

Antecedents of stakeholder management in public private partnership projects in Uganda

Antecedents of stakeholder management

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to assess stakeholder management antecedents in public private partnership (PPP) projects in Uganda.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is cross sectional and quantitative in nature. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire survey from a sample of 94 PPP projects in Uganda. Stratified random sampling was used in selecting projects for this study. Smart PLS–SEM was used for analysis.

Findings – Results from the study show that the key antecedents of stakeholder management include; communication, engagement, commitment and trust. Communication was found to be the strongest antecedent of stakeholder management. Results also show that trust and commitment are significantly associated with stakeholder management in PPP projects.

Research limitations/implications – This paper is limited to the antecedents of stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda. Further studies should be conducted in the public and private sectors where there are also multiple stakeholders.

Practical implications – The paper has documented the antecedents of stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda. The results will help project managers and policy makers appreciate the different antecedents of stakeholder management and how they are important in managing interests and expectations of different stakeholders.

Originality/value – This research focused on the key antecedents of stakeholder management in PPP projects within the Ugandan context.

Keywords Uganda, Communication, Trust, Engagement, Commitment, Stakeholder management, Public private partnership projects

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The complexity of public private partnership (PPP) projects has generated a network of stakeholders which make quite a lot of demands on a project depending on their interests in the project (Rolstadås *et al.*, 2014). These multiple stakeholders more often than not have different interests and expectations which could be contradicting each other depending on their attributes (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). Mismanaging their interests and concerns could have devastating consequences on PPP projects (Chinyio and Olomolaiye, 2010) such as conflicts and controversies during the implementation of a project (Jergeas *et al.*, 2000). Managing different stakeholders is a key factor in the success of any project (EL-Gohary *et al.*, 2006; Alinaitwe and Ayesiga, 2013; Huemann *et al.*, 2016). Harris (2010) and Menoka *et al.* (2013) noted that managing stakeholder interests helps the stakeholders to work together to decrease negative environmental impacts and increasing the economic sustainability of the project.



Managing interests of multiple stakeholders is necessary because they play important roles such as advocates, sponsors, partners and agents of change. Stakeholders also provide resources and support for the projects to succeed (Ndandiko, 2006; Chinyio and Olomolaiye, 2010). El-Gohary *et al.* (2006) noted that many PPP initiatives around the world have, however, faced many challenges, such as stakeholder opposition, which have led to project failure and as such, identifying and addressing stakeholders' issues were found to be crucial to the success of the projects. Neglect of stakeholder's interests can affect the project's ability to create and maximize value (Freeman, 1984; Olander, 2007). Olander and Landin (2005) further noted that stakeholders influence project decisions positively or negatively and the inability of project to identify and take into account the claims and influences of its stakeholders has been pointed as a reason for stakeholder management failure (Bourne and Walker, 2005; Olander and Landin, 2005).

Despite the growing amount of research on stakeholder management (Yang *et al.*, 2009; Jergeas *et al.*, 2000; Harris, 2010), little theoretical and empirical attention has been paid to the antecedents of stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda. Most of the research carried out has focused on the process of stakeholder management (Blair and Fottler, 1998; Karlsen, 2002; Post *et al.*, 2002; Preble, 2005; Yang and Shen, 2014) and broad aspects of stakeholder management (culture, leadership, management of risk and quality) (Chinyio and Olomolaiye, 2010) and thus the contributions of stakeholder communication, trust, commitment and engagement have been neglected as probable antecedents of stakeholder management in PPP projects. This study therefore, aims at establishing the antecedents of stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda.

To achieve the aforementioned objective, the paper presents reviewed literature, role of government, hypothesis development presents methodology and results of the study. Finally the paper presents discussion of findings, conclusions, managerial implications, future research directions and limitations of the study.

Literature review

Role of Government of Uganda in PPP projects

The Government of Uganda plays a very important role in making PPP projects successful. After transferring the responsibilities for the financing, designing, construction and operation to private sectors, the role of Government of Uganda is not limited only to supervision and monitoring, but also plays an active role in the preconstruction phase of a project. It is the responsibilities of the government to initially approve the use of PPP project and then identifies sectors in which private sector will be involved. The government also decides the procurement process, manages the procurement proceedings and defines the criteria of selection. Besides, playing the role of facilitator, it is of utmost importance for government to develop proactive policy to stimulate private sector participation in infrastructure projects. Therefore, in order to facilitate private sector participation, governments need to establish an enabling environment consisting of:

- credible legal framework to facilitate infrastructure projects development through PPP;
- an administrative framework to expedite implementation of PPP projects; and
- government incentives and other forms of support to encourage private sector in PPP projects.

Setting up of a credible legal and regulatory framework by the government is critical to the success of PPP projects as it deals with the fundamental legal issues such as enforcement of contracts, private ownerships, security arrangements, taxes, remittance of foreign exchange and profits. Inadequate legal and regulatory framework undermines the strength and

effectiveness of contracts in PPP projects, and reduces the attractiveness of the project to private investors. In Uganda, PPP received a great impetus on May 8, 2015 when the President of Uganda signified his assent to the bill, "The Public Private Partnerships Act, 2015" which sought to provide for the establishment and management of PPPs. Currently, the PPP Framework Policy and the Uganda Public Private Partnership Act 2015 serve as applicable policy and Law for PPP's management.

Hypothesis development communication and stakeholder management

Different stakeholders have different interests, attitudes and priorities toward the project. This makes effective communication necessary since it ensures stakeholders receive accurate, timely and relevant information which helps in building positive attitudes to the project (Welch and Jackson, 2007; Turkulainen *et al.*, 2015). Communication refers to the patterns of exchanging information and knowledge between project stakeholders (Johns and Gratton, 2013). The goal of stakeholder communication is to create common understanding and project goal alignment (Faraj *et al.*, 2011; Mayfield, 2014). Effective communication is also essential for maintaining the support and commitment of all stakeholders (Briner *et al.*, 1996). It is therefore important to communicate the right information in the right way to the specific stakeholder in mind. Effective, regular and planned communication with all stakeholders of the project is necessary for stakeholder management (Briner *et al.*, 1996; Cleland, 1995). Weaver (2007) further noted that project managers should be good communicators capable of managing individual stakeholder's interests' expectations and creating a positive culture change within the overall project. Henjewe *et al.* (2013) noted that it is important to manage communication process to complete the loop in managing project stakeholders. Chong *et al.* (2016) noted that listed NZ companies were utilizing their websites for communicating CSR information to stakeholders. Kelly *et al.* (2010) and Ruehl and Ingenhoff (2015) noted that social media empowers stakeholders to raise their voice. They opined that social web applications potentially allow organizations to move closer to their stakeholders, understand about their communicative needs and be able to serve those more immediately and effectively than before. From the above discussion, we can conclude that effective stakeholder communication creates, shapes, maintains relationships and endorses mutual understanding between the project and its stakeholders. We thus hypothesize the following:

H1. Stakeholder communication positively associates with stakeholder management.

Trust and stakeholder management

Different scholars have found that trust among the stakeholders is positively related to stakeholder management. Karlsen *et al.* (2008) noted that trust is a necessary ingredient when building good relations with the stakeholders. This is so because trust enables cooperative behavior, reduces damaging conflicts and transaction costs and promotes more effective responses to crisis (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998). Trust encourages the exchange of relevant information and determines whether stakeholders are willing to permit others to influence decisions and actions (Carnevale and Wechsler, 1992). Trust among stakeholders can relieve stress and enhance adaptability, information exchange, joint problem solving and promise better outcomes (Mohr and Spekman, 1994).

Zasuwa (2018) found that stakeholders' response to corporate social initiatives is high when stakeholders have a high trust in the firm. The more the stakeholder trust each other, the higher the perceived value of the relationship by the stakeholder and consequently the greater the chances of managing such a stakeholder. Presence of trust can act as an important deterrent of stakeholder opportunistic behavior, reduce the specification and

monitoring of contracts, provide material incentives for co-operation and reduce uncertainty (Hill, 1990). Trust creates the willingness to rely on an exchange stakeholder in whom one has confidence (Moorman *et al.*, 1992). If the trust between the stakeholders is believed to be strong, the co-operation between them tends to be long term (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). If the trust is high between the stakeholders, conflicts that arise between the stakeholders could be more of a functional kind and the uncertainty tends to decrease. Thus, the more the stakeholders trust the project and vice versa, the more their management becomes easier. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H2. Trust positively associates with stakeholder management.

Commitment and stakeholder management

Stakeholder commitment has been widely recognized as a central ingredient in establishing long term relationships (Rylander *et al.*, 1997; Tellefsen and Thomas, 2005). Stakeholder commitment refers to the willingness by the stakeholders to devote energy and loyalty to a project. Meyer and Allen (1997) expressed it in three forms: affective, continuance and normative. Affective commitment is the stakeholder's emotional attachment with the project. Continuance commitment refers to the stakeholder's recognition of the benefits of continued association with the project compared to the perceived cost of leaving the project. Normative commitment refers to the stakeholder's feeling of obligation to remain in the project. All the three forms of commitment affect the stakeholders' willingness to remain with a project. Morgan and Hunt (1994) further conceptualized commitment as an exchange a stakeholder believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it. Stakeholders who perceive a social exchange relationship as evidenced by higher levels of commitment are likely to be more cooperative and willing to put effort on behalf of the project (Bettencourt, 1997). Committed stakeholders more often do not have intentions to quit, which saves the project the costs of recruiting and orienting new stakeholders in terms of both time and money. Similarly, costs of supervision are mitigated if the project stakeholders are committed to their project activities. Thus we hypothesize the following:

H3. Stakeholder commitment positively associates with stakeholder management.

Stakeholder engagement and stakeholder management

Different stakeholders have different interests in the project in which they are involved (Yang *et al.*, 2009). Thus, engaging stakeholders prior to the time a decision is reached is considered crucial for projects (Eschenbach and Eschenbach, 1996). Stakeholder engagement refers to all those practices that the project undertakes to involve stakeholders in a positive manner in project activities (Greenwood, 2007). Stakeholder engagement may be seen as a mechanism for consent, as a mechanism for control, as a mechanism for co-operation, as a method for enhancing trust, as a discourse to enhance fairness and thus a mechanism of stakeholder management (Owen *et al.*, 2000).

Stakeholder engagement is also a mechanism by which organizational accountability and responsibility toward stakeholders can be acquitted (Gray, 2002), often through the involvement of stakeholders in decision making and governance (Van Buren, 2001). The more an organization engages with its stakeholders, the more accountable and responsible that organization is toward these stakeholders. Engagement of stakeholders can be a means by which the organization may assemble contributions (Sillanpaa, 1998) or manage risks (Deegan, 2002) posed by influential stakeholders. The importance of engaging stakeholders has been advocated for in building meaningful and sincere relationships (Hart and Sharma, 2004; Sharma and Vredenburg, 1998). Kaur and Lodhia (2018) noted that

engaging stakeholders in the accounting and reporting process enables organizations to identify and incorporate their material concerns, issues, perceptions, needs and expectations. Quality stakeholder engagement in the sustainability reporting and accounting process generates creative solutions to address stakeholders' concerns, increases responsiveness, transparency and accountability (Brown and Hicks, 2013; GRI, 2013) and establishes closer ties to stakeholders interested in sustainability performance (Hörisch *et al.*, 2015). Thus we hypothesize that the following:

H4. Stakeholder engagement positively associates with stakeholder management.

Methodology

This study adopts a cross-sectional and quantitative approach. A cross-sectional survey was preferred because it enabled the researcher to obtain data at one specific point in time which increases the validity and generalizability of findings (Yin, 2009).

The study was limited to the 141 PPP projects in the different sectors in Uganda (Planning and Economic Development, 2016). A sample size of 103 PPP projects was selected basing on the table for determining sample size by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Data were collected from 94 projects (a response rate of 91.3 percent). On the basis of Field's (2009) guidelines, this study covered a minimum of six stakeholders per PPP project. Stratified random sampling was used to select projects from the entire population. PPP projects were categorized according to different sectors of the economy. The different strata included: agriculture, energy, education, transport, health, tourism, industry, judiciary, defense and security. This method was preferred because it ensures proportionate representation in the sample and it took into account the differences across the different PPP projects in the different sectors of the country (Hoxha and Capelleras, 2010).

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires that were hand delivered to the stakeholders (Creswell, 2003). Questionnaire items were adapted from previous studies. All the items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Trust was measured using two indicators (honesty and benevolence). Trust items were adapted from Liu *et al.* (2008). The items include, "we believe that the project will keep the promises they make on time, we believe the project is always honest when dealing with stakeholders, when making important decisions, the project is concerned about our interests and expectation." Engagement was measured using three indicators (vigor, dedication and absorption). Engagement items were adopted and modified from Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) and the items include: I can continue with this project for a very long period of time, am proud to be with this project and it is difficult to detach myself from this project. Commitment was measured using three indicators (affective, normative and continuance) adapted from Meyer and Allen (1997). The items include: we feel emotionally attached to this project, we have a sense of obligation to other stakeholders of this project and I enjoy discussing this project with people outside it. Communication was measured using two indicators (frequency and formality) adapted from Anderson *et al.* (1987) and Frazier *et al.* (1989). The items include: the project frequently communicates with project stakeholders, we spend little time to get to know more about the project and we have been provided with relevant project information.

Stakeholder management was measured using four indicators (collaboration, interdependence, defending stakeholder actions and consultation). Stakeholder management was operationalized in this study to mean the different ways and means the PPP project can undertake to meet the interests and expectations of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). The items include: the project relies on its stakeholders for the resources, the project team consults stakeholders before making decisions, our input is always taken seriously by the project and our interests and expectations are always protected.

Common methods bias was also addressed in order to reduce the measurement error which normally threatens the validity and study conclusions (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). A number of precautionary procedures were undertaken to overcome common methods bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). These included; elimination of questionnaire ambiguity. We avoided vague, ambiguous and double barreled questions. Construct items were separated, staggered and mixed them throughout the survey instrument to prevent respondents from easily guessing the relationships under study. Independent variables were collected differently from dependent variable. This approach is supported by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) who contend that one way of controlling common methods variance is to collect the measures of both predictor and criterion variables from differently.

Data analysis

Before data analysis, data cleaning was carried out (Field, 2009). Missing data were determined in terms of cases, variables and values. Since missing values were less than 5 percent, we replaced them using Linear interpolation. Few outliers were identified in the data using box plots and were replaced with the mean accordingly since their presence bias the mean and inflate the standard deviation (Field, 2009). Cleaned data were imported and analyzed using structured equation modeling with the aid of partial least squares specifically Smart PLS 3 (Ringle *et al.*, 2005). According to Hair *et al.* (2013), Smart PLS works well with small samples (less than 200). From our study valid responses were 94 PPP projects, thus making PLS-SEM suitable.

Results

Validity of the instrument was obtained using the content validity index (CVI). Through expert interviews and a panel of practitioners, the questionnaires were assessed to ensure that the scale items are meaningful; the statements are generally understandable and capture the issues under study. CVI of greater than 0.70 was obtained for all the constructs studied and all matters that were raised by the experts were addressed in the final instrument. Construct validity was carried out to establish whether the instrument measures the latent items of intended constructs (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). Construct validity was in two forms that is; convergent validity and discriminant validity (Neuman, 2007). Convergent validity is the extent to which a measure correlates positively with alternative measures of the same construct. To establish convergent validity, average variance expected (AVE) was used. Our results indicate that all the AVE values are greater than the acceptable than the threshold of 0.5, indicating convergent validity was confirmed (Henseler *et al.*, 2009) as indicated in Table I.

On the other hand, discriminant validity is the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other constructs by empirical standards. Establishing discriminant validity implies that a construct is unique and captures phenomena not represented by other constructs in the model (Hair *et al.*, 2013). Using discriminant validity, an indicator’s outer loadings on a construct should be higher than all its cross loadings with other constructs that is the square root of the AVE of each construct should be higher than its highest

Latent variables	Cronbach’s α	Composite reliability	Average variance expected (AVE)	VIF
Commitment	0.896	0.924	0.708	4.971
Communication	0.894	0.922	0.705	2.697
Engagement	0.870	0.927	0.714	4.381
Trust	0.883	0.928	0.809	2.866
Stakeholder management	0.893	0.916	0.611	2.751

Table I.
Reliability validity

correlation with any other construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). According to the results in Table II, this condition was met indicating that there is discriminant validity.

Furthermore, internal consistency reliability of the indicators was ascertained using both the Cronbach's coefficient α and composite reliability. Cronbach's α assumes that all indicators are equally reliable and is sensitive to the number of items in the scale. It generally tends to underestimate the internal consistency reliability. But PLS-SEM prioritizes the indicators according to their individual reliability. Composite reliability was employed since it takes into account the different outer loadings of the indicator variables (Hair *et al.*, 2013). According to results in Table I, all the α coefficients and composite reliability values for individual test variables were above 0.8 meaning the instrument was reliable (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1978).

In order to establish the degree to which independent variables are highly correlated (Hair *et al.*, 2011), variance inflation factors (VIF) was used and the VIF values for all the variables meet the threshold of less than five indicating multicollinearity is not an issue in this study as seen in Table I.

Project characteristics

Majority of the PPP projects have been in existence for a period of 6–10 years and 1–5 years, respectively, representing a total percentage of 47.83 percent implying that PPP arrangement in Uganda is in its infancy stage and a new experience. On project type, majority of the projects studied were energy projects representing 23.48 percent indicating that PPP arrangement was first embraced in the energy sector. On project size, majority of the PPP projects in Uganda representing 68.7 percent have less than \$100m invested in them. This explains the fact that PPP arrangement in Uganda is still in the infancy stage and not a lot of money has been invested in them.

Correlation and regression analysis

In order to establish the direction and strength of the relationships between the latent variables and to determine the explanatory power of communication, trust, engagement and commitment on stakeholder management, a structural model was assessed as indicated in Figure 1.

Results from Figure 1 indicate a significant positive relationship between communication and stakeholder management with a path coefficient of 0.426, $t = 3.710$, $p < 0.05$. This implies that when there is effective, clear and timely communication among the stakeholders, stakeholder management is enhanced in PPP projects in Uganda. Thus *H1* is supported. Results further indicate that there is an insignificant positive relationship between trust and stakeholder management ($r = 0.061$, $t = 0.566$, $p < 0.05$). This means that when stakeholder trust is increased slightly, stakeholder management in PPP project is also slightly enhanced. Thus *H2* was not supported. Furthermore, results show that commitment is insignificantly and positively associated with stakeholder management ($r = 0.145$, $t = 1.095$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that stakeholder commitment is not a significant predictor when addressing their interests and expectations. Thus *H3* was also not supported. Finally, findings show that there

Variables	Commitment	Communication	Engagement	Trust	Stakeholder management
Commitment	0.842				
Communication	0.779	0.883			
Engagement	0.812	0.729	0.891		
Trust	0.825	0.794	0.817	0.900	
Stakeholder management	0.771	0.683	0.774	0.741	1.000

Table II.
Discriminant validity

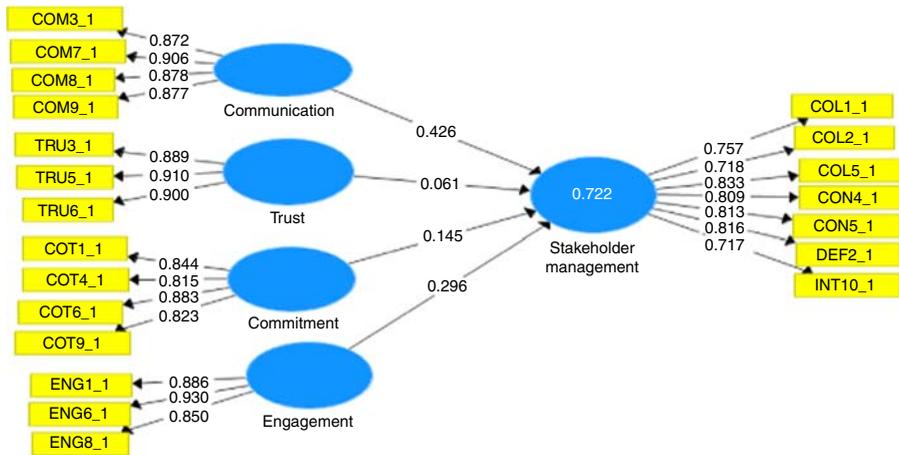


Figure 1.
Correlation results

is a positive and significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and stakeholder management with a path coefficient of 0.296, $t = 2.024$, $p < 0.05$. This result implies that when stakeholders are fully engaged in the project, managing their interests and expectations become easier.

Results from Figure 1 further indicate that a combination of stakeholder communication, trust, commitment and engagement account for up to 77.2 percent of the variance in stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda. However, it was noted that addressing stakeholder communication and engagement should take priority if stakeholder management is to be effectively done.

Discussion of findings

Results indicate that stakeholder communication is a significant predictor of stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda. This means that when stakeholders are kept informed of project decisions and expectations, stakeholder management is enhanced. Effective communication creates, shapes, maintains stakeholder relationships and endorses mutual understanding between the project and its stakeholders. It also helps in resolving stakeholder disputes, aligns perceptions and expectations and creates an understanding between the two parties. The result is consistent with (Briner *et al.*, 1996; Cleland, 1995) who noted that effective, regular and planned communication with all project stakeholders is necessary for stakeholder management since it helps in resolving conflicts among stakeholders.

Results also indicate that trust is insignificantly but positively associated with stakeholder management. This means trust is not a significant predictor of stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda. One of the reasons for an insignificant relationship is that PPP arrangement in Uganda is still in the infancy stage and yet trust among stakeholders is a concept that is built over a long period of time. This means that PPP projects will be accepted by stakeholders after demonstrating that they are reliable and can offer support by meeting interests and expectations. This finding is inconsistent with Yin-Hsi (2013) who noted that building trust is vital aspect in stakeholder management in Chinese hotel industry. If trust between the stakeholders is believed to be strong, the co-operation between them tends to be long term. The result is also inconsistent with Beslin and Reddin (2004) who noted that trust is a powerful asset and can create loyalty that gives project stakeholders the benefit of the doubt in situations where they want to be understood and believed.

Results further indicate that stakeholder commitment is insignificantly and positively associated with stakeholder management in PPP projects. This finding means that when stakeholders are emotionally attached to the PPP project is not an important factor in managing interests and expectations. Just like trust, commitment improves when stakeholders begin to recognize the benefits that PPP projects offer to them. This finding is contrary to Meyer and Allen (1997) and Wang (2010) who found a significant positive relationship between stakeholder commitment and stakeholder management. They noted that committed project stakeholders more often do not have intentions to quit, which saves the project the costs of supervision, recruiting and orienting new stakeholders in terms of both time and money.

Results further suggest that stakeholder engagement is significantly and positively associated with stakeholder management. This means when stakeholders are involved in project planning and implementation, managing them becomes easy. This is because stakeholder issues and controversies are easily handled once stakeholders are actively involved. This is in line with Hart and Sharma (2004) who noted that engaging stakeholders is vital since it is important in building meaningful and sincere stakeholder relationships.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the antecedents of stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda. We surveyed 94 PPP projects and found that stakeholder communication and engagement are significant antecedents of stakeholder management in PPP projects. While trust and commitment are insignificant precursors of stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda. Results imply that once there is effective communication among stakeholders, stakeholder management becomes possible. Also, as long as stakeholders trust each other and there is high level of commitment, stakeholder management in PPP projects is enhanced. Finally, when stakeholders are engaged in project activities, managing them becomes easy also. This is because constant interactions among stakeholders lead to identification and of their concerns.

Implications, future directions of research and limitations of the study

Since stakeholder communication has proven to be a significantly antecedent of stakeholder management, it is imperative to all those charged with projects to always provide efficient, correct, regular and timely information to all the stakeholders so that any misunderstandings are sorted out. Thus, there is a need to establish an effective information system to public private projects so that every right and concerned stakeholder can access and share ideas. Managers need to ensure that information to be communicated should be clear, accurate and understandable and should be passed on to the stakeholders as quickly as possible. Engaging all the stakeholders at the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages is key activity when addressing the interests and expectations of stakeholders. This is because involving stakeholders makes them feel a part of the project. This creates project ownership and setting of clear goals and objectives by the PPP project.

The analysis of the inner model (Figure 1) shows that communication, trust, commitment and engagement can only explain 72.2 percent of the variance in stakeholder management in PPP projects in Uganda. Future studies should consider other factors that explain stakeholder management in PPP projects. The study has concentrated on PPP projects in Uganda. Future studies should concentrate on other sectors where many stakeholders are eminent. The study adopted a cross-sectional design and a positivistic approach. Future studies should take a longitudinal approach to be able to capture stakeholders' opinions over a long period of time since PPPs are long term in nature. At last interpretivism approach should be adopted to get a deeper understanding of the antecedents of stakeholder management.

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