CORPUS PUBLISHERS

Current Trends in Engineering Science (CTES)

ISSN: 2833-356X

Volume 6 Issue 1, 2026

Article Information

Received date : January 15, 2026

Published date: January 27, 2026

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DOI: 10.54026/CTES/1078

Keywords

SMART++; SMART; SWOT; PESTLE; Bahrain; Project Management; Strategic Planning; Framework

Mini Review

Investigating SMART++ Project Creation Framework: A Case Study in Bahrain

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Abstract

Project initiation is one of the most critical yet least structured phases of project management. Existing research often focuses on standalone tools such as SMART for goal setting, SWOT for internal assessment, and PESTLE for environmental scanning. However, there is limited integration of these tools into a unified framework for early-stage project creation. This paper introduces the SMART++ Project Creation Framework, a novel methodology that sequentially integrates SMART, SWOT, and PESTLE into a cohesive project-generation process. The framework is evaluated through an applied case study in Bahrain involving youth participants in project-based training. Findings indicate that SMART++ enhances goal clarity, improves internal readiness assessment, and strengthens external risk awareness. The framework demonstrates practical value in educational, community, and professional settings, offering an original contribution to project management literature.

Introduction

The initiation phase of a project lays the foundation for all subsequent planning, execution, and evaluation activities. Despite its importance, this stage is often underdeveloped, particularly among youth, early-career professionals, and non-specialist teams. Common causes of project failure - such as unclear objectives, misaligned capabilities, or insufficient external awareness - highlight the need for a structured, integrative approach to project creation.

Traditional tools such as SMART, SWOT, and PESTLE each address distinct aspects of project preparation, yet their isolated use may lead to fragmented planning. To address this gap, this study proposes the SMART++ Project Creation Framework, which unifies these three methodologies into a sequential and logical workflow. Bahrain, with its strong emphasis on youth development and project-based learning, serves as an ideal context for evaluating the framework's applicability and effectiveness.

This paper aims to:

a) Introduce the SMART++ framework conceptually
b) Demonstrate its structured workflow
c) Apply it to a real project scenario in Bahrain
d) Assess its impact on project clarity, readiness, and environmental alignment

Literature Review

SMART Framework

The SMART acronym—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound—was introduced by Doran [1] as a guideline for effective goal setting. Research consistently indicates that well-defined objectives improve project focus, resource allocation, and outcome measurement. SMART criteria are widely adopted in both educational and professional contexts to reduce ambiguity and enhance accountability.

SWOT Analysis

Developed as a strategic planning tool, SWOT examines internal factors (Strengths and Weaknesses) and external factors (Opportunities and Threats) relevant to an organization or project [2]. It is commonly used to assess readiness, identify competitive advantages, and anticipate challenges. However, its effectiveness is often limited when used in isolation from goal-setting and environmental scanning tools.

PESTLE Analysis

PESTLE—Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental—provides a macro-environmental scanning framework [3]. It helps project planners understand contextual risks and opportunities beyond organizational control. While valuable for external awareness, PESTLE alone does not ensure alignment with internal capabilities or strategic goals.

Integrated Methodologies

Although SMART, SWOT, and PESTLE are well-established individually, few studies propose their integration into a single structured process. Existing literature often discusses pairwise combinations (e.g., SWOT+PESTLE or SMART+SWOT), but a tripartite sequential model remains underexplored. The SMART++ framework contributes to this gap by offering a unified, phased approach that aligns goal clarity, internal readiness, and external awareness.

Methodology

This research employs a conceptual development and applied case study approach, structured in three phases:

a) **Framework Formulation:** Development of the SMART++ model by integrating SMART, SWOT, and PESTLE into a sequential process.
b) **Case Study Application:** Implementation of the framework in Bahrain with 12 youth participants tasked with planning a "Youth Celebration Event."
c) **Evaluation:** Qualitative assessment based on four criteria: goal clarity, internal readiness awareness, external risk understanding, and feasibility confidence. Data were collected through facilitated workshops, participant feedback, and project documentation.

The SMART++ Project Creation Framework

The SMART++ framework consists of three sequential phases:

Phase 1: SMART – Goal Definition

Projects begin with a clear objective formulated using SMART criteria:

a) **Specific:** Precise target
b) **Measurable:** Quantifiable outcomes
c) **Achievable:** Realistic given constraints
d) **Relevant:** Alignment with purpose
e) **Time-bound:** Defined timeline

Phase 2: SWOT – Readiness Assessment

The SMART goal is then evaluated through SWOT analysis to assess internal capabilities and external possibilities (Table 1):

a) Strengths & Weaknesses: Internal resources and gaps
b) Opportunities & Threats: External enablers and risks

Phase 3: PESTLE – Environmental Scanning

The project is contextualized within the broader environment using PESTLE factors:

a) Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental influences

SMART++ Outcome

The integration yields a project concept that is:
a) Clear (SMART-based)
b) Ready (SWOT-informed)
c) Resilient (PESTLE-aligned)

Case Study: Youth Celebration Event in Bahrain

SMART Application

a) Specific: Organize end of training celebration at a community center.
b) Measurable: 50 attendees (trainees + family invites), ≥85% satisfaction rate.
c) Achievable: Sponsorship from local training center.
d) Relevant: Supports Bahrain's youth engagement agenda.
e) Time-bound: Within three weeks post-training.

SWOT Insights

Table 1: SWOT Insights.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Volunteer support	Limited budget
Center backing	Inexperienced team
Opportunities	**Threats**
NGO sponsorship	Venue constraints
Media coverage	Regulatory hurdles

PESTLE Context (Bahrain)

a) **Political:** Venue approvals required
b) **Economic:** Sponsorship influenced by training income conditions
c) **Social:** High youth participation culture
d) **Technological:** Available digital and audio tools
e) **Legal:** Safety and compliance standards
f) **Environmental:** Waste management considerations

Participant Feedback

Participants in the study reported enhanced clarity, improved risk awareness, and greater confidence in project feasibility after applying the SMART++ sequence.

Discussion

The Bahrain case study demonstrates that the SMART++ framework:

a) Reduces ambiguity in early project conceptualization
b) Encourages holistic thinking by linking goals, capabilities, and context
c) Increases risk awareness and strategic alignment
d) Supports national developmental priorities such as youth empowerment

The sequential design (SMART → SWOT → PESTLE), shown in Figure 1, was found clear and effective for project management learners, particularly for beginner project creators.

Conclusion

The SMART++ Project Creation Framework offers a structured, integrative approach to project initiation by combining SMART, SWOT, and PESTLE into a cohesive workflow. The case study in Bahrain validates its practicality in enhancing project clarity, readiness assessment, and environmental alignment. SMART++ is particularly suited to educational, community, and early-career contexts where structured guidance is needed.

Future Research Directions

a) Quantitative evaluation of SMART++'s impact on project success rates.
b) Sector-specific applications in corporate, governmental, and entrepreneurial settings.
c) Cross-cultural validation in diverse geographical contexts.
d) Development of digital tools (e.g., app or platform) to facilitate framework adoption.
e) Longitudinal studies on SMART++'s effect on long-term project outcomes and leadership development.

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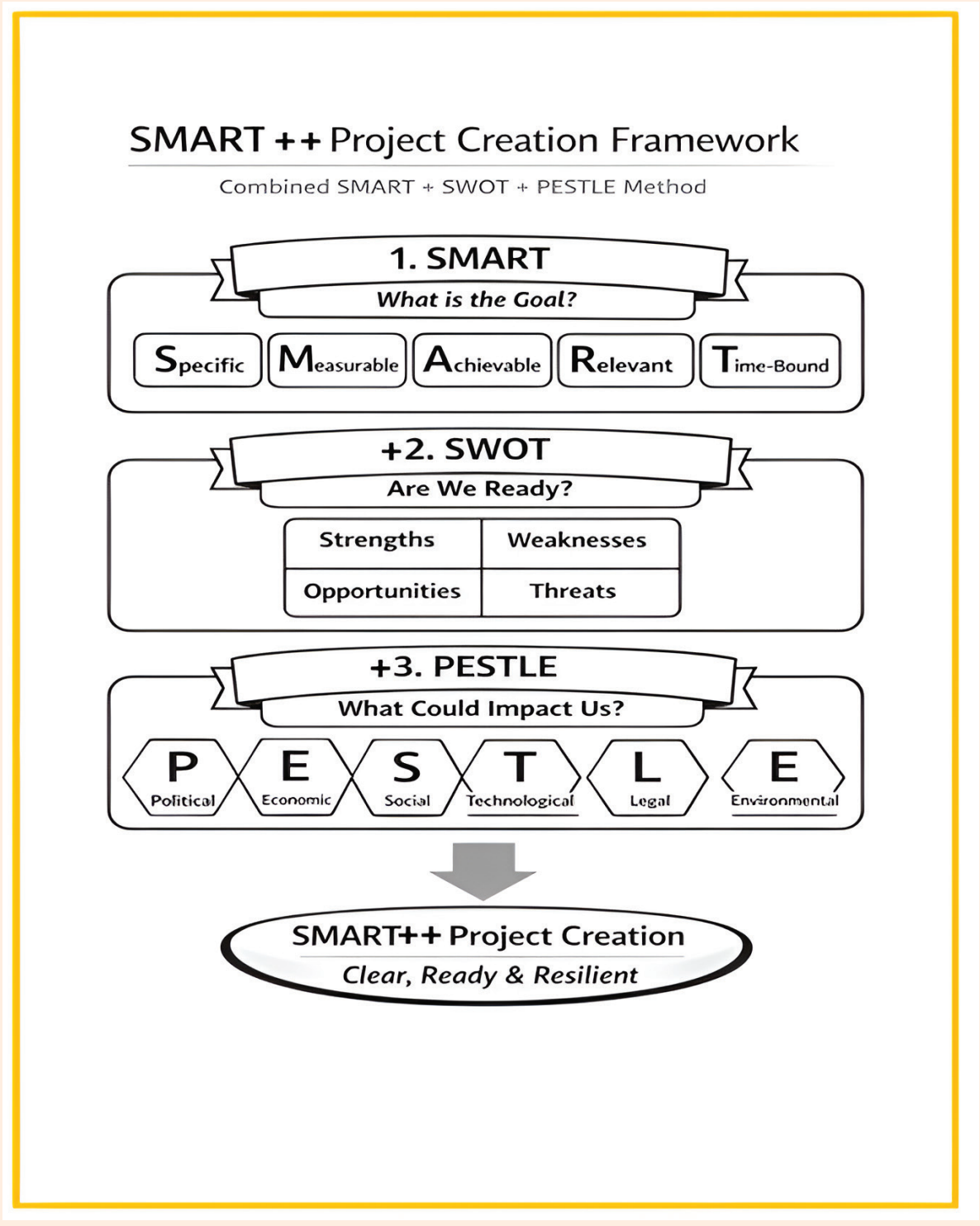

Figure 1: SMART++ Project Creation Framework.