

Understanding leadership and managerial challenges at border crossing points of Pakistan: a CAREC and CPEC perspective.

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ABSTRACT

The geo-strategic location, availability of all-weather seaports, and proximity to gigantic inland connectivity projects like CAREC (Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation) and CPEC (China–Pakistan Economic Corridor) can transform Pakistan into a trade and transit hub. Cognizant of the economic potential of regional/global connectivity, state-of-the-art infrastructure and cargo handling facilities are being developed by Government of Pakistan on the border crossing points (BCPs). However, the realization of the envisioned benefits from land trade seems conditional to the effectiveness of leadership/management at BCPs. The simultaneous engagement with multiple stakeholders, social and environmental concerns, and over-riding desire of trade facilitation can best be addressed by leaders through identification and resolution of challenges. Using the Stakeholders' Theory, this study investigates the leadership and management challenges directly influencing the land trade performance of Pakistan's BCPs. A total of 25 well experienced experts from public and private sector were interviewed. Drawing on the qualitative insights and the thematic analysis, the study finds that responsible leadership plays a critical role in improving operational efficiency, interagency coordination, implementing reforms, and accountability at the BCPs. Major leadership challenges identified by this study include disjointed decision-making, poor resource allocation, lack of transparency, gaps in rules and regulations, and lack of focus on trade efficiency and competitiveness. The study also finds that responsible leadership can address the challenges thorough creation of trade facilitative organizational climate through improved interagency coordination and enhanced accountability.

Keywords: Leadership, Management, Efficiency, Borders, Land-Trade, Coordination, Decision-Making

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is located at the cross-roads of Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East to serve as a transit hub for regional trade. Being member of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program, Pakistan is part of the CAREC-5 and CAREC-6 projects for cross-border trade facilitation and regional connectivity for providing access to the CAREC signatories to new/potential markets and trade routes (ADB, 2020). The strategic location of Pakistan is highly advantageous and needs to be exploited through proactively integrating Pakistan in the regional and global supply chain coupled with propagation of its softer image and diplomatic

efforts on bilateral and multilateral trade agreements (Wasi, 2023). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has led to the commencement of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) development from Xinjiang till Gwadar Deepsea Port. CPEC focuses on developing the energy and transport infrastructure, enhancing regional connectivity between China, Pakistan and extending it to the broader region (Wolf, 2019). Both CAREC and CPEC offer Pakistan an opportunity to utilize its full potential to become a regional transit hub. However, this realization is dependent upon the efficient management of the Border Crossing Points (BCPs) handling transit trade (Ali, 2024).

The term BCP is used interchangeably with border land ports which are the gateways for trade and travel and provide first points of contact to foreigners approaching a country for trade and travel conveying the degree of facilitation to be expected by them in the next stages (Khan et al., 2023). An efficient border management helps ensure smooth clearance of goods and movement of passengers. The port efficiency of major BCPs on the CAREC Corridor and Sost on the CPEC Corridor depends upon Pakistan's ability to capitalize on its strategic location and foster effective regional trade (Khan & Bukhari, 2024; ADB, 2020). The procedural delays and prohibitive port and logistics costs lead to a regulatory-cum-financial burden that undermines the advantages of infrastructure investment and trade facilitation (Kawachi & Shibasaki, 2024). The trade and non-trade barriers need to be minimized with collaboration of national and international institutions and trade partners for optimal benefits.

Physical infrastructure has been improved significantly at various BCPs through considerable investment but under-utilization of the facilities reflects deficiencies in leadership and administration. Generally, BCPs lack strategic leadership required to execute process improvements that optimize operations and efficiently coordinate across several agencies, i.e., immigration, border security and Customs etc (Zahid-ul-Islam-Dar, Kaur & Chattu, 2023). Poor inter-agency coordination as a result of inadequate leadership has caused delays, redundant procedures, and increased expenses for the traders. Furthermore, management issues like insufficient resource allocation and a lack of accountability exacerbate these problems (Rehan, Khalid & Nair, 2024). While physical infrastructure upgradation of the Country's BCPs has attracted significant attention in both policy and academic discourse, the leadership and management aspects of border trade operations have been relatively less explored (Carter, Donahue & Williams, 2024). Current studies tend to focus on procedural bottlenecks or Customs inefficiencies without examining how leadership and management failures contribute to these operational weaknesses (ADB, 2020; Rahman, 2018).

Fragmented decision-making arising out of weak leadership results in a lack of coordination across various trade facilitation agencies at the BCPs (Akbari, 2021). Many BCPs in Pakistan suffer from an absence of transformational leadership that can drive organizational change to achieve process optimization (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Without a visionary leadership, several BCPs in the Country are seriously lacking transformational management style that can bring the changes required for the desired efficiency and competitiveness at par with other land ports in the region. Other areas where BCPs struggle relate to adaptations to meet new challenges of green operations, implementation of digital innovations, alignment with automated non-intrusive

cargo operations, and registration of trade facilitation standards with international organizations (De, 2023). As already mentioned, the role of leadership in managing border trade operations has received little attention in existing research. Most of the studies focused on technical and procedural improvements in customs and border management, overlooking the human, leadership, and organizational factors that influence these operations (World Bank, 2018). Additionally, while leadership theory is well developed in the context of other public and private sector organizations, its application to border management, especially in developing countries like Pakistan, remains limited (Bhatti, 2024).

The Stakeholder Theory, which asserts that organizations must account for the interests and concerns of all parties impacted by their decisions and operations (Freeman, 1984), offers a significant framework for examining the leadership and management problems at Pakistan's border crossing points (BCPs). Utilizing Stakeholder Theory, this study aims to investigate the leadership and management challenges that directly influence the performance of Pakistan's border crossing points related to land trade. The study will examine the impact of managerial practices and leadership behaviors on the efficacy of operational processes, decision-making and interagency coordination at BCPs. The Inquiry will also explore the linkage between leadership failings and inefficient practices which are at the base of higher costs and delays at borders. It will identify main hurdles, but more importantly recommend leadership related changes that can improve performance of BCPs in line with strategic objectives set by CAREC and CPEC. It seeks to foster a deeper understanding of existing organizational dynamics and the leadership behaviors required for implementing border management reforms. This research also seeks to fill the gap created by scanty attention to roles of leadership in border operations (Hussain & Hussain, 2023), by focusing specifically on the leadership and management challenges that impact border performance at Pakistan's major border crossing points. By doing so, it contributes to both the theoretical understanding of leadership in complex public administration settings and provides practical insights into improving border trade performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership and Trade Facilitation - Leadership in Public Administration

Border management poses complex challenges which require a transformational, agile, and responsible leadership to achieve an optimal performance in the public sector organizations. In a multi-agency environment, Bass & Avolio (1994) state, transformational leadership theories, highlighting the significance of leaders in driving organizational change, increasing collaboration, and enhancing overall performance. Transformational leadership also tends to enhance operational efficiency at border crossing points as it enables the individuals to perform well, foster collective efforts and promotes innovation (Northouse, 2018). The significance of leadership in the enhancement of institution performance in public administration is underscored by research conducted by Trimmers and Knies (2016) and Denhardt and Campbell (2019). They contend that leaders who prioritize collaboration and inclusivity within the government agencies, including Customs, border security and immigration, are far more likely to effectively coordinate and navigate bureaucratic complexities (Heaver, 2015). Nevertheless, there is a significant deficiency

in research that examines the direct impact of leadership on a BCP performance, particularly in developing countries such as Pakistan (Safdar, 2024). Table-1 below indicates some of the studies conducted on the role of leadership in public management organizations.

Table 1

Leadership and Trade Facilitation Studies

Study	Focus
Bass & Avolio (1994)	Transformational leadership and organizational change
Northouse (2018)	Leadership theories in complex settings
Tummers & Knies (2016)	Leadership fostering collaboration in public sector projects
Denhardt & Campbell (2019)	Leadership dynamics in public administration
Heaver (2015)	Navigating bureaucratic complexities in trade facilitation
Fernandez & Rainey (2006)	Organizational change in public sector through effective leadership

Source: Authors Compilation

There are many leadership challenges in the developing countries causing institutional fragmentation, under-utilization of limited resources, and political instability detrimental for trade activities. Research by Grendel 2007 highlights how weak leadership-structures lead to inadequate communication across public sector agencies and weak decision making. The issues are prevalent in Pakistan's border management where customs, border security, immigration often work in disharmony due to conflicting mandates (Rahman, 2018). Leadership deficiencies, particularly in decision making and interagency communication in case of Pakistan's border crossing points are more pronounced. Inadequate leadership is observed to hinder accountability, slow-down of trade processes, and impeding the effective utilization of resources. The impact of poor leadership is especially significant at key BCPs like Torkham and Chaman where delays and inefficiencies have a cascading effect on trade facilitation and regional connectivity (Rehman, Nazly, Nasir & Noor, 2023).

Management Practices in Border Management - Importance of Effective Management in Border Trade Operations

Management practices are essential for border crossing points to ensure enhanced trade facilitation. The ideas on operational management (Slack, Chambers, and Johnston, 2020) focus on the integration of management and technology to improve performance of cargo and passenger clearance. These theories are crucial to guarantee that border controls at the BCPs do not impede the movement of goods while upholding security and regulatory adherence (Kassel, 2016). Customs, immigration and security agencies dictate the policies and regulations related to trade and border management and associated management practices. The risk management system and national single window mechanisms promoted by the WCO (2018) help reduce the instances of delays and enhance process efficiency of trade operations. However, Pakistan has been slow in adopting new technology until recently due to the hurdles created by the bureaucracy and resistance to change management by status quo loving stakeholders (ADB, 2020). In modern era,

borders have to be managed in line with international best practices as advocated by numerous studies. Table-2 lists few of the studies exploring the use and influence of efficient management practices in border operations.

Table 2

Management Practices in Border Operations Studies

Study	Focus
Slack, Chambers & Johnston (2010)	Operations management theories emphasizing resource utilization and process optimization
Kassel (2016)	Public management and process improvement in complex environments
World Customs Organization (2018)	Single-window systems and risk management frameworks in trade facilitation
Asian Development Bank (2020)	Management innovations to reduce clearance times and improve trade facilitation
World Bank (2018)	Institutional challenges and inefficiencies in border management
Fernandez & Moldogaziev (2015)	Organizational capacity in public management and the role of leadership in innovation

Source: Authors Compilation

Challenges in Management at Pakistan’s Border Crossing Points

The outdated Customs procedures despite automation of business processes and duplication of examination by various trade facilitation agencies in the name of security at the Pakistan’s BCPs have led to inefficiencies in the BCP management and governance (Rehan, Khalid & Nair, 2024). Insufficient use of technology and its improper handling by the semi-trained BCP officials often result in long delays and increased port costs (World Bank, 2018). Lack of accountability mechanisms under the Arusha Declaration for Prevention of Bribery has not led to initiate management reforms required for effective operations at the BCPs. Moldogaziev and Fernandez (2015) have exhibited that inefficiencies increase when management is not in consonance with the leadership. A misalignment between leadership and management has resulted in overlapping of procedures, redundant operations, and fragmented decision-making, all leading to a weak port performance (Gul, Iqbal, Nosheen & Wohar, 2024).

Institutional Coordination and Organizational Behavior at Border Crossing Points – Inter-Agency Coordination and Its Impact on Border Performance

Various trade facilitation agencies at the BCPs require effective inter-agency coordination for an integrated transit trade management (Zahid-ul-Islam-Dar, Kaur & Chattu, 2023). It is well-researched fact that without proper coordination among the Customs, immigration, and border security (Alexopoulos, 2018; Heaver, 2015) operational inefficiencies continuously come to surface during cargo clearance and passenger facilitation. Variance, overlapping, and redundancy in border agency procedures regarding clearance of goods at a BCP increase the transit time between origin and destination, either to aid or deter imports and exports and therefore play an

important role in land trade (Hurria, 2019). The World Trade Organization (2018) emphasizes on commitment towards establishing an improved coordination among trade facilitation entities operating at the BCPs to facilitate cargo flow with reduced operational costs. Pakistan lacks a centralized inter-agency coordination mechanism at the major BCPs like Torkham, Chaman and Khunjerab. This has resulted into redundant procedures and added logistics costs, and institutional fragmentation leading to agencies operating in silos without proper communication or alignment of objectives (ADB, 2020). Interagency coordination has been recognized by scholars as a major factor impacting efficiency of BCPs, some of the studies emphasizing institutional coordination have been listed in Table-3 below.

Table 3

Institutional Coordination and Organizational Behavior Studies

Study	Focus
Heaver (2015)	Impact of institutional fragmentation on border performance
World Trade Organization (2018)	Improved inter-agency cooperation reducing transaction costs
Tummers & Knies (2016)	Leadership and coordination across multiple agencies
Mintzberg (1983)	Leadership shaping organizational culture and collaboration
Alesina & Giuliano (2015)	Public sector coordination and institutional efficiency
Fernandez & Moldogaziev (2015)	Role of leadership in improving organizational capacity and coordination

Source: Authors' Compilation

Organizational Behavior and Leadership Dynamics

The influence of leadership on performance of trade facilitation agencies working at the BCPs is often depicted by the organizational behavior theories in a critical manner (Mustafa & Amjad, 2020). Mintzberg (1983) has found out that the organizational culture of the governing bodies is shaped by the leadership style for fostering cooperation. BCP performance is enhanced by the leaders who take the initiative of promoting transparency, accountability, culpability, and innovation, are more akin to improve performance of BCPs in a border management scenario (Irfan, Bhatti & Ozturk, 2023). The rigid leadership norms in Pakistan tend to be traditionally more hierarchical and therefore stifle the cooperation among the trade facilitation agencies. It is the transformational leadership which promises to promote team empowerment through collaborative flexibility to foster inter-agency coordination (Manzoor et al., 2019).

Trade Facilitation in the CAREC and CPEC Contexts - Trade Facilitation under CAREC and CPEC

The CAREC and CPEC initiatives are aimed at enhancing regional connectivity, trade facilitation measures and infrastructure improvements in the region. Reducing trade barriers, improving logistics and border crossing processes are essential aspects of the CAREC Transport Strategy 2030 (ADB,2020) for economic integration in Daisy Cherian this region. Likewise, the CPEC focuses on upgrading Pakistani infrastructure to enable Pakistan compete with regional trade (Wolf, 2019). As these regional frameworks can yield maximum benefits only if the

leadership and management practices at border crossing points of Pakistan are aligned with CAREC and CPEC orientations. The Trade Facilitation Assessment (2018) of the World Bank has revealed that Pakistan needs leadership reforms and better management practices in order to achieve its trade facilitation objectives.

Trade facilitation trending concepts remains the understudied aspects of the leadership and management who relate to the effectiveness of border crossing points (BCPs) especially in countries such as Pakistan which are still developing. Most of the existing analysis considered the traditional customs, and regulatory and infrastructural aspects (ADB, 2020; World Bank, 2018). However, leadership, management, and inter-agency collaboration as part of organizational factors are still grossly ignored. In Pakistan, these factors are particularly relevant as cross-border points are understaffed with poor leadership structures, ineffective management, and low operational activity among the institutions (Rahman, 2018).

Table 4

Identified Gaps in the Literature

Area of Focus	Identified Gap
Leadership in Border Operations Management Practices at BCPs Institutional Coordination Organizational Behavior	Lack of empirical research on the role of leadership in shaping border land performance, particularly in developing countries. Insufficient exploration of management frameworks to address operational inefficiencies in border management. Limited focus on how leadership can enhance inter-agency coordination and streamline border processes. Scarcity of studies addressing organizational behavior in the context of border management, particularly in terms of leadership and team dynamics.

Source: Authors Compilation

Leadership in Border Operations: The available literature regarding Border Crossing Points (BCPs) tends to restrict its analysis to issues of customs integration, diffusion, and facility construction. (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2020; World Customs Organization [WCO], 2018). Nevertheless, the issue of leadership in the context of advancing border performance has not been dealt with sufficiently. Leadership impacts such important operational aspects of border crossing points such as functional dimensions, decision making and integration among various stakeholders (Tummers & Knies, 2016). In Pakistan, where leadership systems are mostly hierarchical and fragmented, it calls for studies seeking to answer how transformational leadership can be a mean for change and enhance of operations management practices in the country (Mutua, 2022).

Management Practices at BCPs: In the studies on customs procedures and trade facilitation, the management practices that facilitate daily activities at BCPs have been given least attention by scholars (World Trade Organization, 2018). Effective management is indispensable to efficiency, resource allocation, effective implementation of processes, and bringing in new technological systems (Slack, Chambers, & Johnston, 2010). However, existing investigations cover only the

role of managers at BCPs related to cargo clearance, passenger facilitation, and infrastructure maintenance, which do not include practices of optimizing leadership interventions at border crossing points. (Ngoc et al., 2020). In Pakistan, outdated management practices contribute to delays and inefficiencies highlighting the need for more in-depth research in this area. As noted by the World Bank (2018:115), a potential area for research is the impact of leadership styles in BCP management in Pakistan which tends to be ignored by antiquated managerial practices causing delays and inefficiencies.

Institutional Coordination: The lack of coordination between agencies is perhaps the most important problem in the border management, and especially in developing countries wherein there are various agencies like customs, immigration or security that work independently of each other (Heaver, 2015). Call for streamlined procedures and modernization of Customs is the focus of existing literature, while there is limited research exploring how leadership impacts in facility coordination to avoid duplication of procedures and delay in operations (Das, 2022). Most agency's failure to adopt integrated coordination approach creates a non-conducive environment for efficiencies to thrive at crucial BCPs such as Torkham and Chaman, thereby hindering trade facilitation goals (ADB, 2020).

Organizational Behavior: A further important gap in the knowledge is related to the lack of focus on organizational behavior in the context of border management (Rehman, Nazly, Nasir & Noor, 2023). So, studies on the dynamics of relations between leaders and their subordinates, and legal procedures in government organizations need to be conducted (Mintzberg, 1983; Northouse, 2018). Specifically, how organizational culture, employee empowerment, and leadership styles influence the performance of agencies operating at the land ports are underexplored, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan (Rahman, 2018). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing strategies to foster collaboration, enhance accountability, and improve service delivery at BCPs (Ngoc et al., 2022).

The Stakeholder Theory

Freeman (1984), proposed the Stakeholder Theory which posits that “organizations must consider the concerns of individuals and groups that can affect or are affected by their activities while making decisions and achieving organizational goals”. Organizational leaders are expected to be cognizant of the responsibilities and obligations towards a broad range of stakeholders. Stakeholder Theory is based on the interplay between organizations and their stakeholders (Gray, Owen & Adams, 2014) and, emphasizes the management of the relationships (Friedman & Miles, 2002). Organizational leaders are pivotal to the dynamism of stakeholder management and embedding relational orientation in organizational policies and practices. Stakeholder Theory offers a significant framework for examining the management and leadership problems at Pakistan's border crossing points (BCPs). The study focuses on the critical difficulties including operational inefficiencies, interagency coordination challenges, reluctance to change, and deficiencies in transparency and accountability. Utilizing stakeholder theory, these issues can be comprehended as stemming from the intricate interactions among diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector organizations, and the wider society.

This research seeks to fill this gap by exploring the performance of BCPs in relation to leadership behaviors and management practices in Pakistan. The research will review ways leadership can enhance inter-agency coordination, resource management, and streamlining processes. On the one hand, examining roles and functions of leadership at BCPs using CAREC and CPEC perspectives as case studies by this research, will offer further theoretical insights to leadership issues within public administration; on the other hand, it will also seek to find leadership interventions for trade facilitation across developing countries. It will provide guidelines to policymakers and border management agencies for leadership-driven reforms by leadership necessary to improve Pakistan's position as a regional trade hub to ensure alignment with broader trade facilitation objectives.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative approach to explore the leadership and management challenges affecting the performance of significant BCPs in Pakistan. This qualitative method facilitates an in-depth examination of the management and organizational elements influencing the efficiency of border operations (Nasri, 2023). The study also seeks to gather the lived experiences, perceptions, and insights of participants who were directly engaged in trade facilitation, inter-agency coordination, border management, and related areas. Considering the intricate aspects of leadership and management at the BCPs, utilizing qualitative research was the most suitable approach for grasping the comprehensive and context-dependent factors that affect operational efficiency and the decision-making processes. The respondents were selected based on their expertise on the subject matter, job experience, their involvement in trade facilitation, logistics and border management. The respondents were affiliated with different government departments and private sector. It was ensured that all respondents hold a minimum of ten years of job experience in their respective roles as it was deemed necessary for extracting meaningful insights into leadership and management challenges at the BCPs. The following table presents the demographic details of respondents.

The data was collected from 25 respondents using semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted face to face as well as online due to varied geographic locations of the respondents. The interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and were recorded with the consent of all the respondents. The semi-structured format aided a more flexible approach to investigate the essential themes that were generated from the interviews. Thematic analysis was applied using NVivo software in this study to identify the recurrent themes and patterns associated to leadership and management challenges at the BCPs. The data collected through the interviews were coded by employing the deductive and inductive method. Based on the thematic analysis key themes were identified. Notably, as argued by Creswell (2010) the coding framework was guided by the literature on the key construct that are leadership, management and operations, and challenges at BCPs. Lastly, all ethical considerations were ensured for the present research as all respondents were approached to provided prior consent for conducting their interviews, confirming that they clearly understand the aims and objectives of the current research (Tracy, 2024). Respondents were also updated of their rights to exit from the research in case of any conflict of interest. The entire

data was anonymized to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents. And all transcriptions were shared and endorsed by the respondents to ensure that it was accurate and that there are no misinformation or confusion in understanding the responses.

Table 5

Respondents' Profile

Respondent ID	Basic Pay Scale	Ministry/Organization	Gender	Service (Years)
1	21	Ministry of Finance	Male	32
2	17	Federal Investigation Agency	Female	10
3	20	Pakistan Customs	Female	18
4	19	Federal Investigation Agency	Male	12
5	-	Exporter/Importer	Female	24
6	20	Ministry of Commerce	Male	23
7	-	Exporter/Importer	Female	20
8	-	Clearance Agent	Male	14
9	-	Exporter/Importer	Female	24
10	21	Ministry of Commerce	Female	33
11	-	Exporter/Importer	Female	22
12	-	Clearance Agent	Male	10
13	-	Transporter Association	Male	13
14	-	Terminal Operator	Male	25
15	21	Ministry of Law and Justice	Female	32
16	-	Transporter Association	Male	19
17	-	Exporter/Importer	Male	10
18	-	Pakistan Customs	Female	15
19	17	Planning & Development	Female	10
20	-	Terminal Operator	Male	26
21	17	Ministry of Interior	Female	10
22	-	Chamber of Commerce	Male	21
23	-	Terminal Operator	Male	14
24	-	Chamber of Commerce	Male	16
25	20	Ministry of Interior	Male	24

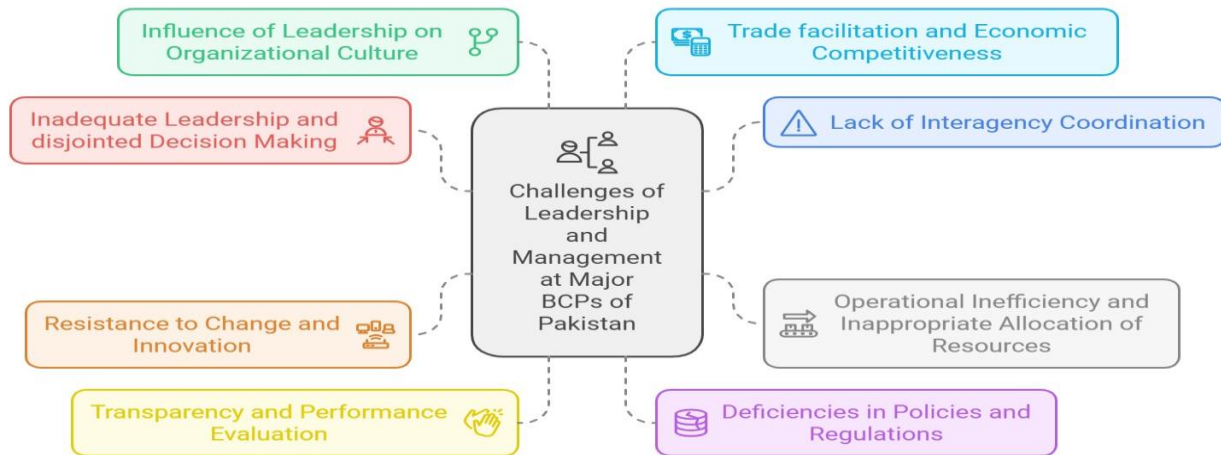
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present research offers significant findings about the challenges of leadership and management at major BCPs of Pakistan influencing port efficiency, land trade flow, and effective border management. As stated earlier a qualitative approach was employed by using in-depth interview technique to collect data from 25 respondents from land trade stakeholders. In consonance with the Stakeholder Theory, the perceptions and live experiences of respondents concerning stakeholder management were explored to reach the difficulties faced by them at BCPs. The thematic analysis showcased a number of challenges being faced by the leadership and management that directly affected the overall performance of BCPs. The key themes that emerged are: Inadequate leadership and disjointed decision making; Lack of interagency coordination;

Operational inefficiency and inappropriate allocation of resources; Resistance to change and innovation; Transparency and performance evaluation, Deficiencies in policies and regulations, Influence of leadership on organizational culture, and Trade facilitation and economic competitiveness. Figure 1 presents an overview of the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of data provided by respondents and the same has been elaborated in the ensuing paragraphs.

Figure 1

Main Themes Indicating Major Challenges Faced by Leadership at BCPs



Theme 1: Inadequate Leadership and disjointed Decision Making

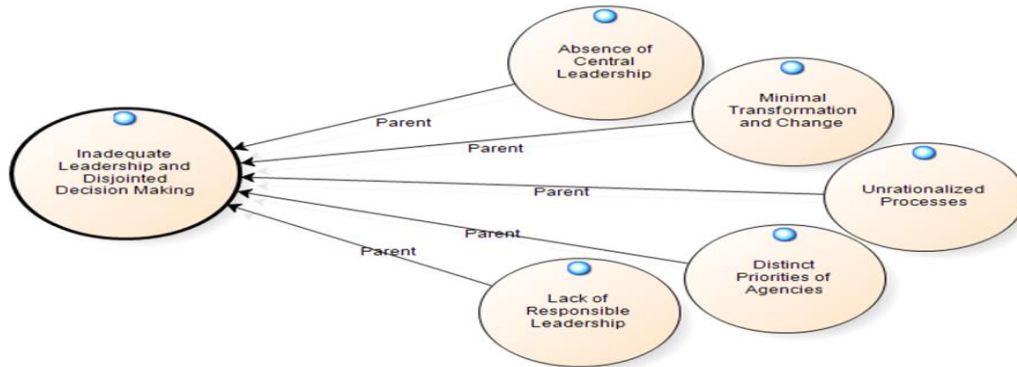
Based on the thematic analysis it was evident that inadequate leadership is one of the key issues that hinders the operational efficiency of the BCPs in Pakistan. All respondents advocated that there is an inadequate leadership structure and disjointed decision making, as no single authority is responsible having a leadership role for coordinating with other border agencies like Customs, Federal Investigation Authority (FIA), Law Enforcement, and so forth. This lack of centralized leadership framework is aiding in creation of silos where agencies are operating at their own without an integrated approach. The resultant severe inefficiencies, operational delays, and conflicting decision-making are causing major adverse impact on the overall performance of the ports and trade facilitation.

Respondent 5, 6, 7, 14, 21, and 24 further stressed that the absence of central leadership is contributing to operational inefficiencies and bottlenecks, as different border agencies follow their own priorities without a proper alignment with the other agencies. Unfortunately, these inefficiencies hinder the ability of the BCPs to rationalize the overall processes and respond accordingly to the increasing demands of cross-border trade especially in the context of CAREC and CPEC frameworks. The respondents argued that Responsible Leadership with the emphasis on transformation and change is urgently needed. As it would aid in the creation of a centralized structure that can focus on inter agency coordination, timely decision making and drive reforms. It was further stressed that without the presence of such leadership, the highly fragmented

operations at BCPs will continue to hinder the implementation of required improvements, hence, restraining Pakistan’s capacity to improve its regional trade competitiveness. Figure 2 depicts the node map of this theme.

Figure 2

Theme-1 – Node Tree (Inadequate Leadership and disjointed Decision Making)



Theme 2: Lack of Interagency Coordination

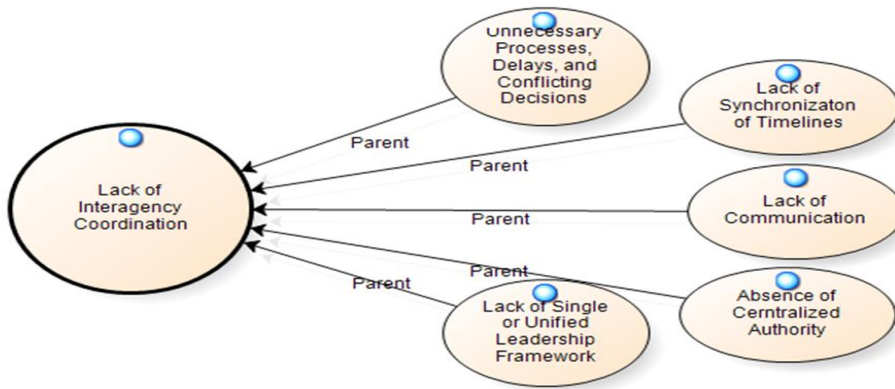
All respondents affirmed that effective interagency coordination was of great significance and that a lack of coordination created a number of challenges which negatively affected the efficiency of the border crossing points. Respondents 1, 3, 7, 11, 17, and 23 advocated that their hands-on experience and interactions with law enforcement personnel, customs officials, and private sector stakeholders such as exporters, importers, and clearing agents, have highlighted the necessity for better coordination among the agencies operating at the BCPs. Notably, this lack of coordination shoots from not having a single or unified leadership framework that can streamline the overall objectives, processes and priorities of all the concerned departments that are operating within the premises of the BCPs.

The respondents further argued that a centralized authority was needed that could provide not only leadership but also a communication or a coordination platform to improve the lack of harmonization that existed amongst the agencies at the BCPs. It is understandable that the agencies working on the BCPs have their own mandate and work independently. However, the agencies can easily have a coordinated and harmonized method of cargo clearance but mostly they are unable to reach consensus which results in unnecessary processes, delays in operations, and occasionally conflicting decisions. It was pointed out by respondents that the Customs and the immigration department could operate on similar timelines for cargo clearance, while plant and animal quarantine might have entirely different timelines. This lack of coordination and synchronization in processes and timelines affects the overall performance of the BCPs, which in turn negatively impacts trade facilitation as affirmed by all the respondents.

Respondent 1,2 ,3, 10, 25 advocated the need for a leadership driven reform to establish a modern, forward looking, trade facilitation oriented, and a joint coordination authority or a platform for improving communication, processes and operational alignment among the agencies at the BCPs. They all stressed that such an authority can improve and encourage teamwork through an agreed operational framework which would help in enhancing the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the BCPs and improving trade facilitation especially keeping in view the CAREC and CPEC trade frameworks. The node map of theme 2 has been presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Theme-2 – Node Tree (Lack of Interagency Coordination)



Theme 3: Operational Inefficiency and Inappropriate Allocation of Resources

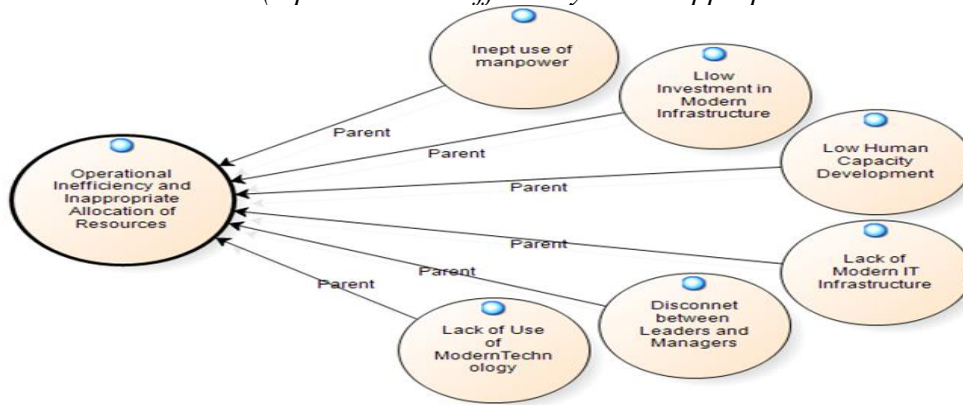
Based on the data collected through the interviews, all respondents affirmed that inappropriate allocation of resources was one of the major factors contributing to operational inefficiencies at the BCPs in Pakistan (Figure 4). It was highlighted that inept use of manpower, technology and low investment in modern infrastructure and human capacity development were severely contributing to BCPs being inefficient and ineffective to manage the growing demands of trade facilitation and operational management under the CAREC and CPEC frameworks. It was further argued that these inefficiencies contributed to higher trade costs, operational bottle necks and prolonged delays in processing export/import goods. Further, lack of modern IT infrastructure which was required by the agencies to operate on the border crossing points slowed down the operational flow as it required extra time for passenger and cargo clearance negatively impacting the port performance. Similarly, by not having skilled workforce increased the likelihood of procedural errors which again led to operational inefficiencies and wastage of additional resources on supervision, detection of errors, and correcting/redoing the erroneous outputs. Therefore, these inefficiencies not only disrupted trade flow and increased cost of doing business, but also impacted Pakistan’s competitiveness in the CAREC and CPEC.

Lastly, the respondents also affirmed that it was evident to observe a major disconnect between leadership and day to day managerial activities at the BCPs which clearly reflected the underlying issues of operational inefficiency and inappropriate allocation of resources. It was

suggested that capitalizing in leadership driven reforms, establishing a centralized authority, investing in modern technology, and human resource capacity building are key necessities for improving BCPs operational efficiency. And without addressing these critical resource allocation challenges the overall performance of the BCPs in Pakistan would remain unsatisfactory.

Figure 4

Theme-3 – Node Tree (Operational Inefficiency and Inappropriate Allocation of Resources)



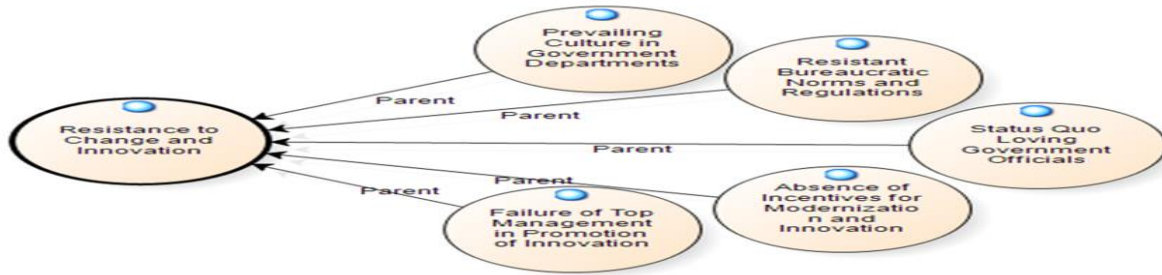
Theme 4: Resistance to Change and Innovation

Resistance to change and innovation was a critical factor in improving the performance of the BCPs, as stressed by all respondents. The resistance to change and innovation was particularly evident amongst the government officials in commerce, plant and animal quarantine and interior, where bureaucratic norms and regulations hampered the adoption of new technologies and operational reforms. Their reluctance to accept new technologies was attributed to the prevailing culture within these departments, which unfortunately offered minimal or no incentives for innovation or change. The node map, showing the ‘resistance to change’ theme along with its nodes/codes in Figure 5. Respondent 6,9,11,15,19 and 20 claimed that the absence of incentives for modernization and the avoidance of new technologies was the key reason for resistance to innovation and transformation among certain government agencies.

Furthermore, they attributed this issue to top management, which failed to promote and cultivate a culture of innovation and change. It was noteworthy that outdated methods and procedures continued to be employed in the context of security and clearance, albeit the availability of new technologies such as automated clearance systems and real-time data sharing platforms for trade and cargo. These advancements could significantly enhance trade facilitation and port efficiency, as indicated by respondents 1, 3, 5, 17, and 23.

Figure 5

Theme-4 – Node Tree (Resistance to Change and Innovation)

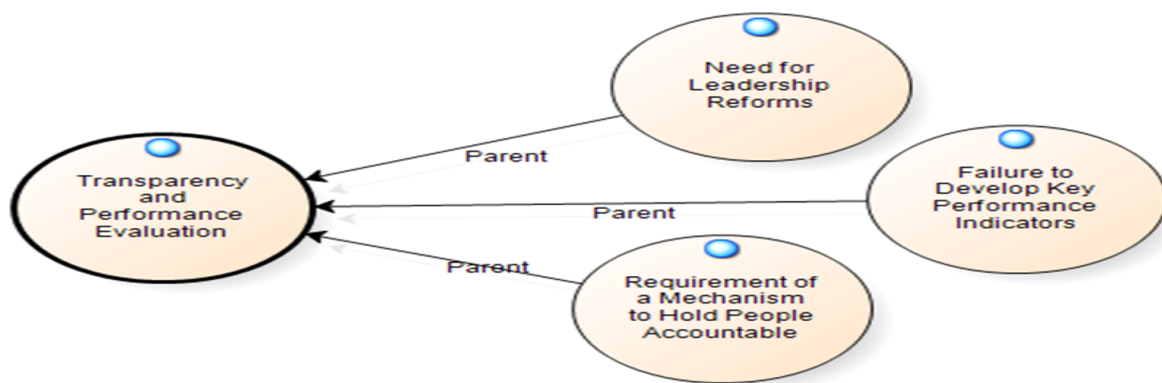


Theme 5: Transparency and Performance Evaluation

All respondents stressed that the lack of transparency and performance framework was a critical impediment to high operational efficiency of BCPs in Pakistan. They stressed that without a well-defined mechanism to hold people accountable for their actions or outcomes, the BCPs operations would remain ineffective and unresponsive to the needs of traders and stakeholders. It was affirmed by the respondents, that a lack of leadership or a central authority to oversee all the operations of BCPs contributed to the failure of developing key performance indicators (KPIs) that can accurately gauge and monitor the operations, as well as, staff outputs at the BCPs. Hence, the absence of land port key performance indicators regrettably made it challenging to assess how fit the port operations were running or resolve inconsistencies in managing trade flow or hold the concerned staff accountable for creating extra red tape or bottlenecks for seeking rent. In brief, all respondents had advocated the immediate need of leadership reforms to ensure establishment of accountability mechanisms and key performance measures. It was important to note that these reforms would not only improve overall transparency but would also allow the BCPs to align their long-term objectives with the international trade facilitation framework as cited by CAREC and CPEC. Figure 6 presents node map of this theme.

Figure 6

Theme-5 – Node Tree (Transparency and Performance Evaluation)



Theme 6: Deficiencies in Policies and Regulations

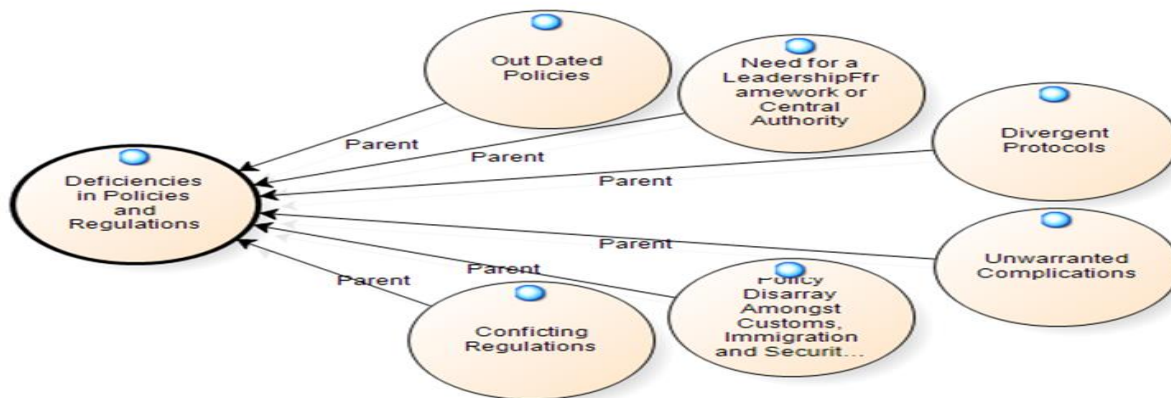
The thematic analysis clarified that policy and regulatory deficiencies was a significant factor impacting the operational effectiveness of BCPs in Pakistan. Respondent 1,2,4,7,8,15, and

22 highlighted that there were still a number of outdated policies and conflicting regulations being practiced by agencies operating at the BCPs which were contributing to the operational inefficiencies. These discrepancies and divergent protocols often led to serious procedural overlaps, confusions, bottlenecks and poor coordination. It was further asserted by respondent 7,19, 11, 12,13,17 and 22 that the deficits in policy and regulations led to unwarranted complication in trade facilitation which not only increased the trade costs but also increased the overall cargo clearance/dwell time. Other Respondents affirmed that policy disarray amongst customs, immigration, and security agencies aggravated the operational inefficiencies and the border crossing points reputation.

All respondents concurred that alignment of policies and regulations was the key for enhancing the performance of the BCPs. Notably, there was a dire need for a leadership framework or a central authority that could play a critical role in updating and modernizing the regulatory structures that were inline with the international best practices as guided by CAREC and CPEC framework. As these improvements would augment the border operations and enhance trade competitiveness of Pakistan by warranting a coherent regulatory and trade facilitation-oriented environment cross all border agencies. Figure 7 presents the node map of Theme-6.

Figure 7

Theme-6 – Node Tree (Deficiencies in Policies and Regulations)



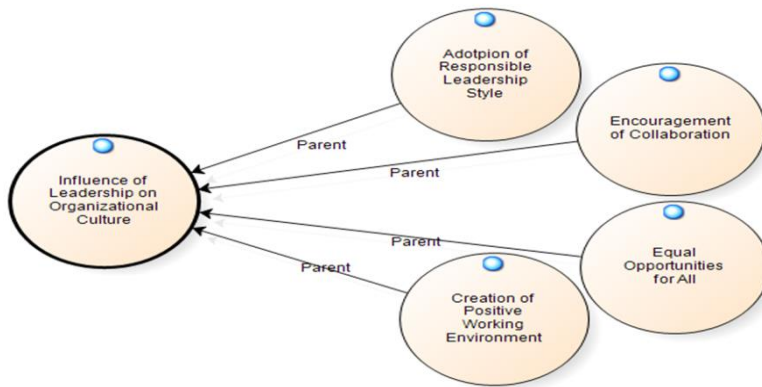
Theme 7: Influence of Leadership on Organizational Culture

Leadership played a very critical role in shaping the culture of an organization. All respondents emphasized that leadership had a strong and direct impact on innovation, collaboration and accountability in any BCP. They stressed that it was the leadership that either promoted or hindered the development of an organizational culture that encouraged collaborative or positive working environment. It was further argued that a leader must be responsible, visionary and should provide equal opportunities to his/her coworkers to perform and progress. With the absence of such basic leadership traits that failed to promote justice, innovation and collaboration it would miss the mark to improve the organizational growth and effectiveness, too the same applies to BCPs as it would hinder their operational efficiency. It was also echoed by all the respondents that indeed responsible leadership was of key significance, yet lack of accountability of leadership

worsened inefficiencies in any organization, as there was little motivation among people or senior management to promote organizational change. In brief all respondents agreed that leadership reforms were critical and that they must focus on fostering a culture of innovation and accountability as it would align the BCPs operations with trade facilitation framework of CAREC and CPEC (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Theme-7 – Node Tree (Influence of Leadership on Organizational Culture)



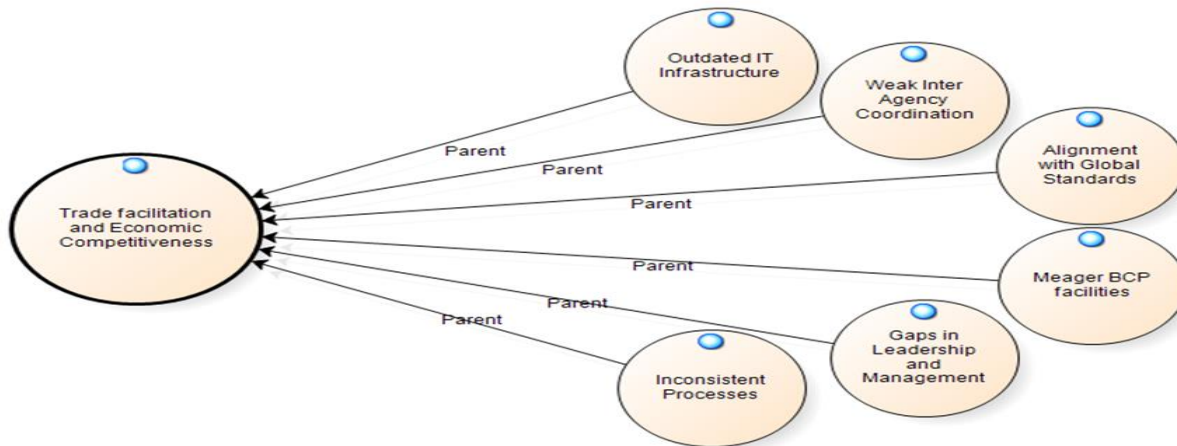
Theme 8: Trade facilitation and Economic Competitiveness

All respondents affirmed that inefficiencies like cargo delays, lack of interagency coordination, and higher costs of doing business at the BCPs significantly limited the potential of Pakistan to take full advantage of the CAREC and CPEC programs.

It was stressed that inconsistent processes, meager BCP facilities, outdated IT infrastructure, and weak interagency coordination were leading to increased dwell time which was ultimately increasing the costs of doing business for traders. This all had a massive negative impact on Pakistan as it made it lesser attractive regional trade hub compared to its neighbors. With all the efforts being made by Customs to improve port efficiency and ease of doing business other border agencies working in silos restricted the overall efforts of trade facilitation. In fact, all respondents advocated that it was highly critical and urgent to address leadership and management gaps through national reforms that could improve the operational efficiency, trade facilitation and lowering the cost of doing business. As it would help Pakistan to boost its economic competitiveness in the region. Lastly, it was important that the operation at BCPs must be aligned with the global trade facilitation standards so that Pakistan could fully capitalize its strategic position (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Theme-8 – Node Tree (Trade facilitation and Economic competitiveness)



CONCLUSION

The present study attempts to understand the leadership and management challenges at major BCPs in Pakistan in the context of CAREC and CPEC in the light of the Stakeholder Theory. The thematic analysis showcases that the lack of leadership, inconsistent and fragmented decision making and ineffective inter agency coordination are some of the major factors hindering the operations and efficiency of Pakistani BCPs. These key factors have a direct impact on the trade facilitation and economic competitiveness, making Pakistan less attractive as a regional trade hub. These factors have been identified by other studies also declaring them causing significant adverse effects on the competitiveness and efficiency of BCPs (Ali, 2024; Bhatti, 2024; Carter, Donahue & Williams, 2024).

The study highlights that responsible leadership plays a critical role improving operational efficiency, interagency coordination, implementing reforms and accountability at the BCPs. It recognizes that the lack of strong and responsible leadership is a major cause that leads to mismanagement of resources, resistance to change and innovation, and lack of transparency and performance slackness. Importantly, if these key factors of improvement are not addressed appropriately at the BCPs, Pakistani BCPs will continue to experience higher dwell time, delays in cargo clearance, port inefficiency and higher cost of doing business (Gul, Iqbal, Nosheen & Wohar, 2024). Eventually distancing Pakistan’s major border crossing points from main supply chain making them lesser attractive for businesses under the CAREC and CPEC trade framework (Hussain & Hussain, 2023). Steering further, the study also clarifies that the gaps in the exiting policy and regulatory framework BCPs require an immediate action for the establishment of a unified operational framework amongst the agencies operating at the BCPs, as such a framework will support Pakistan to successfully embed into regional and international trade networks. Hence, the present research advocates that leadership and management reforms are highly imperative for transforming the efficiency, trade facilitation and performance of border crossing points and firming Pakistan’s position in the regional and global economy.

Recommendations and practical implications

As stressed earlier the present study has proffered critical insights on leadership and management challenges at Pakistan's border crossing points. And suggested practical recommendations aimed at improving operational efficiency, trade facilitation and interagency coordination. It was evident that responsible leadership reforms or an establishment of a central authority that could play a critical leadership role was vital for enhancing the coordination amongst all the agencies operating at the BCPs. At present, different agencies operating at BCPs work in silos defined by their respective legal frameworks without any sense of urgency or an urge to enhance efficiency. Resultantly, duplication of procedures, lack of coordination, and conflict of interest lower the overall efficiency deterring the trader to other options for cargo traffic. This study recommends establishment of a dedicated trade facilitation authority to address the problems of land trade. This authority is suggested to have two-tiered governance structure; tier one for resolving issues at national level through relevant ministries; and tier two for overseeing the operations of agencies and resolving interagency coordination issues.

Similarly, promotion of responsible leadership could also improve transparency, improvement of dwell time, and accountability leading to enhanced collaboration amongst all the stakeholders. Responsible leadership is likely to address the issues which are viewed seriously by international community like environmental depletion caused by cargo traffic, pollution due to trade activities, economic and social inclusion of communities surrounding BCPs etc. A specific area where responsible leadership is likely to be more effective is the sensitivity to the obligations towards different stakeholders. At present, transparency and accountability at BCPs of Pakistani borders seems to be one of the biggest issues in trade facilitation posing a challenge for the leadership. With the increase in support across border agencies, policy harmonization, and meeting international standards would be observed more evidently which could surely improve the border land port procedural and operational efficiency.

Another likely area of responsible leadership intervention is the close harmony with the agencies and border management departments of the neighboring countries. The development of facilities compatible on both sides of the border without which the efficiency of land trade and cargo traffic handling cannot be raised to its optimal levels. With involvement of international agencies like World Customs Organization, World Trade Organization, CAREC, CPEC, and financial institutions like Asian Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, etc., documentational, procedural, legal, and institutional aspects may be harmonized. The standards laid down by regulatory agencies, both at local and international levels, need to be taken seriously for making BCPs in Pakistan competitive and attractive for international traders. In this regard, membership and reporting of the compliance data along with physical audit may be coordinated with relevant organizations.

In addition, focused investment in human capacity building and fostering a culture of change and innovation were critical factors for improving operational effectiveness of the BCPs. It was significant to ensure that the workforce at the BCPs acquired the skillset needed to effectively use modern equipment and technologies and adapt to new operational and business models. It was vital to improve transparency and accountability frameworks that could incorporate

clear key performance indicators to facilitate the ongoing monitoring processes. It was worth noting that these reforms had the potential to substantially improve Pakistan's trade competitiveness through the reduction of cost of doing business, improved cargo dwell time, and trade facilitation for more efficient trade flows. These changes driven by leadership coupled with regional and international policy alignment and ongoing capacity building would improve BCPs operations and could reinforce Pakistan's position in regional trade networks, specifically with the CAREC and CPEC framework.

This study contributes to the literature on land trade management at the BCPs from the perspective of leadership. Responsible leadership has been advocated by this study as a suitable leadership style because of the diversity and significance of stakeholders involved in bilateral and multilateral trade and its importance for the economy of the country. The analysis and evaluation of leadership at BCPs for enhancing land trade and resolving HR issues has been a weak link in trade facilitation research which has been addressed by this study. In addition, this study has endeavored to draw a linkage among inadequacy of leadership, lack of interagency coordination, and poor allocation of resources as root causes of delays in cargo clearance. Similarly, the study has also associated inefficiency at BCPs with resistance to change/innovation, inappropriate performance evaluation, and deficiencies in rules/regulations. The study highlights pivotal role of responsible leadership in creation of supportive organizational climate at BCPs to enhance their competitiveness as a focal contribution to the research on trade facilitation and cargo traffic management.

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