
Internal Stakeholder Management in ZESCO Distribution Projects

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Abstract. The study reported in this paper investigated internal stakeholder management in ZESCO distribution projects, recognizing the influence of stakeholders on both project performance and success. The objectives of the study were to: find out factors that influence stakeholder management on ZESCO distribution projects; establish the degree of influence of stakeholder engagement on the performance of ZESCO distribution projects; determine the impact of stakeholder mapping on the performance of ZESCO distribution projects; and describe the relationship between stakeholder management and the performance of ZESCO distribution projects. The objectives were achieved by employing a mixed method research approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study sample encompassed ZESCO employees engaged in various distribution projects, and data was gathered through interviews and questionnaires. The findings underscored the critical role of effective stakeholder mapping, engagement and management in the success of ZESCO distribution projects. It was established that addressing internal stakeholders' concerns and proper engagement positively influences project performance. Additionally, it was established that engaging internal stakeholders at various project stages improves project delivery. The findings also indicated that internal stakeholder mapping is valuable for project duration, cost management, environmental considerations, and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Internal stakeholder management, ZESCO distribution projects, Project performance

Introduction

Energy's significance for both societal progress and economic growth is evident, serving as a linchpin for various sectors, from fundamental industries like agriculture and mining to more modern domains such as manufacturing and information technology (Bergasse & Paczyski, 2013). This context is crucial for understanding the emphasis placed on enhancing electricity generation, transmission, distribution systems and diversifying energy sources within Zambia's Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2022). The current landscape of globalization has spurred an upsurge in Zambia's energy demand, driven by both productivity needs and recreational activities (Batidzirai, Moyo, & Kapembwa, 2018). According to the energy sector report 2022, the national energy consumption rose by 12% from 11,481MWh in 2020 to 12,831 in 2021 (ERB, 2022). To address this escalating demand, ZESCO Limited, the state-owned utility responsible for electricity generation, transmission, distribution, and supply, is implementing various projects (ZESCO, 2022). These projects require effective management of both internal stakeholders, such as ZESCO employees with vested interests, and an array of external stakeholders, including but not limited to the government, independent power producers, and local communities (ITA, 2022). Research by (Ngetich & Gakuu, 2019) underscores the pivotal role of stakeholder perspectives and actions in influencing project outcomes. They advocate for comprehensive stakeholder evaluation before project initiation, recognizing the profound impact this practice has on project success.

Stakeholder management, particularly in the realm of electricity distribution projects, is a relatively new discipline compared to other sectors like environmental management and urban development (Mok & Yang, 2015). Neglecting to comprehend stakeholder needs, expectations, and potential conflict areas, coupled with an inadequate understanding of stakeholder management can adversely affect projects with numerous stakeholders (Zarewa, 2019). For instance, disputes over compensation have led to project delays. It is essential to underscore that the success of distribution projects is heavily reliant on the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement, which profoundly influences the achievement of strategic goals (Liu & Wilkinson, 2016).

The importance of stakeholder management is magnified as project complexity increases. Complex projects can be characterized by uncertainties arising from emerging technologies and the involvement of various types of stakeholders and their interests (Rankinen & Lakkala, 2022). Power distribution projects by ZESCO are an example of such an undertaking. This paper is focused on internal stakeholder management in ZESCO distribution projects.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, Zambia's energy consumption has expanded mainly due to mining, industrial, agricultural and other sectors rapid expansion. According to the energy sector report 2022, the national energy consumption rose by 12% from 11,481MWh in 2020 to 12,831 in 2021(ERB, 2022). Although ZESCO is a major energy supplier to its SADC neighbours, it has struggled to expand access to electricity due to various factors which include lack of national grid coverage, particularly in rural regions (Muchiya, 2022). Additionally, Zambia's access to power has been limited by outdated transformers and Medium Voltage (MV) feeder lines (USAID, 2018). Evidence from the 2015 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey (LCMS) indicates that 31.2% of Zambian homes are connected to the national grid with the vast majority (96.3%) of rural dwellers not accessing electricity whereas 67.7% urban dwellers have access (ZamStats, 2016). Technically this demonstrates the demand for having projects to address the identified problems in the energy sector.

According to the Environmental Sustainability Department (ESD), project stakeholders have negatively been affected by project implementation as a result of social distress raised by affected communities through pleas from village chiefs and municipal representatives (ZESCO, 2016). On the other hand, stakeholders have also impacted projects negatively. For example, on projects where there has been compensation, conflicts have arisen between implementing teams and the stakeholders being compensated leading to delays in project execution (Jones, 2021). Literature also shows that stakeholders have significant influence not only on the success of projects but primarily on the performance of the projects (Ngetich & Gakuu, 2019). However, there is a lack of comprehensive information in the Zambian context regarding the effects of internal stakeholder management on ZESCO distribution projects. Hence, this study aimed to investigate the influence of internal stakeholder management on the performance of ZESCO distribution projects.

Methodology

The research design employed for this study was exploratory sequential which is a mixed method approach. It started with qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by quantitative data collection and analysis. This research design allowed the development of preliminary insights and understanding of pertinent variables through key informant interviews. The study took place within ZESCO Ltd's Directorate of Planning and Projects with a sample size of 37 participants made up of personnel from the following departments:

projects; Environment Sustainability Department (ESD); planning; geomatics; and system studies. The sampling technique that was used in this study is total population numeration. The data collection methods that were employed are semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire survey. The data analysis was done using SPSS and Excel to process both qualitative and quantitative data. Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation were applied to survey responses, helping to organize and interpret the data effectively. This mixed-methods approach and the combination of qualitative and quantitative data was aimed at enhancing the study's validity and reliability.

Data Analysis

The findings and analysis of the data from the interviews as well as questionnaire survey are presented in this section.

Interview Data and Analysis

The chosen approach utilized structured interviews, which were selected as the primary means of data collection and getting insights into the perspectives and experiences of professionals involved in ZESCO distribution projects. The sample size for the interviewees was ten respondents who were purposively sampled based on their expertise and experience.

Training received in project management

The findings of the research indicate that nine respondents had received training in project management while one respondent had not received it as shown in Figure 1 below.

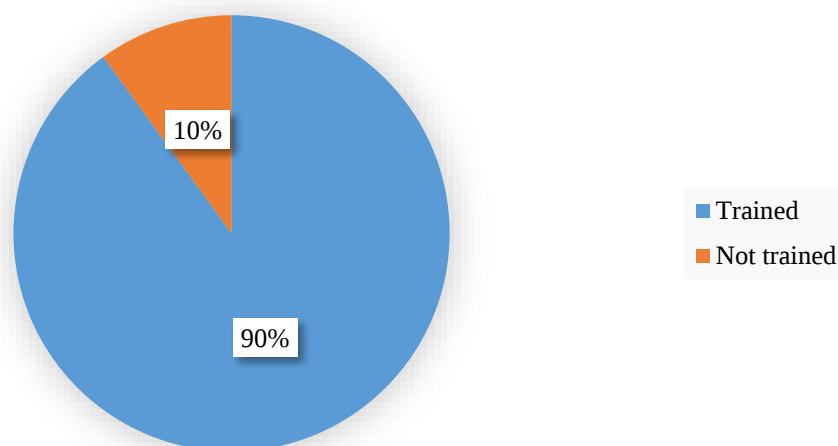


Figure 1: Training of interviewees in project management

Knowledge status about ZESCO project management procedures

The responses from eight participants indicated that they are aware about the ZESCO project management procedures while two are not and this is shown in Figure 2.

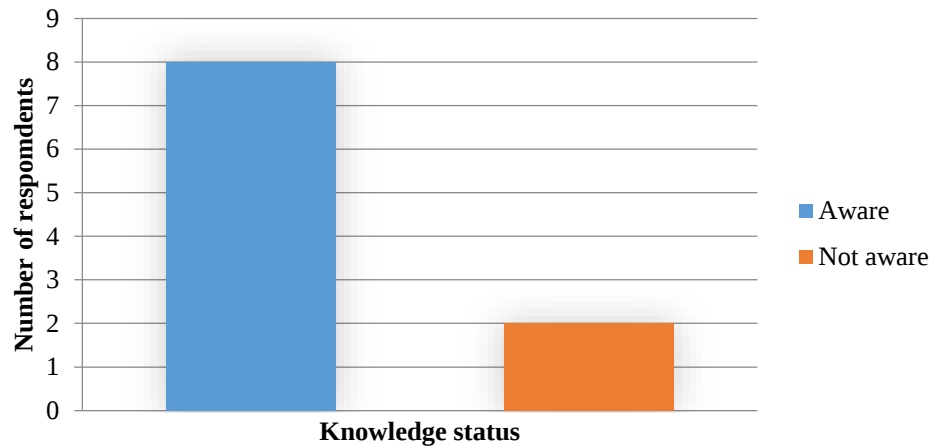


Figure 2: Awareness about project management procedures by interviewees

Awareness about stakeholder management guidelines

The participant's responses about their knowledge concerning guidelines for stakeholder management indicated that six respondents are awareness about them while the other four are not. Figure 3 below shows the responses.

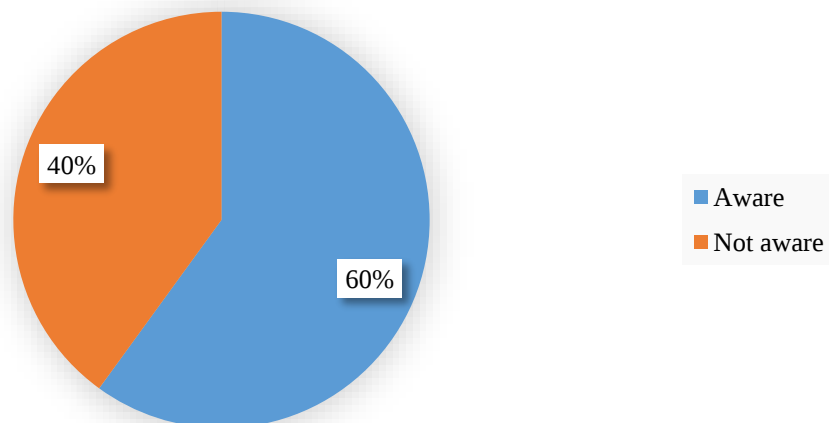


Figure 3: Interviewees knowledge status about guidelines for stakeholder management

Explaining the stakeholder management procedures

From the responses, it was observed that two employees demonstrated a strong grasp of stakeholder engagement plans and matrices. In addition, it is worth noting that one respondent reported that the guidelines they adhere to are dependent on the specific requirements set by project financiers. The importance of external factors in shaping project management approaches was emphasised in this response. Two respondents acknowledged the recognition of environmental and social impact assessment guidelines. The guidelines have a significant impact on promoting sustainable project practises that prioritise environmental and social factors. In addition, one employee focused on the creation of stakeholder engagement plans, which involved activities like identifying stakeholders, engaging with them, and analysing their needs. It is worth noting that one employee indicated a lack of awareness regarding the current project management guidelines in place.

Point of involving stakeholders in the project life cycle

The responses from the interviews provided various perspectives about the point at which stakeholders are involved in the project lifecycle. Out of ten respondents, four highlighted the importance of stakeholder engagement throughout the project life cycle. The planning phase was found to be a significant factor for stakeholder involvement, according to three respondents. According two respondents, stakeholders are engaged during the implementation phase. In addition, it is worth noting that one respondent indicated that stakeholders are engaged from the very beginning of the project. This highlights the importance of engaging stakeholders early on in order to ensure that objectives and expectations are aligned. The figure below shows the responses.

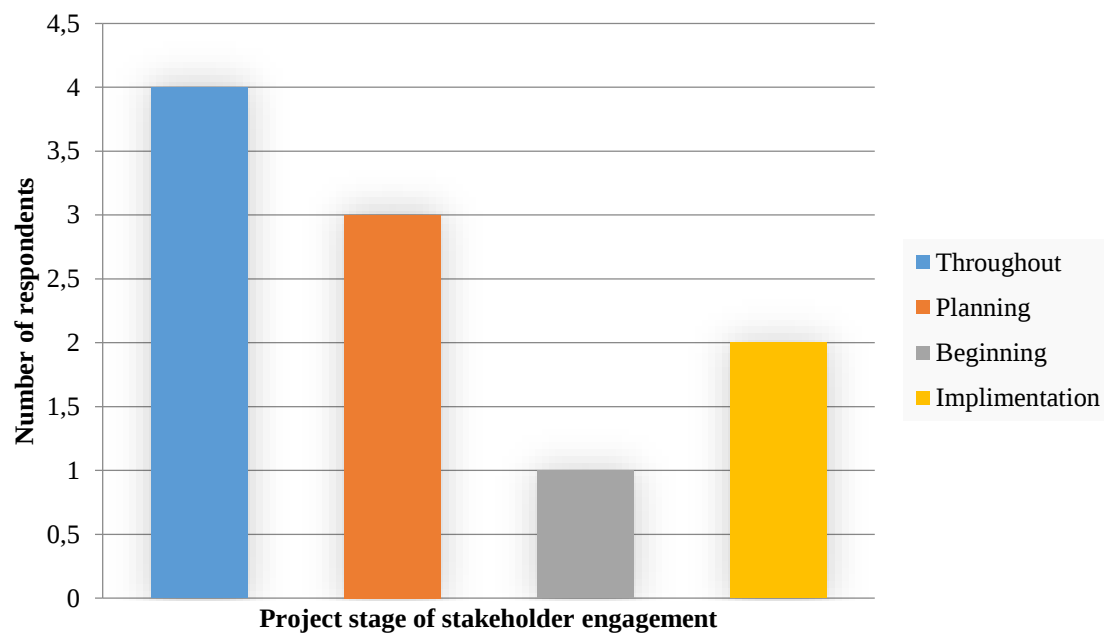


Figure 4: The point in the project cycle at which stakeholders are involved

Receiving training from ZESCO on stakeholder management

The respondents were interviewed to find out if they had received any training from ZESCO about stakeholder management and their responses were as depicted in Figure 5. From the ten respondents, four indicated that they received stakeholder management training directly from ZESCO. In contrast, the other six employees had not been provided with any stakeholder management training by ZESCO.

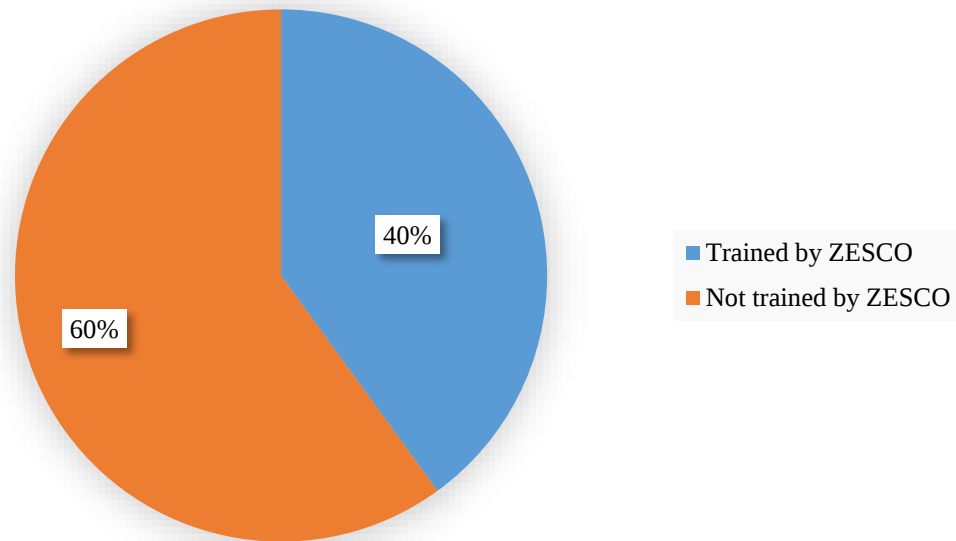


Figure 5: Interviewees responses on stakeholder management training

Acquisition of knowledge about stakeholder management by respondents not trained by ZESCO

The respondents who were not trained by ZESCO in stakeholder management were asked about how they learned about it. From the responses, two reported acquiring knowledge through personal study. Furthermore, another two reported that their comprehension was through practical involvement in project implementation. Another respondent reported gaining knowledge through broader project management training and exposure. Lastly, one employee attributed their understanding of stakeholder management to education at the University of Zambia, specifically through a course named Environmental Project Management.

Questionnaire Survey and Data Analysis

The participants of the survey consisted ZESCO internal stakeholders, who were involved in ZESCO distribution projects. A total of 36 questionnaires were disseminated, resulting in a response rate of 100%. The questionnaire used had a 5 pointer Likert scale where; 5 was strongly agree; 4 was agree; 3 was neutral; 2 was disagree and 1 was strongly disagree. The responses of the respondents were measured using mean scores, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis values serving as indicators of these perceptions.

Impact of stakeholder management on the performance of ZESCO distribution projects

The weighted average for all the statements was calculated to be 4.04. The data analysis revealed crucial insights into the perception of stakeholders within ZESCO as depicted in Table 1. Firstly, it is evident that internal stakeholders have a limited awareness level of ZESCO's project management procedures, with a mean score of 2.67, significantly lower than the weighted mean of 4.04. On the other hand, there's a strong consensus among respondents, with a mean of 4.53, that prolonged negotiations among stakeholders can lead to delays in commencement of ZESCO distribution projects. This underlines the critical role of effective stakeholder management in project timing, a paramount concern in project execution. Moreover, the data reflects a resounding belief, with a mean of 4.67, that adept stakeholder management can swiftly identify and resolve conflicts and issues among stakeholders, ensuring timely project delivery. Lastly, while stakeholder management is perceived as influential for both project time and quality, it's somewhat more weighted towards time

(mean of 4.28), emphasizing the need for efficient stakeholder management to achieve timely delivery of projects. In summary, the stakeholders placed significant importance on stakeholder management's impact, particularly on project time, offering valuable guidance to ZESCO for optimizing strategies while balancing time, quality and cost considerations for successful distribution projects.

Table 1: Impact of stakeholder management on project performance

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Weighted Average
I. There is ample awareness about ZESCO project management procedures by internal stakeholders	2.67	0.956	0.323	-0.246	4.04
II. Prolonged negotiations among stakeholders can lead to delays in the commencement of ZESCO distribution projects	4.53	0.56	-0.632	-0.65	4.04
III. Effective stakeholder management enhances the ability to identify and address potential conflicts or issues among stakeholders leading to timely delivery of ZESCO distribution projects.	4.67	0.478	-0.738	-1.544	4.04
IV. The quality of ZESCO distribution projects are closely tied to effectively managing stakeholders	4.28	0.779	-1.311	2.324	4.04

Influence of stakeholder engagement on performance of ZESCO distribution projects

The data presented in this analysis is dedicated to exploring the impact of stakeholder engagement on the performance of ZESCO distribution projects. The weighted average for the statements under this section is 4.38. Notably, statements emphasizing the importance of stakeholder engagement for project performance, such as "Proper stakeholder engagement contributes to the overall performance of ZESCO distribution projects" and "Adequately addressing stakeholders' concerns has a positive influence on timely delivery of ZESCO distribution projects," garnered substantially higher means (4.72 and 4.74, respectively) compared to the calculated weighted mean of 4.38. This indicates a clear consensus among respondents regarding the positive impact of stakeholder engagement on project performance, particularly affecting the variables of time and, to a slightly lesser extent, quality. Conversely, the statement "All stakeholders agree on the quality standard that the ZESCO distribution projects should conform to" presented a lower mean (3.5), significantly below the weighted mean, underscoring the potential challenges in achieving consensus on project quality standards. The results are shown in the Table 2 below.

Table 2: Influence of stakeholder engagement on project performance

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Weighted Average
I. Proper stakeholder engagement contributes to the overall performance of ZESCO distribution projects	4.72	0.741	-3.955	18.514	4.38
II. Adequately addressing stakeholders concerns has a positive influence of the timely delivery of ZESCO distribution projects	4.74	0.741	-4.134	19.71	4.38
III. Inadequate specifications from internal stakeholders can negatively affect the quality of ZESCO distribution projects	4.5	0.811	-2.556	9.076	4.38
IV. All stakeholders agree on the quality standard that the ZESCO distribution projects should conform to	3.5	0.941	-0.109	-0.8	4.38
V. Omission of certain performance requirements when scoping a project can increase the overall cost of ZESCO distribution projects.	4.44	0.695	-1.415	2.909	4.38
VI. Developing stakeholder management plan positively influences the performance of ZESCO distribution projects	4.39	0.803	-2.247	8.036	4.38

Impact of stakeholder mapping on performance of ZESCO distribution projects

The weighted average for the responses under this heading was calculated to be 4.46. It was used to measure the levels of agreement among the respondents. The statement "Not engaging external stakeholders e.g., local communities at the beginning of the ZESCO distribution projects can affect the project duration" received a notably high mean score of 4.72, implying a robust consensus among respondents. This consensus is further reinforced by the low standard deviation, indicating a consistent agreement. Secondly, the notion that "Stakeholder compensation has a huge impact on the overall cost of ZESCO distribution projects" garnered a mean score of 4.31, signifying low level agreement among respondents. Similarly, the statement "Regulatory stakeholders such as ZEMA have an impact on the delivery of ZESCO distribution projects delivery time" was met with low levels of agreement among respondents, reflected in the mean score of 4.33. On the other hand, the statement emphasizing how "stakeholder mapping aids in identifying and minimizing the environmental and social impacts of ZESCO distribution projects" obtained a mean of 4.53, significantly above the weighted mean. This highlights a robust consensus among respondents regarding the positive impact of stakeholder mapping on project quality, especially concerning the identification and mitigation of environmental and social impacts. In the case of "Stakeholder mapping helps manage the influence of stakeholders on ZESCO distribution projects performance," low level of agreement is evident, as indicated by the mean score of 4.31. Lastly, the statement asserting that "not addressing the conflicts of stakeholders' interest in a project can affect the performance of ZESCO distribution projects" garnered a high mean of 4.56, significantly above the weighted mean. This signifies a strong consensus among stakeholders regarding the influence of stakeholder mapping on project

quality, especially in terms of conflict resolution, and potentially affecting cost and time as well.

Table 3: Impact of Stakeholder mapping on project performance

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Weighted Average
I. Not engaging external stakeholders e.g. local communities at the beginning of ZESCO distribution projects can affect project duration.	4.72	0.454	-1.036	-0.985	4.46
II. Stakeholder compensation has huge impact on the overall cost of ZESCO distribution projects	4.31	0.749	-1.01	1.123	4.46
III. Regulatory stakeholders such as ZEMA have an impact on the delivery of ZESCO distribution projects.	4.33	0.862	-1.291	1.191	4.46
IV. Stakeholder mapping aids in identifying and minimizing the environmental and social impacts of ZESCO distribution projects	4.53	0.56	-0.632	-0.65	4.46
V. Stakeholder mapping helps to manage the influence of stakeholders on ZESCO distribution performance	4.31	0.624	-1.061	3.754	4.46
VI. Not addressing the conflicts of stakeholder's interest on a project can affect the quality of ZESCO distribution projects	4.56	0.504	-0.233	-2.064	4.46

Discussion of Findings

Factors Influencing Stakeholder Management on ZESCO Distribution Projects

The study findings indicate that a sizable percentage of participants were aware of ZESCO's project management procedures. However, the respondents were unable to describe the procedures for project initiation, execution, and closeout. This suggests the importance of not only awareness but also thorough comprehension of the procedures, particularly since stakeholder management is part of the procedures. One other key issue that emerged from the study's findings is the awareness about stakeholder management guidelines. Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they were aware about the guidelines. However, it's noteworthy that there is a subset of respondents who lack of awareness about these guidelines. This discrepancy suggests that there may be varying levels of exposure and understanding of these crucial resources among project personnel. The study findings revealed that only 40% of respondents had received training on stakeholder management from ZESCO. While this is a positive finding, it also highlights the importance of identification of training needs in stakeholder management. The study implies that not all respondents had received such training, some received training from personal studies hence the need for tailored training among those who engage in stakeholder management for uniformity in the knowledge. When comparing the results of this study with similar research in the field of stakeholder management, these concerns resonate with prevailing themes. The existing literature highlights the need of training and capacity building in addressing the potential knowledge gaps in project management procedures (Johnston, 2019). Likewise, the disparity in

knowledge regarding stakeholder management standards aligns with scholarly literature that supports the importance of clear and readily available guidelines (Freeman & McVea, 2005).

The Influence of Stakeholder Engagement on Performance of ZESCO Distribution Projects

The research revealed a noteworthy relationship between stakeholder engagement and ZESCO distribution projects. The study observed a strong consensus among respondents that effective stakeholder engagement positively influences the success of ZESCO distribution projects. The study findings underscore the importance of effective stakeholder engagement practices in ZESCO distribution projects. It demonstrates that when stakeholders' concerns are addressed and when there is consensus on quality standards, project performance tends to improve.

These findings highlight the significance of robust stakeholder engagement strategies in the planning and execution of ZESCO distribution projects. The results findings align with the studies conducted by Sinclair (2019) and Mwanaumo & Sakala (2020), which indicate that the participation of stakeholders in projects is crucial for achieving project success by mitigating cost overruns. The research findings indicated that a lack of stakeholder engagement in power distribution projects was associated with a higher likelihood of cost overruns. In a similar vein, Johnston (2019) demonstrated that the actions of stakeholders played an impactful role in the escalation of cost overruns, consequently leading to project delays. The aforementioned findings were substantiated by Baharuddin & Costello (2013) who evaluated early stakeholder engagement as a process for innovation.

The Relationship between Stakeholder Management and the Performance of ZESCO Distribution Projects

The research findings unveiled a notable and positive relationship between stakeholder management and the performance of ZESCO distribution projects. This outcome reflects a widespread consensus among the study's respondents, highlighting the constructive influence of effective stakeholder management in diverse dimensions of project performance. Consequently, the study underscores the pivotal role of proficient stakeholder management practices in enhancing overall project outcomes. It substantiates that, when stakeholders are managed adeptly, project performance is inclined to experience improvement. The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Pacagnella et al. (2015), which underscored the project's early emphasis on comprehending the interests of key stakeholders and exploring ways in which these stakeholders could contribute to the project's success. The study also revealed that effective stakeholder management necessitates more than just the identification of technical factors that could persuade stakeholders to engage; it requires a thorough examination of the underlying, often subtle motivations that drive each stakeholder's involvement in the project. These subtle motivations are aspects that often become apparent only in the project's later stages. Furthermore, Retfalvi (2014) in the study on project success using proven stakeholder management techniques discovered that the likelihood of successful project execution and organizational success is considerably increased by the capacity to recognize and manage project stakeholders. The success of the project is greatly dependent on the project manager's capacity to get agreement on the project's objectives among the major project stakeholders, including the project team, management, and the client. Failure to do so could subject the project to needless delays, missed opportunities, detrimental financial effects, and even severe reputational harm to the company. Also, Abdalla and Elmualim (2020) found that that effective stakeholder management in construction projects depends on appropriately identifying stakeholders within a project and establishing proper communication.

The Impact of Stakeholder Mapping on the Performance of ZESCO Distribution Projects

The study findings on stakeholder mapping in relation to project quality, cost, and duration is generally recognised, as mismanagement and can result in potential challenges in these domains such that external stakeholders like land owners affect duration and internal stakeholders affect quality and this conflict arising is agreeing with what is quoted by Jones in the problem statement.

In comparing the findings of this study with similar research in the field, it becomes evident that stakeholder mapping and management are recurring themes. Prioritizing stakeholders based on influence and interest is a common practice supported by various studies (Freeman & McVea, 2005). Similarly, the challenge of conflicts stemming from conflicting stakeholder interests has been documented in the literature (Baharuddin & Costello, 2013). Therefore, the findings of this study align with the broader research landscape in stakeholder management.

Conclusions

The research findings shed light on several critical aspects of stakeholder management within ZESCO distribution projects. Firstly, it is evident that a substantial portion of participants are aware about ZESCO's project management procedures, indicating a fundamental grasp of project execution and stakeholder engagement. However, the respondents lack a deep understanding of these procedures, highlighting a knowledge gap among project personnel. This underscores the importance of not only awareness but also comprehensive comprehension of project procedures by the teams involved in projects.

Additionally, the study revealed a positive relationship between effective stakeholder management and the performance of ZESCO distribution projects. Stakeholder management has an influence on the duration and quality of ZESCO distribution projects. Moreover, stakeholders' engagement is shown to have a landmark influence on the performance of ZESCO distribution projects. Stakeholder engagement has a bigger positive influence on the duration of ZESCO distribution projects. Further, inadequate specifications from stakeholders could lead to poor quality on ZESCO distribution projects. The cost of projects can be increased by omissions of some performance requirements during project scoping. The research underscores the significance of robust stakeholder engagement strategies in project planning and execution. Finally, stakeholder mapping emerges as a crucial aspect of project management within ZESCO distribution projects with a bigger impact on the duration. The study also highlighted the complexity of managing stakeholder conflicts arising from diverse interests, emphasizing the need for comprehensive mapping, proactive engagement, and clear conflict resolution mechanisms. In conclusion, the research findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder management, awareness, and training in ZESCO project management, ultimately contributing to project success and effective conflict mitigation in these complex endeavours.

Recommendations

The study recommends that ZESCO management implements training programs tailored for project personnel to understand project management procedures. Further, project leads should document lessons learned during stakeholder engagement exercises and building a knowledge repository for future projects. Lastly, project managers should launch ongoing awareness campaigns to inform project personnel about the existence and importance of stakeholder management guidelines.

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