



Goal Orientation, Employee Creativity, and Performance Synergies through a Social Cognitive Lens

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Abstract:

Goal orientation is a significant yet underexplored driver to influence project performance. Grounded in the theoretical underpinning of the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), we addressed this novel research gap by examining how goal orientation can affect NGO project performance by bridging the mediating mechanism of employee creativity. Empirical data were gathered from 303 professionals working in the unique context of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was applied to access the relationships among variables. The findings offer robust evidence that goal orientation significantly enhances project performance, while employee creativity was found to play a pivotal mediating role in this linkage, highlighting the strategic relevance in leveraging performance outcomes. Despite the growing emphasis on goal orientation in project based settings, empirical research investigating goal orientation's influence on project performance, particularly in developing economies remains scarce. By addressing this gap, this research contributes to the evolving discourse on goal orientation and creativity effectiveness in project management. Notably, this research is among the first empirical efforts to model and validate the interconnections between goal orientation, employee creativity and project outcomes in the NGO sector of Pakistan. Furthermore, this research contributes to the emerging literature at the intersection of cognitive motivation, creativity, and social impact project delivery, offering practical insights for leadership, decision-makers and human resource managers.

Keywords: Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), Goal orientation, Employee creativity, Project performance, Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs)

Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) function a pivotal part in addressing socio-economic impairments and contributing to education, healthiness, poverty relief, well-being and disaster management in developing states like Pakistan (Masood et al., 2024). Over the previous few years, the performance of NGO sector has been drawn growing consideration, with stakeholders demanding better accountability, novelty, and impact. NGOs faces resource limitations, multifaceted stakeholder expectations and active project atmospheres, improving project performance has grown into an important organizational imperative (Bashir et al., 2021). In the particular background of NGOs, understanding the behavioral and cognitive features that drive project outcomes is fundamental. Goal orientation has become one of the central psychological concept gaining motivation in organizational behavior literature, defined as an individual charisma to craft or validate one's capability in achievement setting (VandeWalle, 1997). Goal orientation kindles how individuals comprehend their tasks, react to feedback, and engross in the course of performance enlightening, that are all necessary to project-based working situations (Patanakul et al., 2016; Zia, 2020). Inside the NGO regime where creativity and novelty are utmost to navigating

uncertain project circumstances, goal-oriented personnel's contribute greatly by means of proactive engagement and addressing problems meritoriously. Goal clarity is a decisive criterion for effective project management and its successful completion. Deficient it, projects are likely fails to meeting the prospects of stakeholders and projected outcomes (Tyssen et al., 2014). Likewise, individual and team level performance are subjective to what extent goals are developed and understood (Latif et al., 2020). Equivocal or ambiguously defined aims often results in weakened employees' motivation and inadequate performance (Anderson & Stritch, 2016). On the contrary, when goals are defined correctly and aligned with operational priorities, employees' are more likely to establish greater levels of dedication and job involvement, hence stirring overall project success (Raziq et al., 2018). Current studies highlighted the need to work on how goal orientation contributes to project performance outcomes (e.g. Dust et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2023; Khattoon et al., 2024).

The linking between goal orientation and employee creativity has been well-known in the literature of organizational behaviors (Gong et al., 2009; Hirst et al., 2009). Creative workforces are capable to adapt to unstable project conditions and offer innovative solutions to resource and operative problems confronted by NGOs. Besides, project performance in those sectors often accessed in terms of effectiveness, stakeholders satisfaction, and social wellness, relies not just on essential capabilities but also on the employees behavioral and cognitive inputs (Bashir et al., 2021; Song et al., 2015). So, studying the mediating mechanism of employee creativity offers a novel understanding of how goal orientation translates into tangible project outcomes (as advocated by Siddiqui & Iqbal et al., 2023). The current research is grounded in the theoretical underpinning of the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) presented by (Bandura, 1986), which stated that human behaviour is formed by a vigorous interchange between personal factors, cognitive processes, and conservational effects. SCT highlights the function of self-regulatory mechanisms including goal orientation and self-efficacy, in shaping behavioral and performance outcomes (Wood & Bandura, 1989). By applying the guidelines of SCT theory, this study places goal orientation as a personal cognitive factor that enriches employee creativity, which in turn subsidizes to NGO project performance. Moreover, the study aims to ascertain the association between goal orientation, its juxtaposed mediating variable and project performance by evaluating the extent to which goal orientation affects project performance. Despite growing scholarly interest in goal orientation and creative performance in for-profit contexts (e.g. Alexander & Van Knippenberg, 2017; Chen & Lin, 2018), there is a noticeable dearth of empirical evidences inspecting these constructs in NGOs based environments, especially in developing country context like Pakistan. Most of the earlier research conducted on profit-oriented organizations, thus overlooking the unique environmental context and behavioral dynamics of NGOs (Raziq et al., 2018; Safi Ullah & Khalil, 2024). Besides, the mediating role of employee creativity through which goal orientation effects project performances remains understudied in the nonprofit organizational regime (Sahibzada, & Bibi, 2022; Zia, 2020).

These potential research gaps limits our understanding of how individual cognitive factors translate into project-based organizations like NGOs. Keeping in view, this study has following research questions:

1. Does goal orientation influences NGO project performance?
2. Does goal orientation influences creativity?
3. Does creativity influences NGO project performance?
4. Does employee creative level mediates the link amid goal orientation and NGO project performance?

The current study makes several notable contributions. Theoretical prospective, it extends the application of Social Cognitive Theory to the non-governmental organizations project management literature, offering a unique framework to explain how individual cognitive factor influences organizational outcomes. Empirical prospective, it highlights one of the first assessments of how goal orientation and creativity interact to affect project performance in NGOs working in Pakistan. Practical prospective, the outcomes offer practicable insights for project leaders of NGOs, underlining the importance of fostering goal-oriented behaviour and creativity to augment project

performance. Overall, this study offers a paradigm shift for future researchers to analyze the impact of goal orientation and employee creativity and their influences on the project based organizations. Thus, this study answers the calls for context-specific research in project management within developing nations and nonprofit sectors (e.g. Bashir et al., 2021; Masood et al., 2024), contributing empirical evidence that is both timely and contextually grounded.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Goal Orientation

The goal orientation concept was first proposed by Eison (1979) and has become a very popular now a days in successful organizations. VandeWalle (1997) defined goal orientation as an individual character to create or validate one's capacity and capability in achievement settings. Over the time, the foundation of goal orientation has developed from educational psychology literature (Dweck, 1986), and researchers have also connected the connection of goal orientation in sports literature (Duda, 1988) as well as in organizational literatures (Kim & Lee, 2013). Scholar like Dweck (1986) explained the goal orientation in terms of mastery as achievement and performance as achievement. According to SCT, goal orientation has been recognized as a key individual cognitive element that influences and directs behavior. It mirrors the individual's preference for particular goals and further shaped by personal norms, traits and necessities (Dweck, 1991). Individuals exhibiting goal orientations tend to develop distinctive cognitive frameworks (Janssen et al., 2004), which help explaining the variability in innovative behavior across workforces. Prior researchers have empirically established the direct impact of goal orientation on individual innovative behavior, along with its moderating role in innovative-related outcomes (Ma et al., 2021). However, the extant body of literature offers less insight into the indirect mechanisms through which goal orientation affects project performance. Moreover, the underlying pathways remain underexplored, highlighting the need for further investigation into how goal orientation influences project performance.

Project Performance

The success or failure for any project directly or indirectly depends on project performance. In contemporary project settings, project success has been accessed through project capacity to produce transformative value and contribute to organizational learning and societal well-being (Wahab & Shaukat, 2023; Wahab & Ali et al., 2023). Scholar like Mir and Pinnington (2014) have demonstrated project management from various perspectives to decide how best to improve project performance. Project performance within development-oriented initiatives context for instance NGO projects accomplishes its intended social, ecological, and governance outcomes, alongside augmenting traditional standards including in time, optimal resource utilization, and stakeholder needs fulfilment (Ika, 2009). In addition, the Project Management Institute describes project performance as 'corresponding the stimulating stresses for project scope, quality, cost and time, as well as meeting the capricious expectations and worries of the stakeholders. Um and Kim (2018) explains project performance as a novel product developed by the project team which is profitable and sustainable resource therefore meets the objectives of stakeholders. Similarly, the concept of overall project performance include schedule, innovation, benefit and quality performance (Barki & Hartwick, 2001; Gelbard & Carmeli, 2009). The goal of a project is to reach on an agreement and attain acceptance from all the stakeholders. In this respect, Lecoivre (2016) specified that agreement by the stakeholders on the goal is a pre-condition for a positive project performance. Likewise, once the customer's opinion regarding the project meets their expectations, the customers become satisfied. Therefore, we consider multiple-methodologies to the project performance, achieving budget, delivery time, quality, stakeholders' satisfaction, and customers' benefits. (Um & Kim. 2018). The iron triangle is usually considered as benchmark to measure the performance of a project, these are to attain the scope, time, and cost (Sirisomboonsuk et al., 2018).

Goal Orientation and Project Performance

Goal orientation functions a vibrant role in shaping employee motivation, behavior, and decision-making in organizational contexts (Payne et al., 2007). It reflects as an individual's general disposition toward attaining competence, gaining knowledge, and endeavoring for superior outcomes (VandeWalle, 1997). Within the context of project-oriented organizations including NGOs, where efficiency is often established by timely delivery, stakeholder needs fulfillment, and efficient resource allocation, such orientation becomes a key enabler of project performance (Bashir et al., 2021). Employees who have greater attention to goal orientation are able to cope challenging yet realistic goals, preserve through difficulties and adapt strategies to enrich project performance (Patanakul et al., 2016; Zia, 2020). This proactive attitude subsidizes to improved planning, problem-solving and decision making which are crucial for project success especially within the dynamic milieu NGOs. The available literature established a vigorous connection between goal orientation and project performance. For example, Chen and Lin (2018) studied the association between the goal orientation and project performance and found that project performance is positively impacted through goal orientation, which specifies the positive relation between these variables. Additionally, goal orientation has been prioritize as a significant influencer to work commitment and performance in NGOs (Chi and Huang, 2014; Huang, 2012). In the same way, Alexander and Van Knippenberg (2017) established that project performance substantially correlated to employee goal orientation. Contemporary literature also established a positive association between goal orientation and project outcomes across several sectors, reflecting that personnel's with strong orientation contribute to project success via improved coordination and goal clarity (Dao, 2021; Sousa et al., 2022). Based on the guideline of SCT theory, goal orientation impacts task-related behavior which subsequently affect task performance at organizational level. In NGOs where projects address multifaceted societal problems, goal orientation nurtures the behavioral mechanisms essential to meet stakeholder expectations and realize project performance.

Therefore, based on theory and literature support we proposed the following hypotheses.

H1: Goal orientation is positively associated to project performance.

Goal Orientation and Employees Creativity

The extant literature established a robust link between goal orientation and creativity. For example, Gong et al. (2009) found that workforces with robust goal orientations engage more in explorative behaviors and demonstrate higher level of determination which are vital for creative outcomes. Hirst et al. (2009) demonstrated the association between the goal orientation and employee creativity and found noteworthy impression on employee creativity. Similarly, Goal-oriented individuals are more likely motivated, insightful, and adaptive and closely aligned with innovation behavior and creativity (Lee & Yang, 2015). Likewise, Siddiqui and Iqbal et al. (2023) found that goal orientation is a key driver for project management and creative performance outcomes. Moreover, a latest study conducted by Nandi and Watts (2025) validated that goal orientation enhances the intrinsic motivation and autonomy necessary for creative performance in dynamic working environments. In NGOs, where roles often necessitates flexibility, responsiveness, and optimal resource utilization, goal orientation directly enhances employee ability to develop novel and context-relevant solutions. From the lens of SCT theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals with higher goal orientation are more likely to regulate their behavior through goal setting, which reinforces their creative performance and promotes persistent engagement in innovation-oriented tasks. This link is particularly relevant in NGO settings, where creativity is essential for overcoming institutional and operational constraints to realize project success. Therefore, based on theory and literature support we proposed the following hypotheses.

H2: Goal orientation is positively associated to employee creativity.

Employees Creativity and Project Performance

Employees' working expertise and creativity play a critical function in improving managerial performance and overall organizational success. However, enhanced creativity is subjected to the compatibility between person and the working environment (Choi, 2004). Creativity reflects the ability of the individuals' to generate thoughtful ideas, which contribute positively to problem-solving, process optimization and delivery of quality outcomes (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). In project based organizations like NGO sectors where standard procedures often fall short owing to distinctive challenges, creative workforce offer adaptive solutions that boost project performance. Scholars like Carine et al. (2015) stated that employee creativity is a vital aspect to augment project performance. In doing so, employee must be furnished with information, mastery and specialized abilities to upgrade their capabilities and hence boost performance outcomes. Project performance within the context of NGOs is mainly evaluated through effectiveness in project goals achievement, efficient resource utilization, stakeholder needs fulfillment, and enduring impact (Aga et al. 2016). In this regard, employee creativity supports these outcomes by facilitating project teams to innovate within available resources and manage conflicts meaningfully (Anderson et al. 2014). In addition, Hughes et al. (2018) found that organizations fostering employee creativity experience enhanced decision-making, promptly resolve problems and heightened overall project success. Moreover, motivated employees think creatively and share their thought freely, it nurture a culture of participatory conducive to higher commitment and ownership to achieve project objectives. In NGO contexts, employee creativity translates into flexible project strategies that respond to evolving community needs and stakeholders expectations (Khan et al., 2019). While an emerging body of literature relates creativity with organizational performance, its specific impact on project performance largely ignored. We addresses this gap in the context of NGO sectors operating in Pakistan. Therefore we proposed following hypothesis.

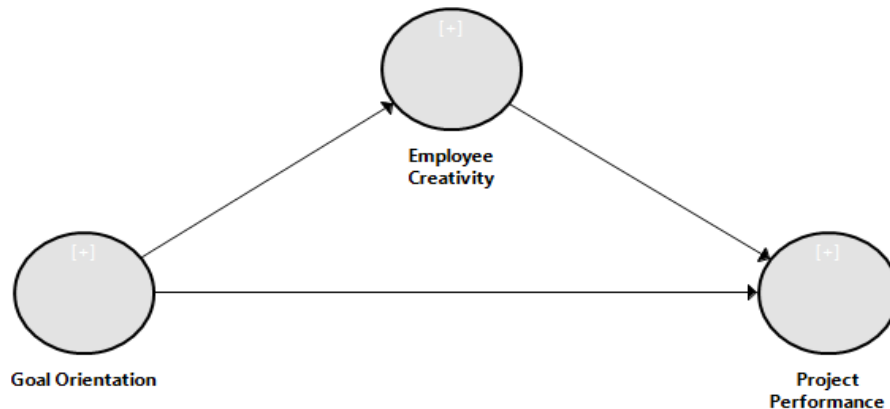
H3: Employee creativity is positively associated to project performance.

Mediating role of Employee Creativity

Employee creativity is the aptitude to generate thoughtful ideas and enhance outcomes at organizational level, especially within dynamic and resource-constrained environments of NGO sector. From the lens of SCT theory (Bandura, 1986), individual cognitive frameworks like goal orientation influence creative engagement of workforce. Goal orientation develop competencies in achievement contexts and shape employee attraction to engage in innovative and creative processes (Hirst et al., 2009). Recent empirical research underscored the mediating role of employee creativity in interpreting goal orientation into superior performance outcomes. For example, Zhen et al. (2022) examined that goal orientation positively impacts innovation behavior, while employee creativity serve as a potential mediator. Besides, Yaseen Ullah et al. (2022) established that employee creativity mediates the link between knowledge sharing and innovative performance in manufacturing context of Pakistan, highlighting its importance in emerging economy. In the context of NGOs, where adaptability and compliance are considered as supreme, raising employee creativity can bridge the gap between goal orientation and project performance. Alobeidli et al. (2024) underlined that employee creativity intervenes the impact of visionary leadership on innovation oriented working behavior, signifying that creative course of actions are essential to achieving organizational objectives in such backgrounds. Notwithstanding these comprehensions, the specific mediating function of employee creativity between goal orientation and project performance remains absence within the context of NGOs in emerging republics. This research aims to fulfill this gap by inspecting how employee creativity mediates the influence of goal orientation to drive project success within NGOs, contributing theoretical and pragmatic contributions to human capital development and sustainable performance. Hence, we proposed following hypothesis:

H4: Employee creativity mediates the link between goal orientation and project performance.

Figure 1: Research Model



METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

Shaukat et al. (2022) and fellows, emphasized the "Triple-P" concept of sustainability (People, Planet, and Profit) as a comprehensive framework for achieving sustainable development goal. In addition, incorporating sustainability into the framework, not only enhances creativity, innovation and performance but also nurtures longstanding value creation (Shaukat & Alam, 2023a, 2024b). In alignment with this approach, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in Pakistan are increasingly addressing sustainability challenges by implementing community-focused development initiatives and green responsible practices. Therefore, the present study is positioned within the context of NGOs of Pakistan, mainly those deal with developmental and social welfare projects. NGOs often operate under resource constraints, making it imperious to understand how internal factors like employee goal orientation and creativity subsidize to project success. Moreover, NGO sector provide a fertile ground for exploring the relationships among goal orientation, employee creativity, and project performance. To discover these associations, this research adopted a quantitative research design grounded in a deductive-reasoning approach. The logic behind selecting a deductive strategy was to test pre-established theoretical associations drawn from Social Cognitive Theory, which strengthens the conceptual framework of this research. The cross sectional survey scheme was engaged to collect data during a specific interval. This arrangement is right to assess respondents' perception and attitudes in a real-world organizational setting, principally when longitudinal setting is not viable. The designated population covered employees working in several NGOs across Pakistan who were engaged in project management undertakings. The respondents were selected owing to their contribution in responsibilities directly impacting project performance. Via purposive sampling technique, a total of 303 valid responses were reached through structured surveys. This sample size is consistent with guiding principle for conducting Variance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (VB-SEM) using Smart-PLS tool. Complying the inverse square root scheme, the sample size adequately meets the statistical requirements to analyze significant path affiliations among employee goal orientation, creativity and project performance (Kock & Hadaya, 2018). This sampling framework and associated research design offers a solid empirical basis for reviewing the hypothesized relationships, so contributing important insights into performance dynamics within Pakistan's NGOs.

Instrumentation and Measures

To validate the relationships among the key variables including employee goal orientation, creativity, and project performance, the qualified instruments were adapted from previous scholarly published work. The overall items were accessed by means of a five-point Likert scale, supporting participants to indicate the degree of their agreement with each given statement. Apiece of the adapted instruments for the research demonstrated robust psychometric properties in previous research, making them suitable for application in the NGOs context.

Goal orientation - The construct of this variable was assessed using 8 items scale taken from VandeWalle (1997) capturing participants' general disposition toward achievement, understanding and performance parameter. This approach furnished a holistic interpretation to measure goal orientation in project based settings. The sample question is included as "I often look for opportunities to develop novel knowledge and skills". Employee creativity - The construct of this variable was assessed using 5 items scale developed by Ganesan and Weitz (1996), which has widely recognized in organizational research to gauge individual tendency in generating novel and useful ideas at place of work. The sample question is included as "I engaged novel ideas and approaches to perform the tasks". Project performance - The construct of this variable was measured using 10 items scale adapted from Gelbard and Carmeli (2009). This instrument covered performance parameters including budget, timeliness, quality orientation, stakeholder satisfaction and team knowledge. The sample question is included as "project was completed within timeline and meet the contractual obligations".

Analysis and Results

Measurement Model

The estimate of the measurement model trailed a comprehensive approach which included the evaluation of reliability and validity, each of these are dire to confirming the robustness and reliability of the constructs under inquiry. Gefen and Straub (2005) stated that outer loadings are deemed acceptable when they outstrip the threshold value of 0.5, displaying that the individual items positively contribute to their own latent constructs. Current research showed that all the item loadings outstripped this standard, confirming satisfactory item reliability. Likewise, composite reliability serves as a critical indicator of internal consistency, and a value of 0.7 or above has been considered to establish acceptable construct reliability (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The outcomes revealed that all constructs showed composite reliability scores well above the mentioned threshold, thus confirming the internal consistency of scale applied. Additionally, Cronbach alpha has been regarded as a traditional technique to measure internal consistency which has also been compiled. Saunders et al. (2009) emphasized that Cronbach alpha is mainly suitable for assessing the reliability of manifold items, and the putative benchmark is typically set at 0.7 or higher. The outcomes also affirmed that all constructs achieved Cronbach alpha values above this cut-off limit, so reinforcing the inference that the measurement scales are internally consistent and valid. In total, these findings endow robust empirical evidence for the reliability of measurement model, forming that the data collected by adapted instruments are consistent and dependable for further analysis. The comprehensive outcomes of these assessments are presented in Table 1, imitating the reliability and validity statistics for apiece construct. Convergent validity was appraised by means of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which showed that the extent to which a construct explains the variance of its observed indicators. Centered on the guiding principle of Sarstedt et al. (2021), the value of .5 or above indicates that the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators, accordingly ensuring suitable convergent validity. Present research demonstrated that the AVE values of all constructs bettering the minimum threshold limit, indicating that indicators sufficiently converge to represent their underlying construct. This outcomes offer strong evidence that the measurement items are successfully capturing the envisioned latent variables. The outcomes of AVE and convergent validity assessment are summarized within the Table 1.

Discriminant validity was evaluated through Fornell-Larcker criteria and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations as advocated by (Sarstedt et al., 2021). The Fornell-Larcker criteria stated that the square root of the AVE for each construct should be larger than its highest correlation with any other construct, stipulating that each construct reflect added variance with its own indicators than with other constructs. The valuation outcomes affirmed that this condition was sufficiently satisfied for all constructs, therefore establishing discriminant validity. Moreover, detecting discriminant validity concerns, a novel technique of HTMT ratio was applied. In view of that, HTMT values should be below 0.85 to ensure discriminant validity, while the values of HTMT

ratio were found to be within tolerable limits (Henseler et al., 2015). The valuation of both criteria are depicted in table 2.

Table 1: Reliability, and convergent validity statistics

Variable and Items		Loading	Alpha	CR	AVE
Goal orientation	GO1	0.686	0.916	0.933	0.637
	GO2	0.879			
	GO3	0.680			
	GO4	0.811			
	GO5	0.872			
	GO6	0.670			
	GO7	0.879			
	GO8	0.868			
Employee creativity	EC1	0.688	0.831	0.881	0.587
	EC2	0.717			
	EC3	0.829			
	EC4	0.758			
	EC5	0.735			
Project performance	PS1	0.725	0.908	0.925	0.580
	PS3	0.839			
	PS4	0.789			
	PS5	0.738			
	PS6	0.838			
	PS7	0.754			
	PS8	0.768			
	PS9	0.622			
	PS10	0.760			

Table 2: Discriminant validity assessments

Assessments	Goal orientation	Employee creativity	Project performance
<i>Fornell-Larcker Criteria</i>			
Goal orientation	0.798	—	—
Employee creativity	0.195	0.766	—
Project performance	0.259	0.610	0.762
<i>HTMT Ratio</i>			
Goal orientation	—	—	—
Employee creativity	0.202	—	—
Project performance	0.282	0.674	—

Structural Model

By considering the methodological recommendations of Hair et al. (2017), this study engaged Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to estimate the predictive performance of the proposed model. The contemporary literature also acknowledge the application of (PLS-SEM) (e.g. Siddiqui, & Shaukat, 2024; Siddiqui & Qureshi et al., 2024; Siddiqui & Shaukat., et al., 2023). In the current study, during the initial course of the analysis, the model fit indicators including coefficient of determination (R^2) and the predictive relevance index (Q^2) were thoroughly evaluated. The results reveal that goal orientation explains a substantial 39% of the variance in project performance ($R^2=0.39$), whereas, creativity accounts for 33% of the variance in project performance ($R^2=0.33$), indicating a meaningful explanatory power influences. To further validate the model's predictive

relevance, the blindfolding process was engaged to compute the values of Q^2 . The resulting Q^2 statistics for project performance and employee creativity were 0.52 and 0.32, respectively. As both values surpass the acceptable limit of zero, this ensures that the model possesses predictive validity and validating its capacity to forecast outcomes beyond mere statistical relationship. Together, these metrics underline the theoretical and empirical adequacy of the SEM method engaged during this study, reinforcing the validity of the hypothesized relationships.

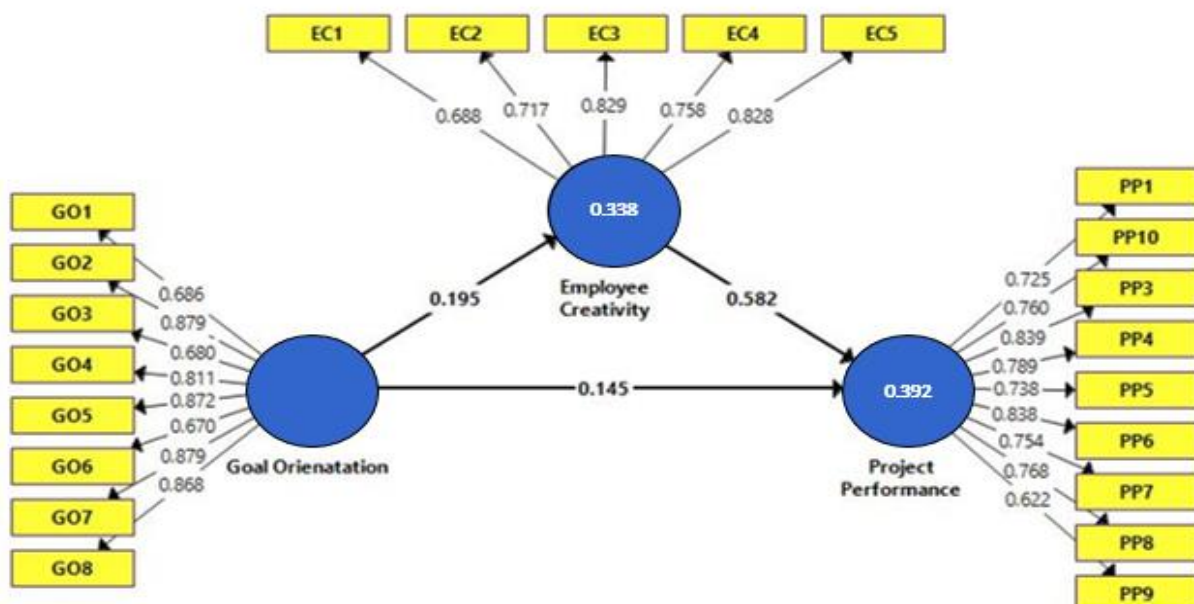
Hypotheses Testing

The model was systematically analyzed by probing the direct and indirect effects among the study variables to weigh the overall structural associations and mediating mechanism. H1 revealed that goal orientation has a significant impact on project performance ($t=3.44$, $p=0.001$), hence H1 is supported. We draw the similar conclusion from the significant impact of goal orientation with employee creativity ($t=3.02$, $p=0.003$), hence supporting H2. Furthermore, H3 result also reflected that employee creativity has a significant impact of project performance ($t=9.47$, $p=0.000$), hence support hypothesis 3 significantly. Mediation analysis embraces the establishing of indirect link between constructs, which appraises the degree to which indirect effect via mediating variables transform the hypothesized direct paths. Accordingly, employee creativity was hypothesized to mediate the link between goal orientation and project performance. The objective is to classify significant path coefficient and represent imperative indirect effects of relationships. In order to test the mediation hypothesis i.e. H4, the direct effect and total effect are specified and examined. The study observed the total and direct effects of goal orientation on project performance. Mediation analysis showed that specific indirect effect is significant ($t=2.60$, $p=0.001$). This reflected complementary partial mediation, thus, H4 supported. The results of the structural model, comprising both direct and intermediating effects are reported to offer a clear understanding of the hypothesized model. Detailed statistical outcomes are systematically presented in the table 3.

Table 3: Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	β	SD	T value	P value
H1: goal orientation -> project performance	0.14	0.04	3.44	0.001
H2: goal orientation -> employee creativity	0.19	0.06	3.02	0.003
H3: employee creativity -> project performance	0.58	0.06	9.47	0.000
H4: Mediating role of employee creativity	0.16	0.04	2.60	0.001

Figure 1: Structural Model



Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the influence of goal orientation on project performance within the NGO sector of Pakistan, with employee creativity provide the mechanism of mediation. The results affirm that goal orientation significantly enhances project performance, bring into line with prior studies that underscore the importance of goal orientation and commitment in attaining organizational success (e.g. Dao, 2021; Sousa et al., 2022). Likewise, the results support the mediating function of employee creativity, strengthening existing theories like Amabile and Pratt (2016), the Componential Theory of Creativity, which highlights how motivational factors such as goal orientation can kindle creative output and advance performance outcomes. From the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), the results can be translated through the dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and ecological factors. Goal orientation embodies a personal cognitive attribute that figures how individuals prioritize their behaviors in the organization. SCT posits that individuals with robust goal orientation and perceived competence are more likely to involve in creative behavior. In the context of NGOs, where ambiguity and resource constraints are common, individuals' belief in their competence to realize meaningful goals fuels creative problem solving and innovativeness in their assigned tasks. Therefore, employee creativity, as observed in this study, functions as a behavioral manifestation of self-regulated learning and motivation, connecting cognitive goals to organizational performance outcomes. The present study extends the literature by hypothetically validating creativity as a cognitive-behavioral mechanism through which goal orientation contributes to heightened project performance in the context of NGOs. These results resonance recent study by Zhou and Hoever (2023), who highlight creativity as a critical mechanism in dynamic work environments, and are particularly relevant to developing republics, where strategic goal setting and innovative mindset are indispensable for project success.

The statistical results reflected a strong empirical support for the hypothesized associations amongst goal orientation, creativity, and project performance within the milieu of NGO sector. Aligned with earlier scholarly works, our results support that employee goal orientation plays a pivotal function in enhancing project consequences. Goal-oriented individuals are intrinsically motivated to realize agreed upon objectives, which, in turn, nurtures innovative thinking and improves task execution (Chen & Lin, 2018). This further supports the notion that organizationally defined goals are key for stimulating employee creativity and boosting overall project success (Carine et al., 2015). While some studies have presented mixed evidence concerning the link between goal orientation and creativity for instance, Yesuf et al. (2024) and Zhen et al. (2022), reported a non-significant link, however our results corroborate with the findings of Hirst et al. (2009) who stated that a clear goal orientation promotes employee creativity positively. Thus, H2 is supported. Moreover, the findings substantiates that employee creativity directly contributes to better project performance, strengthening the importance of nurturing a creative organizational culture (Hughes et al., 2018). The recognition of H3 further validates this relationship. Besides, the mediating function of employee creativity in the link between goal orientation and project performance was confirmed through the study's results. The outcomes suggested that goal orientation fosters creativity which in turn enhances project performance in positive manners, thus supporting H4. This highlights the critical intermediary function of creativity in translating personals goal orientation into superior project outcomes, assisting deeper insight into the influential mechanism that reinforces NGO performance effectiveness.

Conclusion

Grounded in the theoretical underpinning of the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), we addressed this novel research gap by examining how goal orientation can affect NGO project performance by bridging the mediating mechanism of employee creativity. The findings offer robust evidence that goal orientation significantly enhances project performance, while employee creativity was found to play a pivotal mediating role in this linkage, highlighting the strategic relevance in leveraging

performance outcomes. Despite the growing emphasis on goal orientation in project based settings, empirical research investigating goal orientation's influence on project performance, particularly in developing economies remains scarce. By addressing this gap, this research contributes to the evolving discourse on goal orientation and creativity effectiveness in project management. Notably, this research is among the first empirical efforts to model and validate the interconnections between goal orientation, employee creativity and project outcomes in the NGO sector of Pakistan. Furthermore, this research contribute to the evolving literature at the intersection of cognitive motivation, creativity, and social impact project delivery, offering practical insights for leadership, decision-makers and human resource managers.

Research Implications

Theoretically, our research enriches the Social Cognitive Theory in the context of project-based organizations, asserting that goal orientations significantly influence employee creative behaviors and boost project outcomes. While prior research has predominantly examined goal orientation and creativity in educational or manufacturing perspectives, this study bridges a critical gap while considering the NGO project management sector. In addition, by validating the mediating role of employee creativity, the study adds depth to the understanding of how individual level cognitive factors transform into organizational performance, thus optimizing SCT's utility in organizational behavior context. Practically, our research underscore the importance of fostering goal oriented cultures within organizations to boost employee creativity and project success. Organizations including NGOs and other project-oriented setups should prioritize goal-setting practices, and nurture creativity as a strategic asset to augment sustainability.

Future Research Direction

This study have few limitations. First, the study engaged with a cross sectional design that limits the ability to infer causal relationship between the studied variables. Upcoming research should consider adopting longitudinal approach to better understand the dynamics of these associations. Second, based on the consideration of findings generalizability, upcoming research should replicate this model in diverse sectors such as manufacturing, education, or technology to extend the application of the results. Finally, this study consider employee creativity as a mediating mechanism, future research should incorporate others mediators including green creativity, green and frugal innovation, green employee self-efficacy, green knowledge sharing, green work engagement, green team behaviors and green sustainable project management practices. In doing so, leadership styles including green and sustainable leader, knowledge oriented leader, ambidextrous leader, entrepreneurial leader and agile leaderships styles should also consider as predictive variables while incorporating suggested mediators and performance outcomes in a complex research model.

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