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Project title

**The Impact of Time Planning on the Success of Small  
Commercial Company Projects in Saudi Arabia**

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# **1. Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1. introduction**

Time planning is one of the foundations of effective project delivery, especially for small commercial organizations operating in dynamic, resource-limited environments (Alharbi, 2024). In Saudi Arabia, SMEs face growing pressure to perform under the rapid economic changes associated with Vision 2030, which demands efficient project implementation and time management (Abdulrab et al.,

2022). Despite its importance, the link between time planning and project success in these firms remains under-researched. This study examines how systematic time planning, including realistic scheduling, milestone monitoring, and risk buffers, influences project outcomes like timely delivery, cost control, and stakeholder satisfaction. It addresses a significant gap by connecting time management knowledge with SME practices in an emerging economy.

Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing structural economic reforms to diversify beyond oil and empower SMEs. These businesses are expected to drive productivity and job creation, yet many struggle due to inconsistent time planning. Poor scheduling and inadequate contingency planning often lead to delays, budget issues, and lost opportunities. Such inefficiencies are particularly detrimental in competitive sectors like retail and logistics that demand fast service and responsiveness (Abdulrab et al., 2022).

Time planning reflects an organization's strategic maturity. Small firms typically have lean teams where staff juggle multiple roles, and structured planning may be seen as impractical. However, even basic tools like task sequencing, milestone tracking, and time buffers enhance coordination and clarity (Alharbi, 2024). Effective time management allows SMEs to allocate resources wisely, respond to change, and meet expectations.

Digital tools such as Microsoft Project, Trello, and Asana make time planning more accessible. These tools help visualize tasks and deadlines. Still, many Saudi SMEs do not fully utilize them due to digital literacy gaps, cost, and cultural preferences for informal communication (Reed, 2021). Thus, it is necessary to explore how time planning can be culturally aligned and operationally feasible.

Time planning also interacts with other project management processes like risk management, cost control, and stakeholder engagement. A well-designed schedule aids in real-time progress monitoring and corrective actions (Hillson, 2024). It can improve transparency and accountability, strengthening stakeholder relationships. However, without empirical evidence linking time planning to outcomes in Saudi SMEs, tailored interventions remain difficult.

Globally, SMEs often suffer from poor planning. In the GCC, poor scheduling and unrealistic timelines are key causes of failure (Ghak and Zarrouk, 2022). Al-Otaibi et al. (2022) further noted that limited training and resistance to formal procedures hinder adoption of time planning in Saudi SMEs. These findings highlight the need for culturally compatible planning tools.

This research focuses on how time planning affects project success in Saudi SMEs, moving beyond studies of large or public-sector projects. These small firms face unique pressures requiring flexibility and quick decision-making. By studying how they manage time constraints and scheduling complexity, the research provides insights for both theory and practice.

Findings from this study will benefit business owners and project managers with practical planning approaches, guide consultants in creating relevant interventions, and inform policy makers developing SME support initiatives (Sinnaiah, Adam and Mahadi, 2023). It will also examine cultural attitudes that shape planning behavior, such as preference for relationship-based communication and tolerance for ambiguity. The study explores how such factors interact with formal tools and whether adaptations are needed for success (Alzahrani, 2022).

Ultimately, the aim of the study is to see how well time planning practices will influence the success of small commercial company projects in Saudi Arabia. This incorporates the discussion of the correlation between structured planning, milestones tracking and proactive time-risk management to the most critical project deliverables, timely execution, budget accuracy, and stakeholder satisfaction. The primary research question guiding this inquiry is:

By generating empirical evidence and practical insights, this study aims to support both scholarly debate and managerial action. It also intends to contribute to ongoing policy development and academic curriculum designs that aim to boost SME success and competitiveness within the framework of Saudi Arabia's economic reform strategy. Through its findings, the study seeks to inform strategic frameworks that not only elevate project success rates but also bolster the broader sustainability and scalability of SMEs in the national economy.

## **1.1. Research Problem**

In the realm of project management, the significance of time planning has been repeatedly emphasized as a pivotal determinant of project success. However, despite this general acknowledgment, the role of time planning in small commercial companies in Saudi Arabia remains poorly understood. This disconnect presents a pressing theoretical and practical challenge: while literature documents the success of time planning in large, resource-rich projects, much less is known about its function and effectiveness in small enterprises characterized by limited personnel, lean operational budgets, and highly flexible project scopes. As such, existing knowledge is insufficient to guide SMEs in Saudi Arabia toward adopting time planning practices that are both feasible and impactful.

Recent studies in the construction and infrastructure sectors in Saudi Arabia confirm that ineffective time management is among the leading causes of project delays, cost overruns, and diminished stakeholder trust (Almatari, 2021). These findings are reflected even in infrastructure and manufacturing projects that either have overly ambitious and unrealistic schedules or otherwise do not take into account local conditions that limit the schedule. Yet, this evidence largely stems from large-scale, often public-sector projects. There is a clear need to distinguish the context of small commercial companies, which operate with vastly different strategic and operational capacities (Abduljawwad and Almaktoom, 2021). These companies may lack project management offices, experienced planners, or even digital scheduling tools, making the relevance of conventional time planning models questionable. Without tailored guidance, these enterprises are left to rely on trial-and-error approaches, which can be costly and inefficient.

### **Theoretical Gaps**

A significant gap also exists at the theoretical level. While global literature provides substantial discourse on project success factors, the specificity of time planning's impact in SMEs is often generalized or conflated with broader planning and risk management activities. Zahari et al. (2023) argue that rigid scheduling may be ill-suited to the dynamic nature of SMEs, where change and uncertainty are part of day-to-day operations. However, their study primarily examines regional trends and lacks a focused application in the Saudi business environment. Lack of localised research data, therefore, leads to poor information on how Saudi SMEs conceptualize, implement, and gain through time planning techniques ((Sogaxa, Simpeh and Ndiokubwayo, 2021). For example, it remains questionable how these companies manage to harmonize an organized use of Gantt charts against

informal patterns of communication and improvisation techniques used in many organizations of the region.

### **Practical Gaps**

there is a gap in the empirical research of time planning that do not provide distinction on industries or organizational scales, leaving an insufficient knowledge base regarding the occurrence of the contextual variables that define the efficacy of planning. What works for a manufacturing SME may not translate to a service-oriented business or a retail operation. In Saudi Arabia, where commercial SMEs are diverse and rapidly growing, a one-size-fits-all planning approach is unlikely to be effective. Almatari et al. (2022) underline the value of a tailor-made project management approach depending upon the organizational level of maturity and the requirements of specific industries. Consequently, it is essential to learn how the time planning can be correlated with the firm size, the type of industry, and internal capabilities to make up practical frameworks.

On the practical side, the absence of evidence-based planning guidance leaves many SMEs vulnerable to avoidable failures. In situations where clients require deliverables within a short time and scope changes are common, time planning can either make or sink a project. Nevertheless, when there are no empirical standards or local cases, managers cannot formulate informed decisions regarding the type of tools or strategies to utilize (Sogaxa, Simpeh and Ndiokubwayo, 2021). This can lead to under-planning, missed deadlines, budget inflation, and reputational harm. In the case of Saudi Arabia, where the SMEs are supposed to play a crucial role in GDP and employment as one of the components of Vision 2030, they represent a national-scale issue due to compounding inefficiencies.

The other challenging problem is absence of research on skills and competencies required for effective time planning in the SMEs. Are Saudi SME managers well

trained on the techniques of scheduling? Is there an adequate institutional support in the form of access to software or mentoring networks? What is the mechanism of SMEs to take into account stakeholder feedback or risk factor in schedules? These questions have not yet been satisfactorily answered but they are fundamental in the design of interventions that can build better planning capacity within and across the sector.

How does time planning influence project success in small commercial companies operating in Saudi Arabia?

## **1.2. Research Significance**

### **1.2.1. At the theoretical level**

This study contributes to project management theory by contextualizing time planning in small Saudi firms. While traditional literature emphasizes large-scale projects, this research broadens academic understanding by incorporating data from underrepresented business environments. It examines how scheduling, time-risk management, and milestone tracking apply in SMEs, challenging generic project management models (Zahari et al., 2023).

It also contributes to the debate between rigid and adaptive planning. Large companies may follow fixed schedules, but SMEs need flexibility to respond to changing scopes and constraints. The study proposes a hybrid model combining structured tools with agile practices. This enhances understanding of planning maturity models and their scalability (Sayed, 2023).

Moreover, it expands success measurement frameworks. While project success is often defined by cost, scope, and quality, time adherence may be more critical for

SMEs. This study adds nuance by analyzing how time planning affects performance in sectors with tight schedules and client-driven demands.

### **1.2.2. At the practical level**

Practically, this research provides actionable guidance for SMEs by identifying effective time planning practices that require minimal resources. It frames time planning as a strategic advantage that enhances delivery, client satisfaction, and internal coordination. It also examines real-world planning behaviors, comparing formal tools like Gantt charts and software with informal methods like team meetings and verbal planning. This comparison bridges the gap between theory and practice and identifies areas for improvement.

The findings can guide institutional support efforts. Training programs and mentoring networks can be tailored based on the challenges SMEs face in adopting formal time planning. For example, workshops on milestone setting or digital tools can address specific skill gaps (Alharbi, 2024). Consultants and external advisors will benefit from localized, evidence-based recommendations. Rather than using generic frameworks, they can offer targeted support based on SMEs' real capacities. Academic programs can also integrate findings into project management education, preparing future professionals for SME contexts.

Finally, the research lays a foundation for future studies. Its data and analysis can support longitudinal research on planning practices, digital adoption, and the long-

term impact of training and policy interventions. Overall, the study aligns academic theory with practical needs in Saudi Arabia's evolving SME sector.

### **Main Research Question:**

How does time planning influence project success in small commercial companies operating in Saudi Arabia?

### **1.3. Research Questions**

1. Which specific time planning practices are most effective in promoting successful project outcomes among SMEs?
2. How do constraints such as limited personnel and flexible scope moderate the effectiveness of time planning?
3. How do project managers perceive the trade-off between rigid scheduling and the need for adaptive responses?
4. What role does organizational culture play in influencing adherence to time planning frameworks in small Saudi firms?
5. How do external pressures, such as client demands or regulatory timelines, influence SME time planning strategies?

#### **1.4. Research Objectives**

1. To evaluate the impact of structured time planning practices such as scheduling, milestone tracking, and time buffering, on project success in small commercial companies in Saudi Arabia.
2. To examine how internal organizational factors, such as staffing levels, planning experience, and overall capacity, affect the effectiveness of time planning.
3. To explore how cultural norms and communication behaviors influence the adoption and use of formal time planning practices.
4. To assess the role and effectiveness of digital time planning tools in enhancing project delivery within SMEs.
5. To analyze the extent to which external pressures, including client demands and regulatory timelines, influence the adoption and success of time planning strategies.

#### **1.5.**

#### **1.6. Research Hypotheses**

Although time planning is commonly regarded as one of the pillars of effective project management, its practical implementation in small Saudi companies is not evident. They are also known to work in rapidly paced environments that lack the formal processes and the big question is whether structured practices in planning have a role to play in such settings. This paper will attempt to answer this question by proposing a series of research hypotheses based

on the available literature and the real life experiences of small business companies.

The first and main hypothesis proposes that when small businesses adopt structured time planning practices, such as scheduling tasks, tracking milestones, and building in time buffers, they are more likely to see their projects succeed. Here, project success refers to completing

work on time, staying within budget, and meeting the expectations of clients or internal stakeholders.

**H1:** Structured time planning practices significantly improve project success in small commercial companies in Saudi Arabia.

To understand the nuances of this relationship, several additional hypotheses are proposed. These explore the different ways time planning might function in real-world situations, where tools, resources, and habits vary from one business to another.

For example, while many time planning tools are available, like Trello, Microsoft Project, and Asana, not all businesses use them. The second hypothesis looks at whether the use of digital tools specifically makes a measurable difference.

**H2:** SMEs that use digital scheduling tools show higher levels of project time performance than those that rely on informal methods.

Of course, the impact of time planning may depend on the internal capacity of the business itself. A firm with a dedicated project coordinator or a well-trained team may benefit more from planning tools than a business where one person manages everything. This leads to the third hypothesis.

**H3:** The effectiveness of structured time planning is moderated by organizational capacity, such that planning is more effective in firms with greater internal resources and expertise.

Cultural preferences also play a role. In some small Saudi firms, verbal agreements and flexible deadlines are the norm, and this might limit how well-structured tools are received or used.

**H4:** Cultural norms favoring informal communication weaken the relationship between structured time planning and project success.

Finally, outside forces like regulatory deadlines or demanding clients can push firms to adopt more structured planning, even if they wouldn't normally do so.

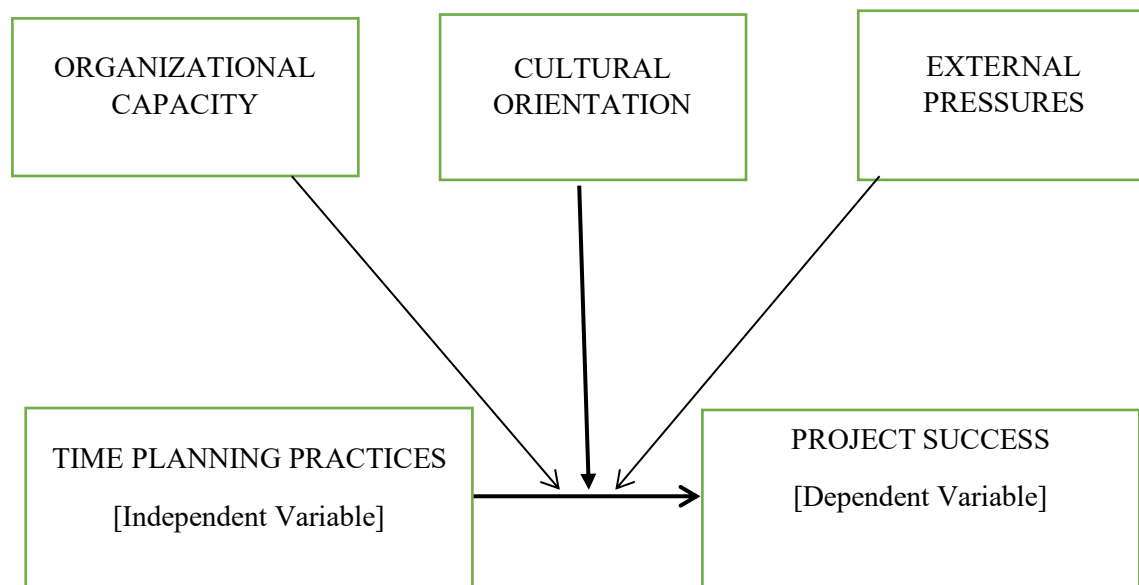
**H5:** External pressures, such as regulatory or client-imposed deadlines, increase the likelihood that SMEs will adopt and benefit from time planning tools.

Together, these hypotheses provide a framework for exploring how time planning works in practice, not just in theory.

## **1.7. Research Model**

The research constructs are framed upon the conceptual model which addresses the role of formal time practice of planning and its ways of affecting project success within small business corporations in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, it examines the possibility of tools like milestone progress tracking, scheduling and the time-risk cushion to improve project outputs such as cost management, on time delivery, and customer satisfaction.

Nonetheless, the model also acknowledges that the practices cannot exist independently. They are influenced by other variables, including the number of people with whom they share the work, the style of decision-making that is generally accepted inside the enterprise or the external incentive, such as a regulatory requirement or an insistent customer, which would make them more self-disciplined in time management. With these moderating variables, the model will capture the reality that time planning might perform effectively in certain business condition compared to others.



## **The Empirical study**

The cultural context adds another layer of complexity. In many small Saudi businesses, personal relationships play a big role in how work is assigned, coordinated, and completed. While this can create a strong team culture and informal trust, it may also result in inconsistent planning or decision-making that is hard to track or scale. Understanding how these cultural factors influence time planning practices is central to this research. Some firms may find it difficult to shift toward formal tools not because they lack capability, but because the tools conflict with the way people are used to working (Sayed, 2023; Alzahrani, 2022).

Firms that participate in this study will be selected based on their willingness to share their experiences, both the successes and the struggles, of managing time within their projects. Participation will involve completing a structured survey and, in some cases, taking part in a follow-up interview. All data will be treated confidentially, and businesses will not be identified by name. The intention is not to evaluate performance, but to learn how these businesses approach time planning and what they need to improve in this area.

small retail and service firms in Saudi Arabia offer a highly relevant and practical setting for this research. Their projects are time-sensitive, their resources are limited, and their management style often blends structure with informality. Studying their approach to time planning can reveal not only whether structured

methods improve project outcomes, but also how those methods can be adapted to suit the realities of small business life in a rapidly evolving economy.

## **1.8. Research Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to investigate how structured time planning affects project success in small commercial companies in Saudi Arabia. The rationale for using this design lies in the multidimensional nature of the research objectives, which demand both quantitative precision and qualitative depth. By integrating numerical analysis with narrative understanding, the methodology captures not only whether time planning matters, but how and why it functions, or fails, within the unique operational and cultural contexts of Saudi SMEs.

The quantitative component will involve a structured survey distributed to project managers, business owners, or operations leads in selected SMEs. The instrument will consist of Likert-scale and categorical items covering:

- Use of time planning techniques (e.g., task sequencing, milestone tracking, contingency buffers)
- Adoption of digital planning tools (e.g., Trello, Asana, Microsoft Project)
- Project performance outcomes (e.g., time adherence, budget compliance, stakeholder satisfaction)

- Moderating variables such as team size, planning expertise, and external pressure

Survey items will be adapted from validated instruments used in recent project management research and contextualized for SME operations (Hair et al., 2021; Hillson, 2024).

The qualitative phase will consist of semi-structured interviews with 8 to 10 participants selected from the survey pool. These interviews will explore topics such as:

- Barriers to implementing time planning tools
- Informal vs. formal planning dynamics
- Cultural attitudes toward deadlines and schedules
- Strategies for adjusting plans under uncertainty
- All interviews will be audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed, and analyzed thematically to uncover patterns and narratives not visible in the quantitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2021).
- 
- **Scope of The Study**

This study focuses exclusively on small commercial companies operating in Saudi Arabia, particularly within the service and retail sectors. It does not include public-sector or large-scale industrial projects. The analysis is limited to project-level time planning practices, including scheduling, milestone tracking, and time-risk management. Broader organizational strategies, national economic policy, and large-scale infrastructure projects are outside the scope of this research.

## **1.9. The Suggested Project Structure**

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

**Chapter 3: research Methodology**

**Chapter 4: statistical Analysis**

**Chapter 5: Findings Discussion & Conclusion**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the study, including the background information, research problem, research questions, objectives, and the significance of the study.

**1.1 Research background:** Explains the importance of project management in SMEs and the emergence of time planning in the Saudi Arabian context.

**1.2 Research problem:** Describes the specific gap in practice and literature that this research seeks to address.

**1.3 Research significance:** Highlights the theoretical, practical, and policy-level contributions of the study.

**1.4 Research questions:** Presents the main and sub-questions that guide the investigation.

**1.5 Research objectives:** Lists the five specific goals that this study seeks to achieve.

**1.6 Research hypotheses:** Outlines the proposed assumptions that will be tested through data.

**1.7 Scope of the study:** Defines the boundaries of the research in terms of industry, geography, and focus areas.

## **2. Literature Review**

Presents a critical analysis of recent scholarly work related to time planning, project success, and the context of small enterprises in Saudi Arabia.

It covers:

- Definitions and theories of project success
- Time planning strategies and tools
- Organizational and cultural influences
- Relevant theoretical frameworks (e.g. PMMM, Contingency Theory)
- Gaps in the literature

## **3. Research Methodology**

Details the design and rationale of the study, covering:

- Research philosophy and approach
- Data collection methods (quantitative and qualitative)
- Sampling strategy and size
- Data analysis techniques
- Ethical considerations
- Limitations

## **4. Analysis and Results**

Describes and interprets the results of the fieldwork using both qualitative and quantitative data.

- Presentation of survey and interview results
- Use of descriptive and inferential statistics
- Thematic analysis from interviews
- Cross-comparison of findings

## **5. Discussion**

Interprets the research findings in relation to the existing literature and theoretical models.

- Discusses alignment or deviation from expectations
- Explores the practical implications for SMEs
- Reflects on how Saudi Arabia context affects planning practices

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Summarizes the key findings and offers actionable recommendations.

- Recap of objectives and whether they were achieved
- Contributions to practice, theory, and policy
- Suggestions for future research

## **2.Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Brief introduction for the chapter

## **2.2. The independent variable**

## **2.3. The dependent variable**

## **2.4. The relationship between the independent and the dependent variables**

## **2.5. Conclusion**

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