INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES BULLETIN
ISSN: (E) 3007-1917 (P) 3007-1909
Volume 3, Issue 9, 2025

ASSESSING PROJECT SUCCESS AND BUSINESS FAILURE: A CASE STUDY OF ISLAMABAD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17090994

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
18 June 2025	28 July, 2025	28 August 2025	10 September 2025

ABSTRACT

The major focus of this study is to examine the inconsistency of project success and business failure. This simply means the situation where a project meets its scope, the stipulated time schedule, and expenses and many other goals but it fails in achievement of its planned business goals. Islamabad International Airport is an example of such a project case. Islamabad International Airport was opened in May 2018 and replaced Benazir Bhutto International Airport to accommodate increased passenger capacity and come into line with international standards. This research investigates how the planning, execution and construction phases of this project achieved technical successes while failed in meeting the larger business and user-oriented objectives. By combining stakeholders' interviews, project management theory, and post-implementation performance analysis, this case study elaborates the insights into the limitations of traditional project success metrics and suggests strategies for aligning project deliverables with sustainable business outcomes.
Keywords: Words: *Project Management, Project Scope, Budget, Schedule, Sustainable growth*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern project management, a successful project is often defined by the "Iron Triangle" of budget adherence, scope and schedule. The Iron Triangle firstly used by Barne was one of the 1st endeavours to assess the success of a project based on cost, time and performance, where these three were represented as interdependent measurements. With the passage of time, these measures expanded and the specific criteria of "satisfaction of stakeholder" became more and more popular. Satisfaction is the name of conformity of fulfilling all the stipulated goals of a project. There often arises a situation where some objectives of a project are met while some are not achieved.

In the modern world there is quite a very strong emphasis on Project management as it has become one of the leading organizational activities. Assessing the outcome of a project is of great significance to all the stakeholders including customers, managers, clients, contractors, consultants and other stakeholders (Cleland, 1986; Kerzner, 1994).

The project of Islamabad International Airport illustrates this paradox: it satisfied its primary technical requirements but fell short of meeting business goals, resulting in a mixed perception of success.

This paper examines:

1. Factors which became the source of successful completion of the project in terms of budget schedule and scope.
2. The deficiencies due to which the project went towards failure from a business point of view.
3. Suggestions to incorporate business-oriented metrics in huge infrastructure projects for ensuring all-inclusive success.

Literature Review:

In Accordance to Midler and Alochet (2024), "A project's success is only evocative if it is measured with reference to 2 perspectives. Primarily, the level to which the technical performance objective was achieved in time within budget. Furthermore, how much the enterprise's strategic mission impacted the project."

A project's scope plays vital role in the three typical efficient factors of a project—money, time and scope—as it affects the owner. Similarly, Project managers should be aware of the profitmaking components of their firms. Project Managers must understand the profitable atmosphere and perceive the project as an element of battle of business for revenue, market share and profit. This belief was strengthened by somebody who looked over the literature on project performance of the last forty years and established that a further inclusive technique of assessing project success was starting to emerge (Serrador & Turner, 2015). A remarkable example was provided by Aubry et al (2021) regarding the different viewpoints of people: "An engineer considers success of a project in terms of technical competence, an architect considers it in terms of artistic look, an accounts manager in terms of money spent, a Manager human resources in terms of satisfaction of employees, a contractor in terms of early completion without delay while a chief executive rates the success in terms of stock market." Ebekozien et al. (2024) study Findings identified turbulent times related to the industry and major techniques for managing construction project risks in the Nigerian construction industry.

1. **Business Success vs Project Success:** Usually literature regarding project management often depicts success of a project as accomplishing it with in time and meeting scope and cost objectives (Morris & Hough, 1987). However, in views of Atkinson (1999) and Shenhar et al. (2001) a true success of a project considers long-term sustainability, strategic alignment with business goals and satisfaction of stakeholders as well.

2. **Business Objectives related to Airport Projects:** Large construction projects, particularly airports, are complex activities having numerous stakeholders. Such projects include private sector investors, government bodies, and the general public. One of the main expectation from airports is to create economic activity. Airports smoothen regional connectivity as well and deliver services of high levels. It is evident from the studies that if project goals misalign with these business objectives, the project often leads to underwhelming performance thus creating an atmosphere of business failure (de Neufville, 2008).

3. **Background of Islamabad International Airport:** This airport was intended for replacing the Benazir Bhutto International Airport and for serving as a new conveyance centre. Scope and Budget objectives were attained by this project; yet, consequent performance appraisals emphasized inefficiencies in operation, dissatisfaction of passengers, and exceeded upgrades and maintenance expenses.

Research Methodology

This research employs a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative approaches, utilizing:

- **Analysis of Documents:** During this study a thorough review of the financial reports, project documents, and timelines to assess the alignment of the airport's stipulated budget, scope, and time schedule with the objectives was carried out.
- **Interviews with Stakeholder:** Interviews were conducted with airport staff, project management officials and key users to understand the challenges faced during implementation and operation.
- **Case Analysis:** In order to reveal disparities between the project's initial success and post-implementation failures, case study approach was applied by comparing technical achievements with business outcomes.
- **Quantitative Analysis**: Financial and operational performance data of Islamabad International Airport from 2023–2024

Findings:

1. **Project Success (Scope, Schedule, Budget):**
   - **Scope:** Islamabad International Airport met its planned scope, with construction focused on

delivering a modern facility capable of handling significant passenger volumes.

- **Schedule:** Though due to the delayed regulatory approvals, this project followed the schedule as it was planned.
- **Budget:** This project got completed inside the budget allocated for it.

2. **Business Failure:**

- **Inefficiencies in Operation:** In spite of the fact that this project has met the construction goals, the airport is struggling with issues in operations like insufficient flow of passengers, inefficiencies in baggage handling, limited facilities which is constantly leading to regular complaints.
- **Dissatisfaction of Users:** The users of the airport are constantly reporting displeasure with the service quality, facilities, accessibility which is affecting the reputation of the airport and dropping the probability of return usage.
- **Economic Shortfall:** This project could not attain Islamabad's economic growth as it was anticipated. Also the airport fell short of the forecasts of the job creation and revenue generation.
- **Environmental and Regulatory Concerns:** The airport was criticized for the environmental oversight having inadequacy in planning to operate sustainably and thus affecting the airport's business viability.

4.1 Operational Performance

Table 1 shows failure of achieving goals regarding efficiency with constant services delays

Operational Metrics (2023)	Performance	Benchmark
Average Wait Time (Minutes)	25	45
Passenger Satisfaction (%)	56	85
Flight Punctuality (%)	70	90

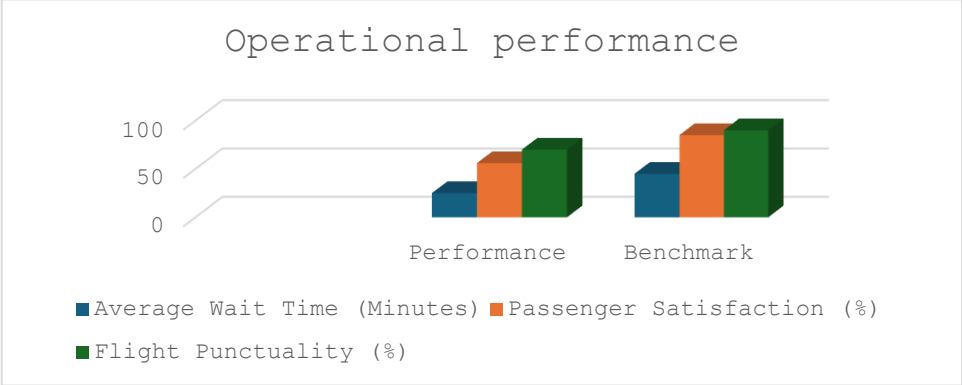


Figure: 1

4.2 Financial Performance

The financial data in Table 2 highlights the airport's inability to generate consistent revenue.

Table:2

Year	Revenue (PKR Billion)	Operational Cost (PKR Billion)	Profit/Loss (PKR Billion)
2022	6.5	8.0	-1.5
2023	7.0	9.2	-2.2

Table:3 Year-wise Proposed vs. Real Passenger Traffic at Islamabad International Airport

Year	Proposed Traffic (Millions)	Real Traffic (Millions)
2018	8	6.5
2019	8.5	7.2
2020	9	3.5
2021	9.5	5.8
2022	10	7
2023	10.5	7.5

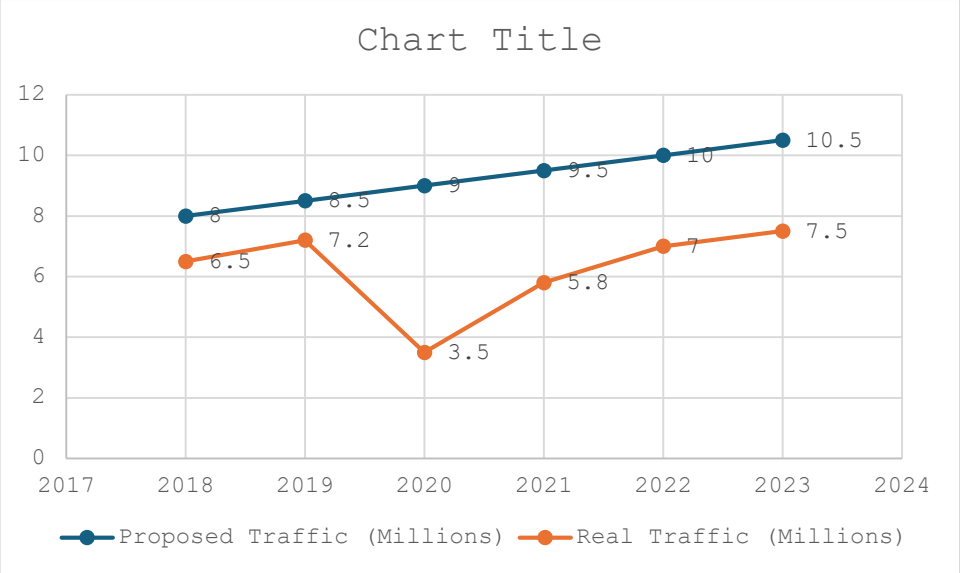


Figure:2

Discussion:

The Islamabad International Airport case highlights a common issue in large-scale public sector projects: an overemphasis on scope, schedule, and budget adherence at the expense of long-term business goals. Factors contributing to this misalignment include inadequate consideration of user needs during the planning phase, limited stakeholder involvement, and insufficient focus on post-project economic viability.

For Islamabad International Airport, the absence of integrated business metrics and user-focused planning meant that, despite technical success, the airport did not achieve its business purpose. Additionally, the lack of a performance-based management system to monitor and adapt to operational inefficiencies hampered the airport's ability to fulfill its intended role as a regional economic catalyst.

Recommendations:

1. **Stakeholder-Centric Project Planning:** Involve a broader range of stakeholders in the planning and execution phases to align project objectives with the needs of users and the community.
2. **Business-Oriented Success Metrics:** Incorporate business metrics, such as user satisfaction, operational efficiency, and economic impact, into the project's success criteria.
3. **Performance Monitoring and Adaptation:** Develop a post-implementation monitoring framework to assess and address operational challenges, ensuring the project meets business goals over time.

4. Environmental and Social Responsibility: Consider sustainable practices and social impact in planning and design phases to minimize long-term operational costs and enhance public perception.

Conclusion:

The Islamabad International Airport case demonstrates that project success, when measured solely by scope, schedule, and budget adherence, is an incomplete indicator of overall project performance. By broadening project success criteria to include business and user-oriented outcomes, project managers and stakeholders can ensure that large-scale infrastructure projects deliver sustained value and fulfill their strategic goals. Future projects, especially in the public sector, should adopt a balanced scorecard approach that evaluates both technical achievements and business outcomes for comprehensive success.

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