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An Investigation into the Attitude and Relational Behaviour in Relationship Based Procurement (RBP): A conceptual Framework

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE ATTITUDE AND RELATIONAL BEHAVIOUR IN RELATIONSHIP BASED PROCUREMENT (RBP): A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

The notion of relationship-based procurement (RBP) proposes to address project complexity, uncertain environmental conditions in a project. However, it is constantly challenging roles of project participants, participants assume greater responsibility that require them to strive for excellence in a project.

There is frequent critique on participants' attitude and behaviour that leads to low collaboration in a project, despite of relationship approaches. Thus, the role of attitude and relational behaviour becomes important in projects. Divergent attitude of participants can lead to misaligned behaviour and ultimately to low collaboration in a project. This requires clear understanding of participants' attitude and relational behaviour that can help improve collaboration in a project.

This paper presents a conceptual framework with role of attitude of project participants that guides relational intentions and ultimately relational behaviour for collaboration in a project. The relationship of attitude of project participants, relational intentions and relational behaviour is explained from Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Further, attitudes of project participants are conceptualised in the dimensions that allows collaborative framework in a relation, relational intentions are conceptualised in practices of project participants and relational behaviour in behavioural aspects that emphasize best for project manifesto and resolving issues jointly. The conceptual framework presented here, provide knowledge on attitude of project participants and their behavioural alignment in a project.

KEYWORDS: Project organizations, Relationship-based-procurement (RBP), Relational behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Project complexity, fragmented nature and insufficient inter-organizational collaboration are considered reasons for poor performance of the construction industry (CIRC, 2001, Dulaimi et al., 2002). Higher degree of fragmentation in design & construction and increased complexity in projects require collaboration among the participants to perform tasks effectively (Mitropoulos and Tatum, 2000).

Collaboration at inter-organizational level is viewed from different perspectives; technological, organizational and contractual (Mitropoulos and Tatum, 2000). In technological perspective, introduction of building information modelling (BIM) improves sharing of information and allows effective decision-making. Organization and contractual perspectives have provided procurement routes that focus on varying degree of collaboration (Lehtinen, 2013,

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Mitropoulos and Tatum, 2000). These collaborative procurement routes provide a base for effective governance of a project, but cannot guarantee team building and collaboration in a project (Lloyd-Walker et al., 2011). In forms of RBP, researchers highlight issues among PORs and NOPS that relate to attitude of the parties and behaviour such as avoiding integrated mechanisms (BIM), separate governance structures, reluctance on commitments, misaligned behaviour and communication problems that can harm collaboration in a project (Ng, 2002; Chan, 2003). This shows even using collaborative procurement route for a project, participant's attitude and behaviour tend to be restricted during project lifecycle. This restricted/misaligned behaviour results in poor performance and relationships in a project. To deal with, studies have highlighted and addressed issues of behaviour and role of trust from different perspectives. But to the best of our knowledge, they did not try to investigate attitudes of PORs and NOPS/participants and behaviour for enriching relations in a project. The focus on the theoretical investigation of social-psychological perspective on forms of RBP is relatively low, for which scholars argue (Bresnen and Marshall, 2000). While addressing black holes in relationship among participants of partnering project (Jacobsson and Roth, 2014) pointed structural elements to provide framework for a relationship, means as the conventions of the game or practical ways that will drive factors for a relation. With similar effort, Walker and Lloyd-Walker (2014), proposed RBP taxonomy that follows 'foundational facilities', 'processes, routines and means' and 'behavioural factors' in projects under RBP in Australian context. Both (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014, Jacobsson and Roth, 2014) have considered social-psychological aspects such as motivation, trust and leadership etc. in their work. Their work can provide a suitable guide to study attitude and relational behaviour of project participants in projects under RBP.

Thus, the paper aims to present a conceptual framework on attitude of project participants, relational intentions and relational behaviour in a project under RBP with the help of Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). It is worth to mention here that different procurement routes allow different levels of collaboration in a project and also shape attitude differently. Change in attitude of project participants in different forms of RBP will also affect their relational behaviour. The conceptual framework presented here, is on the basic assumption that in all forms of RBP, similarities exists. The relational behaviour then will highlight similar characteristics with change in intensity of collaboration.

ATTITUDE OF PROJECT PARTICIPANTS AND RELATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

The attitude-behaviour relationship

Theory of planned behaviour explains "attitude helps to predict and explain human behaviour; Positive attitude will incline towards behaviour and negative attitude will oppose inclination towards behaviour"(Ajzen, 1991). Traditionally, attitude was perceived as an important predictor of behaviour, but the empirical evidence of that was rarely found, studies on attitude-behaviour relationship resulted in poor relationship (Armitage and Christian, 2003).

Examination of attitude-behaviour relationship focused on behaviour of specific nature using attitude of general nature, this approach failed to explain behaviour of specific nature (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000). They argue that explaining behaviour of specific nature, attitude should focus at the behaviour (at least conceptually). Attitude can predict or explain behaviour to the level, if both follow same fundamental character, because the underlying character reproduces a general inclination towards attitude of subject and behavioural aggregates (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000). In an effort to find a suitable mediator for attitude-behaviour relationship

that could improve predictability of behaviour, Fishbein and Ajzen (2011), proposed intentions, they explained intentions are considered as crux of motivation or decision for performing certain action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2011). Change in traditional view of attitude-behaviour relationship explained sufficient empirical support and consideration of intentions as a construct in the relationship (Sheeran, 2002, Ajzen and Fishbein, 2011).

Conceptualization of attitude of project participants

Attitude is defined as “positive or negative evaluation of a psychological object or concept” (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000). Inconsistency in research community about the definition of attitude created confusion. Few scholars conceptualised attitude as “affective in nature”, while others as “evaluative in nature”. These divergent lines reached to a point, when they realised that both sides of community focused on “evaluative nature” of attitude in operationalization, though they differ in conceptualization (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000).

Conceptualization of attitude will emphasize on association of attitude object and its evaluation that is developed in cognition (Fazio et al., 1989). In this way evaluation of attitude and attitude object becomes important features and can cover broad terms under the construct of attitude (Nabi and Krcmar, 2004, Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). If we have a thorough look at RBP literature, we do not have example of attitude and its theoretical investigation. Researchers have pointed out attitudinal responses in studies on RBP forms (Ng et al., 2002, Chan et al., 2003). These researches have pointed low interest of participants to work on single page. However, many researchers focused on variety of aspects in RBP such as trust, commitment, joint structures etc. Lack of clarity on aspects in terms of attitude is important issue in RBP literature. In projects under RBP, our ultimate goal is to achieve effective collaboration for improved performance. Effective collaboration is achievable if the participants believe that structure designed/ adopted for collaboration provide effective platform for collective effort. If they do not believe that the framework designed/adopted can provide effective platform, their behaviour will tend to focus on traditional lines, despite of the collaborative framework arrangement. Thus, we need to consider aspects that allow us to understand rationale for collaboration. Structural/ framework related elements and willingness of participants for adoption/ designing framework for collaboration would help to understand their attitude of project participants. Walker and Lloyd-Walker (2014), proposed platform foundational facilities (PFFs) in RBP taxonomy; they explained PFFs as collaborative framework in a project. PFFs can be helpful to study attitude of project participants in a project under RBP. PFFs include framework-building aspects that will guide relational intentions and relational behaviour suitable for collaboration in a project. Positive evaluation of PFFs will inform about willingness for improved collaboration in a project and vice-versa.

Motivation and context: motivation plays important role in any relationship, it is the basis for effective relationship (Turner, 1988, Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). It guides participant’s interaction in a relation (Memon et al., 2014). Motivation allows participants to realize the project scenario based on expected possible collaboration in the relationship (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Willingness from participants for motivated relation energizes intentions for actions. For example, if project requires resources, experimenting and risk planning, interaction relating to aspects will be effective, when members of individual team feel included the bigger project team and are materially gratified for actions of associates (Memon et al., 2014), their thoughts will positively motivate attitude of participants.

Joint governance structure: for dealing with uncertainty in a project, participants involve joint governance of relations with social approaches to reduce chances of conflict (Carson et al., 2006). With joint governance of relations and social approaches, parties also require to develop careful governance arrangements; specific governance structures, clear assignment of rules and responsibilities (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Despite of the fact that joint governance structures has role Ng et al. (2002), participants from PORs side were unable to take responsibilities seriously even with partnering agreement signed in the project. It leads to willingness of parties for joint governance arrangements. Thus, willingness for adoption and effective use of joint governance with clear roles and responsibilities is important.

Integrated risk mitigation strategy: for effectively dealing with risks in project, participants involve risk mitigation/sharing mechanisms. Rahman and Kumaraswamy (2002), not all risks are visible in a project at contract stage and it is impossible for members of individual team to manage risks effectively, it requires joint and dynamic approach with flexible contract conditions. Developing strategy for risk sharing discussions, allocation and keeping eye on possible risk areas can reduce problem at later stage of a project (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). It also requires willingness of participants for keeping eye on possible risk areas. These risk areas will further start discussions for sharing and effective mitigation strategy.

Joint communication strategy: On technological perspective (Mitropoulos and Tatum, 2000), emphasized role of information sharing mechanisms e.g. BIM. Use of BIM can reduce of information asymmetry and help elevate communication in a project (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). It requires willingness from participants for adoption and effective use of BIM or related technologies for effective communication across the board.

Substantial collocation: for integration during project life span, large organizations often use collocation as tool for integration (Gann and Salter, 2000). It allows frequent interactions to let participants of individual team to feel part of bigger project team (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Many factors can contribute in decision for collocation of teams, but the willingness from individual teams for setting up offices in close proximity can be helpful in driving easy interaction and improve frequency of information sharing in a project.

Conceptualization of relational intentions

Intentions are regarded as decision for performing action (Sheeran, 2002). Intentions play mediator role in attitude-behaviour relationship (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2011), scholars in social sciences termed intentions as central for determining behaviour. Intentions are dependent on people's responses "I intend to do X" (Sheeran, 2002). Further scholars argue that, control over intention performance would provide significant results for behavioural outcome (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2011). Control over intention performance is visible from; consensus on decision-making in project is dependent on information regarding decision, ability of participants to develop consensus, opportunity/environment and cooperation from participants. Further on consistency of results Sheeran (2002), implementation intentions can best predict behaviour, as it change the way we ask question. It follows "When and where" question in addition to "I intend to do X" that allows to be specific in situation about intentions (Sheeran, 2002, Gollwitzer and Sheeran, 2006). In literature, intentions of participants in projects under RBP are rare in discussion, this create a challenging situation for researcher to explore. In this definition of intentions can provide a starting point for exploring and measuring intentions of participants. One way for measuring decisions for action is to ask participants directly. This approach for measuring

intentions can activate the process in mind for behaviour that might result in bias responses. In other way, we can measure practices that appear as result of decisions. For this, we can measure intentions by evaluating day-to-day operation, work procedures of project participants. Day-to-day operation and work procedures will inform about decision to focus on relational aspects or contract-focused behaviour. For example, common best for project mind set and culture can only be achieved when participants have developed consensus on decisions, emphasize on constant learning for achieving objectives of project. Thus, if the parties have developed consensus of decisions and continuously striving for learning in a project that will inform about their relational intention for developing common best for project mind set and culture in the project. Further, being more specific regarding question, consensus on decision that suits project (based on KPIs and KRAs) in project would limit issue of bias from respondents and will provide more accuracy in responses.

Walker and Lloyd-Walker (2014), proposed processes, routines & means (PRMs) in RBP taxonomy; they explain PRMs will drive PM endorsed practices. PRMs can be helpful for studying relational intentions of project participants in a project under RBP. PRMs will inform team's decision for relational behaviour. Increased use of PRMs will inform about positive relational intentions for relational behaviour and vice-versa.

Consensus on decision making: it involves organizational issues that facilitate and resist consensus on decisions, usually organizations that follows more bureaucratic culture their decisions are directed by senior management and would affect decisions making process, when these organizations are in inter-organizational relationships (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Focus on developing flexible environment and culture of team effort facilitates consensus on decision. This focus for developing flexible environment is rooted in attitude of participants for collaboration can drive effort in a project.

Focus on learning & continuous improvement: “continuous improvement involves continuous learning devoted to gradual process of improvement in total quality management (TQM), radical process improvement in process reengineering and learning process improvement for organization” (Garvin, 1985, Chan et al., 2009). Learning in each step of project, utilizing previous experience that helps to refresh and learn new knowledge and experience and develops culture (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Training for project participants at start of project is common in practice. Training and evaluation during the project are rare in practice; training exercises equip members with necessary skill set for dealing with complexity in a project. Persistent focus on training and evaluation of project members will inform relational intentions of participants for relational behaviour. Walker and Lloyd-Walker (2014), separated action learning in pragmatic learning dimension, I would rather consider it as sub-dimension of focus on learning and continuous improvement; as the training and evaluation during project execution also involves on site trainings that meant to improve TQM and process re-engineering.

Incentive arrangements: “a process by which a provider is motivated to achieve extra ‘value-added’ service over those specified originally and which are of material benefit to the user. These should be assessable against predefined criteria. The process should benefit both parties” (Bower et al., 2002). Incentive arrangements help to achieve high-level performance from participants and ensure their commitment (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Provision of incentive arrangements from participants will inform about their relational intentions to achieve high performance in a project.

Transparency and open book process: The sharing of information among participants of relationship, to help elevate openness and allow negotiations on equal terms (Lamming, 1993, Lamming et al., 2001). It refers to openness not only on project level but also at individual level. All participants should have confidence to share information and allow other members to inspect and rectify them (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Openness at team level allows negotiations at equal terms without fearing of opportunistic behaviour from partner. Development of transparent and open system in project will inform relational intentions of participants for trusting each other and would help them to allow behaviour that benefit project and other teams.

Mutual dependency and accountability: Different RBP forms allow different setting for mutual dependency and accountability, developing passionate single team keeping aside RBP form will help encourage characteristics of mutual dependence and trust (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Increased information and resources sharing with the clarity on roles and responsibility, it will inform about relational behaviour of participants.

Conceptualization of relational behaviour

McNeil spectrum of essential contract theory provides the starting point of the term relational behaviour. In marketing literature, the conceptualization of relational behaviour is quite confusing. Few scholars used norms proposed by McNeil as consolidated in (McLaughlin et al., 2014) and others devised their own strategy for exploring relational behaviour (Leuthesser and Kohli, 1995, Ivens, 2004, Lusch and Brown, 1996). This leads to altered understanding and unclear definition of a construct that is resisting from clear conceptualization. The definition of term relational behaviour here is “conduct of participants that best serve project as well as individual teams”. This refers to the actions of participants to focus on key result areas (KRAs) and Key performance areas (KPIs) as agreed in a project. Pointing towards conduct of participants, literature on behavioural aspects in relationship-based approaches provide glimpse to opportunistic behaviour of participants. Opportunistic behaviour concept is from traditional contracting approach; where participants tend to focus on self-centred avenues. Continuation of this tendency reflect low level of trust and focus on market and hieratical structures explained in transaction cost economics (TCE) approach (Williamson, 1979), and reluctance on moving for relational approaches. Research community focused two perspectives for dealing this issue. One side of research community, highlighted issues (Bresnen and Marshall, 2000, Ng et al., 2002, Chan et al., 2003), and suggested strategies to reduce opportunistic behaviour (Das and Rahman, 2002). Strategies suggested in reduction of opportunistic behaviour leave loopholes that result in similar situation in a project. Thus, it is necessary to revisit aspects in a project for enabling trust and reduction of loopholes. Researchers, on the other side emphasized on use of relational aspects that enable trust (Das and Teng, 1998, Jeffries and Reed, 2000) and leadership (Toor and Ofori, 2008, Lloyd-Walker and Walker, 2011) and culture development (Rowlinson and Cheung, 2004). Toor and Ofori (2008), stressed on authentic leadership of project leaders that will enable them to manage today’s complex projects more effectively. They stressed on emotionally and mentally balanced personals for leadership positions that can inspire juniors for adoption of similar behavioural practices. Consistency of actions from project participants will enable trust and flexibility in relation, the emotional feature of trust will allow effective working in relation, even if rational trust is not up to the mark (Jeffries and Reed, 2000). Das and Teng (1998) Emotional reliance would allow effective working atmosphere, but they do not negate rational side of trust that act as control in a relation. Trusting and leadership behaviours will then help to

participants in devising a culture of consistency of actions, project first manifesto and resolving issues jointly.

Walker and Lloyd-Walker (2014), proposed behavioural shaping factors (BFs) in RBP taxonomy; they explain BFs will shape behaviours of project participants in a project under RBP. BFs can be useful for studying relational behaviours in a project under RBP. BFs will allow consistency of action focused on KPAs and KRAs. Increased use of BFs will inform about positive relational behaviour and vice-versa.

Degree of authentic leadership: it refers to pragmatic ways of working in a project (Toor and Ofori, 2008), pragmatic ways of working includes; being optimistic, resilient, adoptable, transparent and future oriented. Ethical values and consistency of actions from participants (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). This allows reflecting leadership traits in decision-making and development of pragmatic ways to work in the projects. Consistent actions of participants based on KPAs and KRAs will show their alignment for effective collaboration and performance in a project.

Trust-control balance: “trust involve positive attitude of others motivation, it does not mean influencing partners behaviour but to believe that actions of partners will be aligned, even if there is no control” (Das and Teng, 1998). Both trust and control are opposed in a sense that if a team trust abilities of other teams, there is no need of formal control over others actions (Rowlinson et al., 2006). Balancing trust-control mean to find a reasonable middle point where parties follow trusting behaviours and use control mechanisms in case of either party avoid following trust-based behaviours. Walker and Lloyd-Walker (2014) explained trust-control balance as allowing members to make decision in a project within boundaries of project governance arrangements and cultural norms. Behaviours from teams then will be on basis trust-control approaches and aligned to KPIs and KRAs that benefit project.

Commitment to be innovative: for incessant stream of innovation, participants need to be committed and able to innovate, that will help achieving organizational success (Van de Ven, 1986, De Jong and Den Hartog, 2007). In projects under RBP, different forms of RBP allow innovation at varying levels, commitment for striving based on need for project will help to improve performance (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014).

Common best for project mind-set and culture: it refers as aligning project and individual team goals. Beside initial goal setting, development of performance and project outcome levels that drives participants to develop environment of excellence in a project (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Goal and performance outcome exercises are common at the beginning of a project and parties achieve agreed goals and performance levels. Behaviours for constant strive for improving limits based on agreed mechanisms will help to achieve excellence.

No blame culture: reporting on interviewee’s view of alliancing (Rowlinson et al., 2006), “... , when problem occurs the focus is on resolving issue, not on blaming each other”. No blame culture refers to behaviours of parties on blame avoidance and jointly handling the situation (Walker and Lloyd-Walker, 2014). Avoidance of blame shift behaviours will develop confidence of participants and improved focus on project without fearing about consequences.

Proposed conceptual framework

The rationale for proposing framework is the behaviour of project participants during project lifecycle. It is clear that even using collaborative form of procurement; project participant’s behaviour tend to be restricted (Bresnen and Marshall, 2000, Ng et al., 2002, Chan

et al., 2003). There can be many reasons for misaligned behaviour e.g. low levels of trust, separate objectives, and commercial pressures, these results in overall performance of a project. The proposed conceptual framework in figure 1, presents a suitable approach to study relational behaviour. Where, attitude of project participants is conceptualised in dimensions that allows development of framework for relationship. To explain attitude, it is necessary that participants should be willing to develop a framework for collaborative environment. Willingness of participants is developed, when they are involved in initial negotiations with joint effort for possible business deal and decide on terms of potential relationship (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). When the terms of relationship are agreed the parties can focus on following specific set of rules of the game/ practical ways using formal or informal approaches such as developing consensus on decisions, allowing incentives following open book policy in the project and reliance on each other. This will reflect participant’s positive relational intentions and would enhance pre-existing levels of trust (Gilson et al., 2010). Further, continuation of open book policy, incentive arrangements consensus on decisions would be reflected in relational behaviour of participants in form of authentic leadership from participants, creation of balance between trust and control and development of culture of project first.

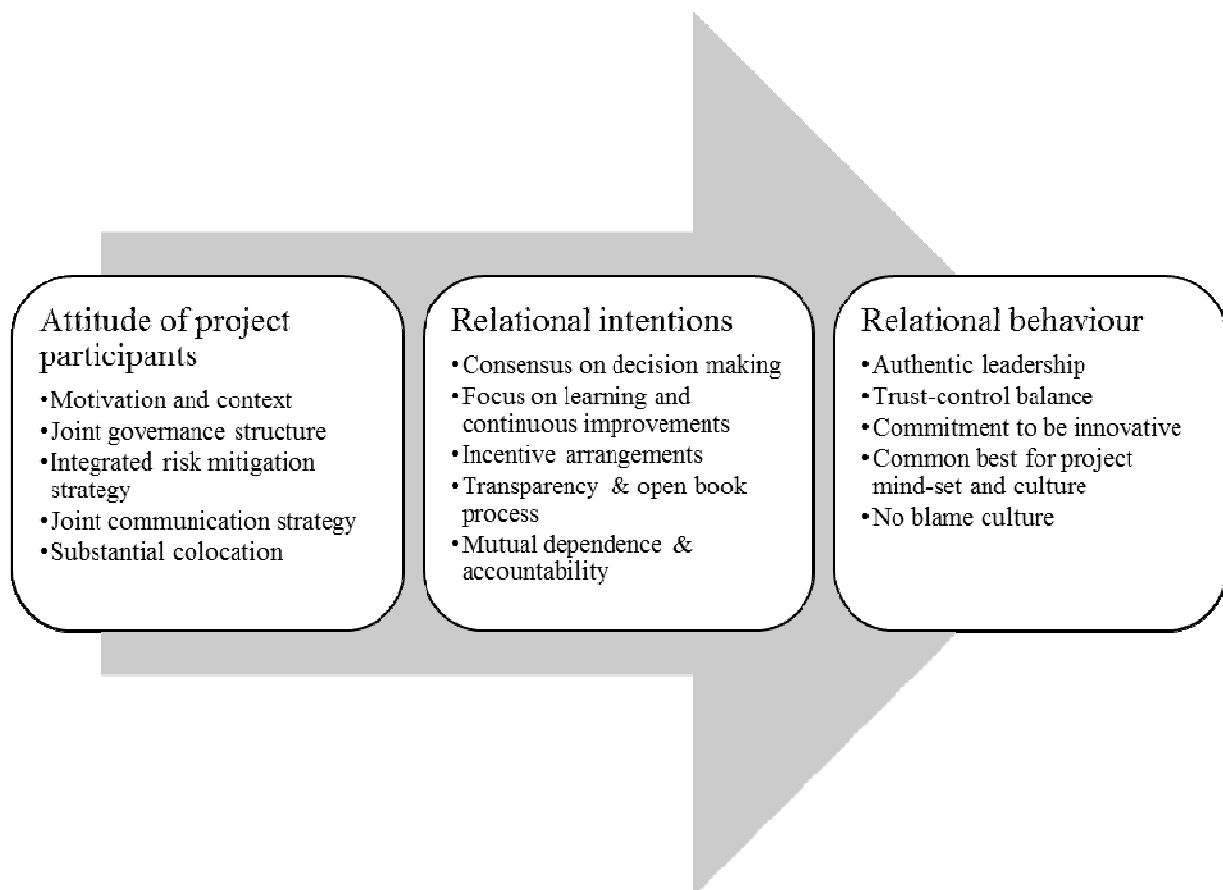


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework

CONCLUSION

The conceptual framework proposed guides to the relational behaviour of project participants in projects under RBP. Relational behaviour will inform their behavioural alignment of project participants in a project. Participants can revisit their relational behaviour by visiting problem areas, in case of problems/misalignment. Further, literature provides the dimensions of attitude, relational intentions and relational behaviour considered in framework. Thus, it is also necessary to explore dimensions of constructs in study context and relate to dimensions of literature to provide more robustness to framework and moving into the next phase for research.

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