Towards building project-stakeholder commitment

Case study – citizenship projects in Uganda

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the effect of project communication on project-stakeholder commitment. Earlier studies have emphasized the significant influence of project-stakeholder commitment to project success; and to date, lack of stakeholder commitment is still listed as a key cause of project failure. In an effort to improve project stakeholder commitment, the paper investigated project communication as a key antecedent of project-stakeholder commitment.

Design/methodology/approach – The study adopted a cross sectional study design and results were drawn from a sample of 92 citizenship projects conducted by 16 commercial banks in Uganda. Data collection was based on a specific type of project in order to obtain context-specific responses.

Findings – The results obtained after running a hierarchical regression indicated that intra-project communication and extra-project communication had a positive combined predictive potential of project-stakeholder commitment with a Beta coefficient of 0.54. It was recommended that project management should create an atmosphere for effective project communication as one of the primary means of ensuring commitment of various project-stakeholder commitment.

Originality/value – This is the first paper to document the effect of project communication on stakeholder commitment in Uganda. Many people in projects in Uganda have lacked commitment to projects due to inadequate information, attributable to gaps in the communication system. The results indicate that project communication has implications for project commitment.

Keywords Uganda, Project management, Stakeholders, Citizenship, Project communication, Project-stakeholder commitment

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Regardless of a project's nature, kind and envisaged goal, the practice of ensuring project-stakeholder commitment is a key antecedent of any project's success (Scott,

2007; Sanchez and Brock, 1996). It follows that a project's failure to be completed on schedule, and meet expected quality within the envisaged scope (Sauser *et al.*, 2009; Howell *et al.*, 2010), will be highly influenced by the commitment of its stakeholders. Of late, the use of the word "project-stakeholder," to describe specifically those persons who affect or are affected by project undertakings is gaining prominence (see e.g. Jan *et al.*, 2008). Project stakeholders include among others the project manager, project beneficiaries and project staff. Although the interest and power of various project stakeholders vary from project to project, the project client, project manager and the project team are arguably some of the key stakeholders across all projects (PMI, 2008). And as such, any efforts made toward boosting the enthusiasm of project management and project staff is a significant stride toward building the overall commitment of project stakeholders. Scott (2007) argues that clarity of project information fosters commitment among stakeholders. According to Baker (2007), over 95 percent of project failures could be attributed to ineffective project communication. Whenever information is not clearly communicated, stakeholders fail to commit to such information. Some commercial banks staff in Uganda showed less commitment to citizenship projects as a result of having insufficient knowledge about what is expected of them by the project managers (Nangoli, 2010). Ireland (2008) also contends that project team members who promise to perform tasks without committing to clear completion deadlines, often cause confusion as to which tasks would be completed in time for follow-on work. Such confusion could be attributed to ineffective project communication (Ramsing, 2009; Ruuska, 1996). This forces rescheduling of project work and has the potential to negatively impact on commitment of project stakeholders (Gakovic and Tetrick, 2003; Conway and Briner, 2002). Research by Wateridge (1999), indicated that less attention has been paid to soft factors like communication despite the significant impact that they have on project undertakings like ensuring stakeholder commitment (see also Crawford and Pollack, 2004, p. 645). The purpose of this study is to find out the extent to which project communication explains project-stakeholder commitment. The rest of this paper contains a review of literature on the conceptualized variables, research design, and the discussion of findings and concludes with implications, limitations and areas for future research.

Literature review

Weaver (2007) contends that project communication has of late gained prominence as one of the inputs to project success alongside Barnes's (1969) "iron triangle" of time, cost and scope. Effective project communication improves the commitment of the project team to performing project activities (Ireland, 2008). Project communication is studied as extra-project communication (external project communication) and intra-project communication (Lievens and Moenaert, 2000). These entail items like appropriateness of information in terms of its quantity, timing, frequency, medium and information quality (Kerzner, 1998). Ramsing (2009) and Baker (2007) contend that the commitment of staff to the performance of project tasks is influenced by the way project managers sway them through verbal, non-verbal and/or written forms of communication. A study by Lei and Skitmore (2004), found out that the most valued skill for project managers is the communication skill. This skill helps managers to communicate in a manner that shapes the attitudes of project stakeholders (Van Vuuren *et al.*, 2006). Effective project communication also makes workers feel that they are cared for and thereby boosts their commitment to undertake tasks (Yammarino and Naughton, 1988; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1990). Parkin (2007) argues that persuasive

means of communication potentially generate high levels of commitment. Such commitment could be expressed in an affective, continuance and/or normative perspective (Meyer and Allen, 1997). This research conceptualizes affective project-stakeholder commitment as the project stakeholder's positive emotional attachment to a project; continuance commitment as the project stakeholders commitment to the project because he/she perceives high costs of losing project membership and normative commitment as the project stakeholder's commitment to the project by virtue of feelings of obligation. Nangoli (2010) avers that effective project communication creates a feeling of responsibility and attachment between a stakeholder and the project tasks that makes one indebted to the project thereby creating an atmosphere for individual team members to act without much control and coercion. This may include acts of taking extra care when executing project tasks without being instructed to do so by the project manager. It can therefore be hypothesized that project communication has a positive impact on project-stakeholder commitment.

Methodology
Research design and setting
The research used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design for data collection. The study population comprised 121 citizenship projects conducted by 16 commercial banks in Uganda (Bank of Uganda, 2009/2010). In line with Smyth and Morris (2007), data collection were based on a specific type of projects in order to obtain context-specific responses. This usually increases relevancy and applicability of results. The list of projects was captured from the sustainability review reports and through interviewing corporate affairs managers/project champions as information about newly commissioned projects was not contained in reports (Goodman, 2000). The unit of analysis comprised the citizenship projects. Simple random sampling method was used. The (121) citizenship projects were written down on small papers and mixed in a box and then (92) of them were randomly picked in accordance with Krejcie and Morgan (1970). This method of sampling gave equal chance to each project in the sampling frame that was chosen. The unit of inquiry comprised the corporate affairs managers and those employees who were/had ever taken part in the sampled projects. From each selected bank, three project managers, two of whom were from any two conveniently selected branches of the bank and one from the bank's head office were sampled. Five employees from each of the bank branches were purposively targeted (Patton, 1990) which added up to a total of 208 target respondents. The inclusion and exclusion criteria was that where a person was picked and found not to have participated in the selected projects, he/she was discarded and replaced with the next convenient person. The responses returned were 77 percent of what was targeted.

Data sources, data collection instrument and data measures
Primary data were sourced from respondents and used in the study because it gives the original perceptions of stakeholders. Since different stakeholders on a project perceive the performance of the project differently, the researcher collected views from the bank project managers, the project team. On the assumption that bank employees are knowledgeable enough to answer questionnaires, yet are the ones who finance and spearhead the execution of tasks, the researcher used their views as a representative sample of stakeholders. Primary data were captured through administering questionnaires. These enabled the respondents to read and

understand the questions before responding and were used to investigate feelings using the Likert scale. The questionnaires contained structured questions. The respondents answered on the basis of how they agreed or disagreed with the statements in the questionnaire. Project communication was measured using an abridged version of The Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire, developed by Downs and Hazen (1977) and Goldhaber' (1979) Communication Audit Survey (CAS) questionnaire. The CAS is being used by many researchers today (e.g. Carrière and Bourque, 2009; Madlock, 2008). Project-stakeholder commitment was measured using an abridged version of the employee Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, as developed by Meyer and Allen (1997), was used to assess the commitment of individual members on the project teams because it specifies a clear delineation among the types of organizational commitment.

Validity, reliability and multicollinearity

The researchers pre-tested the data collection instrument among a section of the intended respondents. Inappropriate questions were revised. The content validity index and the Cronbach's α value were used to measure the validity and reliability of the instrument, respectively.

The reliability analysis was conducted by calculating the Cronbach's α coefficient for each construct. The results showed that the Cronbach's α measures for all the constructs well exceeded the recommended critical point of 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2009), indicating good internal-consistency reliability. The variance inflation factor (VIF) and the tolerance levels were run to test for multicolliniarity. The VIF was <4 indicating that multicollinearity in this study was not a problem (Garson, 2010) and as such the interpretations of the β weights and R^2 were reliable (Table I).

Results and discussion of findings

Sample characteristics of respondents and respondent firms

Of the 161 respondents, 16 were diploma graduates, 114 were degree graduates, 25 had a professional qualifications and only six had masters. Totally 109 of the respondents were working with banks of a foreign origin while 52 of them were employed in banks of a local origin; 60 of the respondents had a less than three years tenure, 88 had stayed for three to six years, ten had stayed for seven to ten years while three had stayed for more than ten years; 78 of the respondents were male while 83 were female; 75 were single, 81 were married, three were divorced and one fell under others; six were below the age of 20 years, 118 were between 20 and 30 years of age, 36 were between 31 and 40 years of age while one was above 40 years of age.

On the side of the number of projects, 13 of the projects came from Tropical Bank, 14 from Stanbic Bank, 30 from Post Bank, three from Orient Bank. National Bank of Commerce had two, three from Housing Finance, seven from Diamond Trust Bank, DFCU Bank ten, two from Crane Bank, three from Citi Bank, one from CERUDEB,

Variable	Anchor	Cronbach α value	Content validity index
Project communication	5 point	0.832	0.800
Project-stakeholder commitment	5 point	0.867	0.889

Source: Primary data

Table I.
Cronbach's α values and content validity indices

four from Centenary, four from Cairo International Bank, one from Baroda, 27 from
Barclays while six where from Bank of Africa (Table II).

All respondents from these projects were undecided on extra-project communication
(mean = 3.7) and project commitment (mean = 3.8) while they were all decided on
intra-project commitment. (mean = 4.0). This because the means of the variables for
extra-project commitment and project communication were below 4 on the item scale.
The study revealed a significant positive relationship between individual intra-project
communication and project commitment ($r = 0.860$, $p < 0.01$) and significant positive
relationship between extra-project communication and project commitment
($r = 0.0835$, $p < 0.01$). Findings on intra-project communication and project
commitment showed that the intra-project communication indicates the level of
communication that takes place in projects. This is supported by Lew (2008) who
asserts that in order to have employees committed to the project work, the project
manager has to avail all the important information on the assignments of the project
and what the project is all about. Findings on extra-project communication and
project commitment showed that clients for the projects need to be aware of what is
taking place in projects order not to be left behind and demotivated. So project
managers have to ensure that they communicate the project information that is
required at the different stages of the project inform of reports to these clients. This
reduces resistances and stoppage in the provision of resources by the clients. This is
supported by Ruuska (1996) who asserts that clients will be committed to provide more
support to projects as long as the project communication environment is favorable
and the project manager provides the relevant information to the project
clients (Table III).

Hierarchical analysis explains the extent to which the independent variables predict
project-stakeholder commitment. In Model 1 intra-project communication was
introduced which predicted 86 percent of the variable in project commitment. When
the second model was run both intra-project communication and extra-project

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Tenure (1)	1.7	0.7	1								
Gender (2)	1.5	0.7	0.15	1							
Marital status (3)	1.5	0.6	0.46	0.15	1						
Age (4)	2.2	0.6	0.53**	0.11	0.377**	1					
Highest level of education (5)	2.1	0.5	0.27**	−0.08	0.322**	0.238**	1				
Origin of the bank (6)	1.3	0.6	0.26**	−0.13	0.278**	−0.32	−0.07	1			
Market share (7)	2.4	0.5	0.1	−0.14	−0.1	−0.07	−0.02	0.220**	1		
Intra-project communication (8)	4	2.6	−0.08	0.12	−0.04	0.02	−0.13	0.146	0.087	1	
Extra-project communication (9)	3.7	0	−0.07	0.04	−0.04	0.04	−0.152	0.109	0.071	0.693**	1
Project commitment (10)	3.8	0.7	−0.12	0.12	−0.08	0.01	−0.15	0.142	0.063	0.860**	0.835**

Note: **Correlation significant at 0.001 level (two-tailed test)
Source: Primary data

Table II.
Zero-order correlation

	Model 1	SE	Model 2	SE	Collinearity Tolerance	VIF
Constant	0.74	0.15	0.19	0.13	na	na
Intra-project communication	0.86**	0.04	0.54**	0.04	0.5	1.9
Extra-project communication			0.46	0.42	0.5	1.9
R	0.86		0.92		na	na
R^2	0.74		0.85		na	na
Adjusted R^2	0.74		0.85		na	na
F-statistics	450.79		445.34		na	na
Significance	0		0		na	na
R^2 change	0.74		0.11		na	na
F-change statistics	450.79		115.44		na	na
Significance F change	0		0		na	na

Notes: $n = 161$. Standardized coefficients are reported. **Regression is significant at 0.01 level
Source: Primary data

Table III.
Hierarchical regression analysis with project communication as the dependent variable

communication were significant predictors of project commitment with a prediction potential of 92 percent. The R^2 change was 73 percent and the F-change statistics was significant (F-statistic $= 450.79$). When extra-project communication was introduced, the β coefficient for intra-project communication dropped from 0.86 to 0.54. The β coefficient for extra-project communication construct was $\beta = 0.46$. This was in line with the research hypothesis. There were no issues of multicollinearly because the tolerance factors were above 0.10 and the VIF were < 5.0. A tolerance of < 0.20 or 0.10 and/or a VIF of 5 or 10 and above indicates a multicollinearity problem (O'Brien, 2007). The research results are in agreement with those of Yammarino and Naughton (1988) who found out that a positive relationship exists between amount of time spent communicating and the level of effort expended by each project team member on execution of tasks. The findings are also consistent with Ntayi *et al.* (2010) finding that workers with positive attitude about the tasks carry out certain role behaviors well beyond the basic minimum levels required of them.

Discussions
A positive and significant relationship between project communication and project-stakeholder commitment was revealed by the results in Table II. These results support the hypothesis that project communication and project-stakeholder commitment are positively related. The results confirm Ng *et al.* (2006), Varona (1996), Yammarino and Naughton's (1988) studies which demonstrated that a positive relationship exists between amount of time spent communicating and the level of effort expended by individuals on execution of tasks. As such, the results may imply that were project supervisors spare time to listen to project stakeholders like the project team, they are likely to exert extra efforts on performing citizenship activities. The results also indicated that communication in citizenship projects is largely shaped by the preferences of the communities for which they are intended. They showed that most of the communities feel that they are cared for and are like part of the family of the citizenship projects' implementation team. These results are in agreement with those of Eisenberger *et al.* (1990), who argued that when individuals recognize that they are cared for, they become more committed and conscious about their responsibilities,

they take greater involvement in the executing tasks, and are more innovative. However, caution has to be taken by management since studies by Schein (1980), Conway and Briner (2002) indicate that this atmosphere of reciprocity can only be sustained if the project management continues to observe their part of the formal or rather informal bargain. The same advice was re-echoed by Gakovic and Tetrick (2003) who argued that as long as a project delivers as expected, its stakeholders remain committed to the project's values.

Implications for practice and research
This study focussed on the impact of project communication on project-stakeholder commitment. Although there is growing research on aspects of project management, the few existing studies that tend to examine these two constructs are largely anecdotal (see e.g. Ireland, 2008). Our study therefore provides an empirical basis for future researchers. This study also makes efforts to popularize citizenship projects in the project management profession which formally were solely studied under the marketing profession. Such a developed can enable data mining by innovative firms. For project practitioners, the study implies that project-stakeholders should be cautious about sending unclear information to others as this will reduce their commitment. It also implies that the onus is on key project stakeholders like the project managers to ensure efficient project communication since project team members cannot be committed to the projects unless they have clear project goals.

Limitations of the study and areas for further research
The results could have limited applicability since the data were collected from a single kind of projects. It is probable that the results may not hold for another kind of project like software projects, construction projects and engineering projects among others. The study was also cross-sectional and responses were vulnerable to mood swings of the respondents among other limitations inherent in cross-sectional results.

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