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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF APPLYING PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPROACHES (AGILE AND PMBOK) IN TRANSFORMING THE SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This article examines the effectiveness of applying Agile and Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) approaches to the transformation of the social service delivery system in Uzbekistan. Particular attention is paid to improving the efficiency, accessibility, transparency, and quality of social services through modern project management methodologies. The study analyzes the institutional reforms implemented in Uzbekistan, including the establishment of the National Agency for Social Protection and the development of “Inson” social service centers. Based on a comparative analysis of Agile and PMBOK principles, the article proposes a hybrid project management model aimed at optimizing resource allocation, strengthening interagency coordination, and improving service delivery. The findings suggest that integrating adaptive management practices with structured project governance can contribute to the sustainable modernization of Uzbekistan’s social protection system.

Keywords: social services, project management, Agile methodology, PMBOK, social protection, public administration, digital transformation, efficiency, Uzbekistan.

The transformation of social service delivery systems has become an important priority in modern public administration, particularly in countries implementing large-scale institutional and socioeconomic reforms. Increasing public expectations, growing demand for accessible social assistance, and the necessity of ensuring efficient public expenditure require the introduction of innovative management mechanisms. In this context, project management methodologies are increasingly recognized as practical instruments for strengthening institutional capacity, improving organizational performance, and ensuring the effective implementation of social policies. For Uzbekistan, where social protection reforms have become an essential component of national development priorities, the application of internationally recognized project management approaches offers significant opportunities for improving the organization and delivery of social services.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has introduced substantial institutional reforms aimed at establishing a more integrated, transparent, and citizen-oriented social protection system. Presidential Decree No. PF-82 of June 1, 2023, provided the legal foundation for establishing the National Agency for Social Protection and developing mechanisms for delivering social services to vulnerable population groups [1]. An important component of these reforms has been the establishment of “Inson” social service centers, which are designed to identify individuals requiring assistance, assess their social needs, and coordinate appropriate support mechanisms. These institutional changes represent an important transition from fragmented administrative practices toward a more systematic and individualized approach to social protection. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such reforms depends not only on the

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development of legal and organizational frameworks but also on the introduction of management instruments capable of ensuring coordination, accountability, and measurable results.

One of the most promising directions for improving social service management is the application of Agile methodology, which emphasizes flexibility, stakeholder collaboration, continuous improvement, and responsiveness to changing requirements. The fundamental principles of Agile were formulated in the Manifesto for Agile Software Development in 2001 [2]. Although this methodology was initially developed for software engineering, its principles have subsequently influenced management practices in various organizational environments.

In the context of social services, Agile principles can be adapted to improve communication between service providers and beneficiaries, facilitate rapid identification of administrative problems, and support the continuous improvement of service delivery procedures. For example, “Inson” social service centers could introduce regular operational review cycles during which employees evaluate service requests, identify recurring difficulties, and develop practical solutions based on feedback from citizens. Such an approach may reduce unnecessary bureaucratic procedures and improve institutional responsiveness to the changing needs of vulnerable groups.

At the same time, the successful transformation of social services requires systematic planning, clearly defined responsibilities, and effective control over financial and organizational resources. These requirements can be addressed through the application of the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK), developed by the Project Management Institute. The PMBOK Guide provides internationally recognized principles and practices for managing projects, including stakeholder engagement, resource management, risk assessment, performance measurement, and value delivery [3]. Its application within Uzbekistan’s social protection institutions could contribute to the development of more structured project implementation mechanisms. In particular, projects related to the digitalization of social services, the modernization of administrative procedures, and the expansion of assistance programs could benefit from clearly established objectives, realistic implementation schedules, transparent budgeting, and systematic monitoring of expected outcomes.

The comparative analysis of Agile and PMBOK indicates that these approaches should not necessarily be considered competing management models. Instead, their integration may create a more balanced framework for addressing the complex organizational requirements of social service delivery. While PMBOK provides a structured foundation for strategic planning, institutional accountability, and resource management, Agile introduces operational flexibility and opportunities for continuous improvement. Consequently, a hybrid project management model may be particularly appropriate for Uzbekistan’s social protection system, where public institutions must simultaneously comply with regulatory requirements and respond effectively to changing social needs. For instance, the implementation of a digital case-management platform could be organized through PMBOK-based project planning, while its technological functions and service procedures could be developed through iterative Agile cycles. This combination would allow institutions to maintain control over project objectives and resources while continuously improving services based on practical experience and beneficiary feedback.

The effectiveness of such an integrated management model can be evaluated through three interconnected criteria: time, resources, and quality. Time efficiency involves reducing administrative delays, improving the processing of service requests, and ensuring timely assistance to beneficiaries. Resource efficiency refers to the rational allocation of financial, human, and technological resources

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while minimizing unnecessary operational expenditures. Quality efficiency concerns the accessibility, reliability, and effectiveness of social assistance, as well as the satisfaction of service recipients. These criteria are particularly relevant to the activities of "Inson" social service centers, where effective management requires the coordination of multiple institutions and the provision of individualized support. The systematic application of project management instruments could help establish measurable performance indicators, including average service processing time, administrative expenditure per completed case, beneficiary satisfaction, and the proportion of successfully implemented individual assistance plans.

However, such indicators should be interpreted together with broader social outcomes to ensure that administrative efficiency does not undermine service quality or equitable access.

Furthermore, the introduction of modern project management approaches may contribute to strengthening transparency and accountability within the social protection system. Clearly defined project responsibilities, regular performance assessments, and systematic stakeholder communication can improve institutional coordination and reduce organizational inefficiencies. Presidential Resolution No. PQ-410 of December 27, 2023, concerning the improvement of social services and assistance for elderly persons and persons with disabilities in need of care, further demonstrates the importance of strengthening institutional mechanisms for delivering targeted social support [4]. In this regard, the application of Agile and PMBOK principles should be viewed as a complementary management instrument supporting the implementation of existing national reforms rather than as an independent replacement for established administrative procedures.

Nevertheless, the introduction of these methodologies may involve certain organizational challenges. Limited project management competencies among employees, insufficient technological infrastructure, resistance to administrative changes, and difficulties in interagency information exchange may restrict the effectiveness of implementation. Therefore, the transition toward a hybrid project management model should be gradual and supported by professional training, institutional capacity building, and the development of appropriate performance evaluation mechanisms. Pilot projects implemented in selected "Inson" social service centers could provide an opportunity to assess the practical applicability of Agile and PMBOK principles before their wider introduction. Such projects should include baseline assessments, clearly defined performance indicators, regular monitoring procedures, and comparative evaluations of service delivery outcomes.

Thus, the analysis suggests that the integration of Agile and PMBOK approaches represents a promising direction for improving the management of social service transformation in Uzbekistan. Their combined application may strengthen institutional coordination, optimize resource utilization, improve service accessibility, and create more transparent mechanisms for evaluating organizational performance. At the same time, the expected benefits require empirical verification through practical implementation and systematic assessment. The development of a hybrid project management framework adapted to Uzbekistan's institutional and regulatory environment could contribute to the long-term sustainability of social protection reforms and support the establishment of a more efficient, accountable, and citizen-oriented social service delivery system.

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