

A qualitative approach to investigate stakeholders' engagement in construction projects

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Abstract

Purpose – Stakeholder engagement in construction projects is an ingredient that contributes to project optimal performance. Many developing countries have a paucity of literature about stakeholders' engagement in construction projects. Therefore, the study investigated South Africa's shareholders' engagement in construction projects and recommended possible measures to mitigate potential limitations.

Design/methodology/approach – The researchers collated data from South African experts in stakeholder engagement via a phenomenology type of qualitative research design. They explored the "perceived hindrances" facing stakeholders' engagement in construction projects and proffer measures to mitigate them. The study analysed collected data via thematic analysis and achieved saturation. Three themes emerged from the analysed data.

Findings – Findings show that efficient stakeholder engagement will enhance team collaboration and integrated construction project delivery. Results identified the perceived limitations facing stakeholders' engagement in South Africa's construction projects and categorised them into individual perceived hindrances, organisational perceived hindrances and government-related perceived hindrances. Also, findings proffer measures to mitigate perceived hindrances via policies and programmes within the sector.

Practical implications – Besides enhancing policymakers and other stakeholders in South Africa's construction industry to understand the benefits of stakeholder engagement better, the study may stir up the construction sector's stakeholders to embrace enhanced and effective stakeholders' management.

Originality/value – This study contributes to construction project practice that involves stakeholders, as it reveals the underlying causes of perceived hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement in construction



projects. Also, it proffers feasible solutions to mitigate these hindrances and enhance stakeholders' engagement within South Africa's construction projects.

Keywords Construction sector, Hindrances, Projects, Stakeholders engagement, Qualitative approach, South Africa

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Integration and partnerships of stakeholders in the construction industry have been identified as crucial factors that influence the performance of construction projects. [Nguyen and Mohamed \(2021\)](#) opined that efficient stakeholder management is one of the vital success factors for construction projects. [Freeman \(1984, p. 46\)](#) defined stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives”. It is the most frequently used definition and adopted for this paper. For this study, the stakeholders include the project manager, client/employer, supervising ministry/department/agency, contracting firms, sub-contracting firms/suppliers, project management members/consultants, and financiers/sponsors, in line with [Othman and Abdellatif's \(2011\)](#) assertion. [Haywood et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Figueiredo-Filho et al. \(2021\)](#) affirmed that stakeholder platforms are created to strengthen and encourage partnerships. One of the possible outcomes will be optimal construction project performance. Stakeholder engagement enhances many opportunities, such as creating a collaborative platform for sharing matters of public interest, assuring the platform for inclusive processes and affirming joint action on general issues ([Nambuta et al., 2015](#)). Professionals from different backgrounds and vested interests in the construction industry exist. [Nguyen and Mohamed \(2021\)](#) avowed that the increasing complication in the connections among stakeholders and their different personalities, power and interests makes managing stakeholders difficult. [Damoah and Akwei \(2017\)](#) asserted that many construction projects fail to accomplish their completion schedule, original cost and stakeholder accomplishment.

In New Zealand, [KPMG \(2017\)](#) reported that scholars conducted national research in 2017. They discovered that 31% of firms might complete construction projects on time, 29% may complete construction projects on budget, 33% may meet the original aim and 34% may attain stakeholder fulfilment. The report further explained that about 70% of firms complete construction projects that may be over budget or below schedule or do not attain stakeholder fulfilment. [Dao et al. \(2016\)](#) claimed that project complexity is one of the critical factors that could lead to project failure if the stakeholders involved are not well managed. [Mok et al. \(2015\)](#) believed complexity in construction projects demands a systematic mechanism and relevant project management skills to engage all stakeholders and derive the most outstanding outputs. [Ommen et al. \(2016\)](#) opined that the ability to manage stakeholder interrelationships would lead to project complexity. The authors' submission collaborated with [McKenna and Metcalfe \(2013\)](#) and [Yang \(2014\)](#). The latter author found that significant stakeholders in complex construction projects enhance interactions among the key players. In contrast, [Yang \(2014\)](#) found conflict among the stakeholders because of their interests.

In South Africa, the construction industry is one sector that contributes highly to the GDP and employs many people ([Aghimien et al., 2019](#)). [Haupt and Harinarain \(2016\)](#) reported that in 2012, the industry contributed R59,422 million to the GDP and employed about 433,000 employees, translating into 3.5% of the South African GDP. [Research and Markets \(2021\)](#) identified the sector as a “socio-economic driver and employment multiplier”. Business Insider South Africa (2021) reported poor optimal stakeholder engagement by agencies, departments and ministries. This led to wasteful expenditure, irregular projects, the inability to recoup millions paid in error and non-conforming tenders. Examples are, first, from the Department of Water, resulting in R13.4 million (R1/US\$0.07). Second, the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) wastes R2.2 billion because of non-compliance with the procurement procedure.

Third, the conflicts between the founders and the City of Johannesburg in the Modderfontein Project should be the “New York of Africa” (Concrete Trends, 2019). Among the feasible global measures utilised to mitigate crisis within the engaged stakeholders in projects include consensus between stakeholders via effective communications (Altameem, 2015; Ovdia, 2018) and enhanced stakeholder management success for developing countries (Eyiah-Botwe *et al.*, 2020). Nguyen and Mohamed (2021) recommended effective stakeholder management by empowering stakeholders to participate in decision-making and implement a governance system. Others are effective communication mechanisms, building a good relationship with stakeholders, stakeholders’ opinions in decision-making and detailed descriptions of project objectives (Figueiredo-Filho *et al.*, 2021). The stakeholder assists managers in addressing each stakeholder effectively and achieving better replies that may integrate the project delivery (Nguyen and Mohamed, 2021). Whether South Africa’s construction industry has engaged these feasible measures for possible implementation is indeterminate. If not, they are undoubtedly worth exploring so that integration, collaboration and teamwork can fully manifest in South Africa’s stakeholder engagement in construction projects. One of the possible outcomes will be optimal productivity of project performance.

Based on those mentioned above, examining the level of stakeholder engagement in developing countries’ construction projects cannot be overemphasised. In South Africa, investigating the perceived hindrances and proffering measures to mitigate the issues facing stakeholders’ engagement may enhance the construction project’s optimal performance. The stakeholder engagement level in construction projects has yet to receive in-depth studies in South Africa. This is a knowledge gap because the desired study’s results do not exist. It is one of the study’s motivations. A few studies, such as Othman and Abdellatif (2011), Eyiah-Botwe *et al.* (2016), Aghimien *et al.* (2019) and Haywood *et al.* (2019), have researched stakeholders in South Africa. But none addressed the level of stakeholder engagement and the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders’ engagement in construction projects. These gaps strengthened the study’s motivation, and the results will form part of the theoretical contribution to the body of knowledge. Othman and Abdellatif (2011) explored the role of partnership in incorporating the corporate social responsibility of project stakeholders to improve housing delivery for South Africans. Eyiah-Botwe *et al.* (2016) evaluated ways to improve the stakeholder management process. Aghimien *et al.* (2019) presented preliminary findings from investigating stakeholder management practices in the South African construction industry. Thus, this study will fill the existing methodological and population gaps. Also, apart from contributing to the existing knowledge emphasising measures to mitigate stakeholders’ engagement hindrances, the study will fill the literature gap regarding stakeholders’ engagement in South Africa’s construction projects. It is because stakeholders’ engagement has become part of the best global practices in the construction sector. Also, studies regarding the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders’ engagement in construction projects are scarce from the reviewed literature in South Africa’s context. Hence, the study investigated South Africa’s shareholders’ engagement in construction projects and recommended possible measures to mitigate the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders’ engagement in projects delivery through the following objectives:

- (1) To evaluate the level of stakeholder engagement in construction projects.
- (2) To investigate the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders’ engagement in construction projects.
- (3) To suggest feasible solutions to mitigate perceived hindrances facing stakeholders’ engagement in project delivery.

In proffering answers to the study’s research questions, the study reviewed relevant academic literature, and the study employed a qualitative approach for the primary data collected from

interviewees. The study is divided into seven main sections. This is in line with [Modgil et al. \(2021a\)](#). The first section focuses on the introduction, including part of the study's motivations and objectives. The second section highlights reviewed literature. This includes stakeholders' engagement and hindrances. Following is the research method that involves collecting data from 25 participants in the Gauteng province of South Africa via interviews. The fourth section is the analysed results via a thematic approach and discussion with reviewed literature. The research captured the study's implications in the fifth section. The study's limitations follow. The concluding section comprises the conclusion and recommendations section.

2. Literature review

2.1 Stakeholders' engagement in the construction sector

Among the industries, the construction industry is one of the most challenging. It is because of dynamic mechanisms' complicated nature and risk ([Ebekoziem et al., 2021](#)). [Mills \(2001\)](#), [Bal et al. \(2013\)](#) and [Ebekoziem et al. \(2021\)](#) affirmed that the sector generates a large quantity of waste. Also, it faces many encumbrances because of the myopic control from the stakeholders. The personal interest of the various stakeholders may have contributed to the crisis. The larger the number of stakeholders, the more complicated it may become to communicate successfully and engage them ([Barrane et al., 2020](#)). It will boost the required resources and project costs. [Ovadia \(2018\)](#) recommended a stakeholder register to mitigate some of these foreseen hindrances. The stakeholder register assists in comprehending which stakeholders will require more care and communication and a template of how to proffer solutions to the problems as they arise during the project. Thus, engaging key stakeholders in this unique industry cannot be overemphasised. [Isike and Ajeh \(2017\)](#) and [PMI \(2017\)](#) affirmed that engagement management intends to mitigate the confrontation and improve the partnership between stakeholders to reduce possible risks and costs and enhance integrated project value.

In Sweden, [Kallstrom et al. \(2021\)](#) found four variables that interplay and influence the perception of the key actors' narratives regarding stakeholder engagement. It includes social, political, spectacle, reputational and professional factors. In Tanzania, stakeholder engagement is based on principles that are tailored towards development. It is widely outspoken and inspired by a rights-based approach to development ([Nambuta et al., 2015](#)). The authors asserted that despite the stakeholder's engagement mechanism acceptance, the meaningfulness of the concept of "stakeholders engagement" in the decentralised framework of public service delivery is not admirable. [Bal et al. \(2013\)](#) identified six steps to a stakeholder engagement process. It includes identifying, measuring performance, managing, connecting stakeholders to separate sustainability-related aims, prioritisation and putting targets into action. Thus, a managed stakeholder engagement process aids stakeholders in enhancing their comfort and quality of services ([Talapatra et al., 2018](#)).

In South Africa, a few studies, such as [Othman and Abdellatif \(2011\)](#), [Eyiah-Botwe et al. \(2016\)](#), [Aghimien et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Haywood et al. \(2019\)](#), have researched stakeholders. But none addressed the level of stakeholder engagement and the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement in construction projects. These gaps strengthened the justification, and findings from the study will form part of the theoretical contribution to the body of knowledge. [Othman and Abdellatif \(2011\)](#) explored the role of partnership in incorporating the corporate social responsibility of project stakeholders to improve housing delivery for South Africans. [Eyiah-Botwe et al. \(2016\)](#) evaluated ways to improve the stakeholder management process and found that key actors in the sector are yet to embrace the concepts of "stakeholder management and sustainability". [Aghimien et al. \(2019\)](#) presented preliminary findings from investigating stakeholder management practices in the South African construction industry. The authors suggested measures to improve stakeholder management, including knowing the stakeholders' needs, understanding stakeholders' interests, defining project missions and

formulating required strategies. [Haywood et al. \(2019\)](#) focused on achieving sustainable development goals via stakeholder partnerships. The authors called for extraordinary interventions to strengthen the existing partnerships via stakeholder platforms.

2.2 Hindrances to stakeholders' engagement

This subsection reviewed hindrances that may hinder stakeholders' engagement in construction projects. [Nguyen and Mohamed \(2021\)](#) affirmed that challenges confront stakeholders' management in the industry. The complexity of the sector, stakeholders' personalities, power and interests, among others, were identified as possible reasons for stakeholder management's challenges. The authors suggested effective stakeholder management as one of the critical solutions to mitigate the challenges. [Nambuta et al. \(2015\)](#) identified four significant encumbrances influencing stakeholders in Tanzania. They are the strict adherence to the rules and regulations within the systems and perverse goals instead of honest and legitimate integration of the proposed core interest of the process ([Talapatra and Uddin, 2019](#)). Others are making the procedure the tool for segregation instead of inclusion and exposing it to a conflict of interest between different groups. [Talapatra and Uddin \(2019\)](#) identified strict adherence to the rules and regulations, making the procedure for segregation and conflict of interest between other groups as the significant hindrances influencing stakeholders in Bangladesh. [Mysore et al. \(2021\)](#) found the clash of personalities, non-cooperation, malfunctions in governance, exclusion from decision-making and lack of reasoning, among others, from the 28 adverse situations, as the most significant variables that can influence stakeholders' engagement in the context of global-IT projects.

[Figueiredo-Filho et al. \(2021\)](#) identified inadequate stakeholder interactions and communication as possible hindrances. This can lead to misalignment and conflict in construction projects, complicating the amicable solution. [Gupta et al. \(2019\)](#) identified a lack of risk management and inadequate communication with stakeholders as factors that cause project failure. In the opinion of [PMI \(2017\)](#), a stakeholder register can assist in mitigating this adverse risk probability. The register helps the project team to have an enhanced understanding that will enable them to recognise, classify and understand the stakeholders' objectives and opportunities. Also, it can assist in identifying potential harmful risks ([Sperry and Jetter, 2019](#); [Huma et al., 2020](#)). The reviewed literature shows that successful stakeholder engagement may enhance sustainable construction. Sustainable construction is a component of integrated project delivery and should be encouraged. In South Africa, there is a paucity of literature about stakeholder engagement and perceived hindrances facing engagement in construction projects. Therefore, the study investigated South Africa's shareholders' engagement in construction projects and recommended possible measures to mitigate the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement in project delivery. It is well described with the framework, as shown in [Figure 1](#).

This paper is anchored on stakeholder theory and supports the proposed framework. It aligns with [Kimanzi \(2020\)](#), who adopted the stakeholder theory to support stakeholders' engagement in housing projects. [Xia et al. \(2018\)](#) asserted that stakeholder theory usage in project management has proved that stakeholder management is essential to successfully implementing various projects. [Rhenman \(1964\)](#) developed the theory. The underlying principle of stakeholder theory is that large organisations, such as the ones in the construction industry, recognise stakeholder interests and constantly build and reimagine these connections to generate more value for more stakeholders ([Freeman et al., 2004](#); [Strand and Freeman, 2015](#); [Santos and Carvalho, 2019](#)). [Santos and Carvalho \(2019\)](#) pointed out that according to stakeholder theory, major organizations recognize stakeholder interests and create constant linkages to provide greater value. In line with all, "shareholders are stakeholders", as opined by the former authors; the shareholders in this context are the

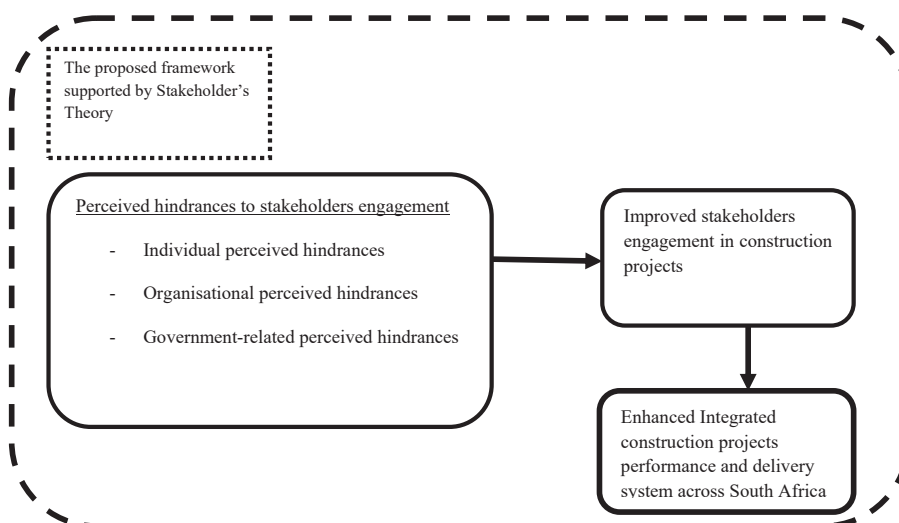


Figure 1. Proposed framework for stakeholders engagement in South African construction projects

Source(s): Authors fieldwork (2021)

construction projects. All participants/stakeholders are project shareholders with a focus on completion. The theory comprises a collection of expressions, ideas and metaphors linked to the central notion. This theory shows the significance of stakeholders in a project and emphasises the need to create value for different groups of people within a system. It is not without some hindrances, which [Figure 1](#) highlighted. One unique thing with this theory is that the interest of the stakeholders, that is, those groups and individuals who can affect (or be affected by) their tasks, must be considered by the managers or organisation ([Freeman et al., 2004](#); [Rahman et al., 2020](#)). [Rahman et al. \(2020\)](#) pointed out that managers or organisation must consider the stakeholders' interests.

3. Research method

The researchers adopted a qualitative research design. The study is engrained in interpretivism. It is in line with [Chandra and Shang \(2019\)](#) and [Jaafar et al. \(2021\)](#). Interpretivism explains a situation where the investigator aims to comprehend the meaning of individuals' actions ([Ebekozi, 2020a, 2020b](#)). [Sekaran and Bougie \(2016\)](#) and [Ebekozi and Aigbavboa \(2021\)](#) affirmed that qualitative research provides an in-depth perspective via subjective interpretations of participants' experiences and develops an acceptable method to deal with work situations. Thus, the study justified the adopted qualitative approach aligns with [Kallstrom et al. \(2021\)](#). The authors employed the interview approach in Sweden to explore the decentred governance theory's theoretical perspective. A phenomenological-driven perspective was utilised for this study. The study utilised "Phenomenological", which is the notion of deriving the meaning of a phenomenon through interviewing a small group of persons ([Paley, 2016](#)). The reviewed literature and semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tools employed. [Ebekozi \(2021\)](#) used a similar method. The study adopted a purposeful elite sampling technique. The study focuses on interviewees considered engaged in stakeholder projects, credible and knowledgeable, as [Marshall and Rossman \(2006\)](#) opined.

The study achieved saturation with the engaged 25 participants, as presented in [Table 1](#). The research design is presented in [Figure 2](#). This is in line with [Modgil et al. \(2021b\)](#). This cut across

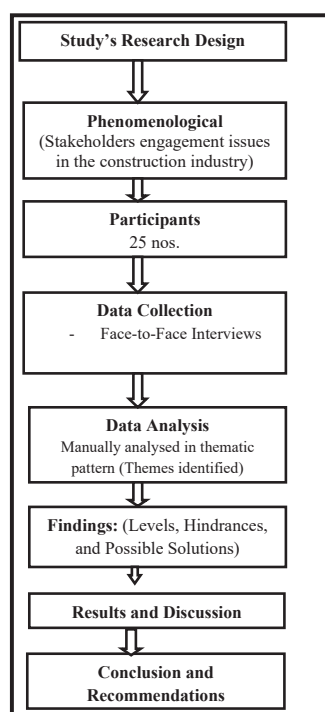
built environment practitioners based in the Gauteng province of South Africa. It is in line with Aliu and Aigbavboa (2021), but the latter authors investigated generic skills for the built environment graduates. The interview took place from September 2021 to early November 2021. For this study, the sample size was insignificant because the phenomenon's attributes depended on the trust of words (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006). Tansey (2007, p. 767) affirmed that the power of purposeful elite interviews is that the engaged participants can “shed light on the hidden elements”. The collected data were analysed using the theme analysis technique. This approach allows for identifying, analysing and reporting themes. The outcome enhances the research's replicability, reliability and validity (Stysko-Kunkowska, 2014). In line with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) suggestions, member checking, triangulation and researcher reflexivity were adopted as the validity methods. Each interview took about 45 min.

Retrieved data from the field were coded as suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2015) and Ibrahim et al. (2022), via invivo, themeing and narrative coding techniques (Saldana, 2015). Twenty-five transcript documents created the 76 codes, and six categories emerged. Three themes (level of stakeholder engagement, perceived hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement and feasible measures to mitigate perceived hindrances) finally emerged. Appendix shows the cover letter and semi-structured questions. The interviewees' identities were concealed for confidentiality. The engaged participants were quantity surveyors (P1 to P5), construction project managers (P6 to P12), engineers (P13 to P17) and architects (P18 to P25). Five years was the least work experience, with only two participants (P3 and P16). The participants' designation reveals that those involved have reliable insight regarding stakeholders' engagement in South African construction projects.

ID	Organisation	Years of experience	Rank
P1	Quantity surveying firms	15 years	Deputy director
P2		11 years	Senior resident QS
P3		18 years	Chief estimator
P4		15 years	Operational head
P5		19 years	Senior consultant
P6	Construction project organisations	21 years	Management staff
P7		25 years	Director
P8		19 years	Operational head
P9		20 years	Deputy director
P10		30 years	Director
P11	Engineering consultant firms	23 years	Head, logistics
P12		22 years	Asst director
P13		20 years	Senior staff
P14		29 years	Principal director
P15		25 years	Deputy director
P16	Architectural firms	28 years	Director
P17		18 years	Resident engineer
P18		5 years	Resident architect
P19		5 years	Architect trainee
P20		20 years	Manager
P21		27 years	Director
P22		19 years	Senior architect
P23		20 years	Head, design
P24		27 years	Site coordinator
P25		28 years	Principal partner

Table 1.
Summary of
interviewees'
description

Source(s): Authors' fieldwork (2021)



Source(s): Authors fieldwork (2021)

Figure 2.
Representation of the
study's research design

4. Findings and discussion

This section presents the results that emerged from the interviews. The existing literature shows a paucity of in-depth studies concerning the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement from the construction practitioners' perspective. The relevance of stakeholder engagement in public construction projects is to address opposition issues and improve public involvement in decision-making. If there are no feasible measures to mitigate these perceived hindrances, the aim of stakeholder engagement may be adversely affected. The analysed results and discussion are presented in a thematic pattern, as previously reported in the research method section. Figure 3 summarises the thematic network analysis of the possible perceived hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement and feasible solutions to mitigate the perceived hindrances.

4.1 Theme 1: level of stakeholders' engagement

Theme 1 presents the level of stakeholder engagement in South Africa's construction projects via perceptions of the key industry professionals. It has become pertinent to improve proffering solutions to issues that may hinder projects much quicker. Findings across the board suggest that much still needs to be done to abridge the perception that teamwork within construction projects enhances conflicts and disputes, especially in developing countries such as South Africa. Participant P12 says, "...We can only improve the level of stakeholders' engagement if practitioners within the industry do not see other practitioners as a threat to their profession. We are a country where an Architect sees a Professional Builder or a

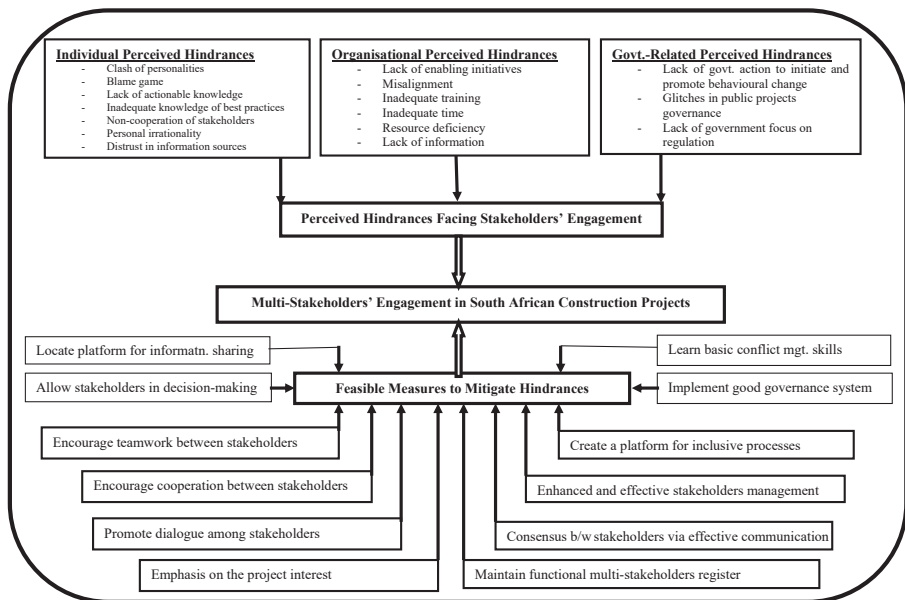


Figure 3.
Thematic network
analysis of multi-
stakeholders
engagement in South
African construction
projects

Source(s): Authors fieldwork (2021)

Structural Engineer as a threat. The same applies to the Quantity Surveyor, who sees an Architect who understands the basics of measuring works as a threat Participants P2, P9, P12, P17, P21, P23 and P25 opine that agreeing on common goals per construction project among different actors is necessary to improve engagement. Participant P19 says, “... stakeholders in construction projects are from different backgrounds. Therefore, they have multiple goals, cultures, and financial strengths. The ability to manage this diversity is pertinent to the success of any project. Thus, stakeholder engagement is indispensable to maintaining a good relationship between the involved players . . .”

According to Participants P4, P8, P13 and P20, many key actors feel better comfortable working independently than the stakeholders' approach mechanism. Participant P13 says, “... my skills are unique and should be protected. As suggested, vital information may leak if we embrace stakeholders. We should consider the disadvantages too . . .”. The issue of ego and trust within the team has emerged. The following sub-section will address these prospective hindrances. Results agree with Eyiah-Botwe *et al.* (2016), and it was found that key actors in the sector are yet to embrace the concepts of “stakeholder management and sustainability”. The authors avowed that successful project stakeholder management would improve and promote sustainable construction. Some attributes that enhance sustainable construction are embedded in successful stakeholder management, such as teamwork, integrated project delivery and collaboration. Findings show that stakeholder engagement is less pronounced in local government public construction projects than in urban provinces. Participants P9, P12, P18 and P22 affirm that local government projects are closer to the people, and stakeholder engagement should be encouraged at that level because of the associated benefits. Findings agree with Tengan and Aigbavboa (2017). Ghana, a developing country with similar features, had a high level of stakeholder engagement in project delivery but was lax in monitoring and evaluating projects at the local government level.

4.2 Theme 2: perceived hindrances facing stakeholders engagement

Theme 2 presents the possible perceived hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement in South Africa's construction projects. It is summarised in the top section of the thematic network analysis, as presented in [Figure 3](#). The participants across the board agree that issues are hindering the success of stakeholder engagement in construction projects. The pertinent idea that develops from this theme is the categorisation of the perceived hindrances into three groups. It includes (i) individual perceived hindrances (clash of personalities, blame game, lack of actionable knowledge about stakeholders' engagement, inadequate knowledge about best practices, non-cooperation, personal irrationality and distrust in information sources); (ii) organisational perceived hindrances (lack of enabling initiatives, misalignment, inadequate training (skills), inadequate time, resource deficiency and lack of information); and (iii) government-related perceived hindrances (lack of government action to initiate and promote positive behavioural change, glitches in public projects governance and lack of government focus on regulation). Most emerged hindrances agree with [Mysore et al. \(2021\)](#) but differ in hindrances grouping. Also, their research was in the context of stakeholder engagement in global-IT projects, while this study focuses on stakeholders' engagement of South Africa's construction projects.

Findings show that most issues emerge from individuals, and those linked to the organisation and government-related perceived hindrances have many attributes to individual problems. Participant P12 says, "*... If construction practitioners can learn to accept responsibility for error(s) and abide to ensure that every project's goal that they are engaged in is achieved. There will be no limited hindrances within the stakeholders' engagement duration ...*". Participants P4, P12, P19, P25 and P28 identify ego clash and blame game because of the different backgrounds of the construction professionals as the possible hindrances. One of the possible outcomes, if not mitigated, is a clash of personalities. Findings agree with [Sudhakar \(2014\)](#), [Nambuta et al. \(2015\)](#), [Izang et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Nguyen and Mohamed \(2021\)](#). [Izang et al. \(2015\)](#) found that the ego of the team leader, most times the project manager, will determine either aggressively or defensively to play the blame game. It may not go well with other team members, leading to dissatisfied relationships. It is anti-integrated project delivery. [Sudhakar \(2014\)](#) and [Talapatra et al. \(2019\)](#) found that blaming is used to establish a scapegoat (alleged lesser stakeholder) when there is an error or failure in projects. [Nambuta et al. \(2015\)](#) and [Talapatra et al. \(2022\)](#) discovered lax adherence to the rules and regulations within the systems, perverse goals as opposed to genuine and legitimate integration of the proposed core interest of the process, among others, contributed to the hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement. [Nguyen and Mohamed \(2021\)](#) discovered the stakeholders' personalities, power and interests, among others, as the possible reasons for the challenges facing stakeholders' engagement.

4.3 Theme 3: feasible measures to mitigate perceived hindrances

Theme 3 suggests measures to mitigate perceived hindrances facing stakeholders engagement in South Africa's construction projects. The thematic network analysis of the suggested measures is summarised in the bottom section of [Figure 3](#) as presented. Majority of the interviewees agree that feasible measures can mitigate possible perceived hindrances. The outcome will improve capabilities, enhance construction sustainability and improve communication performance within the project team. Also, it will enhance innovation and collaboration within the project team. Participant P12 argues, "*... allowing stakeholders participation on construction project decision-making process will enhance enterprise capacity to deal with project risks. Also, teamwork and cooperative behaviour between stakeholders can mitigate construction conflicts and disputes that may lead to costs and time overruns if not addressed ...*" Results agree with [South et al. \(2018\)](#), and it was discovered that the

motivation of good collaborative good behaviour between stakeholders could reduce conflicts. When conflict is mitigated on a construction project, it will, by extension, reduce project delays, time and cost overruns.

Most engaged participants agree that creating a collective platform would allow for information sharing among stakeholders. It would allow for inclusive processes, with emphasis on the project interest than the individual; stakeholders should acquire basic conflict management skills (P1, P3, P14, P21 and P25) and promote dialogue among stakeholders to improve the exchange of knowledge, and skills development (P3, P7, P13, P20 and 24) should be encouraged. Regarding skills development, findings show that self-awareness (understanding own emotions and triggers), teamwork effectiveness (resolving conflicts), critical thinking (understanding biases) and planning and ways of working (time management and prioritisation) skills are pertinent to reduce the challenges. These measures will mitigate some of the perceived hindrances to the lowest minimum. Results agree with [Aghimien et al. \(2019\)](#), who recommended that exploring stakeholders' needs, understanding stakeholders' interests and defining project missions improve stakeholder management. Others are formulating required strategies, sound stakeholder's behaviour and attributes, managing conflict effectively, effective communication and good relationship with the stakeholders. Most participants agree that the Council for the Built Environment (CBE) has a vital role in mitigating organisation and government-related perceived hindrances, respectively. The CBE is the body that coordinates the six councils for the built environment professions.

Other feasible measures that emerged are consensus between stakeholders via effective communications (P2, P4, P7, P11, P17 and P19), sound governance system (P5, P12, P20 and 22), enhanced and effective stakeholders management (P5, P6, P9, P11, P14 and P22) and functional stakeholders register (P12, P14, P17, P21, P23 and P25). Participant P23 says, "... *stakeholder register support managers to effectively address each stakeholder issue and attain better responses that may enhance team collaboration and promote sustainable construction ...*". Findings agree with [Altameem \(2015\)](#), [Ovadia \(2018\)](#), [Nguyen and Mohamed \(2021\)](#) and [Figueiredo-Filho et al. \(2021\)](#). [Altameem \(2015\)](#) and [Ovadia \(2018\)](#) discovered that successful consensus between stakeholders via effective communications could mitigate crisis among engaged stakeholders in construction projects. [Nguyen and Mohamed \(2021\)](#) found that effective stakeholder management will empower stakeholders to participate in decision-making, implement a sound governance system, build a good relationship with stakeholders and provide detailed descriptions of project objectives.

5. Theoretical and practical implications

The reviewed literature shows stakeholders' engagement in construction projects cannot be overemphasised. It has been proved that stakeholder's engagement in construction projects will improve decision-making inclusiveness, construction sustainability, sustainable development and team collaboration, accelerating the transformation of integrated project delivery to productivity and optimal performance. Others are improved capabilities, improved communication performance within the project team and improved innovation and skills within the project team. Evidence from the reviewed literature shows that few studies conducted in the subject area did not address possible perceived hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement in construction projects, including in South Africa. Moreover, these previous studies did not explore the underlying issues from the root.

5.1 Theoretical implication

Therefore, the study addressed the theoretical and methodological gaps; concerning the theoretical gap, the reviewed literature established a paucity of literature on hindrances

facing stakeholders' engagement in South Africa's construction projects. Filling this gap via the findings is a contribution to the existing literature. Regarding the methodological gap, this may be the first qualitative approach in South Africa to explore the level of stakeholder engagement, hindrances facing the actors and proffer measures to mitigate them from the key practitioner's perspective. As revealed from the theoretical perspective, findings identify the possible perceived hindrances and suggest measures to reduce the potential issues from the viewpoint of the key actors in the industry.

5.2 Practical implication

Regarding the practical implication, the outcome of this research will stir up new frontiers of knowledge concerning stakeholders' engagement and hindrances in South Africa's construction industry. Some new frontiers would be tailored towards research about the relationship and most prominent hindrances from the categorised groups (individual perceived hindrances, organisational perceived hindrances and government-related perceived hindrances). Also, as part of the theoretical contribution, the study's proposed framework is supported by stakeholder's theory to enhance integrated construction projects performance and delivery system across South Africa via stakeholders' engagement in construction projects as presented. The study's practical implications are in the form of contributions to successful construction project management by bringing overall awareness and clarity of the possible hindrances that may hinder stakeholders' engagement in construction projects if not mitigated. The practitioners suggested various measures that could be used to reduce the potential issues. Findings from the study would stir up actors in the built environment to promote stakeholder engagement and avoid issues that may hinder the fruitfulness of the concept in South Africa's construction projects at all levels of government. It may facilitate and strengthen integrated project delivery, leading to productivity and optimal performance in terms of sustainability, quality, time and cost. The outcome will enhance integrated collaboration among the stakeholders and form part of the practical implications for stakeholder engagement in South Africa's construction projects. Other developing countries with similar stakeholder engagement challenges may modify the feasible measures suggested in this study.

6. Limitations and future research directions

6.1 Research limitation

The paper highlighted the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement in South Africa's construction projects and suggested mitigation measures. Thus, it is limited to South Africa's stakeholders' engagement in construction projects and has not investigated generalisability in other countries and sectors. Also, the study accomplished saturation via the engaged 25 experts. The limitations have been acknowledged but do not influence the quality of the findings and could be utilised in other developing countries with similar stakeholder engagement challenges.

6.2 Future research direction

Thus, further research is necessary to create a tool or comprehensive framework for evaluating the construction industry's stakeholder engagement level. Also, studies could be conducted for broader coverage, and variables such as individual perceived hindrances, organisational perceived hindrances and government-related perceived hindrances should be tested to enhance a better representative and generalisation of results. This approach will assist in validating the proposed study's framework.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The study agrees that much still needs to be done to improve stakeholder engagement in South Africa's construction projects. The emerged hindrances were categorised into three groups (individual perceived hindrances, organisational perceived hindrances and government-related perceived hindrances). Also, the study suggested feasible measures to mitigate potential hindrances via a qualitative approach. Suggesting measures mitigating these potential hindrances facing stakeholders' engagement was pertinent. Functional stakeholder engagement will improve decision-making inclusiveness, construction sustainability, sustainable development and team collaboration, accelerating the transformation of integrated project delivery to productivity and optimal performance. The key suggested measures are as follows:

- (1) The study suggests that stakeholders embrace enhanced and effective stakeholder management via consensus between stakeholders and effective communication. The Council for the Built Environment (CBE) has a vital role in making enforcement and implementation feasible. Stakeholders register support managers, a sound governance system, a participatory decision-making process and the collaboration of the team members should drive it.
- (2) The study suggests that stakeholders should ensure a collaborative platform allowing for information sharing. It will bridge the lacuna in distrust and lack of information sources. The platform should promote dialogue among stakeholders and improve their skills development. It should be reinforced with self-management, teamwork effectiveness and critical thinking to resolve conflicts amicably.
- (3) The study further recommends that stakeholders embrace good collaborative behaviour to mitigate conflicts in construction projects. One way to achieve this goal is to emphasise the project against individual interests. When a conflict is reduced on a construction project, it will, by extension, mitigate project delays, time and cost overruns.

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Appendix

The cover letter and semi-structured questions

Dear Participant,

Request for short interview

Stakeholder engagement in construction projects is an ingredient that contributes to project productivity and optimal performance. In many developing countries, including South Africa, there is a paucity of literature about stakeholders engagement and perceived hindrances facing the concept in construction projects. Therefore, this study is titled: **A Qualitative Approach to Investigate Stakeholders Engagement in Construction Projects**. The following objectives will achieve the study's aim.

- (1) To evaluate the level of stakeholder engagement in construction projects.
- (2) To investigate the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders engagement in construction projects.
- (3) To recommend feasible solutions to mitigate perceived hindrances facing stakeholders engagement in project delivery.

Note, the interview questions are going to be within the stated objectives. Responses provided by you will be collated and analysed together with that of other engaged participants. It will make up the value and contribution to achieving the success of this research. Information provided will be treated with confidentiality.

Thanks for the anticipated participation.

Regards.

Yours faithfully,

(Researchers)

Basic questions for the participants

- (1) Please, for record purposes, what is the name of your organisation?
- (2) What is your position in the organisation and discipline?
- (3) Please, how long have you been working?
- (4) Please, are you knowledgeable regarding stakeholders engagement in South Africa's construction projects?
- (5) If yes to question 4, how can you describe the level of stakeholder engagement in South Africa's construction projects?

-
- (6) What is your lived experience regarding stakeholders engagement in South Africa's construction projects?
 - (7) From your perspective, what are the perceived hindrances facing stakeholders engagement in construction projects in South Africa?
 - (8) Please, can you range the significance of the perceived hindrances mentioned?
 - (9) Please, what role can the key stakeholders play to mitigate perceived hindrances?
 - (10) In your view, what are the feasible ways to improve stakeholders engagement in construction projects in South Africa?
 - (11) Please, can you rank the significance of the feasible solutions identified?

Source(s): Authors' fieldwork (2021)

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