 2023). The adoption of hybrid frameworks has seen significant growth, reflecting a paradigm shift towards "fit-for-purpose" solutions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach (Project Management Institute, 2024).

Concurrently, the Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) sector is a key player in most global economies, serving as an engine of innovation, economic growth, and job creation (Sibiya et al., 2023). However, these organizations face a unique set of challenges in managing their projects, including, among others, limited financial and human resources, less formality in processes, and a restricted capacity to absorb changes or execute multiple projects simultaneously (Janjušić, Nikolić, & Gošnik, 2024; Bjelica et al., 2023). Effective project management is, therefore, a critical factor for their sustainability and growth (Sibiya et al., 2023).

Despite the relevance of both HPM and SMEs, a considerable knowledge gap exists at the intersection of these two domains. The academic literature on HPM suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity and a consensus definition, which hinders rigorous empirical research and knowledge accumulation (Reiff & Schlegel, 2022; Špundak, 2014).

This deficiency is particularly pronounced in the context of SMEs. The absence of theoretical frameworks and validated measurement tools makes it difficult for these companies to effectively evaluate the "success" of their project initiatives when using hybrid approaches, thereby impeding continuous improvement and evidence-based decision-making.

2 Objective

This scoping review addresses this gap in literature through two objectives. First, to identify and synthesize how "project success" is defined and measured in the literature, distinguishing between the traditional concept of the "iron triangle" and contemporary multidimensional models. The dimensions of success are categorized into two key areas: project management efficiency and project outcome impact.

Next, the literature is reviewed to pinpoint knowledge gaps in defining and measuring success for hybrid projects in SMEs, the link between hybridization and success, and key success factors in this context. The structure of the document first dedicates itself to the conceptualization of success in project management, while the second part presents a critical analysis of the gaps in the literature.

3 Methodology

A bibliographical scope review was established in accordance with the objectives set. The search period ranges from 1988, with one reference article in the field of study, to 2024. The databases Scopus, ResearchGate, Google Academic, and Project Management Journal (PMI) were consulted. Specific bibliographic search tools such as Consensus, Elicit, and Semantic were used. Articles addressing hybrid project management, project management success, project management success criteria, project management success factors, project success metrics, project management in SMEs, hybridization methodologies in SMEs, fit for

purpose, and the iron triangle were included. Literature reviews, case studies, and related articles were also included.

Part I: The Multidimensional Concept of Success in Contemporary Project Management

Section 1. Definitions of Project Success: From Constraint to Perception

The conceptualization of project success has undergone a profound evolution in recent decades. What was once a seemingly objective judgment based on execution metrics has matured into a complex, subjective, and context-dependent concept, reflecting the diverse perspectives of stakeholders and long-term strategic value.

1.1. The "Iron Triangle": Origins, Prevalence, and Critique

The most traditional and persistently cited framework for evaluating project success is known as the "Iron Triangle" or "Triple Constraint." This model posits that success is achieved if a project is delivered on time, within budget, and meets the specified scope and quality (Pollack, Helm, & Adler, 2018; Ika, 2009; Berssaneti & Carvalho, 2015). Its popularity, among both experienced and novice project managers, is largely due to its simplicity and the apparent objectivity of its components (White & Fortune, 2002; Müller & Turner, 2007). An exhaustive bibliometric analysis of project management literature confirms that Time and Cost are the two most consistently recognized vertices of the triangle. The third vertex, however, has been a subject of debate, with "Quality" being the strongest candidate, but with alternatives like "Scope" or "Performance" also proposed by various authors (Pollack et al., 2018).

Despite its prevalence, the academic community has subjected the Iron Triangle to intense criticism, arguing that it represents a restrictive, short-term, and purely operational view of success (Pinto & Pinto, 1991; Bannerman, 2008).

The main limitations identified in the literature are:

- **Oversimplification of Complexity:** The model is criticized for oversimplifying the multifaceted nature of success, ignoring crucial factors such as stakeholder satisfaction, business value, and long-term benefits (Atkinson, 1999; Van der Hoorn & Whitty, 2015).
- **Focus on Efficiency, not Effectiveness:** It centers on "doing the project right" (process efficiency) rather than "doing the right project" (strategic effectiveness) (Baccarini, 1999). A project can meet all three constraints and still be a strategic failure if it does not deliver value to the client or the organization.
- **Short-Term Perspective:** Its metrics are evaluated at the end of the project lifecycle, ignoring impacts and benefits that only materialize over time, such as product use, return on investment, or the creation of new business opportunities (Shenhar, Dvir, Levy, & Maltz, 2001; Ika & Pinto, 2022).
- **Ignoring Stakeholders:** The model does not explicitly incorporate the perceptions and satisfaction of various stakeholders, which are fundamental to the final perception of success (Jugdev & Müller, 2005; Pinto & Slevin, 1988).

The persistence of this model, despite its evident limitations, can be explained beyond its simplicity. It represents the dimension of success that is most directly under the project manager's control and measurement. Adherence to schedule, budget, and scope are direct indicators of process management performance (Bannerman, 2008). In contrast, broader metrics like "business impact" or "long-term customer satisfaction" often fall outside the direct control of the project team and are inherently more difficult to quantify objectively (Shenhar et al., 2001). Consequently, both organizations and project managers themselves may gravitate towards the Iron Triangle because it offers a semblance of control and measurable objectivity,

even if this is achieved at the expense of measuring the real, strategic value the project generates.

1.2. The Emerging Paradigm: Towards a Multidimensional and Stakeholder-Oriented View

In response to the limitations of the Iron Triangle, contemporary research has advanced towards a conceptualization of success that integrates social, subjective, and multidimensional aspects (Ika, 2009; Jugdev & Müller, 2005). From this perspective, there is no "absolute success," but rather a "perception of success" that is constructed by individuals and groups (Alderman & Ivory, 2011; Ika, 2009). This perception can vary significantly among different stakeholders (client, project team, sponsor, end-user) and can evolve over time as the long-term impacts of the project become evident (Ika, 2009; Turner & Zolin, 2012).

A key conceptual advance in this evolution was the distinction proposed by Baccarini (1999) between project management success and project product success:

- **Project Management Success:** Refers to the efficiency of the execution process. It focuses on the Iron Triangle and the quality of the management process itself.
- **Project Product Success:** Refers to the success of the project's final outcome, i.e., the delivered product or service. It is measured in terms of the effects and benefits this product generates for stakeholders.

This distinction becomes relevant by recognizing that a project could succeed in one aspect and fail in the other. For example, a project may exceed its budget and schedule (management failure) but deliver an innovative product that generates enormous business value (product success).

This emerging paradigm places stakeholder satisfaction and value creation at the center of the definition of success (Aga, Noorderhaven, & Vallejo, 2016; Pirozzi & Pirozzi, 2024). In this context, measuring success goes beyond certifying a deliverable to extend its boundary to the project's ability to meet the needs and expectations of key actors and to contribute to the organization's strategic objectives (Serra & Kunc, 2015; Pirozzi & Pirozzi, 2024).

Section 2. Dimensions for the Measurement of Success

To operationalize the multidimensional view of success, literature has proposed various frameworks and criteria. Following the fundamental distinction between process and outcome (Baccarini, 1999), these criteria can be categorized into two main dimensions: Project Management Efficiency and Product/Outcome Impact.

2.1. Dimension A: Project Management Efficiency (Process Success)

This dimension evaluates the efficiency and effectiveness with which the project was carried out. It focuses on "doing the project right" and is closely aligned with the components of the Iron Triangle but often expands them to include the quality of the process itself. It is a measure of the project team's performance in executing the plan.

Key criteria within this dimension include:

- **Budget and Schedule Adherence:** Adherence to cost and time constraints remains a fundamental indicator of project efficiency (Aga et al., 2016; Standish Group, 2015; Shenhar et al., 2001).
- **Scope and Technical Quality Compliance:** The delivery of functionalities, features, and technical specifications defined at the project's outset (Pollack et al., 2018; Standish Group, 2015).
- **Quality of the Management Process:** This criterion goes beyond the Iron Triangle outcomes to assess how the project was managed. It includes the quality of planning,

the effectiveness of communication among team members and with stakeholders, resource utilization efficiency, proactive risk management, and the ability to document and learn from lessons learned (Baccarini, 1999; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Rezaiea et al., 2009; Chan, Scott, & Chan, 2002).

2.2. Dimension B: Product/Outcome Impact (Value Success)

This dimension focuses on the value and benefits generated by the project's final deliverable. It assesses whether "the right project" was done and if it fulfilled its strategic purpose. Its measurement often requires short, medium, and long-term perspectives and is dependent on stakeholder perception.

Key criteria within this dimension include:

- **Stakeholder Satisfaction:** Considered by many as a crucial criterion, it measures the degree to which the needs and expectations of the client, end-users, project team, and sponsors were met (Aga et al., 2016; Pirozzi & Pirozzi, 2024; Cooke-Davies, 2002). Satisfaction refers not only to the final product but also to the quality of collaboration and communication throughout the project lifecycle (Albert, Balve, Spang, 2017).
- **Impact on the Client/User:** Evaluates the direct benefits that the project outcome brings to the client. This includes whether the product is used effectively, if it solves the problem it was designed for, if it improves the client's performance, and if it meets their functional and quality requirements (Shenhar et al., 2001; Baccarini, 1999; Davis, 2017).
- **Benefits for the Organization (Business Success):** Measures the project's contribution to the organization's broader strategic objectives. Criteria include return on investment (ROI), profitability, opening new markets, improving operational efficiency, strengthening competitive position, and overall strategic alignment (Shenhar et al., 2001; Serra & Kunc, 2015; Mir & Pinnington, 2014).
- **Preparing for the Future:** This is a longer-term view that assesses how the project positions the organization for future success. Criteria include the creation of new technological or market capabilities, the development of new product or service lines, and the fostering of organizational learning and innovation (Shenhar et al., 2001).

2.3. Comparative Analysis of Theoretical Success Frameworks

Different influential theoretical frameworks in project management literature have structured these dimensions in various ways. A comparative analysis reveals a notable convergence around the fundamental distinction between process efficiency and value impact.

- **Baccarini's Framework (1999):** As mentioned, this framework pioneered the distinction between "Project Management Success" and "Product Success." The former aligns directly with Dimension A (Efficiency), while the latter aligns with Dimension B (Impact) (Baccarini, 1999).
- **Shenhar et al.'s Framework (2001):** This influential model proposes four dimensions that can be clearly mapped to our categorization. "Project efficiency" corresponds to Dimension A. The other three dimensions "Impact on the customer," "Business success," and "Preparing for the future" are all facets of Dimension B, as they measure different aspects of the project outcome's value and impact (Shenhar et al., 2001).
- **Aga et al.'s Framework (2016):** Developed to evaluate projects in the international development or non-profit sector, it uses three dimensions: "Project Management

Success," which aligns with Dimension A; "Project Impact Success," which measures problem-solving and performance improvement, aligning with Dimension B; and "Stakeholder Satisfaction," which is another key component of Dimension B (Aga et al., 2016).

- Cooke-Davies's Framework (2002): Uses two dimensions, Project Management Success and Project Success, like Baccarini's framework (1999). The former aligns with Dimension A (Efficiency) with the achievement of cost, time, and quality objectives. The latter aligns with Dimension B (Impact) with the achievement of the overall strategic objectives of the project (Cooke-Davies, 2002).

The following table synthesizes this conceptual convergence, demonstrating how different frameworks, despite using different terminologies, address the same fundamental ideas.

Table 1: Comparison of Multidimensional Project Success Frameworks

Theoretical Framework (Author, Year)	Framework Components (according to the author)	Mapping to Dimension A (Management Efficiency)	Mapping to Dimension B (Outcome Impact)
Baccarini (1999)	1. Project Management Success 2. Product Success	Meeting time/cost/quality objectives, Quality of the management process.	Meeting project objectives (goals and purpose).
Shenhar et al. (2001)	1. Project Efficiency 2. Impact on the Customer 3. Business Success 4. Preparing for the Future	Meeting time and cost constraints.	Satisfying customer needs, product use. Commercial and strategic benefits for the organization. Creation of new opportunities, technologies, and markets.
Aga et al. (2016)	1. Project Management Success 2. Project Impact Success 3. Stakeholder Satisfaction	Meeting time and budget constraints.	Problem-solving, performance improvement. Satisfaction of users, beneficiaries, and donors.
Cooke-Davies (2002)	1. Project Management Success 2. Project Success	Meeting cost, time, and quality objectives.	Meeting the overall strategic objectives of the project.

The table illustrates the literature's consensus that a comprehensive evaluation of project success must transcend process efficiency metrics (Dimension A) to encompass a robust assessment of the value and impact generated by the project (Dimension B).

Part II: Identified Gaps in Literature

While the conceptualization of project success has matured considerably, its application and study in specific contexts, such as SMEs using hybrid methodologies, remain an attractive area for research.

Section 3. Gaps at the Intersection of Hybrid Methodologies, SMEs, and Success Criteria

3.1. The Fragmented Definition of Hybrid Project Management (HPM)

An obstacle to advancing research on success in hybrid projects is the lack of a clear and consensual definition of what constitutes "hybrid project management" (Špundak, 2014; Reiff & Schlegel, 2022). A systematic literature review by Reiff and Schlegel (2022) identifies two main definitional streams:

- Combination or Mix: Most studies define HPM as a combination or mix of agile and traditional methodologies, seeking to leverage the strengths of both (Gemino, Reich, & Serrador, 2021; Špundak, 2014).
- Integration: A second group of studies describes HPM as the integration of specific agile practices or components within a pre-existing traditional project management framework (Brandl et al., 2018; Cooper, 2016).

This ambiguity is a barrier to rigorous empirical research. Thus, a clear taxonomy of hybridization modalities is essential for cumulative research. For example, if a study concludes that "HPM improves project success" (Project Management Institute, 2024), its finding has limited value if its operational definition of HPM (e.g., using Scrum for a work package within a Waterfall plan) differs from that of another study (e.g., a formal Agile-Stage-Gate model) (Satpute, 2023). This difficulty constrains the generalizability of results and the identification of the best-performing hybrid configurations. Therefore, research on HPM success will benefit from a clear definition of the type of HPM being analyzed.

3.2. Measuring Success Specifically in Hybrid Projects in SMEs

Within the reviewed academic literature, it was not possible to identify success frameworks and measurement instruments that have been developed and validated specifically for the context of SMEs adopting hybrid methodologies. Most existing research on HPM either focuses on large organizations or does not specify the company size, implicitly assuming a corporate model (McHugh, Hogan, & Bogue, 2018; Satpute, 2023).

A notable exception is the conceptual work of Sibiya et al. (2023), which proposes a hybrid project management model designed for SMEs in the construction sector in South Africa. However, the authors themselves acknowledge that their model is conceptual and needs empirical validation and adaptation to other contexts and industrial sectors (Sibiya et al., 2023).

3.3. The Causal Relationship between Hybridization and Success

The literature on HPM often posits that these approaches lead to greater project success by combining "the best of both worlds": the structure and predictability of traditional methods with the flexibility and customer focus of agile methods (Kuhrmann et al., 2017; Sibiya et al., 2023). However, the evidence supporting this claim is largely based on single case studies or lacks the methodological rigor needed to establish a causal relationship (Reiff & Schlegel, 2022).

Studies like that of Serrador and Pinto (2015) found a high prevalence of approaches that project managers considered "hybrid," but research conclusively linking methodology to success remains limited and often does not clearly distinguish between different types of hybridization (Serrador & Pinto, 2015). Existing research often identifies a correlation but cannot determine whether the adoption of a hybrid approach causes greater success, or if other factors (such as greater project management maturity in general) lead to both the adoption of more sophisticated approaches and better outcomes.

The gap, therefore, is the lack of quantitative or mixed-methods studies that systematically investigate the causal relationship between the degree and type of methodological hybridization and the different dimensions of project success. For example, questions like: Does a higher degree of agility within a hybrid model correlate more strongly with "customer satisfaction" (Dimension B) or with "process efficiency" (Dimension A)? Are

there specific hybrid configurations that optimize both types of success simultaneously? These questions remain unanswered in the current literature.

3.4. Unique Success Factors in the SME Ecosystem

The literature conclusively indicates that Critical Success Factors (CSFs) and Success Criteria (SC) in SMEs differ from those prioritized in large corporations (Janjušić et al., 2024; Murphy & Ledwith, 2007). SMEs are characterized by more limited resources, flatter organizational structures, less formality in processes, and a central and dominant role of the owner or director in strategic decision-making (Janjušić et al., 2024).

A specific study on SMEs in Slovenia found that the most important CSF is having "clearly defined project objectives," while the most valued success criterion is "customer satisfaction" (Janjušić et al., 2024). This suggests a pragmatic and market-oriented approach, possibly in contrast to large companies, where internal process criteria and governance compliance may carry greater weight.

The deepest and least explored gap is not simply the lack of research on HPM in SMEs, but the lack of understanding of how the unique CSFs and constraints of SMEs interact with the inherent challenges of implementing HPM. Existing literature frequently examines these two groups of factors independently. On one hand, the challenges of SMEs are described (limited resources, etc.). On the other hand, the challenges of HPM are described (need for cultural alignment, tool integration, staff training) (Kuhrmann et al., 2017; Satpute, 2023).

The consistency of the knowledge gap lies at the intersection. For example: How does the "limited resources" constraint of an SME affect its ability to provide the "training" necessary for teams to operate effectively in a hybrid environment? Does the "central role of the owner" in an SME facilitate or hinder the "cultural alignment" required to merge agile and traditional mindsets? Is the "lower formality" of SMEs an advantage (allowing more flexibility) or a disadvantage (making the governance of a structured hybrid model more difficult)? These questions about the dynamic interaction between the SME context and HPM requirements become relevant.

The following table summarizes the key differences in CSFs and SCs, supporting the argument that SMEs represent a unique study context.

Table 2: Comparative Critical Success Factors (CSFs) and Success Criteria (SCs): SMEs vs. Large Corporations

Factor Type	SMEs (Based on Janjušić et al., 2024)	Large Corporations (Based on general literature)
Critical Success Factors (CSFs)	1. Clearly defined project objectives. 2. Leadership and support from the owner/director. 3. Team competence and commitment. 4. Effective communication (internal and with the client).	1. Top management support and strategic alignment. 2. Mature and standardized project management processes. 3. Robust risk management and governance. 4. Availability of adequate resources and budget.
Success Criteria (SCs)	1. Customer satisfaction. 2. Quality of the final product. 3. Achievement of project objectives.	1. Compliance with the Iron Triangle (time, cost, scope). 2. Return on investment (ROI) and business benefits. 3. Compliance with regulations and internal governance. 4. Satisfaction of multiple stakeholders (including internal).

4 Conclusion

This scoping review has traced the evolution of the "project success" concept, from the technical and restrictive metrics of the Iron Triangle to a multidimensional, subjective, and value-centered perspective that clearly distinguishes between the efficiency of the management process and the impact of the outcome for stakeholders. This richer, more nuanced conceptual framework is essential for evaluating projects in today's complex environment.

However, the analysis has revealed critical and significant gaps in academic literature, particularly at the intersection of hybrid project management methodologies and the context of small and medium-sized enterprises. Research on HPM suffers from a fundamental conceptual ambiguity that hinders progress in this area. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical studies that define, measure, and validate the success of hybrid projects specifically within SMEs, that establish clear causal relationships between hybridization and project outcomes, and that explore the dynamic interaction between the unique characteristics of SMEs and the challenges of HPM implementation.

It is considered relevant that future research projects focus on taxonomic development, empirical validation in specific contexts, causal research, and the study of the interaction of contextual factors. Such knowledge will not only advance project management theory but will also provide SMEs with the frameworks, tools, and evidence-based guidance they need to navigate the complexity of modern project management, optimize their practices, and ultimately, maximize the value they generate for their clients, their organizations, and the economy at large.

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