



## Handling Projects Under Unprecedented risks: Challenges and Threats: Cases from UAE

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### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

Project Management,  
Unprecedented Risks,  
Challenges, Threats

Received: July, 23, 2023  
Accepted: Sep, 10, 2023  
Published: Dec, 22, 2023

The unprecedented risks pandemic has been the biggest worldwide health crisis in decades. Apart from unprecedented number of hospitalizations and deaths, the pandemic has led to in the financial and economic downturns and business disruptions. The current will aim to establish the implications of the unprecedented risks pandemic on the projects in the UAE. The main objective of the research will be to identify the challenges facing the UAE projects and determine the success of risk management. In addition to that, the research will focus on identifying the most impacted project knowledge areas by the pandemic and the effectiveness of government support to help the business sustain the success of their projects. The research will also address the strategies followed by project managers to recover the delay of projects caused by the pandemic. The descriptive research design and deductive approach will be adopted for the study. Simple random sampling method and purposive sampling method will be applied in the selection of respondents for quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. A total of 50 project managers and 5 senior project managers working in the UAE will be sample for the survey and interview method, respectively. Survey and interview data will be collected will be using the close-ended online and open-ended questionnaire, respectively. It is expected that the research will find a significant impact of unprecedented risks pandemic on the number of days to complete the projects in the UAE. The finding will also reveal that the pandemic has resulted in inadequate access to labor and raw materials, thereby resulting in delay of the business projects. The implications of this research would inform the decision and policy-makers in the UAE to employ efficient ways of addressing the issues and challenges for the stability of the sector.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamic field of project management presents a variety of dangers and obstacles that might impede the pursuit of good project outcomes, especially when venturing into unexplored territory with enormous risks (Müller, 2009). The United Arab Emirates (UAE) presents a fascinating backdrop against which to examine the complexities of project management in the face of

unforeseen obstacles and dangers due to its fast-changing socio-economic environment and ambitious development ambitions (Al-Omouh et al., 2022). The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a country that embodies both history and modernity. It has seen rapid growth and development in a wide range of industries, including infrastructure, technology, healthcare, and construction (Abu Hatab et al., 2023). These industries not only serve

as important catalysts for economic growth, but they also serve as sites for the planning and execution of intricate projects (M. El Khatib et al., 2020). But these projects' natural dynamism also means that they are more vulnerable to dangers arising from social, political, technological, environmental, and economic considerations (International Science Council, 2022).

When faced with extraordinary risks, project managers in the United Arab Emirates face a variety of obstacles and threats. This research aims to explore these facets (Tariq, Alshurideh, Akour, & Al-Hawary, 2022). Unprecedented hazards are especially difficult to predict and reduce since, by definition, they have never happened before (Meier et al., 2022).

The United Arab Emirates presents a compelling case study for examining the durability and adaptation of project management frameworks due to its construction of iconic structures, massive infrastructure projects, and adoption of cutting-edge technologies (Chen et al., 2023). The objective of this study is to ascertain, scrutinise, and offer discernment into the tactics utilised by project managers to manoeuvre through the complex network of obstacles presented by unparalleled hazards in the UAE (A. I. Aljumah et al., 2021b; Ghazal, Al-Dmour, et al., 2023).

The research will utilise actual cases from several projects in the UAE, looking at situations where unanticipated risks caused delays in project schedules, resource distribution, and stakeholder interactions. Through a close examination of these situations, the research aims to identify trends, best practices, and potential weaknesses in existing project management techniques, ultimately aiding in the improvement of approaches for managing hitherto unseen risks in the UAE and worldwide project management.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Challenges faced by businesses in continuing their projects amidst unprecedented risks*

As opined by (International Science Council, 2022) the unprecedented risks pandemic has been a nightmare for global businesses. The pandemic increased distance between businesses and their customers (Ahmed & Nabeel Al Amiri, 2022; H. M. Alzoubi et al., 2020; Blooshi et al., 2023; M. Nuseir & Elrefae, 2022). Therefore, it has become complex task for the companies to reach their customers. In

order to reduce the spread of virus, the government declared national lockdowns (Yan, 2020). The organizations were closed overnight and people were instructed to stay at home (I. Akour et al., 2021; M. T. Alshurideh, Alzoubi, et al., 2022; M. T. Nuseir et al., 2021). Only the essential services were available and companies have to shut down their ongoing projects immediately due to lack of resources and workforces (I. Akour et al., 2023; M. M. El Khatib et al., 2019). The government also instructed firms to continue their necessary operations with least number of employees possible. The work from home was quickly introduced due to lack of physical contacts the employees' participation and performances were largely affected (A. H. Al-Kassem et al., 2022). The lack of employee engagement affected quality of projects. Therefore, the lack of customers, employees, and communication are some primary challenges faced by businesses to continue their projects during the pandemic. In the discussion of (A. I. Aljumah, Nuseir, et al., 2022b; H. Alzoubi & Ahmed, 2019), there are some secondary challenges as well that restricted businesses from carrying out or completing their projects. During pandemic many people lost their jobs and due to unemployment, the economic conditions of people were deteriorated (M. T. Alshurideh, Al-Hadrami, Alquqa, Alzoubi, Hamadneh, & Al Kurdi, 2023; M. T. Nuseir et al., 2020). The effect of pandemic on employment can be felt even today after one year of lockdown.

Due to lack of proper income many customers changed their buying habits. It is observed that people developed preferences for essential products over luxury products. As mentioned by (Al-Awamleh et al., 2022; Arshad et al., 2023; M. El Khatib, Zitar, et al., 2023), the pandemic taught people to save as much as they can and not to be flamboyant. The changing consumer behaviour has been a major challenge for business projects (A. I. Aljumah et al., 2021a; H. M. Alzoubi, Ahmed, et al., 2022; M. M. El Khatib & Ahmed, 2018). The businesses are neither able to attract customers nor enhance their profits. Thus, they ultimately failed to contribute to their projects and the only options are to either postponed or terminate the projects (H. Alzoubi et al., 2020; M. El Khatib, Ahmed, et al., 2023; Hani Al-Kassem, 2021; Sakkthivel et al., 2022). Many industries have to shut down their premises or workplaces

permanently as they ran out of budget to complete their projects and operations.

### *2.2. Role of government in supporting businesses to sustain the impacts of unprecedented risks*

Everyone was speculating about a pandemic; however, no one was sure about when and how it is going to hit (M. Alshurideh, Almasaeid, et al., 2022; M. M. El Khatib & Ahmed, 2020). Finally it did on 2019 in form of unprecedented risks pandemic. As opined by (Amiri et al., 2020; M. T. Nuseir, 2021; Varma et al., 2023), the science was quick to identify that the virus is airborne and measures like social distancing and mass lockdown are essential to sustain. In modern world, businesses and organizations influence people to get out from their homes in search of jobs, essential products and to meet several desires (M. T. Alshurideh, Alquqa, Alzoubi, Al Kurdi, & Hamadneh, 2023; H. M. Alzoubi, Kurdi, Akour, et al., 2022; M. El Khatib, Beshwari, et al., 2023). Hence, the best option for government was to temporarily shut down every business operation in order to restrict mass gathering (Elkhatib, M., Al Hosani, A., Al Hosani, I., & Albuflasa, 2022) (M. Alzoubi et al., 2021; Mubeen et al., 2022). However, the lockdown ceased all opportunities for businesses and they quickly began to fail in their projects. In order to ensure sustainability of these businesses, government offered aids and supports (El khatib, Beshwari, et al., 2023; Louzi, Alzoubi, El Khatib, et al., 2022). As discussed by (Al-Kassem et al., 2012; Aziz et al., 2023), the governmental helps came in form of loans and funds that are required to complete the projects. Thus, even in absence of revenues or profits, the businesses continued their projects through the funds and loans provided by government at lower interests (H. M. Alzoubi, Kurdi, Alshurideh, et al., 2022; M. El Khatib, Alnaqbi, et al., 2023). The government also encouraged business acquisitions in order to save a dying company or business (M. T. Alshurideh, Obeidat, et al., 2022; M. El Khatib, Al Qurashi, et al., 2021).

The local companies were encouraged to develop partnership with global MNCs in order to get the necessary supports and helps (M. El Khatib, Khayat, et al., 2023; M. T. Nuseir & Aljumah, 2020; Tariq, Alshurideh, Akour, & Al-Hawary, 2022). Through the business partnership the local companies were able to share their risks with other companies (H.

M. Alzoubi, Alshurideh, Kurdi, et al., 2022; M. T. Nuseir, Aljumah, & El Refae, 2022b). On the other hand, the government also influenced the entrepreneurs to act according to new behaviours and necessities of customers. As stated by (H. M. Alzoubi, Ghazal, El khatib, et al., 2022; M. T. Nuseir & Aljumah, 2022), the businesses were encouraged to provide essential products and services like masks, sanitizers, PPEs, ventilators, food home delivery, and ambulance services etc (Alhamad et al., 2021; Farrukh et al., 2023). Therefore, the pandemic changed preferences of people from luxury to essential services and so the companies were bound to change their methods in order to meet the requirements of a new world (Ahmed et al., 2022; R. S. Al-Marroof, Alnazzawi, et al., 2022).

### *2.3. Risk Mitigation efficiencies in overcoming the challenges of unprecedented risks*

As per (I. Akour et al., 2022; M. El Khatib, Yaish, et al., 2021; M. T. Nuseir, Aljumah, & El-Refae, 2022), every business has their personal risk mitigation strategy to overcome any significant challenge or risk. However, the modern civilization had never witnessed a pandemic; thus, all the plans were only in theories until they were implemented during the unprecedented risks pandemic (Abudaqa et al., 2021; I. A. Akour et al., 2022; El khatib, Mahmood, et al., 2023). Due to lack of practical implementations and evidences the businesses initially stumbled with their risk mitigation strategies (H. M. Alzoubi, Sahawneh, Alhamad, et al., 2022; M. El Khatib et al., 2020; Gulseven & Ahmed, 2022; M. T. Nuseir, 2020). Firstly, the workforce was significantly reduced to avoid the chance of spread. Secondly, the works from home measures were implemented to continue operations from isolation. According to (Al-Dmour et al., 2023; Mat Som & Kassem, 2013), thirdly, the e-commerce projects were initiated to meet customers' demands through internet. Fourthly, the health and safety measures became primary consideration for all businesses (A. H. Al-Kassem, 2017; M. M. El Khatib et al., 2023; Louzi, Alzoubi, Alshurideh, et al., 2022). All these strategies have been most important considerations in risk mitigation plans of businesses during a pandemic (Abudaqa et al., 2022; A. I. Aljumah, Shahroor, et al., 2022; Lee, Wong, et al., 2023). It has been observed that due to insufficient workforce the companies failed to complete their projects. In the discussion

of (M. Alshurideh, Alzoubi, et al., 2022; Tariq, Alshurideh, Akour, Al-Hawary, et al., 2022; Yasir et al., 2022), the work home from helped in resolving issues and carrying out basic operations but the complex projects remained incomplete due to lack of collaboration and communication (H. M. Alzoubi et al., 2019; Nuseira & Aljumahb, 2020).

In order to avoid the possible collapse, the businesses quickly transformed their projects into e-commerce projects. The e-commerce has been recognized as most important risk mitigation strategy during the unprecedented risks pandemic. As mentioned by (Bawaneh et al., 2023; M. El Khatib, Ibrahim, et al., 2023), the online channels enabled businesses to maintain communication with their customers and suppliers. The e-commerce also provided opportunity to businesses to regain their customer base (Aityassine et al., 2022; H. Al-Kassem, 2014; A. Aljumah et al., 2020; Almasaeid et al., 2022). The e-commerce also reduced chances of exposure to the virus and to operate the e-commerce framework, the work from home is suitable (M. El Khatib et al., 2022; Lee, Nawanir, et al., 2023). Lastly, the sanitization and wearing masks or gloves have become mandatory health and safety measures in modern organizations (Alshawabkeh et al., 2021; Amiri et al., 2020; M. El Khatib et al., 2023). Proper precautions enabled businesses to increase their workforce slowly until they are back at original pace (R. S. Al-Marroof, Alahbabi, et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be opined that the risk mitigation strategies have acted slowly but effectively to eradicate the impact of pandemic on business projects (A. Aljumah et al., 2023; Gaytan et al., 2023; E. Khatib et al., 2021).

**2.4. Recovery and restarting the projects**

The start-ups and local businesses were most

**2.5. Interview**

**1. What is the impact of unprecedented risks on projects?**

Manager 1	Manager 2	Manager 3
<i>The pandemic has stopped work flow in organizations and it might take years to restart the collapsed projects or operations.</i>	<i>unprecedented risks was an unseen threat and businesses were not prepared for it. The sudden stop of operations was necessary to contain the spread of virus.</i>	<i>Currently, the organizations lack resources, workforce as well as budget that are essential in completing the projects. Hence, unless these factors are adequately available again, it will be hard for companies to re-initiate and complete the projects.</i>

affected due to the pandemic. As discussed by (A. I. Aljumah, Nuseir, et al., 2022c; Khan et al., 2022), the global MNCs are able to survive because of their enhanced financial strengths; however, the lack of experiences and budget led several SMEs and new ventures to permanent shut down (A. Al-Kassem et al., 2013). It is important to remember that the businesses largely contribute to economical development of nations; therefore, the recovery and restarting the projects has been necessary to ensure proper revenue collections (AlDhaheri et al., 2023; M. El Khatib, Alzoubi, et al., 2023; Ghazal, Hasan, Ahmad, et al., 2023). It is impossible for businesses to recover from the losses that they incurred during pandemic. Hence, the government intervention has been significant in allowing these organizations to recover and restart their operations (R. S. Al-Marroof, Alnazzawi, et al., 2021; Kassem & Martinez, 2022) (R. S. Al-Marroof, Alhumaid, et al., 2021). The pandemic has delayed the projects of organizations for at least a decade or more (M. T. Alshurideh, Alquqa, Alzoubi, Al Kurdi, & Alhamad, 2023; Ghazal, Hasan, Alzoubi, et al., 2023). Even with governmental supports and regained customer bases, the businesses are far behind than their forecasted results (H. M. Alzoubi, In'airat, et al., 2022; M. El Khatib et al., 2021).

In the opinion of (M. T. Alshurideh, Al Kurdi, Alhamad, Hamadneh, Alzoubi, & Ahmad, 2023), the pandemic has affected businesses worldwide; thus, it is important for the governments to work together in order to recover the businesses and restart their projects. The supports are necessary as businesses currently lack resources, workforce and budget required to initiate and complete the projects (A. Al-Marroof et al., 2021; A. I. Aljumah, Nuseir, et al., 2022a; Ghazal, Hasan, Abdullah, et al., 2023).

**2. How government’s intervention can solve the challenges posed by pandemic?**

<b>Manager 1</b>	<b>Manager 2</b>	<b>Manager 3</b>
<i>The government needs to support businesses with proper funds and aids in order to encourage them to complete the projects.</i>	<i>The government intervention will enable organizations to overcome their losses and develop their methods.</i>	<i>The government can provided loans, funds, and even take over SMEs for re-building their frameworks.</i>

**3. What are risk mitigation strategies available to counter the challenges?**

<b>Manager 1</b>	<b>Manager 2</b>	<b>Manager 3</b>
<i>The work from home has been our best choice to continue business operations amidst the pandemic.</i>	<i>The risks were immediately mitigated by reducing the workforce and e-commerce strategy was adopted to continue operations.</i>	<i>Currently, the healthy and safety resolutions have enabled organizations to counter all the challenges posed by pandemic.</i>

**4. How much the projects have been delayed due to the pandemic?**

<b>Manager 1</b>	<b>Manager 2</b>	<b>Manager 3</b>
<i>It has been forecasted that it will take almost 10 years to recover and rebuilt the projects.</i>	<i>The projects have been delayed and it will take multiple decades to regain the same glory.</i>	<i>Even with all the governmental supports it will take more than a decade to complete the projects</i>

**3. METHODOLOGY**

**3.1. Research Design and Approach**

Research design can be defined as the model of research techniques and methods selected by a researcher. There are three types of research design, such as descriptive research design, explanatory research design and exploratory research design. For this research, the descriptive research design is going to be used. Descriptive design includes identification of the attributes of a specific phenomenon depending on an observational basis or the investigation of the correlation between two or more phenomena. Adoption of descriptive design is appropriate for this study as it offers the possibility to examine the phenomenon in a completely unchanged natural environment as well as the chance to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data collection method. There are two forms of research approaches like deductive and inductive approach. The current study will be conducted based on the deductive research approach. Deductive research approach generally explores a known phenomenon or theory and tests if the phenomenon or theory is true in the provided circumstances. The main reason for adopting the deductive approach is that it offers the chance to address causal connection between variables and concepts.

**3.2. Data Collection Method**

Data collection method refers to the processes of collecting, measuring and evaluating proper insights for a study utilizing the standard validated techniques. The study will make use of mixed research method. Mixed method is a form of research where a researcher combines the elements of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The main reason for using the mixed method is that it is an effective method in evaluating and understanding the contradictions between qualitative results and quantitative findings.

For the collection of quantitative data, the research will conduct an online survey with the project managers working in the UAE organizations. In this context, close-ended multiple-choice questionnaire will be used as the data collection instrument for primary quantitative data. The qualitative data will be collected by conducting interview with the senior project managers, using the open-ended questions.

**3.3. Research Sample and Sampling Method**

For the primary quantitative data, the target population includes 100 managers working in the projects in the UAE. From the target population, 50

respondents will be selected using the simple random sampling method. Random sampling method will be used for the survey as it will provide all the members of target population with fair and equal chance for being selected in the survey. On the other hand, five senior project managers for the interview will be selected using the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method where the research will depend on their own judgment while selecting the members (H. Alzoubi et al., 2022; M. T. Nuseir, Aljumah, & El Refae, 2022a). The final sample size for the entire research will include 55 respondents.

For the collected quantitative data, the research use of graphs and charts with response frequency and percentage. On the other hand, the collected qualitative data will be analyzed using the thematic data analysis method. The thematic data analysis method applied to interview transcripts and the closely examined to identify the common patterns of meaning and idea, which come up repeatedly.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND EXPECTED FINDINGS

The research has concluded that unprecedented risks has significant impacts on the business projects. It has been discussed that due to lack of knowledge on pandemics, the businesses were not prepared to face unprecedented risks. The lack of preparedness harshly affected the ongoing as well as future projects of organizations. It has been evaluated that most SMEs were succumbed and MNCs' projects have been delayed permanently for more than decades. In order to derive the authentic outcomes, both secondary and primary data has been studied. The secondary data has been collected from online sources, books, journals, or articles. On other hand, the primary data has been collected from the interview. The data has suggested that governmental aids and supports are necessary to overcome the losses caused due to the pandemic. The research has also specified each challenge that businesses had to face during the unprecedented risks. In order to reduce contain the spread, the workforce was significantly reduced; hence, it is almost became impossible for organizations to carry out their international projects. In order to balance the organizational operations and precautions, the work from home was introduced. The enhanced digitalization has enabled modern businesses to communicate with

their employees through technologies. However, the work from home process has often been criticized due to technical glitches. The ineffective communication has affected collaboration between leaders and employees. Thus, it can be opined that the current pandemic has hampered the overall operations and projects of businesses.

It has been expected that proper completion of research will allow in analyzing the impacts of unprecedented risks on the business projects. It has been expected that the research will identify the challenges that the businesses have to encounter in order to carry out their projects efficiently. The research will conclude the role of government in developing the projects after the pandemic. It has been observed that due to the pandemic the businesses have incurred heavy losses. The lack of adequate resources, employees and customers has ceased all the opportunities for modern businesses. The research will also derive solutions for each challenge. It has been expected that the paper will discuss the importance of acquisitions and partnership in mitigating the threats possessed by unprecedented risks. The research will evaluate the helps that the government can offer to the businesses. The governments' aids might come in form of loans or funds. It is important for businesses to determine a proper budget to initiate and complete their projects. The governmental intervention and support is important to reconstruct the projects. The paper will also determine changing behaviour of customers and their impacts on business projects. It has been observed that due to changing customer behaviour the organizations have not managed to understand the needs and requirements of markets. Hence, the modern businesses are losing their customer bases at fast pace. The research is also expected to discuss the important to e-commerce in developing abilities of businesses to achieve their goals and complete their projects. The e-commerce business will allow in maintaining continuous communication with the customers as well as to meet their demands. The research will propose a risk mitigation plan that every business needs to prepare in order to overcome the threats of future pandemics. The world has already witnessed the level of devastation that pandemic can cause to the economy. Hence, it is important to stay a step ahead of pandemic in order to continue projects even at

most threatening situations. Thus, it can be opined that the research will allow specify the impacts of COVID-9 on the projects and will propose effective remedies to overcome the threats.

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