

A Literature Review on Customer Relationship Quality in Agile Projects in IT Industry

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Abstract—This research explores the intersection of Agile project management and Customer Relationship Quality in the Sri Lankan IT industry. Recognizing the pivotal role of project management in the industry's growth, the study emphasizes the significance of Agile methodologies in fostering customer-centric practices. A preliminary investigation, including discussions with industry professionals and a comprehensive literature review, reveals a notable challenge in IT companies: the struggle to enhance customer relationship quality in Agile projects due to a lack of understanding of essential aspects. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory, the research identifies a gap in understanding customer relationship quality dynamics within Agile frameworks, particularly in developing countries. The study formulates a problem statement addressing poor customer relationship quality in Agile-practicing IT organizations in Sri Lanka. The research's importance lies in its focus on the dynamics of customer relationship quality within Agile projects, offering insights to empower organizations in customer engagement, relationship cultivation, and value delivery. The findings underscore the need for a unified framework integrating critical success factors for both Agile projects and customer relationship quality. The conclusion highlights the future research agenda, emphasizing the exploration of common factors driving success in both domains. As the IT industry evolves, this research aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding, enabling organizations to navigate complexities, optimize interactions, and achieve sustained success.

Keywords—Agile project management, customer relationship quality, social exchange theory, IT industry

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the IT landscape in Sri Lanka has witness a remarkable growth by being the one of the key drivers of economic development. The growth of the IT industry and its importance cannot be overstated in today's digital age. For this success, project management plays a key role, by ensuring efficient and effective execution of projects.

Agile methodology has become a prominent and widely discussed topic in the IT industry [1]. Its popularity can be attributed to its flexible and iterative approach to software development [2]. The Agile methodology is closely associated with the Agile Manifesto, which acts as the cornerstone and guiding principles for Agile software development. Agile manifesto promotes customer relationship management of highest quality because agile project management is customer centric.

Customer Relationship quality plays a massive role in maximizing the outcome of a Project [3]. By maintaining a

strong and effective bond with customers, any scale of a company can enhances customer satisfaction, engagement, and loyalty [3]. In project management, Agile methods stand out by putting a strong focus on building excellent relationships with customers. These methods emphasize collaboration and engaging practices [4], recognizing how crucial it is to involve customers in understanding and meeting their needs effectively. In Agile, customers are not just seen as onlookers but as essential contributors to the project team. Their viewpoints and feedback aren't just acknowledged but are valued and actively included. In Agile, working with customers isn't just a process; it's a partnership where their needs aren't just addressed but truly grasped.

II. METHODOLOGY

During the preliminary stage, we engaged in discussions with industry professionals to gain insights into their perspectives and knowledge regarding these factors. Additionally, we sought to understand how these aspects are applied in practical contexts.

Also, through an exhaustive examination of past studies, this preliminary study sought to identify areas where the current understanding is lacking or incomplete. By doing so, it aimed to highlight opportunities for further research, emphasizing the importance of addressing these gaps in both practical applications and theoretical frameworks. This preparatory phase sets the stage for conducting a meaningful and impactful research study. Following a systematic approach recommended by [5-8], the authors conducted a literature review to identify what existing literatures discussed regarding Customer Relationship Quality in Agile Projects. The study included English-language publications, specifically academic materials like peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference papers published between 2012 and 2023.

TABLE I. ARTICLE INCLUSION CRITERIA

Characteristics	Inclusion Criteria
Types of Publications	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, book chapters indexed in Scopus
Language(s)	English
Time Period	From 2012 to 2023 (Inclusive)
Research Design	Conceptual and empirical
Content	studies that include discussions on Customer Relationship Quality
Source	Google Scholar

Google scholar was used for the search, resulting in 53,500 articles. The inclusion criteria were carefully defined (Tab. 1), and the search process followed a three-step

approach: identification, screening, and inclusion, as illustrated in Figure 1. The initial search focused on social exchange theory, guided by keywords such as "customer relationship quality" and "agile project management."

III. FINDINGS

Through insightful discussions with industry professionals, it is clear that IT companies in Sri Lanka face a significant challenge when it comes to strengthening customer relationship quality in Agile IT projects. A prominent factor contributing to this issue is their limited understanding of the crucial aspects that should be considered in order to cultivate strong customer relationships. This lack of knowledge and awareness acts as a hindrance, impeding effective communication, collaboration, and the ability to meet customer expectations.

Also, Past research in this field has consistently emphasized the importance of "customer relationship quality" within projects, drawing upon the Social Exchange Theory [9]. However, these studies primarily focused on developed country contexts [9], neglecting the dynamics in developing countries. Additionally, there is a notable gap in addressing how customer relationship quality behaves within the Agile framework. Past research has primarily focused on investigating success factors individually for customer relationship quality and Agile projects. However, there has been a notable absence of research that comprehensively addresses the combined success factors for customer relationship quality in the Agile project context.

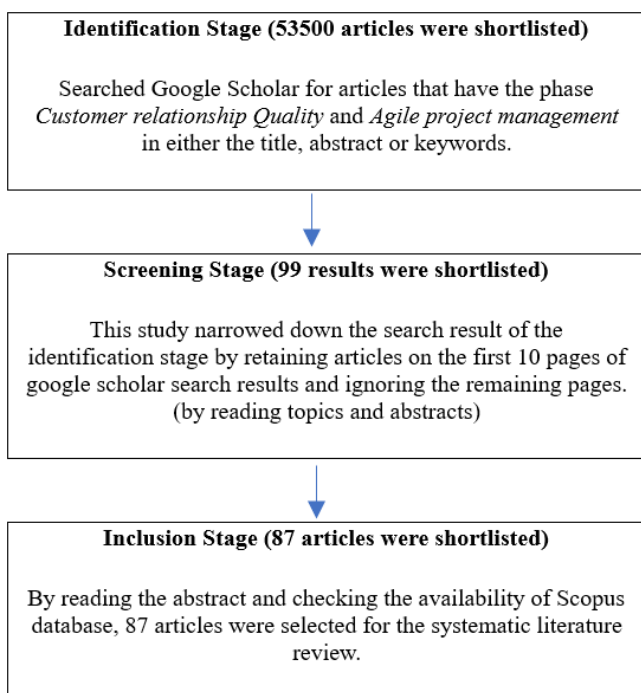


Fig. 1 . Article search process

A critical aspect left unexplored is the application of the Social Exchange Theory to Agile projects, particularly in understanding the cost-benefit relationship with customers, a key success factor in Agile endeavors. This highlights the need for further research to bridge these gaps and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics between customer relationship quality, Agile methodologies, and diverse global contexts.

A. Social Exchange Theory.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is based on one of the oldest ideas on human behavior [9]. According to [9], every interaction between people can be seen as an exchange of something valuable. Reference [9] came up with the term "theory of social exchange" to describe how people interact with each other. In this idea, individuals expect to get something, whether it's money or social rewards, when they engage with others. Reference [9] expanded this theory, saying that our social behavior is like a series of exchanges where everyone tries to get the most benefits. When someone helps us, we feel a duty to do something in return. SET focuses on the internal rewards and the trust between people, unlike economic exchange theory, which looks at external benefits and straightforward transactions [9].

Social Exchange Theory highlights the idea that social interactions involve trading intangible things with symbolic value. These things can be love, respect, knowledge, information, prestige, honor, and friendship [9]. People get into interactions expecting to gain these intangible advantages. Social Exchange Theory stands out from other theories because it emphasizes internal rewards and the importance of trust, offering a detailed framework to understand how people interact, why they exchange things, and what affects the quality of their relationships. In simple terms, Social Exchange Theory provides a unique perspective to explore the complex world of human interactions and relationships.

IV. DISCUSSION

In Sri Lanka, there are numerous IT companies that engage with both internal and external customers who adopt Agile project management methodologies. Despite the customer-centric nature of Agile, it is regrettable that many Agile software projects, both in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, struggle to maintain satisfactory customer relationship quality. This issue is particularly evident within the Sri Lankan context, where poor customer relationships pose significant challenges and contribute to project failures. The underlying cause can be attributed to difficulties faced by IT companies in establishing and nurturing strong customer relationships. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the vital role of effectively managing and cultivating customer relationships to ensure project success.

The social exchange theory provides insights into the determinants and dynamics of customer relationship quality, offering a framework to understand the factors that influence the quality of interactions and exchanges. Previous studies have explored the concept of customer relationship quality based on the social exchange theory in developed countries. However, there is a lack of research addressing this phenomenon in developing countries. Specifically, in the context of agile projects within the IT industry, there is limited understanding of the factors that drive customer relationship quality. This lack of research specifically addressing customer relationship quality factors in the context of agile projects in the IT industry highlights the need for a deeper theoretical understanding in this area.

Therefore, this research aims to fill this practical and theoretical gap by investigating and identifying the factors that influence customer relationship quality in agile projects in the IT industry, particularly in the context of a developing country.

Thus, the problem statement of the study can be formulated as follows,

“Poor Customer relationship quality in Information Technology Organizations that practices Agile project management methodologies.”

The research on “Determinants on Customer Relationship Quality in Agile Projects” holds a significance importance for both academics and industrial contexts. This study mainly focuses on understanding and analyzing the dynamics of Customer relationship quality within Agile projects, specially in the context of the IT Industry. By identifying these factors, this research aims to generate novel insights that can empower organizations to effectively engaged customers, cultivate robust relationships, and deliver solutions that truly and value.

Understanding the profound impact of customer relationship quality on project success and overall business performance is vital as it enables organization to tailor their practices and strategies to enhance customer relationship quality and foster lasting loyalty.

Additionally, this research has the potential to drive continuous improvement within agile methodologies by pinpointing specific areas where customer engagement and collaboration can be further enhanced. Also, this can provide valuable knowledge for project managers, teams, and stakeholders who has involved in IT projects. Overall, this research serves as an invaluable resource for organizations aiming to optimize customer relationships within agile projects in the IT industry, ultimately leading to superior project outcomes and sustained business growth.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has delved into the critical intersection of Agile project management and Customer Relationship Quality within the dynamic landscape of the IT industry in Sri Lanka. The findings underscore the challenges faced by IT companies in maintaining satisfactory customer relationship quality, despite the customer-centric nature of Agile methodologies.

The application of Social Exchange Theory (SET) has provided valuable insights into the determinants and dynamics of customer relationship quality, offering a nuanced framework for understanding the factors that influence the quality of interactions and exchanges. However, the research has also highlighted a significant gap in the current understanding, particularly in the context of Agile projects within the IT industry in developing countries.

Looking ahead, the future research agenda should focus on bridging this gap by exploring the common factors that contribute to the success of both Agile projects and customer relationship quality. While past studies have individually identified success factors for each aspect, a more comprehensive examination is warranted to uncover the shared elements that drive success in both domains. This holistic approach will not only enrich our theoretical understanding but also provide practical insights for organizations aiming to optimize their Agile practices and enhance customer relationships simultaneously.

Future research endeavors should aim to establish a unified framework that integrates the critical success factors for Agile projects and customer relationship quality. This approach will facilitate a more cohesive and synergistic implementation of strategies, addressing the challenges identified in this study. Moreover, by exploring these commonalities, researchers can contribute to the development of best practices that are applicable across diverse contexts, fostering a more universally effective approach to project management within the IT industry.

As the IT industry continues to evolve, there is a growing need for research that transcends individual facets of project management and customer relationships, seeking a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected factors that drive success. By focusing on the commonalities between Agile methodologies and customer relationship quality, future research can pave the way for a more integrated and effective approach to project management in the digital age. This, in turn, will empower organizations to navigate the complexities of the IT landscape, optimize customer interactions, and ultimately achieve sustained success in their projects and business endeavors.

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