

Effective Management: A Key to Stakeholder Satisfaction Performance in Project-Based Organizations

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Abstract

Project-wise, communication is an important element that many ignore its strategizing in projects operations. Communications in rural-setting projects especially in developing countries still needed further studies to reduce number of project failure triggered by poor communication. Therefore, the study aimed at assessing effective communication management emphasizing on the communication channels used in achieving stakeholder satisfaction in project-based organizations choosing RECODA's project as a case study. With 125 sample respondents, the study established types and examined effectiveness of various communication channels. The findings envisaged that; traditional channels are still highly used in rural-oriented projects. Of the four communication channels used, face-to-face and meetings were rated the most effective modes of communication channels preferred by the stakeholders in projects due their convenience. Physical factors and few mobile phone ownerships were some of the highly rated barriers to effective communication. Conclusively, modern communication channels adoption in poor rural-based projects is still challenging.

Keywords

Effective communication • Project performance • Stakeholder satisfaction • Communication channels

Introduction

The Phoenicians developed the alphabet in 3500 BC. The term communication originates from the Latin word communicate, which means 'to make common', and when communicating, a common understanding is created [1]. Communication requires a clear understanding of the communication objectives and the skills to create messages to the right people, at the right time and with the right information in the right format. About 75-90 percent of a project manager's time is spent formally or informally communicating, according to PMI's Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge. But surprisingly today, even with globalization, communication between diverse groups is a major challenge. Most projects experience a breakdown in communications. In order to define a relevant communication strategy, it is essential to determine and be familiar with the targets we are addressing in order to be able to offer them content that is consistent with their centers of interest, their needs or their problems [2].

Hoffmann argues that 70 percent of the delays in project completion occur due to the absence of timely and sufficient communication. Furthermore, on average, two in five projects do not meet their original goals and business intent, and one-half of those unsuccessful projects are related to ineffective communications. From these sample statistics, the level of failure in the projects resulting from poor adherence to communication is high [3]. It further shows that there is little attention allocated in its improvement and management. For instance, the Iranian industries attempted to incorporate Enterprise Resources Planning (ERP) into their operations has witnessed some degree of failure due to miscommunication. Subsequently, one of

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the six major factors is visible during implementation of ICT project is poor communication. Similarly, Community Development Corporations (CDC) in Milwaukee, Dallas, and Philadelphia failed due to communication problems. The Oak Cliff Development Corporation (OCDC) in Dallas failed due to the fact that the executive director did not communicate well with political leaders, particularly local city council representative. Even in Portland CDC's communication between funders and CDC's hindered the success of projects. Further research on the importance of effective communications uncovers that a startling 56 percent (US\$75 million of that US\$135 million) is at risk due to ineffective communications.

Project management is rapidly growing focus discipline within many organizations and business ventures, however searching an optimal way of operating and continuous management of projects are one of the big challenges. One of most significant factors affecting the success of a project is the communication ability of the project manager [4-8]. Buddenhagen and Baldwin conducted a research in Tanzania explained that open communication focuses on unrestricted information flow between community members and project personnel throughout the project [9]. Personnel should make all details available, such as expenditure reports detailing contributions from all stakeholder groups [10]. This open dialogue encouraged mutual understanding. Nonetheless, there is lack of stakeholder cooperation due to poor representation during the discussions, which also reflects the inadequacy of mutual respect, confidence and trust among stakeholders which ultimately leads to mixed-use project failures in Malaysia [11-15]. From the four performance indicators thus, quality, time, cost and stakeholder satisfaction performance, this study focused on stakeholder's satisfaction performance (information stakeholder satisfaction and result stakeholder satisfaction). The focus was selected on stakeholder satisfaction because time and cost performance can be compromised however; stakeholders' satisfaction is mandatory and has no compromise. Stakeholder satisfaction is an utmost important factor in projects especially local governance improvement projects. Quality of communication methods between stakeholders and developers is an understudied area. Henceforth, even with proper time performance and cost performance without stakeholder being satisfied with the result and information provided of the project, the project will be in vain. Communication is a big problem to many entities in the world including Tanzania [16-20].

Empirical research as evidence on how communication impacts the performance of still lacking, including the best set of tools and techniques to be used for successful management of communication. It appears that there is a need to establish contextual and empirical evidence on how communication impacts project performance. According to PMI, poor

communication is the number one reason for projects failure at a rate of 67% or more for larger projects. Henceforth, effective communication must be sought and attained due to its vital role which affects the project's outcome directly. Ultimately, according to PMI, neglecting communication leads to poor coordination of project activities, un-sustainability of the projects, de-motivated project teams and stakeholders, design errors, resistance from the stakeholders, slowdown in the entire project thus, failure generating results that are in line with the stakeholders' expectations [21-25]. Therefore, the study aimed at establishing the communication channels stakeholders perceived effective and the communication barriers stakeholders faced during the project implementation using Research, Community and Organizational Development Associates (RECODA) a project-based organization as a case study.

Literature review

Effective communication: The impact of effective communication by managers has become a topic of interest in the literature because of the way it impacts both the employee experience and organizations. Initially, communication was an activity conducted by small number of people using face-to-face modalities. Several communication models have been developed over the years to better understand the communication process. According to Ted advances in the understanding of how communication works are reflected by the development of communication models (Table 1).

Table 1. History of communication models.

Date	Models	Key characteristics
Sender → Receiver models		
400 BC	Aristotle	A sender transmits a message to an audience
1927	Lasswell	Characteristics of the sender, audience, medium influence message impact
1949	Shannon/weaver	Noise distorts message
1954	Schramm	Sender and receiver's "field of experience" impacts how a message is interpreted
1958	Jakobsen	Communication is effective when senders and receivers have a shared understanding of the world
1960	SCMR(Berlo)	Sender, Message, Channel, Receiver; characteristics of each impact how a message is interpreted
1957	Westley maclean	Gatekeepers control the messages the public receives
Transactional models		
1954	Schramm/osgood	Communication is a reciprocal process between communicators
1959	Riley	Communicators' social groups influence how messages are interpreted
1970	Barnlund	Meaning is created between communicators in a cumulative process
Constructivist models		
1969	Symbolic interactionism	Meaning is created through shared symbols
1974	Framing	How a message is presented influences its interpretation

Today, new technologies have emerged due to Globalization and the 21st Century has made it possible for information to be produced, distributed and shared. A good communication process keeps stakeholders engaged and project teams motivated. That is to say communication has to be stable for proper coordination within the project. If the management struggles with communication, they will probably struggle with the project as well as well as cause of cost overrun.

Satisfactory and effective communication contributes to an

organization's success, employee attitude and morale, and customer satisfaction. Effective communication is about more than just exchanging information. It's about understanding the emotion and intentions behind the information. Being able to clearly convey a message, you need to also listen in a way that gains the full meaning of what's being said and make the other person feel heard and understood. Effective communication requires a clear understanding of the objectives of the communication and the skills to create messages that are focused: on the right people, at the right time and with the right information in the right format. The message has to be decoded by the receiver as intended by the sender in order for communication to be effective. Furthermore, effectiveness of a communication channel is defined by the fact that each channel has a maximum amount of information that can be transmitted within a certain amount of time. Effectiveness is also connected with the cost of communication. Generally, sincere and effective communication styles among project member enables members to integrate the project through internalization of the project's objectives and rules. Communication has been perceived to be a cyclic system and each of the elements in the cycle has to be effective and proper for communication to be precise and effective. Reflects the elements of the communication process (Figure 1).

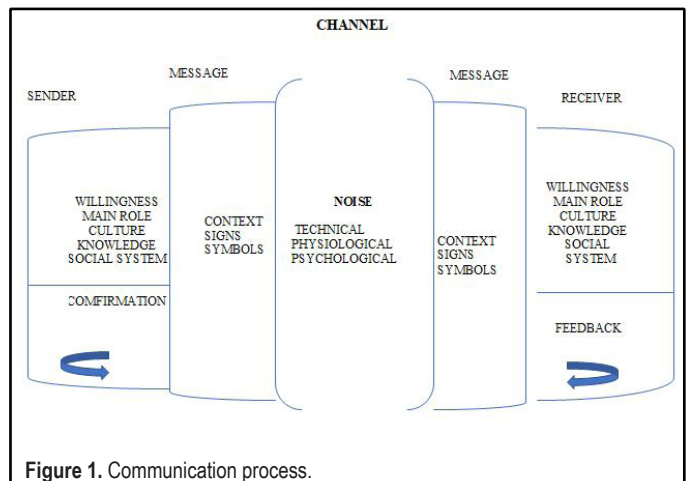


Figure 1. Communication process.

Communication channel: A communication channel is a means by which messages are carried from one person to another and may take the form of mediated systems such as; telephone conversations, internal letters or memos, face to face meetings, electronic mail, internal newsletter, internet. People choose between communication channels for numerous reasons, such as heuristics, ease of use, experience, or simple preference, and the communication channel may contribute to the success of the overall message. Each communication channel has its advantages and disadvantages in terms of speed, clarity, maximum size of the message transferred, cost, etc. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that each channel is suitable for a different set of circumstances. Furthermore, according to Selection of the right communication channel depends on an understanding of the communication objectives and audiences, and the strengths and weaknesses of the different channels that are available.

According to Channels a number of considerations will have to be made in selecting the channel which is;

- What is available,
- How much money can be spent,
- What channel is preferred by the source as well as receiver,
- Which channels are received by the most people,
- Which channels have the most impact,
- Which channels are most adaptable to the kind of purpose which the source has, and
- Which channels are most adaptable to the content of the message (Table 2)

Table 2. The advantages and disadvantages of the four categories of communication medium.

Types	Advantages	Disadvantages
Oral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides opportunity for immediate feedback - Involves non-verbal cues - Allows for immediate feedback and consensus building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides no permanent record of communication - Reduces sender's control of message - Immediate feedback may not be constructive
Written	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides permanent record - Shared easily with large audiences - Minimizes emotional reaction to message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delays feedback including non-verbal cues. - Takes time and resources to distribute
Visual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conveys complex ideas. - Simplifies messages - Reduces demand on receiver's time demand - Provides permanent record 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires specialized skills and more time to produce - Increases difficulty to transmit and store
Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivers messages quickly - Reaches large audiences - Provides interactive media - Provides permanent record 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entails privacy and security risks - Required specialized skill and time to produce

Stakeholder satisfaction performance: Satisfaction is derived from the Latin *satis* (enough) and *facere* (to do or make). Thus, satisfying products and services have the capacity to provide what is sought to the point of being "enough." Two related words are *satiation*, which loosely means enough up to the point of excess, and *satiety*, which can mean a surfeit or too much of enough, as if to say that too much is necessarily undesirable. Generally, it has been widely accepted that quality, time, cost, and stakeholder satisfaction are major concern factors in the performance measurements of a project. However, time and cost attributes in a project can be compromised on however the stakeholders' satisfaction can never be tempered with is the real determinant of the success of the project.

According stakeholder satisfaction is a measurement of stakeholder perceptions of a program, project or initiative. It is measured by asking stakeholders to rate their satisfaction on a numerical scale or index. Stakeholder satisfaction is one among the project performance indicators that is determined by the extent to which the project objectives and a project operation/project implementation (service) meet and/or exceed stakeholder's expectations. In this study, the stakeholders' satisfaction on the communication system was assessed. The key point is that the project success components must meet stakeholders' satisfaction where there is a link between their interest and these components.

Materials and Methods

Research design adopted in this study is a case study. The case study approach allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings. Through case study methods, a researcher is able to go beyond the quantitative statistical results and understand the behavioral conditions through the actor's perspective. By including both quantitative and

qualitative data, case study helps explain both the process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation. Henceforth through the design, the study aims to attain an in-depth understanding on effective communication role in stakeholder satisfaction performance in project. The targeted population included stakeholders of the Empowerment and Livelihood Improvement to PLHAs and their Communities Project implemented by RECODA. The organization was facilitated by several local institutions such as KIWAKKUKI during the project operation [26-30].

According to Bailey and Deilce sample size between 30 at 5% confidence level is generally sufficient for many researchers. Subsequently, Israel says that 30 to 200 elements are sufficient when the attribute is present 20 to 80 percent of the time (i.e., the distribution approaches normality). Furthermore, Kenny and Madgin as long as the sample is based on 30 or more observations, the sampling distribution of the mean can be safely assumed to be normal. Therefore, 30 project stakeholders of the Empowerment and Livelihood Improvement to PLHAs and their Communities Project were surveyed using questionnaires randomly from each village hence, making a total of 120 respondents [31-35].

Furthermore, purposive sampling was used to attain 5 Key Informants who would provide in-depth explanation on the prior data collected from survey whereby, the information was collected through a structured interview using a checklist as a tool. The KI were one village extension worker

- One project manager,
- A representative of the KIWAKKUKI organization
- Two project team members

The analysis and summary of the findings was done with the assistance of statistical tool thus Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) whereby Descriptive statistics were determined using in order to explore the underlying features in the data [36-40]. For each of the indicators for each variable, the mean score and standard deviation of the responses was calculated in the 5-point Likert scales. The mean scores were aggregated so as to illustrate the general score of the specified variables. Responses with mean score below the aggregate mean will be determined as having low impact while responses with mean score above the aggregate mean will be determined as having high impact. The scale analysis assisted to identify the ranking as well.

Results and Discussion

Communication channels project stakeholders perceived effective

The respondents were required to rate the communication channel exposed during the project effectiveness in the deliverance of the project. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of effectiveness of the communication channel to the performance of donor-funded projects whereas

- Not effective
- Slightly effective
- Moderate effective,
- Very effective
- Exceedingly effective.

The scoring was done using mean values ranging from 1-5; therefore, the closer a score is to 5, the more effective the communication channel is to the performance of the projects (Table 3).

Table 3. Effectiveness of the communication channel used during the project (n=120).

Communication channel	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Rank
Face to face	2	5	4.05	0.868	1
Mobile phones	2	5	3.66	0.849	3
Meetings	2	5	4.03	1.004	2
Letter	2	5	3.64	1.036	4
Grand mean		3.845		Digital	Digital

The most frequently used communication channels were mobile phones (phone calls and phone messages), public meetings and face to face [41-45]. Traditional means of communication channel were the only communication channels used in the project. Some of the channels such as telephones and letters were not used by every stakeholder. In rural based projects, the study has shown that even with the perceived globalization around the world, still means of communication used in the rural communities remain traditional. Few respondents had any internet-based and wireless communication channels whereas only 18% of the had smartphones while none had personal computers.

Nevertheless, a study conducted in Zambia revealed that communication channels used in the project included demonstration blocks, village meetings and the electronic communication channel used was radio. Subsequently, print communication channels were also used such as posters (leaflets). The communication channels used in the later project show the use of a more modern form of communication channels contrary to the former project which communication channels were mainly traditional. According to Forcada respondents' preferred verbal communication channel was face-to-face, followed by mobile phone, and finally video call and teleconference [45-50]. While a lot of attention is received by the methods of effective communications that are new, the value along with the relevance of the traditional methods of communication still exists. Table 3 also shows that the respondent's description of how the communication channels were effective during the project. From a grand mean of 3.845, face to face and meetings were rated to be the most effective communication channel used during the project when fostering the performance of the project leading by 4.05 and 4.03 mean. The stakeholders favored face-to-face communication channel despite the development of much less expensive and more flexible electronic ways of communicating, because firstly, being physically close influences better use and understanding of all senses such as sight, sound, smell and touch. Secondly, using face to face allows better chance for probing questions and better clarification during the process of communication (training and practical). Furthermore, Face to face method facilitate connection and bonding between the local communities with external agencies. Lastly, the medium has an advantage of speed because the message was instantaneously received by the receiver.

Face to face communication is the most traditional, but still very effective, way to communicate and spread information, as it allows targeting the message and obtaining a direct feedback. Both Public and small group meeting were used during the project. Public meeting was initially conducted by the project representatives, the local government representatives and the public residing in the stated villages. The initial aim was to introduce the organizations (RECODA and KIWAKUKI) and their intentions, goals and objectives. Small group meetings were then conducted by the stakeholders who were interested and registered to be part of the project. Some of the meeting conducted during the meeting was Kick-of meeting, Project Team internal meetings, Project stakeholders with project team meeting, Project Progress Meetings and Project stakeholders' meetings. Due to the effectiveness of the meetings, there was gradual increase in the attendance level of the stakeholders in all four villages propagating much to stakeholders' satisfaction [51,52].

However, the grand mean suggests that the communication channels were generally rated moderately effective. This shows that in communicating with a project stakeholder the medium used to communicate the project message is just as important as the message itself. The effectiveness of

some of the communication channels was hindered by some communication barriers.

Zulch's conducted a study in South Africa and concluded that, electronic communication ranked the highest in relation to effective communication. The communication method ranked second was written, communication with oral communication ranking third. Visual communication was ranked fourth and nonverbal communication fifth. However, written media were better than oral media (i.e. face to face), a finding that is in contrast with this particular study. Communication channels used in the project varies depending on the setting, which depends on the environmental contexts of interpersonal communication. This could substantiate the variation of communication channels used in the study areas.

Effective communication barriers

A 5-point Likert scale was used to rate the importance of the possible barriers encountered by stakeholders during the project and denoted as

- Not Significant
- Slightly Significant
- Moderately Significant
- Very Significant and
- Exceedingly Significant

This was to measure the importance of the communication barriers because in a community not all problems bare the same weight. The scoring was done using mean values ranging from 1-5; hence, the closer a score is to 5, the more significant the barrier is to communication (Table 4).

Table 4. Barriers to communication (n=120).

Barriers of communication	Mean	Std. deviation	Rank
Poor infrastructure such as roads	3.01	0.983	1
Lack of gargets such as phones	2.48	0.879	2
Sickness	2.33	0.758	3
Illiteracy	2.29	0.893	4
Distance between the stakeholders' households	2.28	0.777	5
Sincerity barrier	2.26	0.615	6
Old age	2.24	0.926	7
Sender's barrier	2.11	0.848	8
Role perception barrier	2.08	0.602	9
Grand mean	2.28		

Study findings in table 4 shows that the Grand mean achieved is 2.28. The effective communication barriers mean score that will fall below the grand mean will be considered low rated communication barriers. Subsequently, the effective communication barriers mean score that will fall above or equal to the grand mean will be considered high rated barriers. Generally, the communication barriers were present however not highly rated. The highest-rated barriers were poor infrastructure, lack of gadgets

such as phones, sickness, illiteracy and distance between the stakeholders' households with 3.01, 2.48, 2.33, 2.29 and 2.28 mean score respectively. The low-rated effective communication barriers were sincerity barrier, old age, sender's barrier and role perception barrier with 2.26, 2.24, 2.11 and 2.08 respectively.

Age difference, ineffective reporting systems, unclear objectives, interpersonal conflicts, unclear communication channels, gender issues and lack of necessary skills are among the leading communication barriers that affect the effective communication in Singapore projects. The classification of some of effective communication barriers is explained below;

High rated effective communication barriers

Physical barriers: Physical barriers to communication in this study were the poor infrastructure and geographic distance between the project staff and the stakeholders as well as from one stakeholder to another with mean score of 3.01 and 2.28 respectively. In case of emergency meetings stakeholders without mobile communication had to be followed to his/her house for delivery of the message which proved difficult. In the villages, the settlement is mostly dispersed especially in Mdawi and Kidia and the poor physical infrastructure such as the roads, especially during the rainy seasons flared the barrier. The findings are supported by Mutua who insisted that communication is generally easier over shorter distances as more communication channels are available and less technology is required.

Accessibility of mobile gadgets: Due to the poor living conditions of the stakeholders, some of the stakeholders could not afford communication gadgets such as hand phones especially smart phone. Nonetheless, telephones were among the main channels of communication used within the project as a way to inform each other of any project progress as well as emergency meetings. This caused a challenge as they missed some of the important and up-to-date project information especially in emergency situation. The barrier was rated by 54.2% of the respondents as a barrier that affected effective communication during the project.

Sickness: Some of the stakeholders were old and about 10% of each group were people living with HIV/AIDS as a requirement. The situation sometimes posed as a challenge as the stakeholders' inability of to make effective participation and involvement in meetings during the project operation. The finding is supported with Melisa explaining that even the most experienced program officers can find it challenging to communicate effectively with special/vulnerable people. It difficult to effectively communicate with a group with young children, adolescents, and older patients as they present unique communication concerns.

Low rated effective communication barriers

Sender barrier: The sender barrier was a barrier that was highlighted by under a third (30.8%). This normally occurred when some of the stakeholders with innovative ideas failed to speak up at a meeting, chaired by the superintendent, for fear of criticism. Even with the high level of participation between the project initiators, some stakeholders feared to express their views. However, a further discussion showed that the fear had nothing to do with the project but with the respondent's lack of self-confidence. Conjointly Lunenburg discussed that some stakeholders fail to speak up at a meeting to provide innovative ideas for fear of criticism.

Sincerity barrier: Some of the project respondents claimed that some project beneficiaries were not completely sincere with their devotion to the project. As a consequence, number of group members has slowly decreased after the project phased out. When the project phased out, RECODA handed the project to KIWAKUKKI to ensure sustainability of the project. Without sincerity, honesty, frankness, and validity in a project, all attempts of communication are destined to fail. Subsequently, FAO explained that lack of interest or wrong attitude can lead to improper communication.

Role perceptions: Role perception is the person's or a group's viewpoints, attitudes, understandings, approaches, or expectations that are related to the status and the position responsibilities. Some of the beneficiaries did not respect their roles in the project. Some disregarded the

project's attempt to improve their livelihood. A 45 year old male respondent claimed that "Other members would tell fellow group members, just go ahead I will learn from you later", another 63 year old female respondent claimed that "some member's lie that they are attending to family emergencies hence, they cannot attend the group meetings but you later find out he/she was farming instead".

Lunenburg explicate that when the stakeholders do not know what their role is, the importance of their role, and what is expected of them, they will not know what to communicate, when to communicate or to whom to communicate.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that traditional communication channels i.e. face to face, meetings, telephones and letters are still entrenched with stakeholders in rural setting channels due to several factors i.e. conservatism and poor livelihoods. Modern communication channels are yet challenging to be adopted proving that there could a long way before project officers use modern form of communication channels when handling rural community projects. Of the four communication channels, face to face and meetings have been rated by the stakeholders as being more satisfying due to being a more effective means of communication. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the effective communication barriers to projects established in the study include poor infrastructure such as roads, lack of communication gadgets i.e. phones, sickness, distance between the stakeholders households, lack of sincerity, old age, sender's barrier and beneficiaries perception of roles barrier were rated. However, from the Likert scale rating, they were not highly rated meaning that the barriers were not as threatening to the stakeholder satisfaction with the project.

Recommendation

- Information sharing by project officers and implementers to stakeholders should consider the socio-demographic characteristics such as education, age and occupation of respondents. This is because they can limit the persons' understanding towards what is communicated.
- Project managers, officers, designers and implementers should think of using a multitude of communication channels such as radios and print communication (posters). Doing so will increase the number of stakeholders interest towards the project and further deliver information to a larger number of stakeholders?
- Communication in project calls for recognition to its role in performance. Therefore, there is need for proper communication plans that are realistic and which call for commitment and a communication management department that is well resourced.
- Lastly, project planners have to critically do proper risk analysis of their communication strategy right from proposal development. Barriers should be predicted and proper contingency plans are put in place so as to reduce or avoid the negative effects of poor communication on the performance of the project.

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