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Project Steering Committee members and project success: a quantitative study on individual responsibilities, shared goals and mutual trust

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Abstract

Purpose – Projects that pose high risks to the funding or owning organizations, or those that require support, need oversight by senior managers. This is typically conducted through a Project Steering Committee (PSC). PSC members each have individual responsibilities stemming from the permanent and temporary (project) organizations. The PSC needs shared goals and mutual trust to balance those responsibilities. The relationship between PSC members acting according to individual responsibilities, shared goals, mutual trust and project success is unclear. This paper quantitatively tests these relationships and verifies the use of roles for members.

Design/methodology/approach – A conceptual model of the relationship between PSC members *acting according to individual responsibilities and project success* is tested using a survey with 178 valid responses. Additionally, the survey gathers opinions of PSC members and project managers on PSCs.

Findings – PSC members acting from individual responsibilities positively affect project success regardless of the degree of shared goals and mutual trust. Four representation roles are generally covered: funders, user groups, suppliers and groups that maintain the project's products.

Originality/value – The study is unique in including PSC members as respondents. PSC members are agents for their stakeholder group and, at the group level, for the funding and owning organization. The study confirms the value of four stakeholder-representation roles for members. It emphasizes the importance of defining clear and distinct individual responsibilities for members, rather than focusing solely on shared goals and mutual trust.

Keywords Project management, Project governance, Project owner

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

Project success is positively related to project governance, where competent decision-makers influence both (Turner, 2025) and governance is needed to align the project with business objectives (Musawir et al., 2023). *Project steering committees* (PSCs) are one of the possibilities for the governance of a project (Müller et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2024). A PSC is a group that acts at a strategic level and is responsible for achieving the business case and the progress of the project (Zwikael and Meredith, 2018). This places PSCs in the research field of project



governance, which studies the governance of a single project. It has four contemporary research strands (Sankaran *et al.*, 2025). PSCs are in the strand *Resilience*, as they help deal with multiple stakeholders and viewpoints (Murphy, 2016). Also, the *Organizational* strand is relevant, as PSCs provide unified direction in case of multiple funders and owners (Miller and Lessard, 2000).

Committees, by definition, consist of several members (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2025). One of the members' potential roles is representing the funder(s), often referred to as the project owner, which is well-studied (e.g. Breese *et al.*, 2020). Less is known about the other roles of members in the PSC and the inner workings of the PSC in general (Lechler and Cohen, 2009; Murphy, 2016).

The PSC is responsible for achieving the business case (Zwikael and Meredith, 2018). Changes in the project environment or in the project itself can influence the business case (Al-Twairsh and Al-Mudimigh, 2011), which the PSC must recognize and act upon (Loch *et al.*, 2017). The PSC's performance should be evaluated using a broad definition of project success that encompasses the owner's and investor's success (Zwikael and Meredith, 2021). This study uses the definition for success by Joslin and Müller (2016, p. 613) as "... the achievement of a particular combination of objective and subjective measures, manifested in the success criteria and measured at the end of a project". The accountability of a PSC for the business case implies it must have decision-making authority (McGrath and Whitty, 2018; Stewart *et al.*, 2023); therefore, our study does not include advisory boards.

This study is part of a series of consecutive studies on PSCs. A first study qualitatively explored the inner workings of PSCs, highlighting the lack of knowledge about individual roles and responsibilities of members (Stoppels *et al.*, 2023). A second qualitative study therefore defined standard roles (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025). It argued that having shared goals (Franco *et al.*, 2016) and mutual trust (Benoliel and Somech, 2016) in the PSC influences the relationship between PSC members working from individual responsibilities and project success. Members should share a degree of trust in each other and agree on shared goals before acting on individual responsibilities. In practice, the individual responsibilities of a PSC member are primarily derived from their function within the permanent organization (Stoppels *et al.*, 2023). The study presented in this paper takes a quantitative approach. It builds on our previous paper by investigating how members' individual responsibilities, shared goals and mutual trust contribute to project success. It includes responses from PSC members: a group that does not often participate in such studies.

This study presents insights from theory and empirical data that could aid management practice by clarifying how individual PSC members contribute to project success. Additionally, it deepens the current application of agency theory (Breese *et al.*, 2020) by distinguishing between governance at the group and individual levels. The PSC, as a whole, serves as the project owner. But the members themselves have individual and dual responsibilities: for the project as a whole and for the stakeholder group they represent (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025). So, the PSC is an agent to the funding organization and a principal to the project manager. PSC members are agents to both the funding organization and their own stakeholder group, while also part of the group that is the principal towards the project manager. We also respond to the call of Murphy *et al.* (2018) to study the inner workings of PSCs.

In the remainder of this paper, we first provide the theoretical background. This leads to a conceptual model linking PSC members acting from individual responsibilities to project success. We then provide the research methodology and analyze the study's reliability. The results are presented, leading to a discussion on the link between PSC members and project success. Lastly, we present conclusions, including theoretical and practical relevance.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 The PSC and its members

One way to view PSCs is as the linking pin between permanent organizations and temporary projects (Lechler and Cohen, 2009), where stakeholders collaborate (Müller *et al.*, 2015). Senior

managers cooperate and form a boundary-spanning team (Murphy, 2016). Both agency theory and stewardship theory support the appointment of a project owner (Breese *et al.*, 2020; Zwikael and Smyrk, 2019). The PSC as a group can have this role of project owner (Crawford, 2023; Crawford *et al.*, 2008). The project owner focuses on project success on behalf of the funder, though should also take the interests of other stakeholders into account (Müller *et al.*, 2017). The PSC members represent affected and contributing stakeholder groups (McGrath and Whitty, 2017; Murphy, 2016), of which the funder is significant but not the only stakeholder (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025).

The PSC consists of senior managers who are primarily selected based on the stakeholders they represent within the permanent organization (Harvey *et al.*, 2025; Murphy, 2016). As a result, members must balance the interests of the project with those of the permanent organizations they represent. Their responsibilities from the permanent function can conflict with the overall interest of the project. For example, ERP implementations (large integrated software systems) lead to process changes that may result in increased workload or complexity for the department a PSC member is responsible for (Allen, 2005).

Our previous studies have shown that members tend to struggle with these dual responsibilities (Stoppels *et al.*, 2023, 2025). This can lead to them either focusing mainly on the interests of their permanent organization or prioritizing project goals and neglecting individual responsibilities derived from the permanent organization (Loch *et al.*, 2017). This raises the question of whether PSCs should explicitly define individual responsibilities and then act accordingly to achieve project success.

A PSC and its members should govern and support the project (Crawford *et al.*, 2008). The governance involves providing direction based on the interests of the funder and other stakeholders. It also involves holding the project manager accountable for performance and conduct (Müller *et al.*, 2016). This means that information must be gathered and transformed to make decisions (Karlsen, 2010; Murphy, 2016). In practice, the project manager attends meetings to report, provides information during discussions and prepares the agenda (Stoppels *et al.*, 2023). The project manager has no decision rights and is not a PSC member (Axelos, 2009). The support duty of PSC members involves them serving as champions (Andersen, 2012). At times, they need to act, such as ensuring compliance with decisions within their own stakeholder group. However, they should be careful not to manage the project team, as this is the project manager's accountability (Zwikael and Meredith, 2018).

2.2 Project success

Project success and success criteria are well-researched (Joslin and Müller, 2015). It originated from a narrow definition of the triple constraints (cost, time and scope), later developed to include long-term stakeholder perspectives (Cellerino *et al.*, 2025). Following Cooke-Davies (2002), the PSC is responsible for project success and not just project management success. Therefore, it should encompass the perspectives of stakeholder groups and the project's long-term outcomes. Khan *et al.* (2013) define five project success dimensions: *project efficiency, organizational benefits, project impact, future potential and stakeholder satisfaction*. Project efficiency is generally managed by project management, though the PSC should provide direction and hold the project manager accountable (Stoppels *et al.*, 2023). The individual with the project owner role, often chairing the PSC (McGrath and Whitty, 2020), is primarily responsible for benefits realization (Zwikael *et al.*, 2019). Future potential is relevant to the success of future projects, as part of the responsibility of PSC members within their permanent organizations (Kloppenborg and Tesch, 2015). PSCs should consider the satisfaction of stakeholders, not only morally (OECD, 2016) but also since a stakeholder orientation helps project success (Joslin and Müller, 2016), and the PSC itself is a body where stakeholders collaborate (Lechler and Cohen, 2009).

2.3 Individual responsibilities of PSC members

Earlier work (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025) provides an overview of why clear responsibilities for each member are needed. Firstly, clear responsibility among PSC members helps project success, as

it shapes actions that contribute to the goals of the funder and other stakeholders (Müller *et al.*, 2017; Too and Weaver, 2014; Turner, 2020). Zwikael *et al.* (2019) provide an overview of the responsibilities of the project owner, who is an agent for the funder and should focus on benefits realization both before and after the project's output is delivered. Breese (2020) adds that the owner should take full ownership of the project's benefits by separating the project's oversight role from the permanent function. Secondly, Bechky (2006) describes how role clarity serves as a mechanism for coordination in temporary organizations, enabling each member to know what to do and what others can expect from them. Thirdly, explicit and communicated roles can prevent tensions within the team (DeFillippi and Sydow, 2016).

Standard roles can help determine members' responsibilities. In earlier work, we proposed five roles for selecting members and as the starting point to determine individual members' responsibilities and authorities (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025). These roles are *Representation of the Funder*, *Representation of User Groups*, *Representation of Suppliers of Project Resources*, *Representation of the Support organization for Project Deliverables* and *Quality Assurance towards the PSC*.

2.4 Shared goals

A PSC must ensure alignment with the funding or owning organizations' goals (Project Management Institute, 2016) and provide unified direction (Axelos, 2009). Besides, "goals affect performance by directing attention and action, mobilizing effort, and motivating individuals" (Clerkin and Jones, 2013). Members should agree on these goals since a previous study (Stoppels *et al.*, 2023) showed that a PSC is more than an advisory board towards the owner and tends towards shared decision-making. Arnesson and Albinsson (2013) found that agreement among PSC members on the project's goals is needed for success.

Schippers and Rus (2021) studied the influence of shared views among Top Management Team members on the quality of shared decision-making. They stress the importance of a common goal and task clarification via sharing, discussing and integrating information among team members. Loch *et al.* (2017) mention "goal agreement" as one of the important challenges of a PSC, in which they include the importance of achieving clarity on what the goals imply and where conflicts of interest among members exist.

Therefore, it is expected that members sharing goals help project success. We define "shared" as "to have in common" (Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2025). This includes members knowing the goals, agreeing upon them and using them for guidance when acting or making decisions. Chow and Chan (2008) examined the influence of social networks, mutual trust and shared goals on employees' intention to share knowledge in organizations. They found that shared goals positively affect knowledge-sharing intentions.

2.5 Mutual trust

Joslin and Müller (2016) predicated that governance based on trust helps project success, which is supported by the findings from Zwikael *et al.* (2015) on trust between the project owner and project manager. Both focus on trust by the governors in Project Management. It can be expected that mutual trust inside the PSC is also important for project success. In ERP implementations, interdepartmental cooperation based on trust and clear goals is a key success factor (Somers and Nelson, 2001). PSC members sometimes struggle with their duties related to project oversight (Loch *et al.*, 2017), so they should feel confident asking their fellow PSC members for help (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025).

Research on management teams indicates that members sharing goals make them want to solve task conflicts (disagreement about the content of the task). This, in turn, leads to quality decision-making (Janssen *et al.*, 1999) and members willing to accept decisions (Simons and Peterson, 2000). Relationship conflict (the perception of personal resentment and incompatibility), on the other hand, should be avoided, as it limits information processing and makes the members focus on each other instead of reaching group goals (Wit *et al.*, 2012).

When members lack mutual trust, they are likely to interpret task conflict (resulting from PSC members acting according to individual responsibilities) as hidden agendas or personal attacks. In the words of [Simons and Peterson \(2000, p. 109\)](#): “companies can realize the benefits of task conflict with minimal danger of relationship conflict if an appropriate basis of intragroup trust is established.”

2.6 Conceptual model

We argue that PSC members acting from clear individual responsibilities ([Bechky, 2006](#)), having shared overall goals ([Janssen et al., 1999](#)) and having mutual trust ([Simons and Peterson, 2000](#)) helps achieve governance towards and support of the project. Thus, it could add to project success. Based on findings and literature from Organization Management and data from interviews in our earlier study ([Stoppels et al., 2025](#)), we add that PSC members will only engage in information sharing, discussing and integrating if they trust the other members and share overall goals ([Franco et al., 2016](#)). If not, we expect members to consider only the interests of their function within the permanent organization, leading to task conflict that can lead to relationship conflict ([Simons and Peterson, 2000](#)). On the contrary, if members trust each other and share the same overall goal, working from individual responsibilities enhances information processing by bringing diverse viewpoints to the table, enabling members to act effectively within their respective areas of responsibility.

The PSC being functionally heterogeneous ([Murphy, 2016](#)) underscores the relevance of both negative and positive effects, as well as the significance of mutual trust and goal sharing ([Deng et al., 2020](#)). The field of organization management shows that management teams with goal consensus capitalize on differences between team members ([Bang and Midelfart, 2017](#)).

Our findings are summarized in the conceptual model of [Figure 1](#), suggesting that having *Shared Goals* and *Mutal Trust* moderates the relation between *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* and *Project Success*.

If this model holds ground, there must first be a relation between *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* and *Project Success*. So, we pose hypothesis **H1**:

H1. Acting according to Individual Responsibilities has an effect on Project Success

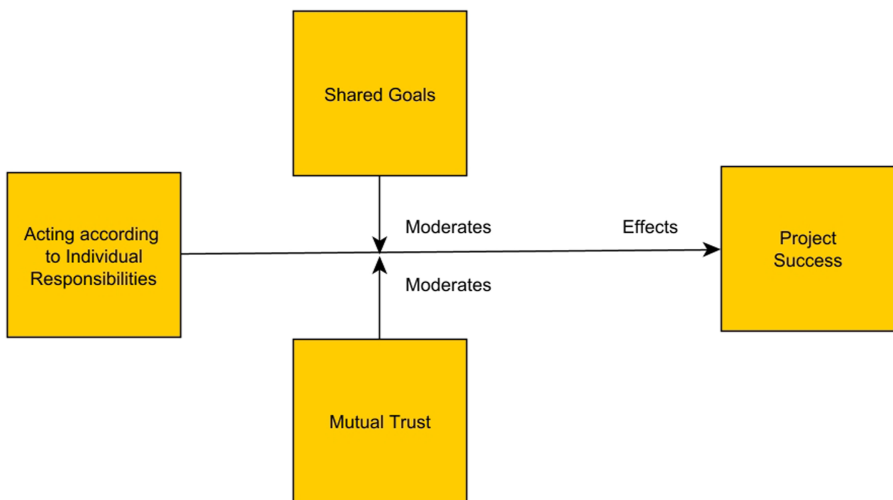


Figure 1. Conceptual model linking acting according to individual responsibilities to project success

Secondly, we expect a degree of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust* to be needed to prevent task conflict from becoming relationship conflict. Literature shows that task conflict helps project success, while relationship conflict does not. A minimum level of team trust is needed for knowledge sharing (Lee et al., 2010), and trust can be a moderator rather than directly affecting success (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001). Based on interviews with members from six PSCs, our previous study added that members should be free to act based on individual responsibilities. However, they are bound by preserving mutual trust and shared goals (Stoppels et al., 2025). Therefore, we expect a different effect of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success*, between high and low degrees of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust*. So, we propose hypotheses H2, split into three parts.

- H2a. The effect of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success* is different when a certain degree of *Shared Goals* AND *Mutual Trust* are present, compared to when one or both are not present.
- H2b. The effect of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success* is different when a certain degree of *Shared Goals* is present, compared to when this degree of *Shared Goals* is not present.
- H2c. The effect of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* on *Project Success* is different when a certain degree of *Mutual Trust* is present, compared to when this degree of *Mutual Trust* is not present.

3. Methodology

Given that the hypotheses are derived from literature and previous studies, we chose a deductive approach using new empirical data. We follow the epistemology of the cautious realist (Blaikie, 2009), stating that respondents' perspectives can shed light on reality. Our previous studies were qualitative and exploratory, leading to a list of standard roles and the relevance of members working from clear and communicated individual responsibilities in a setting of mutual trust and shared goals. Quantitative research enables validating the occurrence of these roles and testing hypotheses about the influence of variables on project success. A structured survey enables the data collection needed to test hypotheses (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

3.1 Design of the survey

The survey questions were taken from previous studies, if available. This helps construct validity and adds reusable data to the field of project management research. The survey consists of four sections. The first is to check respondents' agreement with using the data, how long ago they experienced the PSC, whether the project has delivered at least part of the end-products and whether the PSC was dedicated to a specific project. The second is to gather data on the four variables: *Project Success*, *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* of PSC Members, *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust*. The third section gathers opinions about PSCs, such as whether individual responsibilities are clear and which roles are present. The fourth and last section is on the respondent, PSC and project metadata. The survey is added as [supplementary material](#). It was available in English (43 responses), German (18 responses) and Dutch (117 responses).

3.2 Variables

To measure project success, we follow Joslin and Muller (2015, 2016), as their survey questions are based on existing project success dimensions, are extensive and have been used in two relevant studies. A review encompassing all aspects of Project Success, with studies by Bakker and de Kleijn (2018) and Zwikael and Meredith (2021), revealed no gaps.

For the variable *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* of PSC members, the survey questions were grouped into three sets: about roles and responsibilities being defined, about members acting based on individual responsibilities and about the attitude members have towards these responsibilities. The questions in the first set were defined explicitly for this study. The questions for the other two sets were adapted from a quantitative study by [Michie et al. \(2006\)](#) about the impact of diversity on collaboration and decision-making in Top Management Teams.

The questions on *Shared Goals* were grouped into three sets: Knowing the goals by the members, agreement on the goals by the members and members working based on the shared goals. They were adapted to relevance and wording for a PSC from quantitative studies by [Lee et al. \(1991\)](#), [Michie et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Chow and Chan \(2008\)](#).

We defined two sets of questions to assess *Mutual Trust*. The first set concerns perceptions of the other PSC members' personal characteristics regarding trust, with questions adapted from [Simons and Peterson \(2000\)](#). The questions in the second set concern the relationship between the members, adapted from [Janssen et al. \(1999\)](#). We addressed benevolence, honesty and competence ([Simons and Peterson, 2000](#)).

Each question has a five-point Likert scale. For example, in the resulting variable Project Success, a score of "5.0" means the respondent answered "Strongly agree" on all the underlying questions. [Table 1](#) shows the variables, the sets and the source. This paper uses the abbreviation in brackets in formulas for readability.

3.3 Data collection

The first version of the survey was pilot-tested by 15 project managers, leading to minor adjustments in wording. These responses were not used in the analysis. Data collection was conducted through snowball sampling, as there is no formal organization of PSC members. Respondents were approached through the researchers' network, and via six project management organizations (APM Austria, BPUG, GAPPS, IPMA-NL, PMI Benelux and NAP-network), and one organization of project owners (NETLIPSE). We explicitly asked respondents to forward the email invitation to PSC members, as these were the most difficult to approach. We included responses from project managers, as they attend PSC meetings and can evaluate project success for stakeholders ([Cheung et al., 2010](#)). The survey was conducted online between April 2023 and August 2024 using the Qualtrics platform ([2023](#)) and in two time periods. After the first period, 60% of the respondents were project managers. Therefore, we specifically targeted PSC members in the next round, resulting in a 53% response by project managers overall. We tested the variation for the four main variables between the two periods and found no significant effect. Responses were anonymous, and the University's ethics committee approved the survey design.

We asked respondents with experience in a PSC dedicated to a project somewhere in the last three years. At least part of the end-products had to be delivered to ensure knowledge of project success ([Cooke-Davies, 2002](#)). We did not select the projects based on their type, size, or duration, but we did measure these factors. Checking for valid responses through the survey questions resulted in the exclusion of 29 out of 207 responses. Since the object of study is the PSC, respondents were asked to answer the questions for their most recent PSC that fits the criteria mentioned above.

The study employed recommendations by [Kamakura \(2010\)](#) and [Podsakoff and MacKenzie \(2003\)](#) to minimize common methods bias, ensuring anonymity through the survey and achieving construct validity by reusing questions from previous research and conducting pilot testing.

3.4 Method for data analysis

To provide insights into modeling relationships, data were presented and analyzed graphically, as [Field \(2017\)](#) recommends. Since we aim to find an association between several predictors and the *Success* variable, we used multiple linear regression as the primary data analysis technique.

Table 1. Variables and sets for the measurement

| Variable | Sets of questions | Source |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Acting according to Individual Responsibilities (<i>ActingResponsibilities</i>) | Roles, defined Roles, acted upon | Defined for this study specifically Adapted from Michie et al. (2006) , who quantitatively studied the impact of diversity on collaboration and decision-making in TMTs |
| Shared Goals (<i>Goals</i>) | Roles, attitude towards Knowing the goals | Adapted from Michie et al. (2006) Adapted from Lee et al. (1991) , who quantitatively studied the relationship between goal setting and goal communication for interdependent tasks. Adapted for goals in PSCs and reduced the number of questions |
| | Agreement on the goal | Adapted from Michie et al. (2006) . Their questions were specific to a case, so they were adapted for PSCs and projects |
| | Working on the goals | Adapted from Michie et al. (2006) and Chow and Chan (2008) . The latter studied the relationship between shared goals and mutual trust on knowledge sharing in organizations |
| Mutual Trust (<i>Trust</i>) | Perceptions on personal characteristics of members | Adapted from Simons et al. (2000) , who studied task conflict and relationship conflict in TMTs |
| | Relations between members | Adapted from Janssen et al. (1999) , who studied role shaping in management teams |
| Project Success (<i>Success</i>) | Project efficiency | Taken directly from Joslin and Müller (2015) with the kind cooperation of Robert Joslin. They studied the relationship between project management methodology and project success. The question on safety was adapted to “safety performance” since pilot testers from IT projects did not understand the original phrase |
| | Organizational benefits | |
| | Project impact | |
| | Future potential | |
| | Stakeholder satisfaction | |

The three-dimensional graphics suggest linear modeling provides a good fit. The corresponding p -values are obtained by t-testing. All data analyses were conducted with the open-source statistical environment R ([R Core Team, 2022](#)). The studies used several regression models. For readability, we added a “#” followed by a sequence number to each model.

4. Analysis of reliability

To test if the questions can be combined into sets and the sets can be combined into variables, we calculated Cronbach’s Alpha for each variable ([Table 2](#)). A value above 0.7 indicates a good match ([Hair et al., 2010](#)); when it is lower, further investigation is justified. For the variable *Trust*, Cronbach’s Alpha is on the low side. The end of the survey has optional text fields for the name of the PSC and for general remarks. We rechecked the underlying questions on *Trust* with the data from these text fields and other data, considering the context of the PSC and how respondents might interpret them. We also calculated the correlation matrix of the sets within *Trust*. We concluded that they measured various aspects of the same variable. The high Cronbach’s Alpha for the variable *Success* confirms the findings of [Joslin and Müller \(2016\)](#), who used the same construct and reported an alpha of 0.92.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha for the variables

| Variable | Cronbach's alpha |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Actingresponsibilities</i> | 0.73 |
| <i>Goals</i> | 0.85 |
| <i>Trust</i> | 0.58 |
| <i>Success</i> | 0.89 |

5. Results

5.1 Demographics

[Figure 2](#) provides the respondents' demographics. There are slightly more project managers than PSC members, but the overall number of PSC members is unique for research in project governance. The data encompasses a diverse range of project types and sizes.

Four of the six participating project management organizations were based in the Netherlands, resulting in 73% of the projects primarily located there. Both project managers and PSC members considered themselves experienced, with 84% of PSC members and 97% of project managers scoring 4 or 5.

5.2 Testing [Hypothesis 1](#) from the conceptual model

To test the hypotheses for the conceptual model, we used linear regression. The first hypothesis ([H1](#)), that there is an effect of *Actingresponsibilities* on *Success*, can be confirmed via simple linear regression using the following model #1:

$$Success = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times Actingresponsibilities$$

We found an effect of *Actingresponsibilities* of $\beta_1 = 0.48 \pm 0.06$, with a *P*-value smaller than 0.001 ([Figure 3](#)).

5.3 Predicting project success

Given that we know the values of *Actingresponsibilities*, *Goals* and *Trust*, we asked ourselves if this helps predict *Success*. First, we looked at correlations, of which [Table 3](#) provides an overview. These are moderate to strong correlations, all well above 0.5.

Working from the conceptual model relating *Actingresponsibilities* to *Success*, the three-dimensional linear model #2 predicts *Success* based on the other three variables:

$$Success = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times Goals + \beta_2 \times Trust + \beta_3 \times Actingresponsibilities$$

This linear regression leads to estimates of β_0 , β_1 , β_2 and β_3 , which are shown in [Table 4](#).

So, we can conclude that all three variables *Actingresponsibilities*, *Trust* and *Goals* predict *Success* although for *Trust*, the significance is less strong than the other two. The R-squared of model #2 is 0.48, so given *Actingresponsibilities*, *Goals* and *Trust* are known, 48% of the variation in *Success* can be predicted.

5.4 Testing [Hypothesis 2](#) from the conceptual model

[Hypothesis 2](#) claims that the effect of *Actingresponsibilities* on *Success* is different when a certain degree of shared *Goals* and *Mutual Trust* are present, compared to when one or both are not present. So, there should be a threshold value of both *Goals* and *Trust*, which changes the correlation between *Actingresponsibilities* and *Success*. For the threshold, we started with the mean values of *Goals* (3.86) and *Trust* (3.73). For each response in the database, we added a new variable $\mathbb{1}$, where $\mathbb{1} = 1$ if the threshold value was met and $\mathbb{1} = 0$ if not met. This provides

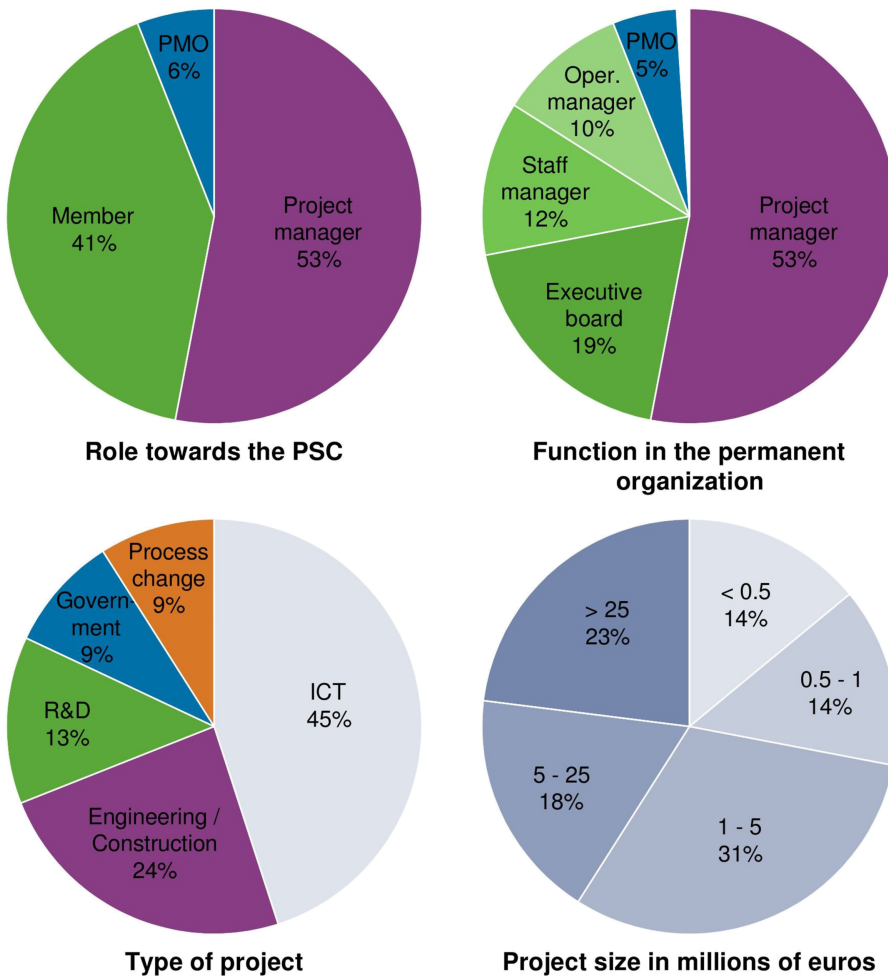


Figure 2. Respondents' and projects' demographics

two stratifications in the data, which makes it possible to test the significance of β_3 (the difference between the effects of *Actingresponsibilities* between the stratifications). We need three models #3 to test the three sub-hypotheses:

Hypothesis H2a: both *Goals* AND *Trust* have met the threshold, Model #3A:

$$Success = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Actingresponsibilities + \mathbb{1}_{HighTrustGoals}(\beta_2 + \beta_3 Actingresponsibilities)$$

Hypothesis H2b: *Goals* has met the threshold, Model #3B:

$$Success = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Actingresponsibilities + \mathbb{1}_{HighGoals}(\beta_2 + \beta_3 Actingresponsibilities)$$

Hypothesis H2c: *Trust* has met the threshold, Model #3C:

$$Success = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Actingresponsibilities + \mathbb{1}_{HighTrust}(\beta_2 + \beta_3 Actingresponsibilities)$$

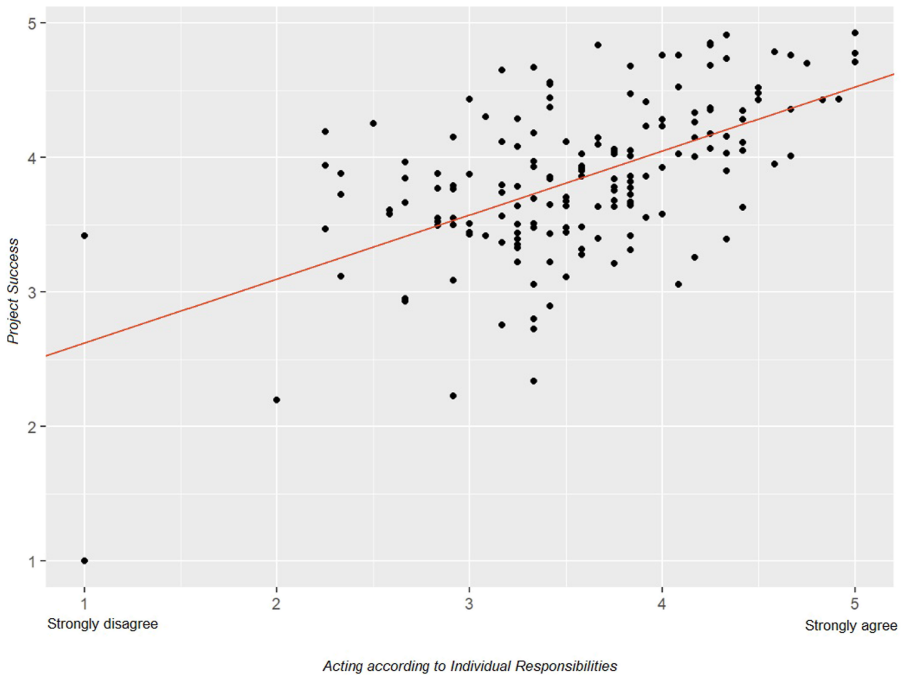


Figure 3. Relationship between “acting according to individual responsibilities” and “project success” – scatterplot with trendline

Table 3. Correlations between the four variables

| Variable | Actingresponsibilities | Goals | Trust | Success |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------|-------|---------|
| <i>Actingresponsibilities</i> | 1.00 | | | |
| <i>Goals</i> | 0.56 | 1.00 | | |
| <i>Trust</i> | 0.56 | 0.70 | 1.00 | |
| <i>Success</i> | 0.56 | 0.63 | 0.59 | 1.00 |

Table 4. Estimated coefficients for the prediction of Success using Model #2

| Variable in function | Estimate | Std. Error | p-value |
|-------------------------------------------|----------|------------|---------|
| β_0 , intercept | 1.41 | 0.20 | <0.001 |
| β_1 , <i>Goals</i> | 0.27 | 0.07 | <0.001 |
| β_2 , <i>Trust</i> | 0.16 | 0.07 | 0.02 |
| β_3 , <i>Actingresponsibilities</i> | 0.21 | 0.06 | <0.001 |

The left side of [Table 5](#) shows the estimation results for β_3 in the three models #3A, #3B and #3C.

We found no significant difference between the effects of *Actingresponsibilities* on *Success*, assuming high or low *Goals* and *Trust*. So, it’s likely that hypotheses [H2a](#), [H2b](#) and

Table 5. Estimated coefficients for the prediction of *Success* using Model #3

| Model | Threshold = mean | | Threshold = 3 | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Estimate of β_3 | P-value of the test $\beta_3 = 0$ | Estimate of β_3 | P-value of the test $\beta_3 = 0$ |
| Model #3A: <i>Goals AND Trust</i> | -0.15 | 0.19 | -0.18 | 0.15 |
| Model #3B: <i>Goals</i> | -0.17 | 0.13 | -0.17 | 0.13 |
| Model #3C: <i>Trust</i> | -0.06 | 0.58 | -0.06 | 0.58 |

H2c must be rejected. Even if, in reality, there is a difference between the stratifications, this is small and will have no practical consequences. One reason might be that the range of measured *Trust* or *Goals* is too limited. Indeed, the average values for *Goals* and *Trust* are above the neutral (“neither agree nor disagree”) value of 3. Therefore, we retested the difference between stratifications with lower threshold values of 3. As presented on the right side of Table 5, this led to minimal differences.

5.5 Differences between project managers and other respondents

Testing the hypotheses separately between project managers and PSC members leaves too few data points. We did, however, check if the indicated *Success* differs between project managers and PSC members, as shown in Figure 4.

As the figure shows, the distributions are mainly the same. We quantified the difference in means using linear regression, which confirmed that the difference is not significant (p -value = 0.172).

5.6 Roles in the steering committee

Figure 5 provides an overview of the roles present in the PSC and in which combinations. The “Set size” on the left shows the role’s occurrence. One PSC member can have several roles. In a previous study (Stoppels et al., 2025), we defined the role of “Quality assurance”. In the survey questions and the figure below, we split this into a role to check quality assurance (*No representation but a role to check quality on behalf of the PSC*) and to advise (*No representation but a role to advise/add skills not present in the PSC*) because Karlsen (2020) only mentions the second.

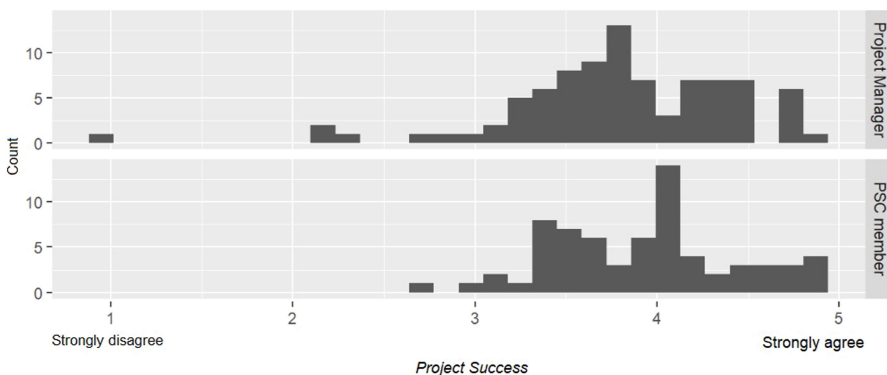


Figure 4. Comparison of rating project success between project managers and PSC members

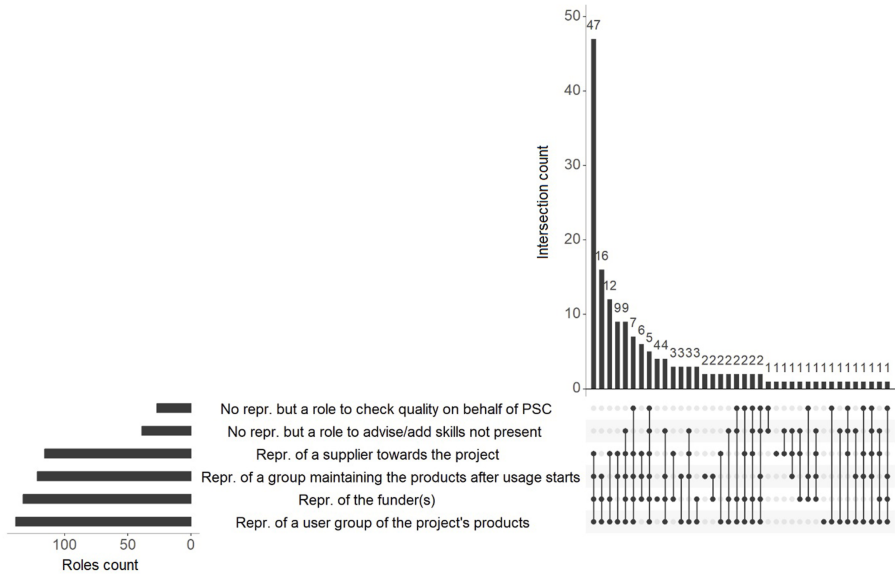


Figure 5. Roles that are present in the Project Steering Committee

The roles of representing funder(s), user groups, suppliers towards the project and groups maintaining the project’s products are typically present. The roles of quality assurance or advice are rare, though they occur. The figure shows that some PSCs lack representation from the funder, so we contacted the respondents who voluntarily left their email addresses. They either indicated the funder was indirectly funding via a project owner or that the budget had to be approved by a portfolio board.

In the survey, we also asked whether each role should be present. Respondents strongly agreed on the need for all the representation roles, with more than 80% in agreement (score 4 or 5). These roles are *Representation of the Funder*, *Representation of User Groups*, *Representation of Suppliers of Project Resources* and *Representation of the Support organization for Project Deliverables*. Opinions on the need for a role solely for *Quality Assurance towards the PSC* were diverse: 49% scored 4 or 5.

5.7 Opinions on responsibilities, shared goals and Mutual Trust

The survey also asked respondents to rate the reasoning behind the hypotheses on a five-point Likert scale, thereby assessing their views on the conceptual model. Table 6 shows the questions and the percentage with scores 4 or 5. Results indicate that respondents seem to agree with the conceptual model, although our statistical testing does not support it.

Table 6. Opinions about acting according to individual responsibilities, shared goals and mutual trust (N = 163)

| Question | Percentage score 4 or 5 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| If members act according to agreed-upon personal responsibilities, this improves project success | 79% |
| Having shared goals are a prerequisite before members should act from their own responsibilities | 90% |
| Mutual trust among members is a prerequisite before members should act from their own responsibilities | 90% |

5.8 Opinions on the relevance of a Project Steering Committee for governance and support

A PSC can be needed for governance or support (Crawford *et al.*, 2008). Governance is needed for risk limitation towards the owning organizations. Therefore, we asked if the owning organization is at risk if the project fails. To address the potential need for support, we measured the perceived importance of the PSC in solving conflicts of interest between stakeholder groups and stakeholder commitment. Table 7 shows the percentage of responses for levels of perceived risk for the organization if the project fails and the need for PSC involvement in stakeholder management. Hardly any projects are in the low/low area, where, according to the literature, there is no need for a PSC.

We also asked if the project needs a PSC to succeed. Respondents see the need, with 90% in agreement (Agree or Strongly Agree).

6. Discussion

This discussion section compares the survey results to the literature and the conceptual model.

6.1 Testing the conceptual model

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed, since Acting responsibilities and Success were shown to have a strong positive correlation. Previous studies indicate this could be a causal relation, since acting from clear individual responsibilities sharpens decision-making, builds commitment, prevents conflict and prevents gaps in activities (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025).

Hypothesis 2 states that the effect of Acting according to Individual Responsibilities on Project Success differs when a certain degree of Shared Goals and Mutual Trust are present, compared to when one of the two or both are not present. Based on the data gathered, this was not confirmed. However, respondents agreed with this hypothesis when asked directly, thus aligning with a previous qualitative study (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025). The first reason for the discrepancy might be that the PSCs studied are mainly in the higher *Mutual Trust* and *Shared Goals* area (78% of responses have both above 3). Thus, the data lacks range, even while we calibrated towards the mean. The same lack of range in our data is in *Project Success* (88% of responses above 3). For projects in trouble, members might start acting primarily based on interests from their position in the permanent organization (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025). Finding enough PSCs with lower trust to expand the dataset might not be feasible, given that in our study, seven professional organizations have cooperated. Follow-up studies can be qualitative on specific projects having difficulty moving forward or lacking trust among PSC members.

The second reason for the discrepancy might be that the conceptual model needs adjustment. Both this study and the previous study (Stoppels *et al.*, 2025) indicate that project managers and PSC members think a minimum of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust* are needed before *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* improves *Project Success*. Our quantitative data show that *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* always has a

Table 7. Responses on PSC needed to limit risk or for stakeholder management ($N = 163$)

| | | PSC is needed for stakeholder commitment or resolving conflicts of interest in stakeholder groups | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| | | High | Low |
| In case the project fails, the owning organization is at risk | High | 48% | 4% |
| | Medium | 12% | 3% |
| | Low | 30% | 2% |

positive relationship with *Project Success*. So, it might be a matter of priority in team development: acting from individual responsibilities is always beneficial, but when shared goals or mutual trust are lacking, improving those takes priority over clarifying individual responsibilities.

A first alternative conceptual model could focus on the effort and timing of activities by the PSC to achieve *shared goals*, *mutual trust* and *members acting according to their individual responsibilities*. A second alternative conceptual model could include *decision-making* and *holding the project manager to account* as mediators. Thereby, following recent work by [Turner \(2025\)](#) on decision-making as a mediator between governance and project success and including the *holding to account* part of governance ([Müller et al., 2016](#)). In such a model, *Mutual Trust*, *Shared Goals* and *Acting from Individual Responsibilities* could be the influencing variables, with *Project Success* as the dependent variable.

6.2 Predicting project success

Knowing *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities*, *Mutual Trust* and *Shared Goals*, 48% of *Project Success* can be predicted. We found a strong positive correlation between the four variables, but each variable adds to the prediction of *Project Success*. It seems advisable to work on achieving all three and measure them at project reviews.

Although we could not compare per project, the data suggest that whether the respondent is a project manager or PSC member does not influence the scores on *Project Success*. This finding is reassuring for previous and future research, as studies on project governance typically use project managers as respondents (e.g. [Bucero, 2024](#); [Joslin and Müller, 2016](#)) or respondents who identify themselves as project owners on LinkedIn (e.g. [Musawir et al., 2017](#)).

6.3 Roles in the steering committee

We found that the four representation roles, as proposed in our earlier work ([Stoppels et al., 2025](#)) and in line with the project management method PRINCE2 ([Axelos, 2009](#)), are generally covered in the projects in our dataset. We found indications of quality assurance roles toward the PSC being present, thus confirming earlier findings ([Stoppels et al., 2025](#)). This earlier study suggested that members whose only role is *Quality Assurance towards the PSC* could add skills and knowledge on project oversight, the product to be delivered, or stakeholders. Based on a case study, [Karlsen \(2020\)](#) explicitly recommends including external members (not working at a funding, owning, or supplying organization) to bring expertise and trustworthiness. However, our previous study found examples where the lack of accountability towards a permanent organization led to free-riding or jeopardizing the authority of other PSC members. These pros and cons may be reflected in the survey respondents' mixed opinions. We infer that individual roles and responsibilities should be considered when designing a governance structure. The PSC at the group level is an agent to the funder and a principal to the project manager. But so is each individual member.

6.4 Measuring project success

Since the study reused the Project Success questions and the project categorization from [Joslin and Muller \(2016\)](#), the data can be used in future meta-studies. Given the high Cronbach's Alpha (>0.9) of the variable *Project Success* found by both [Joslin and Muller \(2016\)](#) and this study, it could be considered to reduce the number of questions in future studies that only need *Project Success* on an aggregated level.

Literature suggests project efficiency is mainly independent of long-term value in the eyes of stakeholders ([De Wit, 1988](#); [Musawir et al., 2017](#)). If so, we would expect the Cronbach's Alpha for *Project Success* to be lower than 0.9. Therefore, this and previous studies may experience a halo effect on some respondents ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#)). They might project their

opinion on the more observable project success dimension, *Project Efficiency*, to the less observable ones, such as *Future Potential* and *Stakeholder Satisfaction* (Khan, 2012).

6.5 Relevance of Project Steering Committees

The data support the two reasons for a PSC, as stated by Crawford *et al.* (2008): governance and support. There are hardly any PSCs in the study where the need for both is low. In line with previous qualitative studies (Stoppels *et al.*, 2023), projects with a high need for support require a PSC when “things get rough”. Respondents indicated that the project needed a PSC to succeed, but there may be a bias because respondents are accustomed to having one. So, follow-up research could focus on projects posing high risk and requiring support, where no PSC was used for oversight, but other governance institutions were used instead (Müller *et al.*, 2017).

7. Conclusion and recommendations

This study quantitatively measures the impact of *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities*, *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust* of PSC members on *Project Success*. It is unique in explicitly including PSC members as respondents, thereby addressing the call by Pitsis *et al.* (2014) to regard project governance as a concern beyond project managers.

We found a clear relationship among these four variables. We proposed that members should have a minimum level of shared goals and mutual trust before acting from their individual responsibilities. Our earlier explorative study suggested that this common foundation is needed to prevent transaction-based negotiation, which jeopardizes information sharing, discussion and integration. Organizational management literature supports this, showing that relationship conflict may arise when shared goals and mutual trust are lacking, potentially harming decision-making quality (Simons and Peterson, 2000).

However, our data did not support the hypothesis that a threshold of *Shared Goals* and *Mutual Trust* is required for *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities* to positively relate to *Project Success*. When asked directly in the survey, respondents indicated that members should first focus on achieving shared goals and mutual trust before acting on individual responsibilities. We conclude that members knowing individual responsibilities and acting on them is always beneficial, but there is a priority. This implies for practice that, when initiating a PSC, members should start by clarifying and sharing goals and building trust. Understanding how members do this justifies future research, such as longitudinal case studies of members' role-taking.

The variables *Acting according to Individual Responsibilities*, *Mutual Trust* and *Shared Goals* are a predictor of 48% of *Project Success*. Although this study does not meet Van de Ven's (2007) criteria for causality, our earlier exploratory study and the survey of respondents' opinions suggest a causal association. Therefore, our study implies that members should take time at the launch of a PSC to discuss their own and other members' responsibilities and how these influence actions and decision-making. Moreover, members should work on team processes to improve mutual trust and informed agreement on the overall goals.

The study is unique in that it quantitatively distinguishes standardized roles of members. We found support for using five roles to select PSC members and determine their individual responsibilities. The four representation roles for funders, user groups, suppliers to the project and groups maintaining the project's products are generally covered in a PSC. These four roles are about representing the contributing and affected types of stakeholders (McGrath and Whitty, 2017) that influence project success. The role of quality assurance towards the PSC is often unfilled and should be used prudently, as members with only this role have limited accountability. The roles can be used in practice, and PSCs' inner workings could be further studied based on these roles.

The study's main weakness is the limited number of projects with low trust among members and low project success, which might limit the size of the effects we detect. With our

snowballing approach, the non-response bias is unknown. There may be a bias towards more successful projects, as a project manager might have a better relationship with PSC members in these projects and be more inclined to forward the survey. Another limitation is that common-method bias cannot be ruled out: the same respondents answer questions about all variables. Future studies would benefit from benchmark data on project success related to project, governance and contextual indicators, to which our data can be a part of the input.

Our findings indicate that PSCs play a significant role in project success, based on the perspectives of both PSC members and project managers. This justifies further investigation into the inner workings, success factors and other variables that influence the effectiveness of PSCs in project oversight. Critical case studies of PSCs supervising failing projects (Flyvbjerg, 2006), combined with an interactionist view of role theory (Bechky, 2006), can provide insights.

Our study adds to agency theory by highlighting that PSCs are not a uniform group but a heterogeneous governance body. The members are, at the same time, agents to their own stakeholder groups and to the funder and owner. Also, the members are part of a group that (at the group level) provides unified direction as a principal to the project manager. The study adds to the project-governance research strand *Resilience* (Sankaran et al., 2025), highlighting the added value of coping with a dynamic environment by having functionally diverse senior managers from contributing and affected stakeholders at the table. Our study adds to the research strand *Organizational* by showing the inner workings of a frequently used governance body, as a collaborative device between organizations and departments. Practitioners should make an effort to understand the impact of overall goals on PSC members' individual responsibilities and should build mutual trust within the PSC by understanding the other members' responsibilities. This enables PSCs to offer unified direction and contribute meaningfully to project success.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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