

# Critical barriers affecting stakeholder management in the construction industry

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## Abstract

Effective stakeholder management is essential in achieving stakeholder satisfaction and project success targets. This paper investigates critical barriers to stakeholder management in the construction industry of developing countries as part of a larger study aimed at developing a “Sustainable stakeholder management framework for construction projects in developing countries”. The present paper aim is necessary since construction projects have numerous stakeholders and involves several activities hence stakeholder management is vital for an enhanced project delivery. A literature review of selected articles on stakeholder management was validated using interviews of 6 project key stakeholders. The study confirmed five additional critical barriers relating to (1) project managers knowledge in stakeholder management (2) public procurement approach, (3) politicization of projects (4) project delays and (5) poor project planning and development. These findings may not be generalized due to limited research participants involved. Nonetheless, it serves as a useful basis for the larger dissertation and contributes to the body of knowledge by identifying critical barriers affecting stakeholder management in the developing nations’ construction industry for improved construction projects delivery. Considering and managing these critical barriers will ensure the achievement of project goals, stakeholder needs and satisfaction.

**Keywords:** construction industry, critical barriers, procurement, stakeholders, stakeholder management

## 1. Introduction

Governments in many developing countries undertake physical infrastructure projects as an intervention for socio-cultural and economic growth (Othman, 2013). These developments include educational, road, transport, health and housing projects. The achievement of cost, quality, time and stakeholder satisfaction targets is a measure of project success (PMI, 2013). This mainly depends on the construction industry and the key players involved in the realization of these objectives. According to Chinyio & Olomolaiye, (2010), the construction industry in the UK employs about 1.6 million. In Ghana, it employs 10% of the working population and contributes about 5-10% of the GDP of nations around the globe (Ofori, 2012). It is worth noting that there are several small and medium size enterprises, demand and supply chain organisations, and participants from different professional background involved raising a challenge in their management on a project.

Construction projects are temporary, unique in nature, scale and size. These projects are located in different geographical regions and involve a broad array of stakeholders whose interests and demands should be considered for project success (Olander &

Landin, 2005). Managing stakeholders is, therefore, an essential part of project management. Researchers have identified critical factors for project success. For instance, the critical success factors CSFs approach has been established over 20 years (Chan, *et al.*, 2004). According to Yang (2010), there are also CSFs that directly or indirectly can ensure stakeholder management success. Equally there are significant barriers and challenges which militate against construction projects successful stakeholder management.

The purpose of this study is to identify and investigate critical barriers to successful stakeholder management as part of a broader study to develop “sustainable stakeholder management framework for construction projects in developing countries”. This paper reviews stakeholder management literature from the institutions database, journals and validates findings by interviewing key stakeholders. This is achieved by answering the following questions:

- What is the level of understanding and consideration of stakeholders and stakeholder management by Project Managers?
- What are the procurement practices and the impact on stakeholder management?
- How is stakeholder management affected by project planning and development?

## **2. The construction Industry and Stakeholder Management**

### **2.1 The Construction Industry**

The construction industries of Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and Botswana were considered. Studies have revealed these countries as having cross-country labour force, some similarities and a reflection of many developing countries (Mwanaumo, 2012). Firstly, the construction industry is responsible for physical infrastructure development of a nation without which other socio-economic and socio-cultural activities cannot function and shelter for the very survival of the citizenry and especially the poor (Ofori, 2012). In addition, the construction industry contributes significantly to employment the economy (Chinyio & Olomolaiye, 2010). Global statistics indicates an estimated 7 - 10% of the global workforce as working in the construction industry (Mwanaumo, 2012; Murie, 2007; ILO, 2005). The construction sector is thus an area with many participants requiring efficient management.

Most sectors of the economy of developing nations like education, health, manufacturing, finance, housing and social welfare heavily depends on the construction industry for its performance and growth. According to UKCG (2009), “The construction sector is a driver of growth in other sectors due to its heavy reliance on an extended and varied supply chain”. The industry’s contribution towards GDP of developing nations cannot be underestimated. In Ghana, the construction industry contributes between 6-8.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (Ghana Statistical Service, 2007). It is pertinent to note the sector’s significant contribution towards economic growth and employment creation. This implies that challenges to the industry and poor project delivery will impact the economy negatively.

### **2.2 Challenges to the Construction Industry**

The construction industry is faced with several challenges. The industry is large, complex and geographically spread out due to project implementation throughout the

country. Areas such as building construction, civil engineering and specialised construction can be identified (Oyedele, 2013). In addition, it is diverse with many factors influencing its performance and prospects at many levels together making it difficult to manage stakeholders involved. There are adversarial relationships; inadequate involvement of suppliers, and a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises impacting on management of participants involved (Bower, 2003a: 9-11).

The industry is typically fragmented in terms of the roles of the participants as well as the distribution of the sizes of its component firms. Ofori (2012), states that among the industry's challenges are the governments' recognition and involvement in activities. In Africa, infrastructure development is a measure of the political achievement of a state (Oyedele, 2013). This has resulted in political interference in project development. The need for continuous action to improve the construction industry is necessitated by the diverse, disorganised and uncontrolled nature of the industry and participants (Oyedele, 2013). This has resulted in poor industry performance in developing countries in relation to achievement of project goals.

The Performance audit report of the Auditor-General on GET Fund funded infrastructural projects in Public Tertiary Institutions in Ghana (2012), identified planning and budgeting, managing project quality and schedule as key to enhanced project delivery. Likewise, the "GetFund outlook 2000-2009" identified poor planning and inadequate involvement of key stakeholders in project planning as a cause of project failure. In Nigeria, inability to forecast completion periods, improper planning and the resultant changes in project team participants are a major worry to the industry and hence project delivery. According to Fugar & Agyakwah-Baah (2010), many construction stakeholders in recent times are becoming increasingly concerned about construction projects duration because of increasing potential disputes and claims leading to arbitration are stakeholder issues. Ametepey *et al.* (2014) therefore suggest the re-examination of traditional project management approach.

According to Emuze (2011), in South Africa, the construction industry is characterised by fragmentation; adversarial relationships; inadequate involvement of suppliers, and a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises becoming a primary concern. Such similar industry challenges in the UK called for construction excellence. The Latham (1994) and Egan (1998) reports proposed a more stakeholder-centred approach to project delivery. In addition to stakeholder focus, there are concerns about the impact of procurement method and routes used by the developing countries regarding project delivery and industry growth. Love *et al.*, (2002) state that procurement is an organisational system that assigns specific responsibilities and authorities to people and organisations. As a result, it shapes the relationships between the different elements of construction in a project while establishing the contractual framework that determines the nature of relationships for the duration of stakeholders' interactions (Oyegoke *et al.*, 2009). Many researchers have focussed on the relationships between project procurement and cost but not project procurement and stakeholder management which this paper assesses.

### **2.3 Procurement Approach (PA) and the Construction Industry**

The construction industry cannot thrive without procurement since there is always demand and supply by the many fragmented units and project participants to achieve

project goals. Construction projects procurement has evolved over the period and entailed method, routes and strategies (OGC, 2009). It is worth noting that procurement route adopted determines the relationships, stakeholders involved and contractual framework which contributes to the project success (Ren *et al.*, 2012). The traditional, design and build, management, partnering and cost reimbursable contract (RICS 2004) are the principal methods employed.

The traditional method mainly separates design and construction with the client bearing the major risk (Newcombe, 1996). Stakeholders are involved at different stages and as and when they are needed. The different routes such as 'open' and 'selective tendering' adopted, has a relationship with stakeholders involved. The Traditional Procurement Approach TPA is the most widely used in developing nations. The Public Procurement Act, PPA Act 663 advocates the use of TPA though with its negative impact on stakeholder management. TPA equally remains the most popular used method in the UK, setting up weak formal legitimate power though declining in use (Newcombe, 1996). There is a remarkable increase in the desire for 'design and build' as compared to developing countries. According to Ren *et al.*, (2012) the primary concern in the Ghanaian construction industry under the TPA is the strained relations among project participants due to problems such as undue delays and over budget with parties focusing exclusively on their own interest without looking at the overall impact on the whole project. Research recommends collaborative and integrated working as the way forward in addressing the adversarial relationship and for the achievement of construction goals of excellence (Latham, 1994; Egan, 1998). This is achievable through enhanced stakeholder management. The procurement approach is necessary as defines relationships, determines participants, roles and responsibilities. Procurement approach constitutes an important decision of the project determined by the project owner.

## **2.4 Stakeholders**

According to PMI (2013), meeting stakeholder satisfaction and needs is a project success measure. Freeman (1984) defined stakeholders as "groups or individuals who can affect or are affected by the objectives of an organization. Stakeholders have vested interest in the success of a project and the environment within which the project operates (McElroy *et al.*, 2000). In addition stakeholders influence, or could be influenced by an organization, support or be antagonistic to an organisation (Necombe, 2003; Kolk & Pinkse, 2006). The most important is the full acceptance that stakeholders have a claim or interest in a project and its activities (Nguyen *et al.*, 2009).

Construction projects stakeholders' are classified as internal or external members of a project coalition (Calvert, 1995; Winch, 2002), project team or scope (Sutterfield *et al.* 2006) who are actively involved in the project, providing finance or are affected by the project in a significant way. Project stakeholders may be directly or indirectly participating in a project, considered as insiders or outsiders (Smith & Love, 2004; Newcombe, 2003) depending on their stake, interest and influence on or by the project outcome. They are primary or secondary stakeholders depending on whether they have a contract or not with the project owner. Key stakeholders are also referred as primary stakeholders. Researchers over the years have identified construction project stakeholders to include; client, project managers, site personnel, contractors, sub-contractors, local government, communities, media, professional bodies, members of parliament, politicians and political parties (Eyiah-Botwe, 2015). Olander & Landin

(2005), Ward & Chapman (2008), Chinyio & Akintoye (2008) and Yang (2010) have also mentioned client, project management team, consultant, design team, contractor, subcontractor, supplier, employees, local communities, funding bodies, government authorities as stakeholders. This research considers stakeholders as individuals or organizations that are actively involved in a project or whose interests affect or are affected by the outcome of the project. It is suggested that project success is not about achieving project targets of cost, time and quality only but satisfaction and efficient management of stakeholders (PMI, 2013).

## **2.5 Stakeholder Management**

Construction projects have numerous stakeholders with diverse occupational, professional backgrounds, different levels and types of interests in the project (Mok *et al.*, 2015). In addition stakeholders can be antagonistic or otherwise, can impact on a project in several ways; the outcome being either positive or negative hence must be managed (Newcombe, 2003; Nguyen *et al.* 2009). Meeting stakeholder satisfaction and effective stakeholder management is, therefore, a success criterion (Jepsen & Eskerod, 2008). This challenge in management is compounded when projects are mega in size resulting in (1) the involvement of numerous stakeholders, complex stakeholder interrelationships and conflicting interests; (2) the dynamics and growing capacity leading to high project uncertainty and (3) their governance, high public attention and controversies (Yeo, 1995). Iyer & Jha (2006) states that schedule performance of megaprojects could be significantly hindered due to conflict, indecisiveness and inadequate coordination of project stakeholders. Stakeholder management is thus a positive approach of bringing to surface concerns of stakeholders and developing robust relationships in complex environments (Bourne & Walker, 2005)

Stakeholder management entails a systematic approach to identifying, engaging, analyzing and monitoring stakeholders (Lock, 2007). Young (2006) suggests, identifying stakeholders, gathering information about stakeholders and analysing their influence. Yang (2010) develops a framework which considers a process of stakeholder identification, assessment, decision making, action and evaluation with continuous support after identifying 15 critical success factors for developed countries. There are challenges in the processes of identifying stakeholder and their needs, assessing stakeholder impacts and their relationships and formulating appropriate engagement strategies (Yang *et al.*, 2011). The objective of stakeholder management is to ensure a successful project delivery by considering stakeholder interests, needs, influence, and conflicts while enhancing stakeholders' contribution and roles. Cleland (1986) and Jergeas *et al.* (2000) stress the need for efficient management of the relationships between the project and its stakeholders. Researchers have identified tools for analyzing stakeholders' management to include Stakeholder Matrix (Chinyio & Olomolaiye, 2010; Newcombe, 1999), Stakeholder Circle Tool (Bourne, 2005) and Social Network Analysis (Bourne & Walker, 2006; Rowley, 1997) as necessary for sustainable project development in developed countries.

## **2.6 Critical Factors**

Every project with a set of parameters for measuring success has critical factors that impact on the project outcome. Saraph *et al.* (1989) viewed them as “those key areas of managerial planning and action that must be practiced in order to achieve effectiveness

Critical success factors (CSFs) for stakeholder management are activities, practices and considerations that directly or indirectly can ensure successful stakeholder management. Yang et al., (2010) have confirmed 15 CFS for developing countries and Hammad, (2013) 23 CFS for the Gaza strip construction industry. Equally critical barriers are factors militating against the achievement of successful stakeholder management and project set targets of cost, time and quality. While many studies have considered CSFs, no research has considered critical barrier factors (CBFs) to effective stakeholder management in developing countries. Yang, (2010) had these factors, found within management groups of: ‘Stakeholder Identification’, ‘Stakeholder Assessment’, ‘Decision Making’, ‘Action and Evaluation’ and ‘Continuous Support. It is worth noting that these activities become challenge and barriers to stakeholder management if not properly managed. These are also not peculiar to developing countries.

Similarly, El-Sawalhi and Hammad, (2015) identified challenges to stakeholder management in the Gaza strip construction industry as; hiring a project manager with high competency, transparent evaluation of alternative solution, ensuring effective communication between the project and its stakeholder. In addition, setting common goals and objectives for the project, exploring the stakeholders' needs and expectations were identified as challenges. Their impact is thus dependent on the active or otherwise management of the factors. This study aimed at identification and evaluation of factors and activities that hinders project managers’ effort hence constituting barriers. 10 factors based on literature were outlined and grouped as “Project Planning and Development”, Project Set Targets”, “Project Stakeholder Management Process”.

Table 1. Factors acting as Barrier to Effective Stakeholder Management Process

item	Group/Factor	Freeman 1984	Newcomb e	Chinyio Yang,	Amankwa a 2003	Ofori,	Oyedele et al	Othman,	Mok et	Eyiah- Botwe
	<b>Project Planning and Development</b>									
1	Project manager’s unfamiliarity with SM process			x			x	x		x
2	Project planning and control		x	x	x		x	x	x	x
3	Procurement approach		x	x	x	x	x			x
4	Political influence		x			x	x			
	<b>Project Set Targets</b>									
5	Project cost increase					x	x			x
6	Project scope changes and quality					x	x			x
7	Project delays					x	x			x
	<b>Stakeholder Management Process</b>									
8	Stakeholder identification	x	x	x	x				x	x
9	Stakeholder engagement	x	x	x	x				x	x
10	Stakeholder analysis and monitoring	x	x	x	x				x	x

### 3. Methodology

This study used a two-stage approach. Stage one considered an in-depth literature review of selected articles from databases and journals such as Science Direct, Emerald Insight, Elsevier, and Journal of Construction Management, Taylor and Francis

publications. Articles were filtered using a combination of keywords such as stakeholder, stakeholder management, construction stakeholder management. Emphasis was also on renowned authors with articles on stakeholder management and developing countries. Mok *et al.* (2015) and Yang, (2009) had used a similar method in previous research. Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and the Gaza Strip were considered for data.

Stage two involved evaluation of ten (10) factors identified from the literature reviewed (table 1) aimed at addressing the research questions and objectives. These are (1) “what are the critical barrier factors to stakeholder management”, (2) “are they peculiar to developing countries” and (3) “how do they impact on project stakeholder management”. A qualitative technique using a structured questionnaire was sent to six experienced industry practitioners (2 architects, 2 quantity surveyors and 2 project managers) who all act like project managers for an interview. A purposive sampling of industry professionals and key stakeholders were identified. The interviews were conducted face to face with an architect’s assistance who also recorded the responses of interviewees performed through the same set of questions. The interview lasted about an hour of half (average) with an interviewee. Interviewees’ responses (table 2) were analysed using coding and descriptive survey method.

#### 4. Findings and Analysis.

Table 2. Response by Interviewees on Critical Barrier Factors

item	Group/Factor	Source						score
		Int 1	Int 2	Int 3	Int 4	Int 5	Int 6	
	<b>Project Planning and Development</b>							
1	Project managers’ unfamiliarity with SM process	x	x		x	x	x	5
2	Project planning and control	x	x	x		x		4
3	Procurement approach	x	x	x	x	x	x	6
4	Political influence		x	x	x	x		4
	<b>Project Set Targets</b>							
5	Project cost increase		x	x		x		3
6	Project scope changes and quality	x	x				x	3
7	Project delays	x	x		x	x	x	5
	<b>Stakeholder Management Process</b>							
8	Stakeholder identification			x	x		x	3
9	Stakeholder engagement			x	x		x	3
10	Stakeholder analysis and monitoring	x					x	2

##### 4.1 Project managers’ PM knowledge on SM

Five interviewees ranked PMs’ poor knowledge as a major CBF for an effective SM. Interviewees agreed that SM practice cannot be enhanced except the PM understands, can implement and is ready to embrace it. An interviewee exclaimed “*How can one practice something he is not an expert in*”. The two architects interviewed agreed that though architects continue to be team leaders and act the role of project managers, without training and education lack of knowledge will continue to be a barrier. One project manager suggested that. “*Consultants’ should be made to submit their SM plan*”

*as part of project approval requirements*". On the impact on SM and project success, interviewees agreed that lack of knowledge affects project planning, results in delays, litigations and the entire stakeholder process.

## **4.2 Project planning and control**

Four interviewees agreed that project planning and control as considered in project development was a CBF to SM. On project manager asked, "*Do you appoint project manager at project post contract stage*"? Another interviewee suggested that "a PM should be appointed during feasibility stage since SM should be considered before designs are even prepared. One architect interviewed mentioned that change of project location and inability to sign off a phase changes a lot of stakeholders and their interest. "*How do you manage stakeholders you don't even know and their budget?*" was an interviewee's response to the late involvement of sponsors. On impact, it was noticed that new involvement of some key stakeholders among others affects stakeholder roles and negotiated stakeholders' interests. Since they are not part of the planning process, their engagement becomes difficult, always insisting on their interest.

## **4.3 Procurement approach**

All the six interviewees suggested that the traditional procurement approach is a CBF. These are because when projects are designed and managed without external involvement, it is easier to identify all stakeholders, agree on funding, address all interests and agree on project targets readily suggested one interviewee. Interviewees were of the opinion that the traditional approach to project development results in different stakeholders involved at various stages hence the difficulty in managing them. One project manager asked, "*Don't you realize that 'design and build' and 'partnering' has few stakeholder problems?*" This is because there can be several stakeholders but having worked together enhances project communication. On impact, late scope changes, identification of stakeholders and having several stakeholders working together for the first time militates against effective SM. It requires entirely new process and SM plan for every project. One quantity surveyor mentioned that... "*There are stakeholders you will never want to work with but meet them on a project because you don't have a choice in their selection*". Some stakeholders may not be identified at the initial stages while the procurement approach dictates project responsibilities and communication channels.

## **4.4 Political influence**

Four interviewees mentioned political influence as a critical barrier factor CBF. Respondents agreed that public infrastructure projects are a measure of political achievement hence key stakeholders of most projects are politicians than a public servant. District Secretaries, Coordinating Directors, Members of Parliament and Assembly Members are stakeholders who can be antagonistic or proponents. Another asked, "*How many projects stakeholders are found actively involved in a project after election year*"? Interviewees agreed that the most difficult stakeholders' are the politicians on a project whose interest will have to be satisfied at all cost. A project manager interviewed mentioned that there is also a frequent change of representatives with some merely dormant, unclear and uninterested in the project. On impact, an architect interviewed said that some stakeholders may not be qualified such as

contractors and suppliers but may be forced to manage them, in addition, the difficulty in determining scope and duration. One of the quantity surveyors mentioned that political stakeholders can misinform others and increase support base to rally against project decisions and other stakeholders' interest. "*The project can even be run by the politicians*" was the answer from another interviewee.

#### **4.5 Project set targets of cost, scope and quality changes**

Three interviewees mentioned project cost increase, scope and quality changes each as affecting stakeholder management. The respondents agreed that changes in these set targets frequently lead to increased duration which leads to changes in end users, and client representatives. One architect interviewed stated that some projects might have consultants even changed after long delays. Change in stakeholders leads to change in interest, roles and stakeholder attitude on the project. Though they militate against SM, their impact may be indirect.

#### **4.6 Project delays**

Five interviewees stated that project delays were a major CBF for stakeholder management. An interviewee mentioned that project delays were always associated with changes in scope and stakeholder representatives especially from the community and client organization. Different stakeholders always have different interest and level of impacts on project outcome. This requires a new approach to stakeholders monitoring. On impact, a quantity surveyor interviewed mentioned that it leads to strained relationship and misunderstandings when project cost increases due to variation and scope changes.

#### **4.7 Stakeholder Management (SM) process**

Three interviewees mainly the two quantity surveyors mentioned that stakeholder identification, engagement are critical barriers to the entire SM process. The architects interviewed were of a different opinion. One architect responded that "*if the whole project planning and development is properly done then the SM process is smooth*". The project managers agreed that stakeholder identification, analysis and monitoring could be critical barriers. However, they were also of the opinion that depending on the procurement approach, stakeholder management process can be very smooth. A PM further asked 'Why are these shopping mall projects running smoothly'? Is it not as a result of partnering, design and build? Interviewees, however, agreed that inadequate stakeholder identification, engagement and analysis affects SM process by having to reconsider and negotiating interest, roles and responsibilities.

### **5. Conclusion**

This study sought to identify critical barrier factors affecting stakeholder management SM process in developing countries, evaluate their impact on SM process as part of a broader study aimed at developing SM framework for construction projects in developing countries. Ten new factors were identified through literature review as possible critical barrier factors and evaluated by interviewing six experienced key stakeholders: architectural, quantity surveying and construction management background but are project managers. These project managers unfamiliarity with

stakeholder management, poor project planning and control, procurement approach adopted and political influence. In addition project cost increase, scope changes and quality project delays were found. Finally were project managers' ability to conduct stakeholder identification, engagement, analysis and monitoring. The study confirmed that five of the factors as peculiar to developing countries. These are (1) project managers' unfamiliarity with SM process (2) procurement approach adopted, (3) political influence on projects (4) project delays and (5) poor project planning and development. Though the other factors can be considered as barrier factors, they are not critical to stakeholder management only in development countries.

The study revealed that the absence of formal stakeholder management process is as a result of the unfamiliarity of the process by many project managers. The procurement approach determines the type of contract the project owner will have with stakeholders and the stage they are involved in the project. Poor project planning and development contributes to project delays and scope changes. Consequently, project stakeholders vary during the project implementation stage changing the stakeholder interest. Political influence impacts on project targets, planning and stakeholders involved. Stakeholders' allegiance is to political leaders rather than achievement of project goals. This paper contributes to the body of knowledge in the built environment by identifying critical barrier factors that impacts on construction stakeholder management in developing countries.

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