

Stakeholder Engagement, Communication and Sustainability in Project Management of INPOs

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explores the intricate interplay of stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability within the realm of project management for International Non-Profit Organizations (INPOs). Anchored in the theoretical framework of stakeholder theory, the study delves into how these elements synergize to enhance project outcomes and foster positive societal and environmental change.

Design/ Methodology/Approach: The paper adopted the desktop literature review method. This involved an in-depth review of studies related to Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Sustainability in INPO Project Management. An in-depth search of the top keywords related to Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Sustainability in INPO Project Management was done in various databases. Thus, the paper was purely qualitative, drawing its findings from secondary sources of information.

Findings: The synthesis of stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability within the context of INPO project management underscores their interdependency and collective significance. Stakeholder theory provides a robust foundation for understanding how engaging stakeholders and facilitating transparent communication contribute to project sustainability. The research gap identified suggests the need for a comprehensive and integrated examination of these concepts to develop a nuanced understanding of their dynamics within INPO projects. Anticipated findings emphasize the positive correlations between stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability, underlining the pivotal role of strategic stakeholder management in driving INPO project success and positive societal impact

Contribution to policy and practice: Practitioners in INPOs can leverage the insights from the study to make informed decisions regarding stakeholder engagement strategies, communication plans, and sustainability initiatives. The study offers practical guidance on how to align project objectives with stakeholder interests for optimal outcomes. The study provides practical recommendations for INPOs to incorporate stakeholder perspectives into project design, ensuring that projects are attuned to beneficiary needs, local contexts, and broader societal goals. This contributes to more effective and relevant project outcomes. By highlighting the importance of transparent and timely communication, the study equips practitioners with tools to foster stakeholder trust, manage expectations, and create a positive project narrative.

Introduction

In the realm of project management, particularly within the context of International Non-Profit Organizations (INPOs), the principles of stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability have emerged as essential pillars that shape the success, impact, and long-term viability of projects. This study delves into the intricate interplay of these concepts, exploring how effective stakeholder engagement and communication strategies contribute to the sustainability of projects undertaken by INPOs. Anchored in the theoretical framework of stakeholder theory, this study examines how these elements synergize to enhance project outcomes and drive positive societal and environmental change.

Research Problem

The research problem underpinning the study on "Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Sustainability in INPO Project Management" is centered around understanding how the integrated application of stakeholder engagement and effective communication strategies influences the sustainable outcomes of projects undertaken by International Non-Profit Organizations (INPOs). This research seeks to address the following key questions:

- i. How does stakeholder engagement impact the sustainability of projects within the context of INPOs?
- ii. What role does transparent and effective communication play in driving sustainable project outcomes in INPOs?
- iii. To what extent does stakeholder alignment, achieved through strategic engagement and communication, contribute to the overall sustainability of INPO projects?

By exploring these questions, the research aims to shed light on the dynamic relationships between stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability, specifically within the realm of INPO project management. The ultimate goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these elements interact and influence each other, ultimately contributing to the success and long-term positive impacts of projects conducted by INPOs.

Objective of the study

To determine the influence of stakeholder engagement and communication on the sustainability of INPOs Projects

Literature Review

Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Sustainability in INPO Project Management

Research by Lee & Lambert (2017) emphasizes that stakeholder engagement is a dynamic process that involves identifying, prioritizing, and actively involving stakeholders in project decision-making. It underscores that inclusive stakeholder engagement enhances project legitimacy and leads to more comprehensive and contextually relevant project designs.

Studies by Adams et al. (2018) highlight that communication is a linchpin in sustainability efforts. Effective communication not only disseminates project information but also fosters understanding, generates support, and encourages collective action among stakeholders. Strategic communication also enables INPOs to showcase the alignment of their projects with stakeholder interests, reinforcing the organization's commitment to sustainable practices.

The research of Dhanani et al. (2016) emphasizes that sustainability in INPO project management is contingent upon stakeholder alignment. When projects resonate with stakeholder values, they are more likely to garner support, resources, and enduring positive impacts. Research by Saeed & Sheikh (2015) reinforces this view, underscoring that successful sustainability initiatives require the active engagement of stakeholders across sectors and geographies.

Research Gap

While existing literature provides valuable insights into each of the three concepts—stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability—a research gap emerges when considering their integrated application within the unique context of INPO project management. Few studies comprehensively investigate how effective stakeholder engagement and communication strategies synergize to drive the sustainability of INPO projects. This gap suggests an opportunity for a holistic examination that delves into the complex dynamics and interdependencies among these elements.

Theoretical Background: Stakeholder Theory

At the heart of this study lies the Stakeholder Theory, a seminal concept introduced by Freeman (1984), which posits that organizations are beholden to a broader network of stakeholders beyond just shareholders. Sundaram and Inkpen (2004) suggest that the goal of maximizing shareholder value is pro-stakeholder. Maximizing shareholder value creates the appropriate incentives for managers to assume entrepreneurial risks. Having more than one objective function will make governing difficult, if not impossible. It is easier to make shareholders out of stakeholders than vice versa. In the event of a breach of contract or trust, stakeholders, compared with shareholders, have protection (or can seek remedies) through contracts and the legal system (Freeman et al., 2004). Venkataraman (2002) suggests that taking a stakeholder approach enables us to develop a more robust theory of entrepreneurship, one in which the role of entrepreneurial risk is better

understood. Sundaram and Inkpen's (2021) view is that taking such an approach would lead to risk avoidance behavior by managers, because, according to them, constituencies except for the residual cash flow claimants have incentives to dissuade managers from taking excessive entrepreneurial risks.

This theory holds particular significance in the realm of INPO project management, as it underscores that the success and sustainability of projects are intricately tied to the needs, expectations, and influence of a diverse array of stakeholders. In the case of INPOs, stakeholders encompass not only donors and beneficiaries but also local communities, regulatory bodies, partner organizations, and volunteers. The Stakeholder Theory provides a robust rationale for the importance of stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability. Engaging stakeholders allows INPOs to gain insights into their concerns, needs, and aspirations, leading to the design of projects that are more relevant, effective, and impactful. Transparent and effective communication ensures that stakeholders are informed, involved, and aligned with project goals. Sustainability, a core objective of INPOs, is inherently tied to stakeholder engagement and communication, as addressing stakeholder interests contributes to lasting positive societal and environmental outcomes.

Methodology

The paper adopted the desktop literature review method. This involved an in-depth review of studies related to Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Sustainability in INPO Project Management. An in-depth search of the top keywords related to Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Sustainability in INPO Project Management was done in various databases. Thus, the paper was purely qualitative, drawing its findings from secondary sources of information.

Criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies.

The researcher established all the inclusion and exclusion criteria before the database search was done. Inclusion criteria involved studies that:

- i. Presented qualitative findings on Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Sustainability in INPO Project Management
- ii. Were written in the English language
- iii. Fully accessible journal articles
- iv. Appeared in a peer-reviewed journal published between 2010 and 2020.

The exclusion criteria involved:

- i. Studies that were neither peer-reviewed and beyond the years 2010 and 2020.
- ii. Journal articles that were not fully accessible
- iii. Studies with duplicate findings.

Search strategy

This is the first stage, which comprised the initial identification of all articles that were based on Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Sustainability in INPO Project Management in various databases; that is PubMed, Biomedical Central, ScienceDirect, Sage journal and Emerald. The first search was done generally by searching for articles according to the article title, abstract, and keywords. The key words included Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Sustainability in INPO Project Management. This was aided by a snowballing technique where studies that were found led to a roadmap in identifying similar studies in the searching process. Besides, a page-by-page grey literature examination of relevant journal issues, reference lists, conference proceedings and other publications for relevant studies was done in line with the top keywords under investigation. The identification and search arrived at 31 articles in total.

Filtration Process

Further filtration process was done based on the recentness of the articles (between the years 2010 and 2020). This section describes the process that the paper followed in analyzing the literature. The researcher reviewed the articles to eliminate duplicate as well as the articles that were not peer-reviewed. Studies in other languages that required translation were dropped. The paper, therefore, arrived at 21 fully screened articles. After the filtration was done, the third step involved the selection of fully accessible publications. Narrowing of the literature to only fully accessible publications yielded specificity and allowed the authors to focus on articles related to the top keywords. An in-depth review of the inclusion criteria, that is, those articles that were qualitative. The authors arrived at 10 fully accessible and peer-reviewed articles that were suitable for analysis while 11 were excluded. However, additional 11 articles were added since they were reflected in the introduction and were used for reference purposes. The analysis was done using content analysis. Below is the Prisma flow chart illustrating the whole methodological process

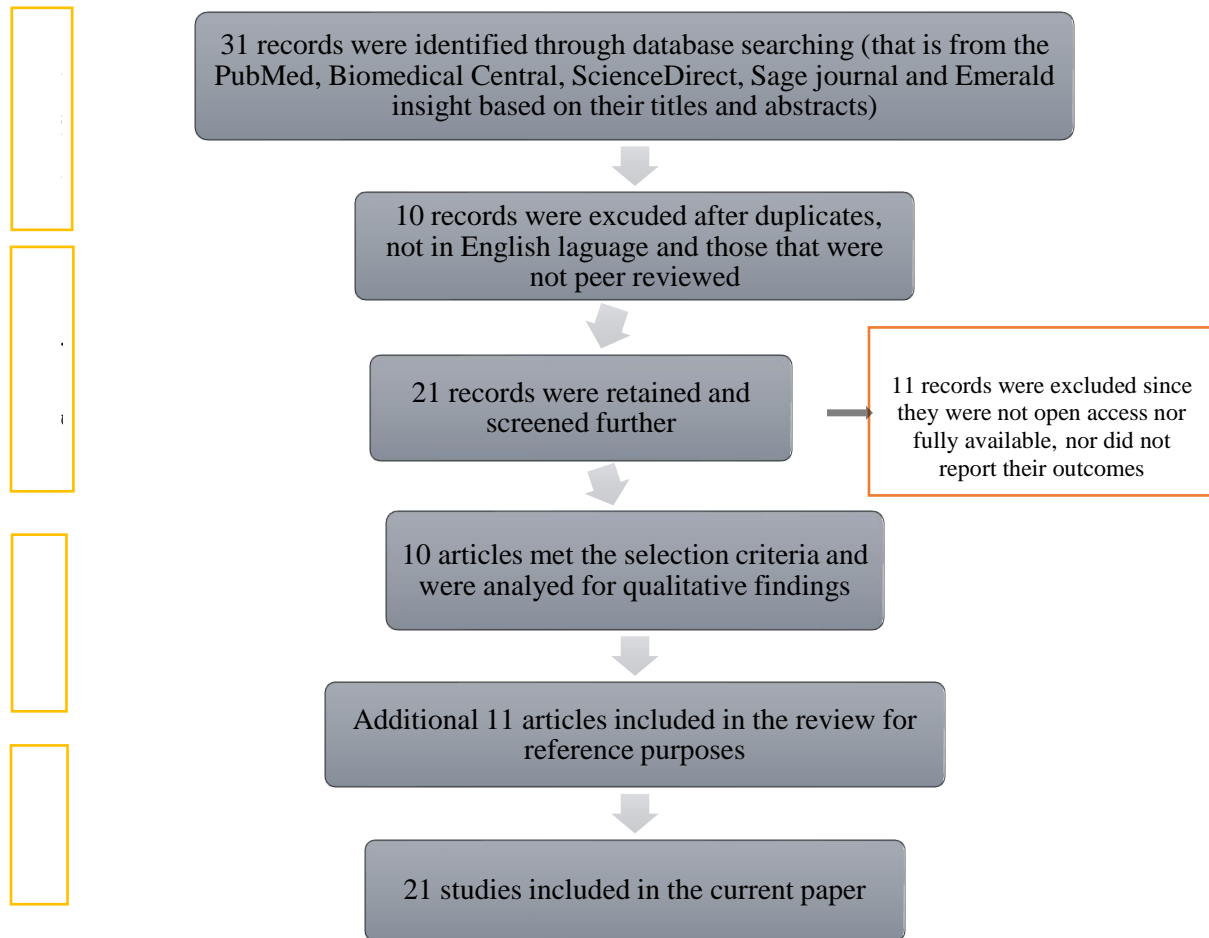


Figure 1: The PRISMA flow-chart for a review update with previously included studies incorporated into the results of an updated literature search

Findings and Presentation

Drawing from the theoretical foundation and the synthesis of existing literature, this study anticipates the following findings: INPO projects that actively engage stakeholders in the design phase are more likely to produce sustainable outcomes by incorporating diverse perspectives and addressing genuine needs. Transparent and effective communication fosters stakeholder trust, encourages collaboration, and enhances project legitimacy, thereby supporting long-term project sustainability. INPOs must navigate the challenge of balancing the sometimes-divergent interests of different stakeholders to ensure that projects align with the organization's mission while meeting the needs of beneficiaries and communities. Projects that foster cross-sectoral collaboration among stakeholders, including government bodies, local communities, and corporate partners, have a higher potential for achieving comprehensive and sustainable solutions. INPOs that integrate stakeholder feedback and respond to evolving stakeholder dynamics are better equipped to adapt their project strategies, fostering resilience and project sustainability. The study identifies potential

challenges in stakeholder engagement, such as stakeholder fatigue, power imbalances, and resource limitations, which require strategic approaches for effective management.

Empirical evidence also corroborates the above, for instance, Demirkesen and Reinhardt (2021) examined the influence of stakeholder involvement on the performance of government projects in Poland. The study adopted the descriptive research design where 13 government projects were targeted by the use of questionnaires. The study indicated that stakeholder involvement is a key segment that influences the performance of the projects. That is, stakeholder involvement is positively and significantly associated with performance. The results also showed that a positive and significant relationship exists between stakeholder involvement and performance. Stakeholder involvement includes enabling all the stakeholders to be involved in decision-making and the implementation process. Stakeholders' involvement is extremely important in the advancement tasks of the projects.

Nguyen et al. (2021) investigated the influence of project stakeholders' engagement and performance of complex and non-complex projects. The study targeted 22 factors for measuring stakeholder engagement and project performance's association within the context of complex projects. The findings indicated stakeholder engagement was found to negatively affect quantitative project performance but to positively and significantly affect qualitative project performance. In non-complex projects, stakeholder engagement also positively affects qualitative project performance. Further, in the context of complex projects, stakeholder engagement negatively affects schedule performance. In terms of cost performance, no significant relationship was observed between stakeholder engagement and cost performance for either group.

Chepkosgei (2020) studied the influence of stakeholder consultation on the implementation of water projects in Machakos County, Kenya. The study targeted 172 water projects under implementation in the County who were sampled 17 water projects and 120 respondents. The study established a strong positive correlation between the strategy of consulting stakeholders and the implementation of water projects. The study concluded that increased stakeholders' consultation would result in effective water projects implementation in the county. The study recommends that there is a need for the identification of link persons or officials who will always represent them during the implementation process.

Adigbo (2020) investigated the relationship between stakeholder engagement and construction project performance in Ghana. The study targeted 338 PMP-certified project managers were contacted and 16 conveniently selected through purposive sampling. Data was collected primarily through interviews. Stakeholder engagement practices were identified as stakeholder types, stakeholder engagement approaches, and level of stakeholder engagement. They were found to enhance project performance in the Ghanaian construction industry. The study recommended that Ghanaian construction project managers continue with best stakeholder engagement practices including continuous stakeholder engagement, use of an appropriate stakeholder engagement approach or a combination of approaches, and encourage high stakeholder participation throughout the PLC.

Emmanuel (2020) analyzed the influence of stakeholder Involvement on the Performance of Donor Funded Projects in Rwanda. By use of a descriptive design, the study used questionnaires from 75 project beneficiaries and interview guides from the donor and implementing agency representatives. A total sample size of 75 was used in the study. The study indicated a significant relationship between stakeholders' engagement in project initiation and project performance. Likewise, there was a significant correlation between project acceptability by the community and the performance of the project. Therefore, on the influence of project management factors on the EYICM project in Bugesera District, the study concluded that adequate institutional management skills, donor contribution, positive government policies and institutional management practices aid the performance of the EYICM Project in Bugesera District in Rwanda.

Conclusion

The synthesis of stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability within INPO project management underscores their inextricable interdependence. Grounded in the Stakeholder Theory, this study highlights the profound influence stakeholders wield over project success and societal impact. The identified research gap underscores the exigency for comprehensive research to elucidate how stakeholder engagement strategies and effective communication synergize to drive project sustainability. The anticipated findings reveal a nuanced tapestry of interactions, emphasizing the vital role of strategic stakeholder management in attaining INPO project success and contributing to holistic betterment.

Contribution of the study

Contribution to Theory

The study extends the applicability of the Stakeholder Theory by demonstrating its relevance in the unique context of INPOs. By showcasing how stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability are interwoven within this theoretical framework, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of stakeholder theory's practical implications. The study contributes to the theoretical discourse on sustainability by illustrating its multidimensional nature. It reveals how stakeholder engagement and effective communication are pivotal in shaping sustainable project outcomes, thus offering a more holistic perspective on sustainability beyond traditional environmental considerations. By integrating stakeholder engagement, communication, and sustainability, the study advances theoretical knowledge on how these concepts mutually reinforce one another. This integration enriches the theoretical landscape by demonstrating the complex dynamics through which effective stakeholder management contributes to sustainable project success.

Contribution to Practice

Practitioners in INPOs can leverage the insights from the study to make informed decisions regarding stakeholder engagement strategies, communication plans, and sustainability initiatives. The study offers practical guidance on how to align project objectives with stakeholder interests

for optimal outcomes. The study provides practical recommendations for INPOs to incorporate stakeholder perspectives into project design, ensuring that projects are attuned to beneficiary needs, local contexts, and broader societal goals. This contributes to more effective and relevant project outcomes. By highlighting the importance of transparent and timely communication, the study equips practitioners with tools to foster stakeholder trust, manage expectations, and create a positive project narrative. This enhances project legitimacy and stakeholder support. The study underscores the role of stakeholder alignment in driving sustainable practices. Practitioners can leverage this insight to develop sustainability plans that account for diverse stakeholder concerns, leading to projects with lasting positive impacts. The study's emphasis on adaptive project management empowers practitioners to be flexible and responsive to evolving stakeholder dynamics and project requirements. This approach enhances project resilience and long-term viability. Practitioners can draw from the study's findings to facilitate cross-sector collaborations, fostering partnerships that pool resources, expertise, and influence to achieve comprehensive sustainability goals.

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