

Journal of Rural and Community Development

Stakeholder Engagement and Project Governance in Local Government: An Empirical Perspective of eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit, South Africa

Authors: Sibusisiwe Patience Thusi, Bongani Reginald Qwabe, & Oluwaseun Temitope Ojogiwa

Citation:

Thusi, S. P., Qwabe, B. R., & Ojogiwa, O. T. (2024). Stakeholder engagement and project governance in local government: An empirical perspective of eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit, South Africa. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 19(4), 45–61.

Publisher:

Rural Development Institute, Brandon University.

Editor:

Dr. Doug Ramsey

Open Access Policy:

This journal provides open access to all of its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge. Such access is associated with increased readership and increased citation of an author's work.



**BRANDON
UNIVERSITY**
Founded 1899



Stakeholder Engagement and Project Governance In Local Government: An Empirical Perspective Of eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit, South Africa

Sibusisiwe Patience Thusi
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, South Africa
214087912@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Bongani Reginald Qwabe
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, South Africa
qwabeb@ukzn.ac.za

Oluwaseun Temitope Ojogiwa
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, South Africa
obasa.oluwaseun@gmail.com

Abstract

Project governance is increasingly becoming a demand to sustain the delivery of projects. Specifically, it has become an essential tool, which requires the adoption of modern project methodologies and stakeholder-led strategy. However, due to the inherent difficulties and uncertainties that result from different socioeconomic perspectives in developing economies, its full functionalities are yet to be explored to determine the performance of government-sponsored infrastructure projects in local government. From a governance perspective and drawing from the stakeholder theory, this study investigated aspects of stakeholders' involvement and project management methodologies employed to deliver infrastructure projects in the KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa's eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit. The study employed a qualitative research design through semi-structured interviews with representatives from cross-echelon management including technicians, senior managers and engineers within the municipality's water and sanitation unit. Focus group discussions were also conducted with the community leaders and councillors. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study findings revealed the need for innovation and liberalism regarding the project management methodology in existence in the unit. It was, therefore, determined that the development and delivery of infrastructure projects are yet to prioritise the involvement of all stakeholders. From a governance and stakeholders' involvement perspective, this study recommends communication with stakeholders and monitoring and evaluation of projects to ensure the effective delivery of infrastructure projects for the eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit. This paper contributes new knowledge in project management, particularly in construction and infrastructure.

Keywords: Stakeholder engagement, project management, governance, service delivery, eThekweni Municipality

Engagement des parties prenantes et gouvernance de projet dans le gouvernement local : une perspective empirique de l'eau de la municipalité d'eThekwini et de son unité d'assainissement, en Afrique du Sud

Sibusisiwe Patience Thusi
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, South Africa
214087912@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Bongani Reginald Qwabe
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, South Africa
qwabeb@ukzn.ac.za

Oluwaseun Temitope Ojogiwa
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, South Africa
obasa.oluwaseun@gmail.com

Resumé

La gouvernance de projet devient de plus en plus une exigence pour pérenniser la réalisation des projets. Plus précisément, c'est devenu un outil essentiel nécessitant l'adoption de méthodologies de projet modernes et d'une stratégie menée par les parties prenantes. Cependant, en raison des difficultés et des incertitudes inhérentes aux différentes perspectives socio-économiques dans les économies en développement, toutes ses fonctionnalités doivent encore être explorées pour déterminer la performance des projets d'infrastructure parrainés par le gouvernement au sein des gouvernements locaux. Du point de vue de la gouvernance et en s'appuyant sur la théorie des parties prenantes, cette étude a examiné les aspects de l'implication des parties prenantes et les méthodologies de gestion de projet utilisées pour réaliser des projets d'infrastructure dans le KwaZulu-Natal, l'unité d'eau et d'assainissement de la municipalité d'eThekwini en Afrique du Sud. L'étude a utilisé une conception de recherche qualitative à travers des entretiens semi-structurés avec des représentants de tous les échelons de la direction, notamment des techniciens, des cadres supérieurs et des ingénieurs au sein de l'unité d'eau et d'assainissement de la municipalité. Des discussions de groupe ont également été menées avec les dirigeants et les conseillers communautaires. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide d'une analyse thématique. Les résultats de l'étude ont révélé la nécessité d'innovation et de libéralisme concernant la méthodologie de gestion de projet en vigueur dans l'unité. Il a donc été déterminé que le développement et la réalisation de projets d'infrastructure doivent encore donner la priorité à la participation de toutes les parties prenantes. Du point de vue de la gouvernance et de l'implication des parties prenantes, cette étude recommande la communication avec les parties prenantes ainsi que le suivi et l'évaluation des projets pour garantir la réalisation efficace des projets d'infrastructure pour l'unité d'eau et d'assainissement de la municipalité d'eThekwini. Cet article apporte de nouvelles connaissances en gestion de projet, en particulier dans la construction et les infrastructures.

Mots clés : engagement des parties prenantes, gestion de projet, gouvernance, prestation de services, municipalité d'eThekwini

1.0 Introduction

Adequate institutional frameworks should be built to permit clear linkages between municipal leadership and project teams as municipalities lay an increasing focus on project applications for initiatives involving the delivery of services and the implementation of policies. It is anticipated for these frameworks to improve project governance by strategically aligning projects, decentralizing decision-making, promptly distributing resources, and particularly involving external stakeholders (Van der Walddt, 2010). Local government structures are required to develop strategies for effective participation as the mainstream feature of the activities of local authorities (Murray et al., 2010). These authors further warn against ad-hoc, incremental, unbalanced, and uncoordinated public participation as just merely a ‘window dressing’ exercise rather than practising good project governance. However, participation can also create false hopes as participants have high expectations while government authorities are cagey about sharing power. This in turn can cause fatigue among participants, which can have a negative outcome, in that trust can be lost between government authorities and residents, and later result in protests, hindering the progress of the delivery of services (Marzouki et al., 2022). However, Murray et al. (2010) suggested that participatory initiative should be reserved for situations where participants could make a valued contribution and where resources are available to implement outcomes. From a project management perspective, there are guidelines to be followed regardless of the project specifications that are undertaken. Council officials, for example, must be aware of the existing structures so that they can communicate this in order to obtain more options available for participation.

EThekweni Municipality’s good governance plan ensures that people are constantly put first to create a clean and accountable administration, and mobilise the organisation for effectiveness (EThekweni Municipality, n.d.). Moreover, the plan focuses on how the municipality manages its knowledge, pilots new and innovative ways of service delivery, and promotes learning through building knowledge networks on the continent and beyond (EThekweni Municipality, n.d.). Meredith et al. (2017) also note that organisations face different needs and develop difficulties in the process of managing diverse projects as technology advances. To have an impact on the associated project management techniques, a thorough organisational assessment would be required, with an emphasis on the right governance and risk policies (Burns, 2021). From the foregoing and project management context, this study focused on project governance and stakeholders’ involvement in local government. This study aims to ascertain the obtainable project management governance practices employed by eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit to deliver water and sanitation infrastructure projects. By using the Water and Sanitation Unit of the eThekweni Municipality as a case study, the study advocates the adoption of innovation and collaborative engagement of key stakeholders in the delivery of Municipal projects.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Urban authorities are gradually held accountable because they are incapable of bringing quality services to poor communities (Sartorius & Sartorius, 2016). Adom and Simatele (2022) examine the structural barriers to public engagement in water governance across South Africa by gathering primary data from four provinces including Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Western Cape, and Free state. The study revealed

that despite the benefits of stakeholder engagements, which fosters public participation, there are frequently ideological conflicts and political propaganda. The findings from the study highlight barriers such as lack of community empowerment and capacity, and inconsistencies in stakeholders' roles and responsibilities as hinderances to successful achievement of an inclusive and practical method for involving stakeholders in local water management. Due to the rise in population and water demand in KwaZulu-Natal in general, and in the eThekweni Municipality in particular, there is a huge need for infrastructure development including water and sanitation-related facilities (Noble & Wright, 2013). However, the municipality has witnessed a series of violent protests related to service delivery failures (Masiya et al., 2019). These occurrences are signs of existing problems in the community's interactions with the government and neighbourhood municipality's actions. Hence, it is required for political leaders and municipal officials to better understand the aspects of managing implemented projects and the extent of the community's involvement in particular the eThekweni Municipality to promote good project governance and the sustainable development of the municipality. This is likely to significantly lessen existing tension and ensure the appropriate dispersal of local government and municipal benefits. According to Dawkins (2014), significant involvement from stakeholders is essential for every organisation, including local government initiatives, to appropriately disperse its benefits.

The lack of skills to succeed with technocratic approaches by local government personnel and reliance on top-down delivery methods with little involvement from the community hinders the success of projects and creates project backlogs (The World Bank, 2011). In some cases, municipal departments are under pressure to produce and deliver projects within a set time frame and budget, which forgoes the engagement of the public (Too & Weaver, 2014). As it is acknowledged that the community's perceptions affect the community's behaviour, a better understanding of stakeholders' impressions of local government communication is also crucial (Glaser & Denhardt, 2000). It is in this context that this study assessed the existing needs, based on the project management techniques used, in the Water and Sanitation Unit of the eThekweni Municipality and examined aspects of stakeholders' collaboration necessary to deliver water and sanitation infrastructure projects effectively.

3.0 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study is informed by the stakeholder theory.

3.1 Stakeholder Theory

The theoretical underpinning of stakeholder engagement is traceable to stakeholder theory, which was popularized by Professor Ed Freeman. According to Freeman et al. (2004), organisations are composed of a group of individuals known as stakeholders who are in charge of supplying the resources necessary for the organisation to succeed. They argue that the stakeholder theory mandates that managers consider stakeholders' interests regardless of the organisation's goals. Stakeholder theory contests the conventional new liberal viewpoint that notes the organisation's main duty is to take care of its stakeholders in accordance with their influence over the organisation. The stakeholder theory emphasises describing and forecasting how an organisation performs in light of the connections and influences present in its environment (Rowley, 1997). Additionally, Mellahi and Wood (2003)

contend that in accordance with the stakeholder approach, the organisation must consider the interests of all the groups in the community that it affects.

Godenhjelm and Johanson (2018) explain that projects can be viewed as remarkably well suited for the development of innovations, which are the major output of projects. They further suggest that projects can be viewed as temporary knowledge for organisations and as an effective tool for innovation, development, and change. However, innovation in governance and services tends to be imprecise and needs to be altered as far as relationships between the actors involved are concerned. From a project governance perspective, innovation requires an environment where both actors and institutional environments have knowledge of the benefits of project development (Godenhjelm & Johanson 2018). This signifies the need to analyse the nature and extent of stakeholder involvement in projects such as the delivery of infrastructure projects by the Water and Sanitation Unit of eThekweni Municipality and ensure the unit involves relevant stakeholders.

Moreover, public policy on service delivery, as defined in project governance, has become an essential tool requiring a number of stakeholders' involvement in project innovations. This involvement is aimed at overseeing the manner in which stakeholders interact with each other in policy and the service delivery administering process (Godenhjelm & Johanson, 2018). Biesenthal and Wilden (2014) add that it is not only human interaction among various stakeholders that is required in project governance, but also intellectual capacity, individual development, and their selection modes of doing, to contribute to the successful delivery of projects. This emphasises the presence of human and technical resources, which is the integration of different departments and units for successful project delivery including municipal projects. In addition, the project manager needs to establish relationships with each stakeholder that are customised to individual project interests. The project team needs to be proactive rather than reactive in dealing with stakeholders for the smooth flow of the project. Moreover, the project team needs to listen to the stakeholders' interests, needs, expectations and concerns. This will, consequently, create good relations and build trust and respect (Gido & Clements, 2017) in order to advance good governance at the project execution level.

3.2 Governance and Project Governance

The concepts of governance have been defined to refer to structures and processes that are designed to ensure (a) accountability, (b) transparency, (c) responsiveness, (d) rule of law, (e) stability, (f) equity and inclusiveness, (g) empowerment, and (h) broad-based participation. Furthermore, governance is associated with words like government, governing, and control. In this regard, governance offers an outline for ethical decision-making and managerial action within an organisation that is based on good governance principles and defined roles (Too & Weaver, 2014).

According to Van Der Waldt (2014), governance means working with and listening to citizens in order to manage the public's resources and respond to the needs and expectations of individuals, interest groups, and society as a whole. Globally, the absence of these factors has contributed to (a) political instability, (b) violence, (c) conflicts between senior management and councillors, (d) human resource management issues, (e) the emergence of extremist groups, and (f) declining citizens' trust in government (Van Der Walt, 2014).

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme defines good governance as the means of ensuring that the priorities of political, social, economic, and community members are determined. This happens on the basis of an agreement and in decision-making with a focus on formal and informal actors (Jamshidi & Safari, 2016). In this regard, the government must take full responsibility for ensuring that all parts of society and public institutions are involved in decision-making for transparency and accountability purposes. Such values are often allied with Western liberal democratic political institutions but are now progressively sought within existing national institutions in diverse political contexts (Biermann et al., 2014).

Associated with the notions of good governance, project governance is the use of systems, structures of authority, and processes to allocate resources and coordinate or control activity in a project. Project governance coexists within the corporate governance framework with the objective to support projects in achieving their organisational objectives (Joslin & Muller, 2015). Samset and Volden (2016) advance that project governance includes a regulatory framework to ensure adequate quality at entry, compliance with agreed objectives, management and resolution of issues that may arise during the project, and standards for quality review of key appraisal documents.

While there are similarities and interlinked definitions of project governance, Bekker (2014) suggests that there is no clear and commonly understood term that defines project governance. According to Ahola et al. (2014) project governance is defined as the framework that sets out the structure, resources, communication, and monitoring systems to manage a project consistent with an organisation's corporate or strategic vision. Equally, Too and Weaver (2014) confirm that project governance's focus is on assisting and ensuring that projects are effected to deliver maximum change to the organisation and promote accountability by an organisation. Moreover, these authors state that for organisations that manage more than one project there needs to be (a) control of varied specialist projects, (b) balance of the often conflicting requirements with limited resources, and (c) coordination of the project portfolio to achieve an optimum organisational outcome (Too & Weaver 2014).

The contextualisation of the project governance definition has led to categorisation according to various schools of thought. These categories are as follows:

- The first category focuses on analysing a single firm's governance scheme with its multiple projects. The single firm is the ultimate decision-making authority and has full control over policies, processes, and activities of projects.
- The second category considers multi-firm projects where various companies engage in contractual agreements. Each participating firm has its own vested interests in the project and the main focus of the governance structure is the protection of intellectual property.
- The third category considers projects as hybrid or network-like structures involving multiple interconnected actors relying on the presence of one supreme hierarchical authority, almost always the lead sponsor or underwriting firm (Bekker, 2014).

Bekker (2014) explains that even though approaches from the school of thought differ, it must be noted that they are not mutually exclusive. There are links and overlaps that are noted, especially in multi-firms and large capital. The single firm looks at internally conducted governance where projects are monitored and controlled, and this stage is categorised as technical. Multi-firm focuses on

maintaining contractual relationships, and it operates at both technical and strategic levels. Viewed from the stakeholder theory discussed earlier, the hybrid or network firm focuses on the inter-organisational and inter-governmental levels. This level promotes the involvement of stakeholders as important elements of any project, rather than project complexity (Bekker, 2014).

3.3 Projects and Project Management: A Local Governance Perspective

Traditionally, project management success is measured at project completion, and is primarily based on the delivery of output on time, cost, and functionality (Serrador & Turner, 2015). Previously, project success had been focused on tangible things, but lately, it is judged by stakeholders, especially the primary sponsors. With time, the focus changed and focused on the impact on customer and customer satisfaction. Lately, the success of projects is viewed and measured on goals, end-user benefits, and contractor benefits, which are said to be highly inter-correlated, implying that success is achieved when there are stakeholders involved (Serrador & Turner, 2015).

Community participation is a very crucial, effective, and efficient tool for cutting costs of addressing the government's huge demands for service against inadequate resources. Farmer et al. (2015) describe the lack of community participation, power dissonance, and governance as problematical and that where there is community participation there is (a) awareness, (b) improved self-efficacy, (c) learning of new skills, (d) implementation of new policies and (e) employment opportunities. From a local government context, the creation of appropriate and relevant community participation mechanisms, processes, and procedures is very vital as it ensures that communities are part of decision-making processes. Community participation removes the dependency syndrome and encourages communities to use their strengths in participating in service delivery matters. Ward committees and civil society organisations, for example, play a crucial role in making this possible. This is also vital in creating an effective, efficient, and accountable administration through stakeholder involvement in implemented service delivery projects (EThekwini Municipality, n.d.).

4.0 Methodology

Our study adopted a qualitative research design using eThekwini Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit as a case study. The qualitative research method is considered applicable because it has gained acceptance as a useful technique in the management and social sciences studies that have extended to focus on policy-related research (Srivasta & Thomson, 2009, p. 73). Qualitative research offers the necessary in-depth and exploratory mechanism to achieve a comprehensive picture of the process for understanding the processes or the how and why of a certain occurrence (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Study participants were purposely sampled based on their experience and knowledge of the research phenomenon. Key informants including councillors and community members from the organisation were invited to participate in the study. This is to gather their perceptions on stakeholders' engagement and their working relations with eThekwini Municipality and the demands from the adopted methodologies used by the organisation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 participants from cross-echelon management at the EThekwini Water and Sanitation including engineers, technicians, and senior managers within the selected organisation. Four focus groups discussions (FGD) were also conducted with the community representatives and

councillors in four wards—that is Wards 16, 17, 34, and 52—at the eThekweni Municipality. Data collected were analysed through the thematic data analysis technique.

Table 1. *Demographic of the Study’s Participants*

Data collection technique	Participants/Organisational roles	Numbers	Pseudonyms
Semi-structured interviews	Senior Officials	3	SOF1 - 3
	Administrators	3	ADM 1 - 3
	Technicians	4	TECN 1 - 4
	Engineers	4	EGN 1 - 4
Four FGD	Ward 16	5	WRD16
	Ward 17	5	WRD17
	Ward 34	5	WRD34
	Ward 52	5	WRD52

4.1 The Context of the Department of Ethekwini Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit

The Water and Sanitation Unit within the eThekweni Municipality is responsible for providing sanitation and water services to the greater eThekweni region in KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. The majority of users of the water services rendered by the department are largely rural communities and urban dwellers. From an infrastructural perspective, the mission of the unit is to ensure the provision of efficient, effective, affordable, and sustainable water and sanitation services to the people of eThekweni in a customer-friendly, effective, and efficient manner. Moreover, the unit has a vision, which is to provide quality and potable water and sanitation services to the citizens of eThekweni Municipality by 2030, as espoused by the National Development Plan, Vision 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. As a local government entity, eThekweni Water and Sanitation Unit must offer services including social infrastructure that respond to the requirements of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996. More specifically, Section 152 of the Constitution stresses that the objects of local government are: to ensure the provision of basic services including water and sanitation to all communities in a sustainable manner (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

5.0 Findings and Discussions

Based on the narratives of the key informants interviewed at eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit, the needs of the employed project management strategy by the municipal employees were assessed. Meredith et al.

(2017) highlight that organisations face different needs and developed difficulties in the process of managing diverse projects as technology advances.

5.1 Demands From the Existing Project Management Strategy

The study revealed that the unit does not have a specific project management methodology in place. Some managers pointed out that the projects they are engaged in are diverse in nature and require personnel with technical skills and commitment to do the work. One of the participants confirmed that: "I am eager to work and learn. Although, I would love to be trained more because this work requires some skills, which I am learning on the job." (ADM2)

In addition, it was revealed that the success of the project management methodologies employed has been supported by an existing collaboration between different teams of different departments. Furthermore, participants also cited certain needs attributed to factors such as supply chain management processes and environmental impact assessment application that takes up to six months, causing delays to projects' completion within a stated period of time. Moreover, it was observed that obtaining a water use licence, also takes time, resulting in delays.

Nevertheless, some participants highlighted that creativity and open-mindedness are important aspects of managing their projects.

5.2 Creativity and Innovation

The demand for creativity and innovation in government projects highlights its significance. Similarly, some of the municipal's officials observed that creativity and innovation have become a priority when describing the contributing factors to realising a successful project delivery. Nederhand and Klijn, (2019, p. 5) conceptualise innovation as the production of perceived new ways of achieving project outcomes, thereby fundamentally changing existing ways of organising or delivering (projects). One participant noted that: "We have to plan prior to implementing our infrastructure projects, hence the need for baseline surveys." (EGN1)

This revealed that the implementation of infrastructure projects is guided by the baseline surveys, which has the potential of attaining citizens' expectation and achieving set targets.

A participant confirmed that: "A person gets allocated to a project and specific timeframes within which to deliver a project. To deliver projects within defined timeframes creativity and innovation are encouraged." (EGN3)

This response corroborates with the view (Hassi, 2019; Zaman et al., 2020) that to ensure increased project success, project management organisations must benefit from the significant advantages of innovation-infused project management.

5.3 Open-Mindedness

The study participants revealed that open-mindedness is a skill that project managers must possess. It is admitted that projects are mismanaged in the absence of tolerance because some challenges would definitely abound and could be surmounted with tolerance that causes one to exploit opportunities in difficulties. It was noted that the absence of open-mindedness or tolerance results in the use of flawed processes and the application of flawed financial criteria for selecting projects (Wells, 2012). A

participant viewed that: “You have no other ways but to use the already existing project with little or no option for adjustment or to redesign your own criteria.” (TECN1)

Some participants’ responses, however, revealed that the enabling environment is yet to be absolutely created to embrace employees’ open-mindedness. For instance, a participant noted that: “Sometimes it is advisable to follow protocols to avoid any problems. It will be better when the feedback or discretion of the officials on the field is trusted and commended.” (TECN4)

The existence of employees’ open-mindedness could improve service delivery such as community projects as it nurtures the team’s flexibility (Karlsen & Berg, 2020). However, the study participants highlighted that there is a minimal chance given to the officials for them to exploit such options.

The presented data here developed from the FGDs held among the community representatives in the selected four wards. The FGD data is presented following the sequence of the themes and sub-themes discussed. The presentation of the FGD data follows the order in which the themes and sub-themes were explored.

5.4 Community Involvement and Their Working Relations With eThekwini Municipality

This study further explored the vital elements of stakeholders’ involvement and their working relations with eThekwini Municipality. Stakeholders’ involvement during the project implementation process promotes easy access to information and access to the area by project officials (Nederhand & Klijn, 2019). Thus, it assists in facilitating efficiency in the implementation of infrastructure projects. The study revealed that the involvement of various stakeholders during project implementation is critical.

5.5 Political Influence

Political leaders such as ward councillors have immense political influence over communities and the success of any project to be executed. Sartorius and Sartorius (2016) confirm that political pressure from opposition parties makes it impossible to obtain assistance from the central government, and consequent service delivery protests result in the allocation of resources being diverted to other projects. Regardless, such political interference could be evaded when councillors who have political influence are carried along. One of the participants in one of the wards noted that: “You need to make sure that you inform the Councillor, the Ward Councillor who will then inform his people that there will be a project in this particular ward and the nature of the project”. (WRD34)

Similarly, another participant from another ward shared that: “We must convince political office bearers how that project will be able to respond to the community’s social and economic issues that will create job opportunities.” (Ward52)

As depicted from the data, political influence plays a substantial role in achieving effective implementation of projects and ensuring all citizens’ satisfaction. According to Nederhand and Klijn (2019), involving stakeholders in projects should never be taken for granted. Irrefutably, stakeholder involvement is a crucial element in projects and project management (Farmer et al. 2015; EThekwini Municipality n.d.; Davis et al. 2010). Alotaibi and Mafimisebi, (2016) note that organisations involved in projects need to consider the stakeholders when executing projects. Notably, stakeholders have a vested interest in the projects and can, therefore,

determine whether such projects would be successful or not. Project stakeholder collaboration is a determining factor for project success. Too and Weaver (2014) remark that the underlying cause of project failure includes the fact that projects are handled in isolation, are not cohesively planned or managed, and are controlled separately.

5.6 Communication and Trust

Communication or awareness plays a major role in the delivery of services such as municipal infrastructure projects. Communities should be informed of all planned developments. One participant in one of the four wards remarked that: “I believe information and communication are the keys. I have realised that the more people become informed the more they get involved in projects.” (WRD16)

A participant from another ward shared that: “I think if people know what is happening in the entire project environment they will more likely accept, for instance, if there are delays in the project.” (WRD17)

This shows that mobilisation of project resources would be easier when awareness is created for community members to prevent protracted conflicts among key project associates. Communication and awareness creation is one of the critical essentials that need to co-exist with other project management aptitudes and associated activities for the delivery of a successful project (Khan et al., 2021; Alladi & Vadari, 2011). Data revealed that communication is an essential and enabling factor required to deliver successful projects. According to Too and Weaver (2014), lack of communication in projects is often prevalent and is the root cause of project failure.

Similarly, one participant from the wards shared the same sentiments as stated above: “we are now moving towards that environment of constantly engaging with all the stakeholders. When you engage with all the stakeholders more on social aspects it becomes easy to reach a collective decision.” (WRD52)

This consequently builds trust and promotes effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of projects. This is particularly suggested by the participants that noted that: “with communication, people feel like they are part of the team and tend to work better than if they feel isolated.” (SOF2)

Our study found that while the culture of communication is encouraged within eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit, it can be improved. More measures need to be introduced and applied in order to significantly enhance the culture of communication, which is one critical feature required to maintain good governance in projects. Kiiza and Basheka (2017) corroborate these findings by stressing the importance of having buy-in from communities residing in the project area. Furthermore, it was observed that globally, contrary to the stakeholder theory perspective, about 50% of water projects initiated by the government in most economies fail due to a lack of community involvement.

Therefore, analysing the current rules and practices could help with the establishment of project management governance solutions. For instance, to deliver sustainable projects, the Water and Sanitation Unit of the eThekweni Municipality has to increase the scope of stakeholder consultation. Stakeholder consultation is especially crucial to determine the necessary initiatives. Moreover, our study’s findings inferred the need to review internal processes as this impacts the delivery of a project in terms of time, budget and scope. The incorporation of stakeholders is imperative for the success of a project; hence, we have adopted the stakeholder

theory. The intensification of the monitoring and evaluation system, which seems to be silent in the study needs to be emphasised as it is needed for the effective delivery of projects' outcome. An improved monitoring and evaluation system would advance the delivery rate of infrastructure projects (Delmon, 2021).

A need to review policies and regular submission of formal reports on project progress is also highlighted as requiring urgent attention. Thus, our paper recommends that the unit reconsiders its current project management practices. Additionally, it provides future reference information on the importance of project management techniques in the context of local government development.

6.0 Conclusion and Implication for Application

With respect to the stakeholder theory that underscores describing and forecasting how an organisation performs in relation to the connections and influences present in its environment, the findings and analysis in this study reveal the need to promote project stakeholder engagement in the development and delivery of infrastructure projects. The eThekweni Municipality Water and Sanitation Unit needs to prioritise the participation of all stakeholders, including communities. Stakeholders' involvement will inform communities about infrastructure projects for water and sanitation that are being carried out in their wards. As a result, this would promote project governance including transparency and accountability.

Progressive organisations are becoming more and more conscious of how intertwined and complicated today's political and social challenges are, and they understand that they cannot solve these problems on their own. Stakeholder involvement is being used more and more as a tool to (a) explore problems, (b) pool talents and resources, (c) achieve agreements, and (d) create innovative solutions to difficult social problems. On the other hand, the organisation's practice of stakeholder engagement is greatly aided by the new paradigm of strategic communication. Strategic communication can be used in government settings where the traditional one-way communication strategy still predominates.

Recent studies have shown that policies and methods aimed at working closely with stakeholders stabilize the organisation's operations, largely due to their support. Hence, this study provided insights into the requirements for an effective project management strategy, particularly at the eThekweni Municipality. Our study revealed the vital elements of improving stakeholder's involvement to support project implementation processes. According to our study, the municipality should evolve from educating to consulting and from involving to collaborating and empowering.

6.1 Limitation of the Study

Our study offers valuable insights into facilitators of successful project management but focuses on a single department in the municipality in South Africa. Therefore, findings might not be generalisable to other departments, regions, or countries, especially where there are different governance structures and socioeconomic contexts. Moreover, the qualitative method employed relies on participants' perspectives which might also differ between respondents. Future studies could be longitudinal and focus on a specific project to assess the effectiveness of implemented changes.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the significant contributions of the late Dr Bongani Reginald Qwabe, who supervised the foundational aspects of this research. His passing is a profound loss to our community, and this work is a testament to his scholarly dedication.

References

- Adom, R. K., & Simatele, M. D. (2022, November). The role of stakeholder engagement in sustainable water resource management in South Africa. *Natural Resources Forum*, 46(4), 410–427. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1477-8947.12264>
- Ahola, T., Ruuska, I., Artto, K., & Kujala, J. (2014). What is project governance and what are its origins? *International Journal of Project Management*, 32(8), 1321–1332. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2013.09.005>
- Alladi, A., & Vadari, S. (2011, December). Systemic approach to project management: A stakeholders perspective for sustainability. In A. Negi, M. G. P. L. Narayana, N. V. Rao, M. L. Narayana, P. Vemuri, K. D. Rao, D. S. Sarma, A. Kumar & H. Devarapalli (Eds.), *Proceedings: 2011 Annual IEEE India Conference* (pp.1–4). Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. <https://doi.org/10.1109/INDCON.2011.6139635>
- Alotaibi, A. B., & Mafimisebi, O. P. (2016). Project management practice: Redefining theoretical challenges in the 21st century. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 7(1), 93–99.
- Bekker, M. C. (2014). Project governance: "Schools of thought". *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 17(1), 22–32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.37497/esg.v6i1.1591>
- Biesenthal, C., & Wilden, R. (2014). Multi-level project governance: Trends and opportunities. *International Journal of Project Management*, 32(8), 1291–1308. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2014.06.005>
- Biermann, F., Stevens, C., Bernstein, S., Gupta, A., Kabiri, N., Kanie, N., Levy, M., Nilsson, M., Pintér L., Scobie, M., & Young O. R. (2014). *Integrating governance into the sustainable development goals*. Post2015/ UNU-IAS Policy Brief #3. United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, Tokyo.
- Burns, D. (2021, May 14). *Organizational change and project management: A review of existing project management methodologies and the organizational impact for teams on an agile journey* (Derek Burns Seminar Research Paper). University of Wisconsin-Platteville.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Davis, J., MacDonald, A., & White, L. (2010). Problem-structuring methods and project management: An example of stakeholder involvement using Hierarchical Process Modelling methodology. *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, 61(6), 893–904. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jors.2010.12>
- Dawkins, C. E. (2014). The principle of good faith: Toward substantive stakeholder engagement. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 121, 283–295. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1697-z>

- Delmon, J. (2021). *Private sector investment in infrastructure: Project finance, PPP projects and PPP frameworks*. The Netherlands: Kluwer Law International BV.
- EThekweni Municipality, (n.d.). *Integrated Development Plan, Durban: eThekweni Municipality*.
<https://www.durban.gov.za/pages/government/documents?d=Integrated%20Development%20Plans%20IDP%20-%20eThekweni%20Municipality>
- Farmer, J., Currie, M., Kenny, A., & Munoz, S.-A. (2015). An exploration of the longer-term impacts of community participation in rural health services design. *Social Science & Medicine*, 141, 64–71.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.07.021>
- Freeman, R. E., Wicks, A. C., & Parmar, B. (2004). Stakeholder theory and “the corporate objective revisited”. *Organization Science*, 15(3), 259–374.
<https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1040.0066>
- Gido, J., Clements, J., & Baker, R. (2017). *Successful project management*. 7th ed. U.S.A: Cengage Learning.
- Glaser, M. A., & Denhardt, R. B. (2000). Local government performance through the eyes of citizens. *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting & Financial Management*, 12(1), 49–73. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBAFM-12-01-2000-B003>
- Godenhjelm, S., & Johanson, J.-E. (2018). The effect of stakeholder inclusion on public sector project innovation. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 84(1), 42–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852315620291>
- Hassi, A. (2019). Empowering leadership and management innovation in the hospitality industry context: The mediating role of climate for creativity. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 31(4), 1785–1800. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-01-2018-0003>
- Jamshidi, M. H., & Safari, M. (2016). Principles of good governance in the “Charter of Malik Al-Ashtar” (Comparative analysis of good governance indicators of the World Bank and the mundane aspects of Alavi governance in the Charter of Malik Al-Ashtar). *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 639–59.
- Joslin, R., & Müller, R. (2015). Relationships between a project management methodology and project success in different project governance contexts. *International Journal of Project Management*, 33(6), 1377–1392.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2015.03.005>
- Karlsen, J. T., & Berg, M. E. (2020). A study of the influence of project managers’ signature strengths on project team resilience. *Team Performance Management*, 26(3/4), 247–262. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TPM-12-2018-0081>
- Khan, A., Waris, M., Panigrahi, S., Sajid, M. R., & Rana, F. (2021). Improving the performance of public sector infrastructure projects: Role of project governance and stakeholder management. *Journal of Management in Engineering*, 37(2), 1–21. [https://doi.org/10.1061/\(ASCE\)ME.1943-5479.0000886](https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)ME.1943-5479.0000886)

- Kiiza, M., & Basheka, B. C. (2017). Community participation and sustainability of rural deep underground water projects in Uganda: Empirical findings from Kkingo Sub-County, Lwengo District. *International Journal of Technology and Management*, 2(1), 1–17.
- Marzouki, A., Mellouli, S., & Daniel, S. (2022). Understanding issues with stakeholders participation processes: A conceptual model of SPPs' dimensions of issues. *Government Information Quarterly*, 39(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2022.101668>
- Masiya, T., Davids, Y. D., & Mangai, M. S. (2019). Assessing service delivery: Public perception of municipal service delivery in South Africa. *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management*, 14(2), 20–40.
- Mellahi, K., & Wood, G. (2003). The role and potential of stakeholders in “hollow participation”: Conventional stakeholder theory and institutionalist alternatives. *Business & Society Review*, 108(2), 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8594.00160>
- Meredith, J. R., Shafer, S. M., & Mantel Jr, S. J. (2017). *Project management: a strategic managerial approach*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Murray, J., Tshabangu, B., & Erlank, N. (2010). Enhancing participatory governance and fostering active citizenship: An overview of local and international best practices. *Politikon*, 37(1), 45–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2010.492149>
- Nederhand, J., & Klijn, E. H. (2019). Stakeholder involvement in public–private partnerships: Its influence on the innovative character of projects and on project performance. *Administration & Society*, 51(8), 1200–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399716684887>
- Noble, M., & Wright, G. (2013). Using indicators of multiple deprivation to demonstrate the spatial legacy of apartheid in South Africa. *Social Indicators Research*, 112, 187–201. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0047-3>
- Republic of South Africa. (1996). *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printer. <https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/images/a108-96.pdf>
- Rowley, T. J. (1997). Moving beyond dyadic ties: A network theory of stakeholder influences. *Academy of management Review*, 22(4), 887–910. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1997.9711022107>
- Samset, K., & Volden, G. H. (2016). Front-end definition of projects: Ten paradoxes and some reflections regarding project management and project governance. *International Journal of Project Management*, 34(2), 297–313. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2015.01.014>
- Sartorius, K., & Sartorius, B. (2016). Service delivery inequality in South African municipal areas: A new way to account for inter-jurisdictional differences. *Urban Studies*, 53(15), 3336–3355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015613001>
- Serrador, P., & Turner, R. (2015). The relationship between project success and project efficiency. *Project Management Journal*, 46(1), 30–39. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.011>

- Srivasta, A & Thomson, S. B. (2009). Framework analysis: A qualitative methodology for applied policy research. *Journal of Administration and Governance*, 4(2), 72–79. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2760705>
- Too, E. G., & Weaver, P. (2014). The management of project management: A conceptual framework for project governance. *International journal of project management*, 32(8), 1382–1394. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2013.07.006>
- van der Waldt, G. (2010). Project governance: A municipal leadership challenge. *Politikon*, 37(2–3), 251–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2010.522337>
- Van Der Walt, G. (2014). *Municipal Management: Serving the people..* 2nd ed. Claremont: Juta.
- Wells, H. (2012). How effective are project management methodologies? An explorative evaluation of their benefits in practice. *Project Management Journal*, 43(6), 43–58. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pmj.21302>
- Zaman, U., Nawaz, S., & Nadeem, R. D. (2020). Navigating innovation success through projects. Role of CEO transformational leadership, project management best practices, and project management technology quotient. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 6(4), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/joitmc6040168>