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EXAMINING PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOLS AND METHODS IN KAZAKHSTAN'S PUBLIC SECTOR

Sabit Mukhamejanuly
Narxoz University, 050035, Almaty, Zhandosova str., 55l, Republic of Kazakhstan
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7213-5965

Samazhan Y Umirzakov
Narxoz University, 050035, Almaty, Zhandosova str., 55l, Republic of Kazakhstan
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4019-878X

Mukhamejan Seksenbay
Kazakh National University of Water Management and Irrigation
080015, Taraz, Zhambyl Region, Republic of Kazakhstan.
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6977-9169

Raushan Kambar
Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan
010000 Abay Avenue, 33A, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan
ORCID ID: 0009-0008-6024-736X

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Abstract. *This article analyses the application of project management tools and methods in the public sector. The relevance of the chosen research topic was determined by the need to optimise public resource management to achieve major goals within clearly defined deadlines, which in international practice is often achieved through the implementation of project management, approval, and implementation of national and local projects. The aim of the study was to identify trends and challenges in the development of project management in government agencies of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyse the data. The implementation of national projects approved and implemented in Kazakhstan between 2021 and 2023, and the current state of national project management, were analysed. A survey of civil servants was also conducted, to determine their willingness to participate in project activities, knowledge of project tools and attitudes towards the organisation of project activities in Kazakhstan's government agencies. It was concluded that the*

current project management system in Kazakhstan's government agencies has some problems, including the underdevelopment of implementation tools and methods and the unwillingness of many civil servants to participate in project management.

Keywords: *Project management, project-based approach, national projects, project management in the public sector, project execution, project management tools, project readiness.*

Reikšminiai žodžiai: *Projektų valdymas, projektais pagrįstas požiūris, nacionaliniai projektai, projektų valdymas viešajame sektoriuje, projektų vykdymas, projektų valdymo įrankiai, projekto pasirengimas.*

1. Introduction

Project management, as a field of professional practice and academic research, has a long history. In the modern context, it is increasingly viewed as an effective tool for improving organisational performance. As Mir and Pinnigton (2014, p. 203) explain, a variety of project management methodologies and tools have been implemented by numerous organisations, leading to widespread recognition of project management as an important factor in achieving organisational benefits. This includes the ability to effectively operate within a limited budget, manage tight time frames, cope with outcome uncertainty and address issues related to human resources and organisational dynamics (Abbasi and Al-Mharmah, 2000, p. 104). Project management can be defined as the systematic application of knowledge, skills, tools, methods and frameworks to effectively complete project tasks and achieve established requirements and expected project results (Opalka, 2024, p.132). Pūlmanis (2014, p. 179) notes that project management tools and methods should be introduced in stages and considered mandatory when implementing large-scale projects in the public sector. The use of proven standards and modern management tools has had a positive impact on the overall success of project management (Sjekavica Klepoa and Radujković, 2019, p. 509), and the introduction of advanced approaches to project management has had a major impact on improving the efficiency of government agencies (Arnaboldi et al., 2004, p. 220).

However, despite positive experiences reported by international researchers, employees in public sector institutions in Kazakhstan lack in-depth knowledge of the application of project management tools and methods. Research by domestic authors shows that Kazakhstani civil servants lack project management knowledge and skills, as demonstrated in 2017 (Taizhanova, 2017, p. 50) and in subsequent studies (Issenova, 2023, p. 7). The underdevelopment of project management skills in government agencies is due to a combination of factors, including the lack of a unified project management system in government agencies, insufficient administrative support from management in the implementation of project management tools, and a limited understanding of the potential effects and benefits

associated with the use of project tools (Issenova, 2017, p. 70).

Therefore, the aim of this article is to identify trends and challenges in the development of project management in government agencies of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

2. Literature Review

Scientific literature on the use of the project approach in public administration can be divided into studies that reveal the general essence and benefits of using the project approach, those that examine the specific experiences and problems of implementing the project approach in public administration, and those that examine the details of using the project approach in a given country or context (in this case, in Kazakhstan's public sector).

In the scientific literature relating to the first group, the project approach is defined as an effective management mechanism that requires necessary changes to be implemented within established deadlines and within a limited budget, including investments, thereby positively affecting the organisation's effectiveness (Cleland, 1998, p. 27). A project is defined as a temporary activity carried out under limited deadlines and budgets, while simultaneously being a temporary structure for implementing these activities. Project management methodology comprises a set of methods, techniques, procedures, rules, templates and best practices in this field (Anantatmula, 2020, p. 3). Abbasi and Al-Mharmah (2000, p.105) point out that project management is the art and science of planning, designing and coordinating activities at all stages of the project life cycle. Project management is also defined as a systematic approach or process that includes planning, developing, scheduling, managing and controlling interrelated project activities to achieve predetermined objectives within a specified time frame, within a budget and of an established quality (Lewis, 2007, p. 40). Notably, the project approach can be applied in both the private and public sectors.

Scientific literature and publications relating to the second group examine issues and problems related to the implementation of project expenditure in the public (state) sector. For example, Crawford and Helm (2009) emphasise that introducing project management methodologies into state institutions increases transparency, responsibility and risk management. Stuckenbruck and Zomorrodian (1987, p. 169) stress that effectively implemented project management can address the natural needs of developing countries, enabling more efficient and economical ways to manage the increasing number of projects. At the same time, many authors highlight that the success of implementing a project-based approach is heavily dependent on the level of project management maturity, competence development and capacity for change (Aubry and Brunet, 2005, p. 109). Ideally, the application of project management methods in the public sector should improve the performance of government agencies in terms of planning, execution and control of projects, provided that project management tools are successfully implemented as part of the activities of government agencies (Miroshnichenko and Shpiro, 2019, p. 365). The growth of project

activities in the public sector generates an increasing demand for developing and enhancing competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) among public officials (Jałocha, 2014, p. 247). Knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of each instrument and technique is crucial for improving the overall efficiency of project work, especially when combined with relevant management processes (Andongndou et al. 2009, p. 39). In his research on the level of awareness among project managers regarding the utilisation of project management tools and technologies, Thamhain (1999, p. 74) found that just 28% of the suggested instruments are actually applied in practice, while the baseline awareness of managers regarding their usage stood at a mere 50%. Difficulties associated with adopting the project-based approach in public administration are frequently described as being due to the following reasons: uncertainty in defining the roles and responsibilities of project participants, ineffective communication between project team members and decision-makers, inadequate supply of precise and timely information needed for sound decision-making, lack of synergy in resource allocation across different projects, and restricted use of experience and lessons learned from prior projects (Janką and Kosieradzką, 2019, p. 149). Dildar et al. (2014) studied the limited adoption of project management tools and techniques and concluded that their effectiveness remains poorly understood. Many researchers concur that the limited application of project management tools and techniques in complex projects stems from the fact that these tools often do not align with the unique demands of such projects.

When considering the scientific literature and publications on the implementation of project management in Kazakhstan's public sector, it is necessary to consider the articles of such authors as Taizhanova (2017), Issenova (2017; 2023), Sembieva and Alikulova (2022) and Kuntuov (2024). The authors refer to the fact that in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the transition to project management began in 2020, the first national projects were approved in 2021 (when three new national projects were approved), local departmental projects are being implemented, the rules for the implementation of project management have been approved (Order of the Minister of Digital Development dated July 31, 2023 No. 301 / NK), the National Project Office (NPO) was created and project offices are located within government agencies. However, it is also noted that the lack of project management qualifications among civil servants and a lack of understanding among some managers of the essence and prospects of the project-based approach hinder the full implementation of the project-based approach in Kazakhstan's government agencies, although there is room for improvement in this area, including in the implementation of strategic projects and national projects for the development of industries and regions (Kuntuov, 2024, p. 604). The role of underdeveloped information support in this area is also noted, although this is important for the coordination and control of projects implemented by several government agencies and institutions (Issenova, 2023, p. 8). However, overall, there has been a lack of relevant research exploring the specifics and challenges of implementing project management in Kazakhstan. Few studies have evaluated project maturity and civil servants' readiness to apply project management tools in their work.

Materials and Methods

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse the project management tools and methods used in Kazakhstan's public sector.

First, regulatory acts and the current institutional framework for project management in Kazakhstan's public sector were examined.

Second, the specifics, results and implementation challenges of the first national projects, which were implemented between 2021 and 2023, were examined.

Third, a survey of civil servants was conducted to obtain information on project management practices in the public sector, the motivations for using project management tools, their advantages, and the existing challenges and barriers to adopting a project-based approach in Kazakhstan's public sector. This approach was chosen for its advantages: identifying the characteristics of a large group of people, cost-effectiveness and the speed of data collection (Luthans and Davis, 1982, p. 48). Questionnaires were completed in June and July 2025 via Google Forms. The questionnaire was sent to 39 civil servants, and 35 responses (n = 35) were obtained for the analysis. Table 1 presents the respondents' personal characteristics.

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents

Gender	No	%
Male	20	52
Female	19	48
Highest qualification		
BSc/HND	11	28.9
Master's degree	15	39.5
PhD	07	18.4
Professional qualification Specialist	02 05	5.4 13.2
Work experience (years)		
1-5	13	34.2
6-10	12	31.6
11-15	04	10.5
16-20	01	2.6
> 20 years	08	21.1

The questionnaire collected responses to questions such as:

Which project management tools and methods do you use in your work?

What are the perceived benefits of using project management tools and methods?

On a 5-point scale, to what extent has your organisation's work been optimised since

the implementation of project management?

Responses were broken down by gender, skill level and years of experience in the public sector. A correlation was established between the dependent and independent variables based on the results.

Results

The transition to project management in the Republic of Kazakhstan took place following the Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "Kazakhstan in the New Reality: Time for Action", which determined the cancellation of state programmes and their replacement with national projects that had a 5-year implementation period. Ten national projects came into force in 2021, with a further three subsequently adopted. However, the first nine projects were cancelled in 2023, due to a failure to achieve the set goals and the complex and inconsistent management of the projects, many of which were highly heterogeneous in size, number of participants and number of indicators (Kuntuov, 2024, p. 604). This is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Integration and financing of national projects that were put on hold

National project	Number of indicators and activities			Budget for 2023			
	In national projects	Integrated into the documents of the SGP	Discrepancy	Financing, billion tenge	Budget utilisation, billion tenge	Deviation, billion tenge	% of execution
Development of the agro-industrial complex	22 indicators, 77 events	21 indicators, 77 events	1 indicator	1,010.2	933.6	-76.8	92.4
High-quality and accessible healthcare for every citizen, 'Healthy Nation'	21 indicators, 73 events	21 indicators, 73 events	None	783.3	781.3	-1.9	99.8
Ulttyk rukhani zhangyru	21 indicators, 66 events	20 events, 65 indicators	1 indicator, 1 event	21.8	21.2	-0.5	97.5
Quality education, 'Educated Nation'	15 indicators, 26 events	15 indicators, 26 events, including 2 completed	None	183.2	183.2	0	100

Technological advancement through digitalisation	44 indicators, 224 events	42 indicators, 206 events, including 51 completed	2 indicators, 18 events	415.8	206.3	-209.5	49.6
Entrepreneur development for 2021–2025	30 indicators, 70 events	23 indicators, 63 events, including 15 completed	7 indicators, 7 events	1,620	1 357, 9	-262.1	83.8
Strong regions are the driver of the country's development	20 indicators, 94 events	18 indicators, 80 events, including 5 completed	2 indicators, 14 events	1,348.6	1,293.1	-55.4	95.9
Sustainable economic growth aimed at improving the well-being of Kazakhstanis	13 indicators, 56 events	11 indicators, 52 events, including 3 completed	2 indicators, 4 events	3,022.4	1,096.7	-1,925.7	36.3
Green Kazakhstan	19 indicators, 50 events	19 indicators, 50 events	None	157.6	55.3	-102.3	35.1
TOTAL	205 indicators, 736 events	190 indicators, 692 events, including 76 completed	15 indicators, 44 events	8,562.9	5,928.6	-2,634.3	69.2

Source: Supreme Audit Chamber of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023)

According to the Supreme Audit Chamber of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 8.6 trillion tenge (from all sources of funding) were allocated for the implementation of nine national projects (excluding the Safe Country national project) in 2023, of which 5.9 trillion tenge (69.2%) were spent, including funds from the republican budget: - 1.9 trillion tenge (31.2%), the local budget - 0.901 trillion tenge (15.2%), the National Fund - 0.57 trillion tenge (9.6%) and extra-budgetary funds - 2.6 trillion tenge (44%). Thus, considerable funds were planned to be attracted from extra-budgetary sources, specifically, more than 5.4 trillion tenge, of which 2.6 trillion tenge (48%) were actually attracted in 2023 (Supreme Audit Chamber of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). The report notes that the extent to which the objectives set in the national projects were being achieved raised serious questions. In particular, the socioeconomic impact of the national projects did not correspond to the planned indicators (Supreme Audit Chamber of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023).

Next, we present the results of the responses to the questionnaires, the composition of the questions and the sample for which were described above.

Table 3 shows the project management methods and tools used in government organisations.

Table 3. What tools and methods for project management do you use in your work, broken down

		Work breakdown structure	Critical path method	Project sensitivity analysis	PRINCE 2	Gantt chart	
Floor	Men	3	5	2	4	6	20
	Women	0	3	6	3	3	15
Total		3	8	8	7	9	35

Respondents were presented with several project management tools they could choose from in the questionnaire.

Table 4 shows the expected benefits of using project management methods and tools broken down by the respondents' level of education.

Table 4. Perceived benefits from the use of project management tools and techniques, broken down by level of education/qualifications

		Good resource management	Known progress of work	Defined goals and objectives	High quality	Better work organisation	Total
Education/ qualifications	Bachelor's degree	4	3	1	2	1	11
	Master's degree	7	4	2	0	0	13
	PhD	3	1	1	0	0	5
	Specialist	3	2	0	1	0	6
Total		17	10	4	3	1	35

Respondents indicated that they considered the appropriate use of project management tools and techniques would lead to greater project success, including by reducing costs and time overruns. Seventeen respondents believed this would enable effective resource management, while 10 believed it would provide a clear understanding of the workflow. The remaining respondents shared four specific goals and objectives, with three claiming that using project management tools improved their work quality, and one suggesting these tools improve work organisation.

Figure 1 shows a breakdown of employees' perceptions of labour optimisation in a government organisation after applying a project management approach.

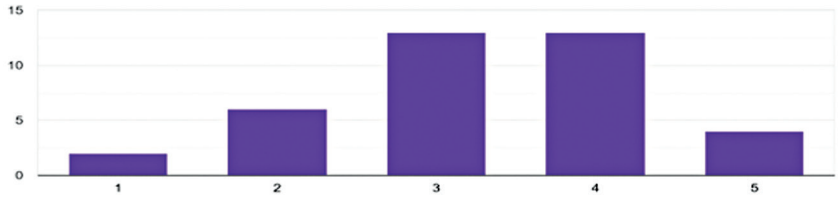

Figure 1. Responses to the question 'On a 5-point scale, rate the extent to which the institution's work has been optimised following the implementation of project management'

Thus, more than 78% of respondents said that their work was optimised to some degree.

Table 5 shows correlations between the dependent and independent variables.

Table 5. Correlations between dependent and independent variables

	What project management tools and methods do you use in your work?	On a 5-point scale, rate to what extent your institution's work has been optimised following the implementation of PM	On a 5-point scale, rate the reduction in bureaucratic procedures following the application of PM	On a 5-point scale, rate the reduction in the level of corruption following the application of PM	On a 5-point scale, rate your level of professional competence in the field of PM
What project management tools and methods do you use in your work?	1,000	0.317	-0.008	0.055	-0.034
On a 5-point scale, rate to what extent your institution's work has been optimised following the implementation of PM	0.317	1,000	0.636	0.596	0.526
On a 5-point scale, rate the reduction in bureaucratic procedures following the application of PM	-0.008	0.636	1,000	0.622	0.637

	What project management tools and methods do you use in your work?	On a 5-point scale, rate to what extent your institution's work has been optimised following the implementation of PM	On a 5-point scale, rate the reduction in bureaucratic procedures following the application of PM	On a 5-point scale, rate the reduction in the level of corruption following the application of PM	On a 5-point scale, rate your level of professional competence in the field of PM
Rate on a 5-point scale the reduction in the level of corruption following the application of PM	0.055	0.596	0.622	1,000	0.707
On a 5-point scale, rate your level of professional competence in the field of PM	-0.034	0.526	0.637	0.707	1,000

PM, project management

The reduction in bureaucratic procedures following the implementation of the project management approach correlates with the optimisation of work following the implementation of this approach. A coefficient of 0.636 indicates a strong positive correlation: the implementation of the project management approach, aimed at reducing bureaucratic barriers, contributed to a significant increase in the institution's performance. In practice, the optimisation of work increases most significantly with the reduction of bureaucracy, then with the degree of implementation of project management tools, and finally with the reduction in corrupt procedures; the contribution of competencies is significantly less when accounting for other factors.

Discussion

A key factor determining such outcomes was the lack of formalised and adequately functioning project management structures. A particularly critical factor was the lack of multi-stakeholder collaboration in the initial stages of the life cycle, when uncertainty in the distribution of functions and responsibilities among participants triggered a pronounced negative 'bullwhip effect', which had a long-term destructive impact on the implementation process, as Edkins et al. (2013) document in international practice. It was for this reason that the first 10 national projects were abandoned prematurely. Uncertainty in planning and implementation, as well as insufficient adaptation to changing economic conditions, were also observed in these national projects. Thus, despite a relatively high level of financial implementation and the achievement of most planned objectives, the overall results of the national projects remained unsatisfactory (7 out of 10 national projects demonstrated

low effectiveness) (Kuntuov, 2024, p. 604). The analysis also showed that the expected benefits from reducing bureaucracy, reducing corruption and improving the organisation of work were tangible due to the successful application of the project approach in the public sector and the clear flexibility and efficiency in achieving the goals and objectives of the project. This is also confirmed in the work of the author, where as a recommendation it is proposed to control the bureaucracy entrenched in all government structures, in all government projects, in order to prevent its inefficiency and unproductivity, as indicated by such authors asSembieva, L.M., and Alikulova, L.B. (2022, p.15).

Policy recommendations can be made to develop project management in Kazakhstan's public sector. Project offices should be developed in all government agencies, and civil servants should be trained in project management. The development of methodological guidelines for coordinating project implementation is also crucial. Unified software and instructions for its use should be introduced for the development, coordination and monitoring of project implementation. The Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan must also develop and approve a new, more detailed list of national projects that are focused, address specific objectives and facilitate easier monitoring.

A further area of research needed is an analysis of the practice and challenges of implementing a project-based approach in Kazakhstan's government agencies. This will require an exploration of the views of government agency leaders on the opportunities and challenges of applying the project-based approach, as well as the views of civil servants (including those implementing the approach) who either are involved or who may in the future be involved in project-based activities.

Conclusions

1. The Republic of Kazakhstan began transitioning to project management in 2020, and in 2021, an attempt was made to replace state programmes with national projects. However, the cumbersome nature of many of the initial national projects (a large number of participants, tasks and target indicators), as well as the generally underdeveloped project management system in government agencies, which was only just beginning to emerge at that time, prevented the initial projects from being implemented, and in 2023, they were cancelled. Three new projects had a narrower focus and are currently being implemented. However, a new network of national projects in critical areas of socioeconomic development has yet to be established.
2. Based on our survey of civil servants regarding their use of project management methods and tools, it was concluded that not all civil servants currently fully utilise project management tools, although some utilise them to a greater extent than others. Furthermore, only half of the respondents understood that project management helps manage resources effectively and ensures a consistent workflow. Few respondents highly valued the potential of projects to achieve goals and objectives,

improve work quality or enhance work organisation. Furthermore, a significant proportion of respondents rated their institution's work as 3 or 4 out of 5 for how it was optimised following the implementation of project management. However, many recognised that the use of project management tools can reduce bureaucracy, thereby increasing efficiency in government agencies. Despite this, it is still important to note that not all civil servants are fully prepared for, or have a positive attitude towards, project-based work in government agencies, a problem that reflects the limited maturity of project management in Kazakhstan's public sector.

3. Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions are drawn, and proposals are recommended. Firstly, de-bureaucratisation is the main driver of optimisation: less paperwork and fewer approvals are closely linked to the efficiency of work processes. Secondly, this is the depth of application of project management tools: not just their "availability", but their regularity and comprehensiveness: responsibility matrices, Gantt charts/SWOT analysis, etc. Thirdly, there are anti-corruption measures (e.g. transparency, digital traces), which provide an additional and tangible contribution to optimisation, and should be a mandatory requirement for project regulations. Fourthly, these are competencies that need to be targeted.

Data Availability Statement

The data used to support the findings of this research are available from the corresponding authors upon request.

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S. Mukhamejanuly, S. Y. Umirzakov, M. Seksenbay, R. Kambar

PROJEKTŲ VALDYMO ĮRANKIŲ IR METODŲ TYRIMAS KAZACHSTANO VIEŠAJAME SEKTORIUJE

Santrauka. *Šiame straipsnyje pateikiama projektų valdymo priemonių ir metodų taikymo viešajame sektoriuje analizė. Pasirinktos tyrimo temos aktualumą lemia poreikis įdiegti viešųjų išteklių valdymo optimizavimo metodus, siekiant pasiekti reikšmingus tikslus per aiškiai apibrėžtus terminus, o tai tarptautinėje praktikoje dažnai pasiekiama įgyvendinant projektų valdymą, tvirtinant ir įgyvendinant nacionalinius ir vietos projektus. Tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti projektų valdymo plėtros tendencijas ir iššūkius Kazachstano Respublikos vyriausybinėse įstaigose. Duomenų analizei buvo naudojami kokybiniai ir kiekybiniai metodai. Buvo analizuojamas 2021–2023 m. Kazachstane patvirtintų ir įgyvendintų nacionalinių projektų įgyvendinimas ir dabartinė nacionalinio projektų valdymo būklė. Taip pat buvo atlikta valstybės tarnautojų apklausa, atspindinti jų norą dalyvauti projektinėje veikloje, žinias apie projektinius įrankius ir požiūrį į projektinės veiklos organizavimą Kazachstano vyriausybinėse įstaigose. Padaryta išvada, kad dabartinė projektų valdymo sistema Kazachstano vyriausybinėse įstaigose turi problemų, be kita ko, dėl nepakankamai išvystytų įgyvendinimo priemonių ir metodų bei daugelio valstybės tarnautojų nenoro dalyvauti projektų valdyme.*

Sabit Mukhamejanuly, PhD candidate, Narxoz University. Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty
E-mail: sabitmukhamejanuly@gmail.com

Samazhan Y. Umirzakov, Doctor of Economics, Professor, Narxoz University, Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty.
E-mail: samazhan.umirzakov@narxoz.kz

Mukhamejan Seksenbay, Head of the Department of "Oil and Gas and Mining" Kazakh National University of Water Management and Irrigation Republic of Kazakhstan, Zhambyl Region, Taraz.
E-mail: seksenbay1961@gmail.com

Raushan Kambar, Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana.
E-mail: raukammm98@gmail.com

Sabit Mukhamejanuly, dr. (PhD), Narxoz universitetas, Almata, Kazachstano Respublika.
E. paštas: sabitmukhamejanuly@gmail.com
Samazhan Y. Umirzakov, Prof. ekonomikos mokslų daktaras, Narxoz universitetas, Almata, Kazachastano Respublika.
E. paštas: samazhan.umirzakov@narxoz.kz

Mukhamejan Seksenbay, Naftos ir dujų bei kasybos katedros vedėjas. Tarazo nacionalinis vandens ūkio ir drėkinimo universitetas. Žambylo sritis, Tarazas, Kazachstano Respublika.
E. paštas: seksenbay1961@gmail.com

Raushan Kambar, Viešojo administravimo akademija prie Kazachstano Prezidento, Astana, Kazachstano Respublika.
E. paštas: raukammm98@gmail.com

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