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Hemza GUERNOUB,
Meryem AMGHAR

Exploring the Role and Competencies of Project Leaders in Academic Research: Insights from Algeria

This paper aims to examine the roles and competencies of project leaders in Algerian academic research, emphasising their contribution to effective knowledge production within research teams. The study adopts a qualitative approach, based on semi-structured interviews with 22 research project leaders. The findings highlight the critical importance of both transformational and distributed forms of leadership in ensuring project success and fostering collective engagement within research teams. Particular emphasis is placed on the project leader's interpersonal skills, especially their ability to motivate, communicate effectively, and mobilise key resources to address emerging challenges. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations to support the development of leadership practices that are better suited to the operational realities of research project management in Algeria.

Keywords: academic research, Algeria, leadership, research team, competencies.

Šio tyrimo tikslas – išnagrinėti projektų vadovų vaidmenis ir kompetencijas Alžyro akademiniuose tyrimuose, pabrėžiant jų indėlį į veiksmingą žinių kūrimą mokslinių tyrimų grupėse. Tyrime taikomas kokybinis metodas, pagrįstas pusiau struktūruotais interviu su 22 mokslinių tyrimų projektų vadovais. Tyrimo išvadose pabrėžiama, kad užtikrinant projekto sėkmę ir skatinant kolektyvinį įsitraukimą mokslinių tyrimų komandose itin svarbi tiek transformacinė, tiek paskirstytoji lyderystės formos. Ypač daug dėmesio skiriama projekto vadovo tarpasmeniniams įgūdžiams, ypač jo gebėjimui motyvuoti, veiksmingai bendrauti ir sutelkti pagrindinius išteklius kylantiems iššūkiams spręsti. Tyrimo pabaigoje pateikiamos rekomendacijos, kuriomis siekiama padėti plėtoti lyderystės praktiką, geriau atitinkančią Alžyro mokslinių tyrimų projektų valdymo veiklos realijas.

Raktiniai žodžiai: moksliniai tyrimai, Alžyras, lyderystė, mokslinių tyrimų grupė, kompetencijos.

Introduction

The process of creating and disseminating academic knowledge relies primarily on the collaborative work of researchers within research projects (Adams et al., 2005; García-Sánchez et al., 2019). According to H. Luo (2009), the research team represents the cornerstone of innovation in the academic world. Research teams help to leverage the human capital of their members and manage the inherent complexity of research activities by mobilising interdisciplinary teams (Mazumdar et al., 2015). Hence, the nature of academic research requires the pooling and integration of diverse yet complementary skills (Levi, Slem, 1995)

Hemza GUERNOUB – senior researcher at Centre for Research in Applied Economics for Development, CREAD, Algeria. Address: Rue El Afghani, Bouzaréah, Algiers. Phone: 00 213 664 243743. Email: hamzaguernoub@gmail.com

Meryem AMGHAR – senior researcher at Centre for Research in Applied Economics for Development, CREAD, Algeria. Address: Rue El Afghani, Bouzaréah, Algiers. Phone: 00 213 555 112828. Email: meriemamghar06@gmail.com.

within a group of researchers working to achieve scientific outcomes and ensure project success (Milojevic, 2014). Nevertheless, the concept of "project success" is distinct from that of "project management success." Project success is assessed in terms of the project's overall objectives, whereas project management success is typically measured using conventional performance criteria such as time, cost, scope, and quality compliance (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Tam et al., 2020). In this context, the effectiveness of a research team depends on both technical and social systems, which together enhance productivity and promote the well-being of team members (Omar & Ahmad, 2014). It is important to highlight that the social dimension relates to team climate, leadership, and coordination, while the technical dimension concerns the tools and work processes involved (Omar & Ahmad, 2014). Given the importance of both project management processes and the team members themselves, project success largely depends on the project leader, who must simultaneously fulfill managerial and leadership roles (Imam & Zaheer, 2021). The emphasis placed on either role may vary depending on the size and nature of the project. Effective leaders are thus expected to maintain an appropriate balance between relationship-building and value-based communication, while also ensuring adequate attention is given to procedural aspects (Turner & Müller, 2005).

Despite the growing prevalence of research projects in academic practice, there remains a limited understanding of how project leaders can effectively ensure their success. Existing studies are relatively broad and often fail to clarify how and why the project leader influences the success of a project team (Bhatti et al., 2021). The complexity and uncertainty inherent in research projects place far greater demands on project leaders than those faced by traditional functional managers. In addition to operating within organisational environments designed primarily for conventional management roles, project leaders are often required to exert influence without formal authority, frequently working within conflict-prone matrix structures (Anantatmula, 2010). They lead diverse research teams over which they have limited direct control, facing persistent challenges related to team formation and motivation, particularly when some team members are simultaneously involved in multiple projects. These organisational challenges, combined with human factors such as lack of motivation, interpersonal tensions, or limited commitment, contribute significantly to project failures in terms of meeting timelines and budgets. This underscores the critical importance of project leaders' management and leadership competencies in driving project performance (Lin et al., 2007; Tam et al., 2020).

In Algeria, teamwork has significantly progressed in the field of academic research, which is expanding rapidly to address complex socio-economic challenges. Leading research projects requires mobilising diverse resources and capitalising on the expertise of the research team members. However, this dynamic often unfolds within an institutional environment that remains relatively unfavourable, creating additional constraints for research teams. Moreover, academic

research studies in Algeria have mainly focused on general themes related to research policy and governance, as well as the integration of universities into the national innovation system. As a result, less attention is paid to micro-level determinants of research, such as the role of the project manager. Therefore, this study addresses the limited understanding of how project leaders influence the success of academic research projects in Algeria. Studying this role in the success of research projects appears necessary, given the various constraints encountered in conducting research projects in Algeria. In light of this situation, the role of the project leader becomes especially challenging. From this perspective, **the aim of this research** is to shed light on the multiple roles of the project leaders and to examine the key competencies required for effective leadership within the Algerian academic research system. Hence, the study focuses on identifying the competencies that the project leaders must mobilise to fulfill multiple roles throughout the project lifecycle. These roles are shaped by the structural and contextual conditions under which research projects are carried out and require the ability to leverage a wide range of resources. Furthermore, it is important to understand the broader conditions for implementing research projects in Algeria, in order to identify both the challenges and opportunities inherent to academic research activities. **The research method** adopts a qualitative approach, grounded in the analysis of project leaders' perceptions of the roles they perform to overcome the challenges specific to research projects.

Literature review

Team-based collaboration has become the standard practice in universities (Adams et al., 2005), reflecting a growing trend across all academic disciplines (Jeong & Choi, 2015). Teamwork addresses the need for flexibility and continuous adaptability within organisations (Delgado Piña et al., 2008), a need that is especially critical in knowledge-production activities such as academic research. In this regard, the adoption of team-based approaches by universities has become essential to meet the increasing demands of the higher education and research environments (van Ameijde et al., 2009). A research team refers to a group of researchers who collaborate within the framework of a research project under the guidance of a project leader. The project leader plays a key leadership role in creating an effective working environment for the project team (Imam & Zaheer, 2021). However, the distinction between management and leadership is not always clear. Management typically focuses on classical functions such as planning, organising, and controlling, while leadership aims to motivate and guide individuals to reach their full potential and contribute to the achievement of ambitious organisational goals (Remy & Sané, 2024; Rosado Feger & Thomas, 2012). In this research, we are particularly interested in examining the project leader's role as a leader rather than as a mere operational manager. Leadership is associated with a set of roles, traits, and competencies specific to team leaders. In fact, research in this area increasingly focuses on identifying key leadership

roles and competencies (Spendlove, 2007). In the context of project management, leadership refers to the ability to mobilise, guide, and coordinate diverse teams operating in complex, uncertain, and risk-prone environments. It is essential for optimising resource use, ensuring effective planning, organisation, and control of project activities, and ultimately achieving project success (Remy & Sané, 2024)we examine the mediating effect of organisational learning on the relationship between humble leadership and the success of international development projects. Design/methodology/approach This study adopted a quantitative research methodology based on questionnaire data collected from 80 international development project managers from different sectors in Senegal (West Africa. A skilled manager must be able to highlight individual competencies and integrate them into collective knowledge by building connections between different areas of expertise and fostering synergy. Therefore, leadership has a strong influence on team processes such as collaboration, knowledge sharing, learning, and collective creativity (Mathieu et al., 2008). It contributes to team success by fulfilling two key functions: managing tasks and attending to social relationships (Levi, Slem, 1995).

Leadership has been extensively studied by scholars across a range of disciplines, each offering a unique perspective on what constitutes effective leadership. Table 1 presents a selection of these definitions:

An effective team leader must possess both technical and interpersonal competencies. From a technical perspective,

Table 1. **Definitions of leadership**

Author	Work / Year	Definition of Leadership	Main Perspective
James MacGregor Burns	Leadership, 1978	Encouraging followers to act toward goals that reflect the values and motivations of both parties	Transactionnel vs Transformationnel
Peter Drucker	The Practice of Management, 1954	Raising vision, performance, and character beyond conventional limits	Personal development and performance
Warren Bennis	On Becoming a Leader, 1989	Ability to turn a vision into reality	Vision and personal transformation
John Kotter	A Force for Change, 1990	A process of guiding a group toward destinations.	Leading organizational change
Bernard Bass	Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations, 1985	An interaction that shapes the expectations and perceptions of group members	Social interaction and adaptation
Henry Mintzberg	Mintzberg on Management, 1990	Influencing others' actions to achieve desirable goals	Influence and managerial effectiveness
Rosabeth Moss Kanter	The Change Masters, 1992	The ability to articulate a vision and inspire others to pursue it	Leadership in a context of change

Source: compiled by the authors based on I. Nechouani and M. Machrafi (2025).

they should have strong domain-specific knowledge, a clear understanding of business processes, proficient project management skills, and the capacity to use digital collaboration tools effectively. On the human side, a successful leader must demonstrate strong communication skills, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and empathy. They should also be able to motivate team members, manage conflicts, prioritise tasks, and make well-informed decisions. Finally, an effective leader consistently acts with ethics and a strong sense of responsibility (Racolta-Paina & Ciucanu, 2023). Numerous studies on leadership styles and competencies have identified key success factors for project manager performance. However, these studies suggest that different leadership styles are more suitable for different phases of a project's life cycle (Lin et al., 2007; Remy & Sané, 2024). In other words, leadership in project management is a dynamic and multidimensional concept. As a result, various leadership styles exist, each with its own characteristics and distinctive approaches. Transactional leadership is process-oriented and particularly effective in straightforward or technical projects, such as those in engineering or IT (Yang et al., 2011). Transformational leadership, on the other hand, is more people-oriented and better suited for complex projects. Transformational leaders inspire their teams, support personal development, and encourage creativity in the face of challenges (Douglas et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2011). Situational leadership involves adapting one's style based on task characteristics and team relationships. Leaders shift between directive and supportive behaviours depending on team members' maturity or autonomy (Douglas et al., 2022). Systemic leadership is a holistic approach that complements classical styles (transformational, situational, transactional (Douglas et al., 2022; Hitt & Ireland, 2002). Inclusive leadership focuses on empowering employees, promoting diversity, and fostering open communication. This approach creates a participatory and motivating environment that supports project success (Lin & Shek, 2019). Adaptive leadership, unlike rigid traditional approaches, emphasizes flexibility and strategic adjustment in the face of unpredictability. It balances technical solutions with human dynamics to foster innovation and proactive team engagement (Naseer et al., 2023). Ethical leadership promotes transparency, open dialogue, and coordinated collaboration (Bhatti et al., 2021). This approach strengthens team members' trust in their leaders and encourages knowledge sharing. Accordingly, effective leaders provide clear guidance, acknowledge individual efforts, and promote autonomy in order to achieve set goals (Howell & Avolio, 1993). It is therefore essential to understand the conditions that contribute to the success of research teams, particularly by analysing the role of leadership in fostering collective engagement and driving the knowledge creation process (Milojevic, 2014).

Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative methodology involving data collection through semi-structured interviews conducted with leaders of several academic research projects in Algeria. Qualitative research aims primarily to understand

individuals' experiences (Aspers & Corte, 2019); in other words, it seeks to understand the meaning and interpretation that actors give to the phenomena under study. This method is particularly appropriate as it allows us to grasp the meaning that actors attribute to their practices by confronting their lived experiences and personal narratives. Through this approach, we can uncover the underlying issues and constraints that shape their actions (Schostak, 2006). In this sense, our study is exploratory in nature and seeks to understand the roles of project leaders in the context of academic research in Algeria, through the investigation of their operational practices.

Our qualitative study adopts an exploratory approach to the research topic. Specifically, our aim is to develop a nuanced understanding of the role of project leaders in the Algerian research context and to identify the competencies required for effective leadership in this setting. The interview guide was designed to reflect the main dimensions identified in the literature on leadership and project management in academic contexts (Spendlove, 2007; Luo, 2009; Omar & Ahmad, 2014). It was structured around several open-ended questions, allowing respondents the freedom to express themselves openly about the competencies and roles of project leaders (including problem-solving, team management and mobilisation, and personal skills). Our study is based on a non-probabilistic, purposive sample, selected with the goal of generating the richest possible data to deepen our understanding of the topic. Particular attention was given to ensuring diversity among interviewees to capture a wide range of perspectives. The sample includes 22 project leaders from various academic disciplines. The number of interviews meets the principle of saturation, i.e. after a certain number of interviews, the information collected begins to repeat itself. Interviewees were primarily selected based on their expertise in leading research projects, with the intention of collecting diverse opinions until data saturation was reached. Table 2 presents the years of experience of the interviewees.

The distribution of interviewees by institution is presented in Table 3.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for thematic and content analysis. Various approaches were considered to conduct the content analysis. First, units of meaning were identified to create initial codes. The coding process led to the construction of nodes, organised in a hierarchical structure

Table 2. **Years of experience of interviewees**

Years of experience	Number of project leaders
More than 5 years	18
Less than 5 years	4

Source: compiled by the authors based on survey data.

Table 3. **Distribution of interviewees by institution**

Institution	Number of interviewees
University	13
Research Center	9
Total	22

Source: compiled by the authors based on survey data.

resembling a tree. Using both inductive and deductive approaches, thematic analysis consists of identifying and organising themes that reflect a shared interpretation of the subject of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Subsequently, the themes identified within the nodes were classified and categorised.

Analysis and discussion of results

The roles of the project leaders

The first theme explored in the interviews relates to the role of the project leader at various levels, as summarised in Table 4.

Thematic analysis reveals that the project leader's primary role is to ensure the continuity of the project in the face of unforeseen challenges, in other words, to guarantee the project's resilience and to find solutions to emerging problems. Throughout the implementation of a research project in Algeria, the leader is constantly required to seek solutions and negotiate alternatives with their team. One researcher emphasised this point, stating: "*Let me give you an example: it is essential to address problems in a timely manner. There must be ongoing communication to involve people in decisions that impact the project. Involving them means assigning responsibility so that they contribute to advancing the project*". Another

Table 4. **Roles of the research project leader**

Dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Prominence in the findings
University Research Center Total	Overcoming obstacles and uncertainties	**Strongly emphasised**
	Negotiating solutions and taking initiative	
	Managing relationships with the administration and partners	
Team dynamics management	Maintaining team cohesion and motivation	
	Managing conflicts	
Project management and organisation	Project planning and monitoring	**Moderately emphasised**
	Managing responsibilities and coordination	

Source: compiled by the authors based on the thematic analysis.

project leader reinforced this observation by explaining: "*During implementation, we needed specific equipment to avoid compressing the data, otherwise the quality would deteriorate. Fortunately, a team member managed to obtain it for us through a personal contact*". This work can only be realised through a conducive atmosphere. One participant drew attention to this point, stating: "*The factors that positively contribute to the success of a project are, generally, the work environment. It is very important. Even if there are difficulties, everyone must be mobilised to resolve them. There must be continuous communication with all the parties involved, with both vertical and horizontal communication concerning the project*".

In line with the broader theme of adaptability and problem-solving, another project leader emphasised the issue by stating: "*The project leader must manage everything related to finances, because here in Algeria it is they who handle the funding. They must be able to negotiate with companies and partners, it is they who bring in the collaborators*". This refers to the leader's ability to navigate challenges that often have little to do with the academic side of research. Sometimes, the leader's time is consumed by resolving unnecessary problems generated by the inefficiencies of the current research system. At the same time, the project leader must adopt a leadership role to maintain team cohesion and reinforce motivation. One interviewee highlighted this by saying: "*The idea of it is the ability to influence, to motivate people, to get them to work, this is very important. But the leader must be patient, very patient*" The leader also plays a role in communication and coordination. A researcher shared their experience, noting: "*It's not about giving orders, but rather coordinating with the entire team. Working together, giving your best and trusting the team, that's crucial*". Sometimes, it's not the lack of resources that's the problem, it's the relational aspect that blocks progress. Another added: "*The leader must be able to create a certain atmosphere among team members, because that will facilitate project success. I find that very, very important*". This dimension encompasses both internal team communication and external relations. Hence, the leader serves as an interface between the team, the administration, and external partners.

In this research, we also sought to understand the general conditions surrounding the implementation of research projects. While our research primarily focuses on the qualities and roles of the project leader, understanding the broader research context helps to better situate and validate the findings. In this regard, project leaders reported a number of on-the-ground challenges that complicate the implementation of research projects. The most frequently mentioned issues concerned access to resources, equipment, and funding. However, the leaders emphasised that it is the administrative management of these resources that presents the biggest challenge. Bureaucratic processes often lead to delays and hinder researchers' efforts. They also spoke of the long-term consequences of these difficulties. Over time, researchers may lose motivation and become less invested in the project. Faced with this reality, project leaders highlighted the importance of strong leadership and sustained team motivation in overcoming these challenges.

The analysis of the roles assumed by project leaders in the Algerian research context reveals that they reflect several dimensions of transformational leadership. On the one hand, this is seen through the emphasis on team motivation and cohesion; on the other hand, through resilience and collective mobilisation to solve problems. Transformational leadership inspires and motivates team members by guiding them toward a vision of success (Stokols et al., 2008). Through both formal and informal transformational leadership practices, research team members' interest in their work is stimulated, motivating them to pursue team objectives beyond their own personal interests (Ball, 2007). It should be noted that transformational leadership models have dominated the understanding of leadership in the higher education sector, highlighting the leader's capacity as a change agent to mobilise team members in response to the challenges of creativity and innovation (Black, 2015). Transformational leadership practices influence team performance through the mediating effect of group cohesion (Mathieu et al., 2006). As such, successful scientific teams are not solely based on scientific expertise but also on the quality of interpersonal interactions and processes that foster members' emotional engagement and the development of a shared language (Love et al., 2021). Furthermore, the conditions under which research is conducted in Algeria necessitate the collective mobilisation of project team members to find solutions to daily challenges. The thematic analysis highlighted the leader's role in this process of resilience and adaptability, particularly through the negotiation of solutions with stakeholders. In this sense, the leader's work should also align with distributed and systemic leadership. Distributed leadership is characterised by two main principles: a shared process of influence among members based on their competencies, and mutual influence grounded in collaboration and collective decision-making (van Ameijde et al., 2009). The systemic dimension is expressed through a holistic vision that aligns individual researcher initiatives with collective goals (Douglas et al., 2022; Hitt & Duane, 2002). Research teamwork requires a high level of interdependence and creativity (i.e., the integration of all members' contributions), which necessitates the adoption of distributed leadership (Black, 2015). This highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships and the recognition of each member's contributions, which offers ideal conditions for fostering creativity and addressing complex problems (Amey, 2006). Furthermore, the shared nature of leadership enables greater accountability among those involved in the project within the university setting (Petrov et al., 2006) and promotes leadership duality between the leader and team members (Ball, 2007). These are two key elements that distinguish leadership in research contexts. Ultimately, despite variations in leadership styles across academic research teams, several common roles fall under the general responsibilities of leaders and the traditional functions of project and team management (Rowley & Sherman, 2003). The effective functioning of a team requires a clear distribution of roles and clearly defined responsibilities for each member.

The project leader's competencies

The second major theme emerging from the interviews concerns the definition of the competencies of an effective research project leader. Thus, a successful project leader must possess a combination of technical, interpersonal, and scientific abilities that enable them to fulfill multiple roles within the project. The following Table 5 presents the key findings related to these core competencies.

Human and interpersonal qualities

An initial analysis highlights the central role of human and interpersonal skills in the success of research project leaders. These competencies are essential for understanding team members' expectations, maintaining a collaborative dynamic, and fostering a healthy and trust-based working atmosphere. They are primarily reflected in personal attributes such as empathy, active listening, kindness, as well as interpersonal communication skills. These traits enable the project leader to create a work environment conducive to collective engagement and knowledge sharing. One project leader summarises this idea by stating: "*To be a project leader, one must meet a minimum threshold: being open-minded and having communication skills to overcome practical obstacles*". Another interviewee adds*: "A project leader must have a sense of initiative and be considerate of others… they must be understood by everyone*".

Ability to mobilise key resources

Beyond the human qualities of the leader, the thematic analysis revealed another major requirement for project leaders in the Algerian research context: their ability to mobilise key resources to overcome the challenges of managing research projects in Algeria. One researcher expressed this view as follows: "*The leader*

Table 5. **Essential competencies of the research project leader**

Dimension	Sub-dimensions	Prominence in the findings
Human skills	Effective communication	**Strongly emphasised**
	Human skills	
	Perseverance and flexibility	
Ability to mobilize key resources	Capacity to leverage professional networks	
	Ability to mobilize key resources	
	Strategic thinking and decision-making abilities	
Scientific expertise and credibility	Field specialization and disciplinary expertise	**Moderately emphasised**
	Scientific expertise and credibility	

Source: compiled by the authors based on the thematic analysis.

must also assume a certain level of responsibility for the project, meaning the ability to identify available resources and use and mobilise them effectively, that is, in my opinion, the most important criterion". In this respect, the project leader must be able to successfully position the project within the research ecosystem, leveraging both professional and/or personal networks to access necessary resources and expertise. This positioning helps to mitigate structural deficiencies within the Algerian research system. As one interviewee stated: "*First of all, one must truly be a leader, someone with a general vision of the project, who can guide members, adjust strategies, and who possesses a sound understanding of the environment and the overall picture. When needed, they must be able to find a resource or a solution wherever it may be found*". In response to the rigidity of the research system, the project leader must have a thorough understanding of institutional and administrative procedures that govern research activity to avoid hindering the team's progress. Furthermore, the leader must adopt a forward-looking perspective, making decisions that shape the future of the project. It is up to the leader to outline the team's strategy and define its main directions.

Scientific expertise and legitimacy

The project leader must possess a certain level of specialisation in their field. Respondents emphasised criteria such as holding a doctoral degree and having in-depth mastery of the research domain. Experience plays a key role in project success, as it facilitates the development of the leader's cognitive and professional capital. As one participant explained: "*The leader must have a solid understanding of the foundations of their specialty; they are recognized experts in their domain. They have worked on the research topic and have accumulated experience in the field*". While scientific expertise is essential and considered a prerequisite, it is not sufficient on its own. The leader also requires scientific legitimacy, which is demonstrated through high-quality publications. Another respondent stated: "*At the very least, the leader should have publications to effectively lead the project and approach the topic with multiple research avenues*". This legitimacy allows the leader to influence team members' behaviour and gain their commitment to both the project's objectives. Moreover, experience in managing research projects is a key asset. It enables the leader to ensure smooth project execution by effectively handling constraints related to time, budget, quality, and integration.

It is therefore possible to identify two main categories of competencies that characterise an effective project leader. The first relates to the human and relational aspects within the team, while the second concerns the operational dimensions of the project. The success of research activities relies on a positive team dynamic, which is reflected in the sharing of responsibilities and strong interpersonal relationships among team members. Therefore, the project leader must possess natural leadership qualities to foster and sustain this dynamic. Our analysis also confirms that, in the field of research, human and interpersonal qualities are more crucial than technical skills when it comes to effective leadership.

Given the increasingly complex challenges related to research activities, universities must facilitate collaboration among researchers within multidisciplinary research teams. In this regard, the project leader assumes a significant responsibility in fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among team members. In the Algerian context, this is reflected in the leader's role in strengthening team motivation and cohesion, thereby creating a positive internal dynamic. Our study revealed that the project leader must possess mobilising skills related to effective leadership, such as empathy, active listening, and strong communication abilities. The importance of these relational competencies, including the ability to communicate and negotiate with others, has also been confirmed in several previous studies (Spendlove, 2007). In fact, leadership practices contribute to improving the performance of research activities (Ball, 2007). Studies conducted on several multidisciplinary research teams have revealed the strong influence of leaders on the processes and outcomes of collaboration in research projects (Stokols et al., 2008). Thus, leadership contributes to team success by fulfilling two key roles: task management and social relationship facilitation (Levi, Slem, 1995). Project teams that perform better are often characterised by strong leadership and a high level of belief among members in their project (Ammeter & Dukerich, 2002). Leadership is expressed through the influence exerted by the leader on other team members, encouraging their active involvement throughout the different stages of the research project (Mazumdar et al., 2015). Moreover, studies on innovation and performance within research teams have shown a strong relationship between team climate and innovation capacity (Gibson, 2002). The findings align with existing leadership research (including in the academic field), which has identified several personal traits that contribute to successful leadership, such as self-confidence, empathy, intelligence, and educational attainment (Stokols et al., 2008). Educational level is closely linked to reputation and scientific legitimacy. Our thematic analysis highlighted the importance of expertise and scientific credibility for the project leader. This result is consistent with several studies showing that academic credibility and experience within the university environment are critical for effective leadership in research activities (Spendlove, 2007). A leader must be scientifically credible in order to gain respect (Petrov et al., 2006). Such credibility is often determined by past performance in teaching and/or research. Therefore, successful leadership is grounded in trust and respect; trust is not commanded, but rather built through fairness and openness (Rowley & Sherman, 2003). Moreover, the leader must be able to mobilise key resources for the project. This finding extends to that of A. Bryman (2007), who argues that the ability to advocate for a project is particularly relevant in the academic world. In the Algerian context, these qualities are crucial in addressing field-related uncertainties. In this regard, our study highlighted the major role played by the project leader in overcoming obstacles and continuously finding solutions to problems.

Managerial and organisational implications

Several managerial and organisational implications can be drawn from this study.

- **At the institutional and organisational level**

Within the framework of research project governance, leadership is understood as distributed leadership, where the project leader primarily acts as a coordinator and facilitator of collective action. Their role is oriented toward enabling collective decision-making. Given the inherently collaborative nature of research projects, institutions should promote practices that facilitate collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and the co-construction of solutions within teams. This requires strengthening a culture of collaboration through high-quality, constructive internal communication and collaborative decision-making processes (i.e., shared leadership). This internal openness among researchers must also extend outward, emphasising the importance of developing collaboration skills with external partners and improving institutional communication that is essential to ensuring the success of research projects. All training and development efforts in this regard must be supported by increased administrative flexibility. Training, therefore, appears to be a top priority for preparing future project leaders. Practical training and workshops aimed at developing researchers' managerial skills and innovation management within research teams are necessary. Additional training should focus on enhancing researchers' adaptability and problem-solving capacities, thereby facilitating their effective integration into project team dynamics. Training programs may also include mentorship schemes, pairing junior researchers with senior researchers. Continuous professional development for leaders in multidisciplinary team facilitation, negotiation techniques, networking, and partnership-building is also a critical priority. The content of such training should help establish the foundations of shared leadership within research teams. The selection of project leaders must be based on rigorous criteria, prioritising managerial competence over seniority. The responsibility of project management should be formally integrated into the criteria used to evaluate both the projects and the leaders themselves.

- **At the team level**

Understanding the motivations of project team members is a leadership priority. The project leader must work to align individual and team goals in order to foster collective engagement. Motivation not only enhances team cohesion but also supports individuals in achieving their personal objectives. A key challenge lies in balancing the pursuit of individual recognition with the need to work and act collectively. Communication lies at the heart of successful research teamwork. Transparent and ongoing communication must be fostered to ensure the free flow of information. Additionally, it is crucial to develop a climate of trust that supports coordination, collective decision-making, and the delegation of responsibilities within the research team. In this regard, institutions should encourage regular dialogue and the organisation of recurring team meetings.

Conclusion and research perspectives

Research projects present numerous challenges, particularly in mobilising collective efforts within research teams to generate useful knowledge and foster innovation. The objective of this study was to analyse the role of the project leader within this dynamic. Rather than constructing a rigid leadership model tailored to research activities in the Algerian context, this work represents an attempt to understand leadership practices as they adapt to the operational realities of the research environment. In the context of academic research in Algeria, the project leader assumes multiple roles that reflect various dimensions of research project management. A strong emphasis is placed on the human component of the project (the researchers), which is evident in the focus on motivation and communication within the team. In addition, the operational dimension of the project and problem-solving tasks appear to occupy a significant part of the project leader's responsibilities. Thus, transformational and distributed leadership approaches emerge as essential strategies to mobilise the team's energy and expertise in the face of rigid administrative conditions surrounding project implementation. As such, leadership within research teams should be central to research management in Algeria. Training emerges as a top priority for strengthening the qualities and competencies of project leaders and preparing teams for collaborative work and the collective development of innovation within research projects. In terms of future research, it would be relevant to assess the training programs offered to researchers in Algerian universities and research centers, specifically to determine whether they adequately address research preparedness and project management skills. The findings from such an investigation could help inform the design of more effective training programs for researchers. Additionally, exploring the motivations of researchers to join research teams also appears pertinent, as it relates directly to team dynamics and the personal commitment of researchers to collaborative scientific work.

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Hemza GUERNOUB, Meryem AMGHAR

PROJEKTŲ VADOVŲ VAIDMUO IR KOMPETENCIJOS MOKSLINIUOSE TYRIMUOSE: ĮŽVALGOS IŠ ALŽYRO

S a n t r a u k a

Šiame tyrime nagrinėjami projektų vadovų vaidmenys ir kompetencijos Alžyro akademinių tyrimų kontekste, daugiausia dėmesio skiriant jų indėliui į veiksmingą mokslinių tyrimų grupių veiklą ir žinių kūrimą. Kai moksliniai tyrimai susiduria su įvairiais struktūriniais ir veiklos apribojimais, lyderystė tampa pagrindiniu projekto sėkmės elementu. Taikant kokybinį, žvalgomąjį metodą, tyrimas grindžiamas pusiau struktūruotais interviu su 22 įvairių akademinių disciplinų projektų vadovais. Tyrimu siekiama geriau suprasti realią vadovavimo praktiką ir nustatyti asmenines ir profesines kompetencijas, reikalingas vadovauti mokslinių tyrimų projektams sudėtingoje ir ribotų išteklių aplinkoje, kokia yra Alžyro aplinka.

Tyrimo rezultatai pabrėžia transformacinio ir paskirstytojo vadovavimo svarbą. Iš projektų vadovų tikimasi, kad jie ne tik koordinuos mokslinių tyrimų veiklą, bet ir įkvėps, motyvuos bei stiprins komandų sutelktumą. Iš tiesų projektų vadovai atlieka pagrindinį vaidmenį užtikrinant projekto atsparumą, nes randa nenumatytų iššūkių sprendimus ir sutelkia komandą. Jie veikia kaip tarpininkai, palaikydami nuolatinį bendravimą, veiksmingą koordinavimą ir teigiamą darbo aplinką. Be akademinių užduočių, jie taip pat valdo finansinius ir logistinius aspektus, kurie Alžyro sistemoje dažnai yra sudėtingi. Tad vadovas yra pagrindinis tarpininkas tarp komandos, administracijos ir išorės partnerių. Tyrimas rodo, kad sėkmingas vadovavimas priklauso nuo tarpasmeninių savybių, tokių kaip empatija ir aktyvus klausymasis, kurios padeda stiprinti komandos įsitraukimą. Be to, tyrime pabrėžiama, kad projektų vadovai turi turėti gerus prisitaikymo ir išteklių mobilizavimo įgūdžius, ypač institucinio nelankstumo sąlygomis. Jų gebėjimas veiksmingai bendrauti, spręsti problemas ir įveikti administracinius apribojimus laikomas itin svarbiu projekto sėkmei. Mokslinis patikimumas ir ankstesni akademiniai rezultatai taip pat labai svarbūs siekiant įgyti komandos narių pasitikėjimą ir įsipareigojimą.

Be to, pasiskirstytas vadovavimas yra vertingas modelis, leidžiantis perduoti atsakomybę ir skatinantis bendrą sprendimų priėmimą bei atskaitomybę mokslinių tyrimų grupėse. Iš vadybinės perspektyvos tyrimas pabrėžia institucinės paramos lyderystės ugdymui svarbą. Universitetai ir mokslinių tyrimų centrai turėtų skatinti tarpdisciplininį bendradarbiavimą ir organizuoti struktūrinius mokymus projektų ir komandų valdymo klausimais. Taip pat būtina persvarstyti projektų vadovų skyrimo kriterijus, daugiau dėmesio skiriant lyderystės ir vadybinėms kompetencijoms, o ne vien darbo stažui. Tyrimo pabaigoje rekomenduojama toliau tirti tyrėjų motyvaciją dalyvauti komandiniuose projektuose ir šiuo metu Alžyro institucijose siūlomų mokymo programų tinkamumą. Šios įžvalgos labai svarbios kuriant stipresnę, novatoriškesnę ir geriau koordinuojamą akademinę mokslinių tyrimų aplinką.