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ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

SCHOOL OF COMMERCE

**The Effect of Stakeholder Management on Project Success: In
the Case of Zerihun Associates**

By: Selman Hussein

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A Research Project submitted to the Addis Ababa University
College of Business and Economics School of Commerce in
Partial Fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Masters of
Arts Degree in Project Management

Advisor: Dr. Seifu M.

June, 2024
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF COMMERCE
PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

**THE EFFECT OF STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT ON PROJECT
SUCCESS: IN THE CASE OF ZERIHUN ASSOCIATES**

**BY
SELMAN HUSSEIN**

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FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF A
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this research entitled “The Effect of Stakeholder Management on Project Success: In the Case of Zerihun Associates”, is my original work, prepared under the guidance of Dr. Seifu M. All resources and materials used here in have been duly cited.

By: Selman Hussein

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Date: _____

APPROVAL

The thesis entitled “The Effect of Stakeholder Management on Project Success: In the Case of Zerihun Associates” submitted by Selman Hussein in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master’s Degree in Project Management to the school of commerce department of Project Management; the University of Addis Ababa has been carried out under my supervision. Therefore, I hereby approve and recommend that it has fulfilled the thesis requirements and can be submitted to the department for examination as the University advisor.

Name of Advisor

Signature

Date

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with the aim of assessing the effect of stakeholder management on project success in the case of Zerihun Associates. The researcher employed a mixed method approach consisting of questionnaires self-administered by project coordinators and field supervisors in addition to interviews conducted with a client-side project lead as well as the general manager and research director at Zerihun Associates. Data from secondary sources was also used to triangulate findings. SPSS 26 was used to conduct both descriptive and inferential analysis on the quantitative data collected while a thematic analysis method was utilized to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the qualitative data.

Findings of the descriptive analysis suggest that the study respondents have a positive impression about the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates. On the other hand, results of the regression analysis indicated that stakeholder identification and prioritization, stakeholder communication and stakeholder engagement had Beta (β) values of 0.063, 1.181 and 0.401 respectively, suggesting that stakeholder engagement had the most effect on variations in project success with a one-unit increase in stakeholder engagement resulting in a 40.1% increment in project success. The researcher highlighted the need for an exhaustive stakeholder mapping to identify and prioritize stakeholders, a written stakeholder communication and engagement strategies while recommending a designated communication personnel/team to ensure proper documentation of all communications, decisions and feedback from stakeholders.

Key Words: Project success, Stakeholder Identification, Stakeholder Prioritization, Stakeholder Communication, Stakeholder Engagement

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The field of project management is concerned with overseeing the different tasks within a project with the goal of achieving the desired outcomes. Projects are temporary entities separate from the implementing organization and adhering to specific timeframes, budgets, and quality standards. Typical projects follow a sequential process from initiation to completion (Mumbi, 2018). Several stakeholders are usually involved in various capacities throughout a projects' life cycle and contemporary project success has been measured in a variety of ways.

Between the 1960s and 1980s, meeting deadlines and staying within budget were the top concerns for project managers whereas nowadays, stakeholder engagement is the key area of interest (Yasir & Farooq, 2019). Project completion on time and without cost overruns could still be considered a failure if the project does not fulfill its required purpose (Nzekwe et al., 2015). Studies conducted by (Murwanashyaka and Shukla, 2017; Demmise, 2021; Abebe, 2022) have also provided evidence and analysis supporting the importance of effective stakeholder management in successfully achieving project outcomes. In addition, Alqaisi (2018) worked on the effect of stakeholder engagement and communication management on success of the project and concluded that project success depends on managing the expectations of stakeholders.

Various observations indicate that the majority of projects fail post-implementation not because of poor execution but rather due to inadequate stakeholder involvement and interaction (Buerthey, 2016). Effective stakeholder management, according to Collinge (2016), is key towards successful project management. To ensure a successful project, the project team must identify the stakeholders, determine their expectations, manage their influence in relation to the requirements and identify the various factors that may affect the stakeholder management (Asma & Sunny, 2018).

Stakeholder management's significance for project success is a common theme in the literature. Alqaisi (2018) emphasized the importance of proactive planning and management of stakeholder requirements, which can lead to a suitable environment and project success. Buerthey (2016) further underscored the significance of stakeholder involvement, noting that it is a key indicator for project success. These studies collectively highlight the critical role of managing stakeholders in ensuring project success. However, little research has been done on how managing stakeholders affects the implementation of research projects in Ethiopia. Hence, this study aims to assess the effect of managing stakeholders on project success in the case of Zerihun Associates development consultancy and research firm.

1.2. Background of the Organization

Zerihun Associates is a development consultancy and research firm that specializes in impact evaluation, program assessment, process and methodology piloting, cost-effectiveness analysis, intervention designs, public opinion survey, market research and large-scale surveys. The firm has provided technical expertise and support to a wide range

of Ethiopian and international organizations in the private, public, and civil society sectors including the World Bank, the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopian Central Statistics Agency, UNICEF, CARE and CRS. It has also been involved in the formulation of academic papers published in top peer-reviewed development economics journals (Zerihun Associates, n.d.).

Zerihun Associates' work centers around promoting evidence-based policy making in Africa with a particular focus in Ethiopia. As of writing this document, the firm has thus far implemented over 40 research projects related to data collection, program evaluation, impact assessment, experimental studies, intervention design and diagnostics for various local and international clients (Zerihun Associates, n.d.).

1.3. Statement of the Problem

A substantial body of literature underscores the critical role of stakeholder management in achieving project success (Mumbi, 2018; Murwanashyaka and Shukla, 2017; Demissie, 2021; and Abebe, 2022). A study conducted by Eskerod and Jepsen (2016) recommends the continuous identification and prioritization of stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle. On the other hand, Alqaisi (2018) emphasizes the need for effective communication and engagement with stakeholders to match project objectives with their expectations. Laws (2016) further highlights the potential adverse impact of poor stakeholder management, indicating the underestimation of these processes as a main cause for project failures and stresses the need for effective stakeholder engagement in projects.

These studies collectively underscore the crucial role of stakeholder management in project success. However, empirical research examining the direct effect of effectively managing

stakeholders on project success, particularly within the research consultancy industry and in the Ethiopian context, remains sparse. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no such research has been carried out in the Ethiopian research and development consultancy industry. Hence, this study will seek to fill the gap by focusing on the stakeholder management practices employed at Zerihun Associates during the implementation of research projects.

The Ethiopian research and development consultancy industry is made up of individual consultants and private firms that are contracted by local and international organizations in the private, public, and civil society sectors to implement a wide range of research projects. Multiple stakeholders including clients, beneficiaries and government authorities are often involved in these research projects, each having their own expectations of what a successful project implementation represents. Given the complexity of sectors in which the projects are implemented, project managers are increasingly required to manage various stakeholders with adequate awareness of consequences and little margin for error.

1.4. Objective of the Study

1.4.1. General Objective

The overall objective of this study is to assess the effect of managing stakeholders on project success in the case of Zerihun Associates.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

- To examine the effect of stakeholder identification and prioritization on the success of projects at Zerihun Associates

- To examine the effect of stakeholder communication on the success of projects at Zerihun Associates
- To examine the effect of stakeholder engagement on the success of projects at Zerihun Associates
- To suggest possible recommendations for enhancing the stakeholder management practices at Zerihun Associates

1.4.3. Research Questions

- How do stakeholder identification and prioritization affect project success at Zerihun Associates?
- How does stakeholder communication affect project success at Zerihun Associates?
- How does stakeholder engagement affect project success at Zerihun Associates?
- What measures can be taken to enhance the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the insights it shall provide into the current stakeholder management practices at Zerihun Associates and evaluate their effect on the success of projects. Findings and recommendations of the study are expected to elevate project managers' understanding of stakeholder management, help them identify areas for improvement and inform the development of effective stakeholder management strategies. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the body of knowledge on stakeholder management and indicate directions for further research in the area.

1.6. Scope of the Study

Conceptually speaking, stakeholder engagement and project success are broad terms and a variety of constructs can be used to explain them. However, only three constructs for the independent variable and a single higher order construct for the dependent variable are considered in this study. This study will only focus on the stakeholder management knowledge area by specifically investigating how stakeholder management affects the success of research projects implemented by Zerihun Associates. Research projects implemented by the firm in Ethiopia over the past two years (January 2022 - December 2023) shall be considered in the research and a combination of primary and secondary data will be collected. The study population will include a client-side project lead, a general manager, a research director, project coordinators and field supervisors collectively responsible for overseeing the implementation of projects.

In this study, project success is the dependent variable while stakeholder management is the independent variable. The independent variable will be measured in terms of three constructs, namely: stakeholder identification and prioritization, stakeholder communication and stakeholder engagement. On the other hand, the dependent variable (project success) is set to a single higher order construct.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to one firm - Zerihun Associates - in the research and development consultancy industry and only research projects implemented by the firm in Ethiopia over the past two years (January 2022 - December 2023) shall be included in the research. Field

data collectors, local government officials and other stakeholders will not be included in the study due to language barrier, the logistic difficulty of getting their response and the limited information they are expected to have about the subject matter. In addition, due to the scarcity of research done on the subject of how stakeholder management affects the success of research projects, conducting a conceptual and empirical assessment was challenging since materials directly related to the subject could not be located in sufficient amounts.

1.8. Definition of Key Terms

PROJECT: refers to a research project contracted by national or international organizations and implemented by Zerihun Associates over the past two years (January 2022 - December 2023).

PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS: include clients, beneficiaries, government authorities and other stakeholders involved in the research projects under study.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT: is defined as the use of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to achieve the project requirements (PMBOK, 2021).

PROJECT SUCCESS: is defined in terms of managing the project scope, meeting project deadlines, completing the project within the allocated budget and delivering the project to the desired quality.

STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT: involves the process of systematically identifying, analyzing, planning, and implementing actions to engage with stakeholders (APM, 2019).

CONSULTING FIRM: is a certified company that offers professional advice, analysis, and solutions derived from thorough research and analysis across a range of sectors.

1.9. Organization of the Paper

This paper comprises five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction which provides basic information on the research including background of the study and that of the organization; statement of the research problem; research objectives; as well as the significance, scope and limitations of the research. It also contains the definition of key terms. The second chapter contains a review of related literature including an overview of stakeholder management; project success; empirical review of related studies; and the conceptual framework for the study. The third chapter presents the methodology employed for conducting this research consisting of an overview of the research design and approach; target population and sampling; the data collection method; validity and reliability; data analysis and presentation; and the ethical principles considered in the study. The fourth chapter deals with analysis and interpretation of the collected data. Finally, chapter five presents a summary of key findings; the conclusions drawn from the interpretation of data; recommendations for successful stakeholder management; and suggested areas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews theoretical and empirical literature related to stakeholder management and project success. The various bodies of literature will be discussed based on their relevance to the study and their contribution to the research problems under study. Finally, the researcher will present a conceptual framework for the study based on the literature review.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Stakeholder Management

Stakeholder Management is a crucial project management function that plays a vital role in achieving successful project results and preventing failures. It accomplishes this by effectively managing the interests of stakeholders through the seamless integration of the project management process (Waris et al., 2022). However, there are many concerns regarding stakeholders, and many projects are characterized by the failure to adequately consider or meet stakeholders' expectations. This is especially true because different stakeholders may have different definitions of project success elements (Eskerod et al., 2015).

Park and Lee (2015) outline a three-step stakeholder management process in their study. Organizations must first identify and assess the stakeholder interests in order to assist them in forecasting the kind of reaction that will occur in the future. Recommendations provided

at this stage can be used to decide which stakeholders need to be included. The next step is the development and implementation of stakeholder management strategies which are selected according to the nature and priorities of the stakeholders. The last phase is the evaluation of the stakeholder management procedure.

According to (Dwivedi, 2021), it is essential to identify the most important stakeholders at the outset of the project and ensure that they possess the necessary knowledge, qualities, and information for the project to succeed. The level of stakeholder engagement in a project differs based on the specific domain and phase it is in, encompassing project planning, requirement analysis, scope management, work breakdown structure management, schedule management, and so on. Therefore, it is essential to engage project stakeholders at each stage of the project life cycle, but particularly during planning and requirement analysis.

Types of Stakeholders

Stakeholders can be categorized according to their level of participation in the project (Gifford and Lesser, 2016). Internal stakeholders, which comprises people or groups within a business or organization including staff members, managers, investors, and the board of directors, is the first category. The project's or company's performance immediately impacts their financial well-being. On the other hand, external stakeholders, or people or groups outside the corporation or organization, include suppliers, customers, regulators, and the community. Their interests are affected by the project's performance even if they might not be actively involved in it.

Stakeholders can further be grouped based on their degree of involvement (Gifford and Lesser, 2016). Those who are involved in the day-to-day activities of the project are known as Direct Stakeholders, while those who do not participate in these activities but are nonetheless interested in the project's conclusion are known as Indirect Stakeholders.

Stakeholder Management Process

According to Waris et al. (2022), there are five components of stakeholder management that have an impact on a project: stakeholder identification, communication, engagement, empowerment, and risk control. These five constraints have also been used by Khan et al. (2021) to measure stakeholder management.

1. ***Stakeholder Identification:*** It is a fundamental part of stakeholder management that helps project managers identify and understand the perspectives and strategies of the stakeholders (Khan et al., 2021). It is important to identify all relevant stakeholders before making any attempts to engage them.
2. ***Stakeholder Communication:*** It encourages information sharing between the involved parties as well as their participation and empowerment (Khan et al., 2021). Effective stakeholder communication is necessary to determine the needs and requirements of the stakeholders.
3. ***Stakeholder Engagement:*** It includes working together with stakeholders to clarify the project, outline their needs, manage expectations, address issues, negotiate, establish priorities, resolve conflicts, and make decisions (PMI, 2021).

4. **Stakeholder Empowerment:** It is a key element of stakeholder management which entails training and empowering the stakeholders to become self-sufficient and financially independent at the end of the project (Barbara, 2016).
5. **Risk Control:** According to Ward and Chapman's study, which was cited by Khan et al. (2021), risk is defined as uncertainty and unforeseen events that arise during a project life cycle.

Identifying and Prioritizing Stakeholders

There are many different stakeholders in every organization, and since many of them have competing interests, it is impossible to meet all of their needs and demands. Furthermore, organizations are unable to handle all stakeholders fairly or in an equal manner. As a result, it makes sense to list and order stakeholder groups. In addition, organizations have to evaluate the potential impact that stakeholders could have on a particular issue and recognize that the influence of various stakeholder groups changes over time based on environment and context (Park & Lee, 2015).

Analyzing the project environment and evaluating the project's potential impact on people or groups, as well as the potential influence of these stakeholders on the project's performance and result, are essential steps in identifying stakeholders. Consequently, depending on the complexity and scale of the project, it is advised to continually identify and prioritize stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle. This is considered by Eskerod and Jepsen (2016) to be a best practice. Furthermore, it's key to remember that circumstances are constantly shifting and that both stakeholders and their interests may likewise alter over time (Wood et al., 2021).

Stakeholder Communication

Effective communication is a crucial strategy for project managers and other stakeholders who are either directly or indirectly involved in the project. Effective communication is required, according to (Zaman et al., 2022; Li, Yin, & Zhang, 2022; Sarpin et al., 2021), to guarantee that the relevant information is shared between project managers and the relevant internal or external stakeholders. In a similar vein, Komar et al. (2020) stress that effective information flow between project teams depends on having top-notch communication channels.

As stated by Zaman et al. (2022), every project team needs to have provisions in place for informing individuals who need to know about the facts and details of the project. These systems shouldn't appear disorganized. By establishing communication patterns early on in the project, the project team will be in a better position to guarantee good communication throughout the project for all parties. One common method utilized to achieve this is holding regular meetings. Regardless of length or frequency, frequent meetings establish a dependable method for updating and including all participants. However, meetings should focus on action items or decisions that must be made rather than status updates, which are detrimental to participation (Zaman et al., 2022).

Stakeholder Engagement

Plan: A strategy is outlined for effective stakeholder engagement from the initial phase through the project completion. It generates a well-defined, practical plan (Jainendrakumar, 2016). The formation and maintenance of strategic relationships among all project stakeholders is a key component of stakeholder management (Retta, 2021). During this

process, plans for including stakeholders are created according to their requirements, expectations, and possible influence on the project.

Manage: Project managers must successfully interact and collaborate with stakeholders in order to meet their needs and expectations, manage challenges, find solutions, and gain their support (Jainendrakumar, 2016). Helping managers increase support and decrease negative consequences is the main objective. In order to guarantee alignment with project requirements, managing stakeholder engagement entails working and communicating with stakeholders in an efficient manner. This entails attending to their requirements, anticipations, and concerns as they emerge. Including stakeholders in project decision-making and execution at the right level and at the right time is the most effective strategy. The stakeholder engagement plan is a tool for managing and guiding stakeholder interaction based on the strategies developed.

Monitor: The fundamental advantage of this process is that it helps to ensure that stakeholders continue to participate positively as the project is integrated into the evolving environment. The objectives of this strategy are to monitor overall stakeholder interactions and adjust strategies and plans for involving stakeholders. The primary benefit is in preserving or enhancing the efficacy and efficiency of stakeholder engagement initiatives in guaranteeing project triumph (Jainendrakumar, 2016). Eskerod et al. (2015) indicates that in order to truly understand stakeholders' requirements, needs, wishes, and concerns, a stakeholders' management strategy must involve stakeholders on a broad scale.

Roseke (2018) states that the process of monitoring stakeholder interactions for projects includes adjusting methods to include stakeholders by revising plans and strategies for

involvement. The key benefit of this process is that it maintains or enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of stakeholder engagement activities as the project progresses and external factors evolve. We can maintain the high caliber and effectiveness of our engagement initiatives by monitoring and managing stakeholder participation.

2.1.2. Project Success

The accomplishment of a project's business objectives, the success of the generated product, or "on time, within budget, to specification" completion are the traditional definitions of project success. However, there is frequent debate over the validity of these indicators and perceptions of success change based on the stakeholder's perspective and the amount of time after project completion (PMI, 2017). As to Besteiro et al. (2015), determining the success of a project is a complex task that relies on various factors such as the organization, stakeholder perspective, project type, and temporal perspective. According to Rajablu et al. (2015), a project's primary objective is to benefit its stakeholders. These benefits are what drive the project and, in turn, project success is driven by stakeholders' objectives.

A project's success, which is frequently evaluated in relation to a set of rules and standards, can be used to determine the extent to which its objectives have been met. In the literature, researchers compare and contrast the traditional triple constraint method with a holistic approach to project success (Ahmed et al., 2022). Success in a triple dimension, commonly referred to as the "iron triangle," is based on how well a project is executed in terms of its scope, budget, and timeliness. This limited definition of success was used by Shafi et al. (2021) to describe the project management accomplishment. A complete approach to

project success includes the iron triangle (time, money, and scope), benefits to the organization, and customer satisfaction (Shafi et al, 2021).

Luo et al. (2020) state that the management literature demonstrates how frameworks for measuring private sector performance developed in the last 20 years have attempted to increase organizational accountability by linking strategy and performance to the viewpoints of various stakeholders. To understand how stakeholder involvement affects project performance, one must first understand the stakeholders. By serving as a mediator, stakeholders can influence the relationship between a business's financial performance and corporate social responsibility.

Zid et al. (2020) found a substantial and positive correlation between external stakeholder participation and the success of project portfolio management. Stakeholder engagement techniques, when executed well, have far-reaching effects beyond project outcomes. In order to facilitate the participation of a fully integrated stakeholder team throughout the project life cycle, Khalife & Hamzeh (2020) delineate the several phases for effective stakeholder management that a project team should utilize. The approach provides the following six key components:

- Identifying all key stakeholders
- Linking stakeholders to various sustainability-related goals
- Setting priorities for stakeholders
- Managing stakeholders
- Assessing each stakeholder's performance
- Translating objectives into actions

2.2. Empirical Review

This section presents a review of empirical studies on the effect of stakeholder management on project success. Due to the scarcity of such research in the research and development consultancy industry, the researcher has considered studies conducted in comparable project context.

Stakeholder management techniques have not been extensively used, which has led to project underperformance, according to research conducted in Pakistan in 2022 by Waris et al. and published in the Journal of Engineering. The study is titled "Stakeholder Management in Public Sector Infrastructure Projects." The study is quantitative, and a questionnaire is used to gather data. The five primary dimensions of stakeholder management — identification and classification, communication, engagement, empowerment, and risk control — were established and validated by the study. The findings indicate that among the techniques, "Empowerment" is the least concerning, while "Risk Control" is the most important aspect of stakeholder management. According to the report, a systematic approach to managing stakeholders is necessary to make sure that projects achieve their goals on schedule and within the allocated budget.

Alqaisi (2018) noted that meeting stakeholder requirements can be facilitated by establishing adequate and timely communication in their study on the impact of stakeholder involvement and communication management on project success. Stakeholder engagement strategy: directness of communication, clarity of stakeholder identity, deliberateness of gathering feedback, broadness of stakeholder inclusivity, and utilization of stakeholder engagement for learning are capabilities necessary to develop relationships with

stakeholders and learning via sustainability reporting, according to Herremans, Nazari, and Mahmoudian (2016)'s study on stakeholder relationships, engagement, and sustainability reporting using qualitative research methods. Furthermore, a condensed method based on two case studies (Ibraheem, Israa, 2018) finds that significant issues in a project arise from inadequate or ineffective planning for every facet of the project, including controlling stakeholder expectations and devising communication strategies.

Stakeholder management is crucial to the success of projects, according to Emmanuel Eyiah-Botwe's research, "An Evaluation of Stakeholder Management Role in GETFund Polytechnics Projects Delivery in Ghana," which was published in 2015 by civil and environmental research. A combination of quantitative and qualitative surveys were employed in the study. It uses questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to gather data. The study discovered that inadequate payment schedules, scope variations, and project delay were all impacted by stakeholder management. It was established that in order to fulfill project goals, stakeholder management is crucial. Furthermore, it recommends that stakeholder management be taken into account at every stage of the project, beginning with planning.

Nauman and Piracha conducted a study on project stakeholder management in an attempt to comprehend the viewpoint of emerging nations. The study employed the key success factors (CSFs) technique to identify the critical components of project stakeholder management. The results demonstrated that investigating stakeholders' expectations and constraints on projects is the most important component of good project stakeholder management, with upholding and cultivating positive relationships through the development of stakeholder commitment and trust coming in second. Other significant

factors that have been shown to contribute to the success of stakeholder management include the identification of stakeholders, effective and frequent communication with engaged stakeholders, analysis of conflicts and coalition formation among stakeholders, and formulation of appropriate strategies to deal with various stakeholders (Nauman & Piracha, 2016).

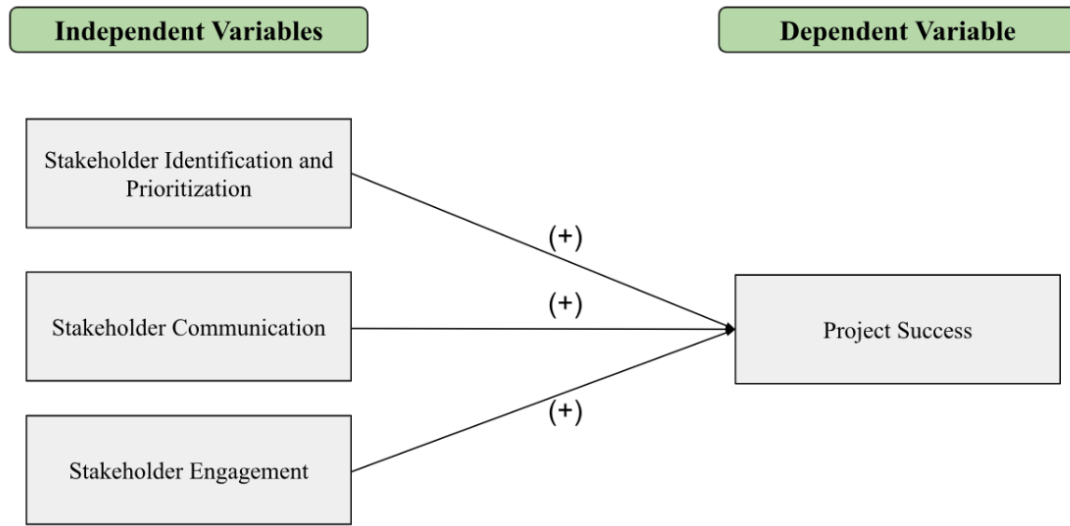
Abebe (2022) used the ICT Incubation Center Building Project as a case study for a study on the impact of stakeholder management on project success. Fifty-two ECWC personnel who participated in the project were given self-administered questionnaires as part of the descriptive and explanatory research design method. The results of the study showed a fairly good correlation between the project's success and efficient stakeholder management, which includes identifying stakeholders, organizing and managing their engagement, and keeping track of their involvement. Results of the multiple regression analysis showed that the success of the project was significantly impacted by each of the four stakeholder management practices. In order to effectively engage stakeholders and increase their level of involvement, the ECWC is advised to develop a more appropriate strategy based on Abebe's research findings. This will ultimately lead to a successful outcome for the ICT Incubation Center Building Project.

2.3. Conceptual Framework

This study aimed to examine the effect of managing stakeholders on project success in the case of Zerihun Associates. Out of the five components of stakeholder management presented by Waris et al. (2022), “stakeholder Empowerment” and “Risk Control” were not used as variables for measuring stakeholder management in this study due to their

marginal relevance given the nature of projects implemented by Zerihun Associates. As a result, the remaining three independent variables and one dependent variable constituted the conceptual framework for this study as illustrated below.

Figure 1:Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology for examining the relationship between managing stakeholders and project success. The research design and approach, target population and sampling technique, method of data collection, validity and reliability of instruments, model specification, data analysis and presentation as well as ethical considerations are all presented as subsections of this chapter.

3.1. Research Design and Approach

In line with the objectives of this study, a combination of descriptive and explanatory research designs was adopted by the researcher. The descriptive component sought to capture the stakeholder management practices already in place at Zerihun Associates while the explanatory component aimed to describe the relationship between stakeholder management and project success.

A mixed method research approach was followed in this study so that measurement of the relationship between variables through the quantitative approach are complemented by detailed insights into the mechanics of managing stakeholders at Zerihun Associates and perceptions of respondents gleaned through the qualitative approach.

3.2. Target Population and Sampling

The organization under study was Zerihun Associates, a development consultancy and research firm in Ethiopia. To ensure a balance between the availability of secondary documents and recency of project implementation, research projects started and completed by the firm over the past two years (January 2022 - December 2023) were considered in the research.

The target population for this study included a total of 40 field supervisors, 10 project coordinators, 1 research director, 1 general manager and 1 client-side project lead who were involved in various capacities during the implementation of projects in the aforementioned period. Field data collectors, local government officials and other stakeholders were not included in the study due to language barrier, the logistic difficulty of getting their response and the limited information they are expected to have about the subject matter. Moreover, supervisors, coordinators, the research director, the general manager and client-side project leads had significantly more exposure with various project stakeholders and, therefore, are better suited to be the target population for this study.

The researcher carried out a census of the entire target population since every member of the population is completely enumerated. According to Dubey & Kothari (2022), maximum accuracy is achieved and nothing is left for chance in such a study when all items are covered.

3.3. Data Collection Method

A combination of primary and secondary data was collected during this study. Questionnaires - including a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree) for close ended questions - was developed on Google Form and the link was shared with project coordinators and field supervisors via email/Telegram for automatic self-administration. This method offered many advantages including the ease of collecting data in a short period of time; compilation of all data in a centralized database on the researcher's Google account as soon as the respondents complete and submit their responses; and the ease with which respondents were able to complete the questionnaire on their mobile phones or computers.

Qualitative data was collected from the general manager and the research director at Zerihun Associates as well as from a client-side project lead through semi-structured interviews, conducted in-person and audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis. In addition, secondary data sources such as Terms of References (ToRs), technical proposals and public reports produced by Zerihun Associates for the projects under study were also consulted to further triangulate findings from the quantitative and qualitative data collections.

Table 1: Target Population of the Study

Stakeholder Type		Sample Size	Data Collection Method
External	Client-side Project Lead	1	Semi-structured interview

Internal	General Manager	1	Semi-structured interview
	Research Director	1	Semi-structured interview
	Project Coordinator	10	Questionnaire
	Field Supervisors	40	Questionnaire
Total		53	

3.4. Validity and Reliability

Validity can be defined as both how well a test measures something and what it claims to measure (Dubey & Kothari, 2022). In other words, validity refers to the degree to which differences found by a measurement instrument reflect actual differences among the test respondents. To maximize the validity of instruments, the researcher adapted well tested variables and questionnaires from Waris et al., (2022), Khan et al., (2021) and Melaku, N. (2023) in addition to running several pre-tests with non-sample respondents obtaining positive feedback.

Reliability was defined by Dubey & Kothari (2022) as the degree of consistency or dependability of the measurement or scale. A measurement instrument is accurate when the findings of the measurement method are repeatable. Reliability also refers to how consistently particular measurement results are generated and how error-free the instruments are. The researcher used Cronbach's Alpha (α) generated using SPSS 26 to assess the instrument's reliability. As with other reliability estimations, coefficient alpha ranges from 0.00 (no internal consistency) to 1.00 (full consistency). A rating above 0.7,

which shows that the items have comparatively strong internal consistency, is generally regarded as acceptable. As shown in Table 2, each of the study variables had an alpha value greater than 0.7, which suggests that the questionnaire has a satisfactory reliability.

Table 2: Reliability Test using Cronbach's Alpha (α)

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability
Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization	6	0.758	Good
Stakeholder Communication	6	0.918	Very Good
Stakeholder Engagement	4	0.701	Good
Project Success	4	0.719	Good

Source (SPSS, 2026)

3.5. Data Analysis and Presentation

After the collection of data from primary and secondary sources, the data was manually cleaned to identify any missing information or data inconsistency. Quantitative data from the structured questionnaire was then entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 software for sorting and analysis. In addition to a descriptive analysis of responses (means, percentages, frequencies and standard deviations), the researcher employed Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis to calculate the

magnitude and direction of correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable. On the other hand, the qualitative data was analyzed using the thematic data analysis method in line with the study variables to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought to maintain a high level of objectivity and confidentiality throughout the study. Informed consent of respondents and right holders was a prerequisite for the collection of any primary or secondary data. To this end, respondents were informed that their responses will be kept confidential and utilized only for academic research purposes. The objectives and overall purpose of the study was clearly stated in the introduction section of the questionnaire and interview guide. Participation in the study was voluntary and respondents had the right not to be included in the study prior, during or after the data collection. In addition, the researcher properly cited all the secondary sources of data consulted as part of this study and upheld utmost objectivity during the analysis and reporting of study findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of research findings. The descriptive statistics, correlation results and regression analysis are presented in separate subsections as follows.

4.1. Introduction

Out of the 50 questionnaires electronically shared with respondents, only 1 was not returned and the remaining 49 were completed and submitted. This resulted in a response rate of 98%. The data analysis was carried out using the 49 completed questionnaires received via Google Forms. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews were administered as planned with a client-side project lead as well as the general manager and research director at Zerihun Associates.

4.2. Demographic Information of Respondents

Gender and Role during Project Implementation: As shown in Table 3, only 10 (20.4%) out of the total 49 respondents were female while the remaining 39 (79.6%) were male. This suggests that there is a significant gender imbalance among project team members with supervisory roles at Zerihun Associates. However, a closer look at Table 3 reveals that the said gender imbalance is only observed among field supervisors, with only 4 (10.3%) female supervisor as compared to the remaining 35 male supervisors. Among

project coordinators, on the other hand, there were actually more female respondents (60%) than male respondents (40%). In addition, the number of field coordinators who participated in this study (39) was almost four times as many as project coordinators (10).

Table 3: Gender of Respondents

		Role during Project Implementation		
		Field Supervisor	Project Coordinator	Total
Gender	Female	4	6	10
	Male	35	4	39
Total		39	10	49

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Age: Out of the 49 respondents who completed the questionnaire, the majority of them fall within the age ranges of 25-30 (20.4%) and 30-35 (44.9%). The average age of the sample respondents is 32.9, ranging from a minimum of 24 to a maximum of 49.

Table 4: Age of Respondents

Age (in years)		
N	Valid	49
	Missing	0
Mean		32.90
Median		33.00
Mode		34
Std. Deviation		5.436
Range		25
Minimum		24
Maximum		49

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Table 5: Age Groups of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 25	3	6.1	6.1	6.1
	25-30	10	20.4	20.4	26.5
	30-35	22	44.9	44.9	71.4
	35-40	8	16.3	16.3	87.8
	Above 40	6	12.2	12.2	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Level of Education: There were significantly more BA/BSc holders (75.5%) among the respondents than MA/MSc holders (24.5%). This indicates that project team members holding supervisory roles at Zerihun Associates are intellectually qualified to manage stakeholders during project implementation.

Table 6: Level of Education of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BA/BSc	37	75.5	75.5	75.5
	MA/MSc	12	24.5	24.5	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Professional Experience: The majority of project team members holding supervisory roles at Zerihun Associates were, more or less, seniors with a total of 40 respondents (81.6%) having over 5 years of work experience while at the other extreme, only 9

respondents (18.4%) had less than 5 years of work experience. The average number of years of professional experience among sample respondents was 8.7, suggesting a seasoned project team capable of providing valuable insights into stakeholder management at Zerihun Associates.

Table 7: Professional Experience of Respondents

Professional Experience (in years)		
N	Valid	49
	Missing	0
Mean		8.704
Median		8.000
Mode		10.0
Std. Deviation		5.4236
Range		33.0
Minimum		1.0
Maximum		34.0

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Table 8: Professional Experience Grouped Statistics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 5	9	18.4	18.4	18.4
	5-10	20	40.8	40.8	59.2
	Above 10	20	40.8	40.8	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

Source (SPSS, 2026)

4.3. Descriptive Analysis of Variables

For each of the independent variables as well as the dependent variable, mean scores and standard deviations of responses provided to the 5-point Likert scale questions were calculated. The standard deviation calculates the data's dispersion and shows how closely the data is clustered around the average. Since the standard deviations for each variable are less than one as shown in Table 9, we can conclude that there is minimal deviation of responses from the mean scores, therefore, responses to all variables are consistent. During the coding of responses to Likert scale questions, a value of 1 was assigned to “Strongly Disagree”, 2 to “Disagree”, 3 to “Neutral”, 4 to “Agree” and 5 to “Strongly Agree”. Hence, the mean score values presented in Table 9 indicate that respondents are generally in agreement, in general, with the parameters proposed under each variable.

Table 9: Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Variables

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Project Success	49	4.2857	.59293
Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization	49	3.9143	.54620
Stakeholder Communication	49	3.9932	.82423
Stakeholder Engagement	49	3.9286	.60596

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization

Table 10 presents the descriptive results for the stakeholder identification and prioritization variable. The overall high mean scores (> 3) indicate that respondents are in favor of the proposed parameters. A particularly high agreement (4.24 and 4.10 respectively) is observed with the “Identified stakeholders are prioritized” and “Time is allocated to the prioritized stakeholders based on their assessed importance” statements while there is a relatively low agreement (3.59) with the “The interests of each stakeholder are analyzed at the inception phase” statement. This suggests that the project team members need to put more effort in analyzing the interests and influences of each stakeholder at the inception phase in addition to allocating budget according to the assessed importance of prioritized stakeholders.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics for Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
All project stakeholders are identified at the inception phase.	49	3.90	1.026
The interests of each stakeholder are analyzed at the inception phase.	49	3.59	.911
The influences of each stakeholder are analyzed at the inception phase.	49	3.76	.925
Identified stakeholders are prioritized.	49	4.24	.693
Time is allocated to the prioritized stakeholders based on their assessed importance.	49	4.10	.797

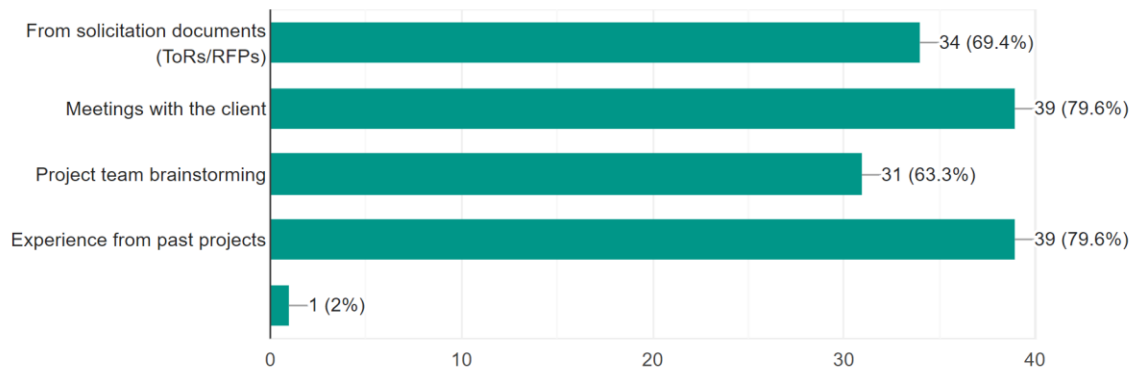
Budget is allocated to the prioritized stakeholders based on their assessed importance.	49	3.88	.781
Valid N (listwise)	49		

Source (SPSS, 2026)

As shown on the bar chart in Figure 2, the majority of respondents (79.6% each) selected “Meeting with the client” and “Experience from past projects” as the primary mechanisms for identifying project stakeholders, followed by “From solicitation documents” (69.4%). These findings are consistent with what the Research Director at Zerihun Associates reported during the interview (Interview with the Research Director, May 31 2024).

“Stakeholder identification starts from the kick off meeting [with clients], which takes place after we win the project and they announce it. There are things we discuss in house and later on, a kick off meeting is arranged with the client. The first thing after we win the project is a kick off meeting. It is in the kickoff meeting that we identify stakeholders. Usually when we get projects, they tend to have a short timeline. Secondly, beyond what we suggest for the purpose of proposals, we don’t exactly know which stakeholders were working with the client, which government offices they work with, what their operation areas are. Therefore, project stakeholders and their expectations are discussed during kickoff meetings. It is also the stage in which we get the information we need to prioritize [stakeholders].”

Figure 2: Mechanisms for Identifying Stakeholders¹



Almost all respondents (91.8%) indicated that stakeholders are identified during the inception phase of projects, with 26 respondents (53.1%) additionally indicating that the stakeholder identification process continues well into the implementation phase. The Research Director at Zerihun Associates echoed these findings as follows (Interview with the Research Director, May 31 2024).

“Within one or two weeks after we win the project, the client themselves invite us to a kickoff meeting. And in that kickoff meeting, we try to identify stakeholders. One thing that I want you to understand here is that one of the things that differentiate research projects from other kinds of projects is that some stakeholders are identifying in due process. All stakeholders are not identified in the beginning. As we understand the project more through the process, that is when we know who are the right people, who we should communicate with and who is the responsible person even from the client side.”

¹ Source (Google Forms): This figure is generated from a question that allowed respondents to select multiple responses (“Mark all that apply”). Hence, the sum of counts across bars far exceeds the total number of respondents.

Figure 3: Timing of Stakeholder Identification²

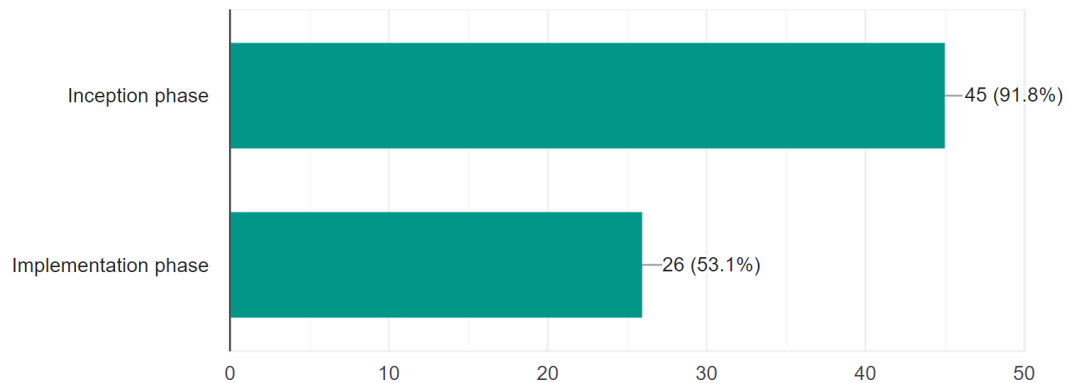
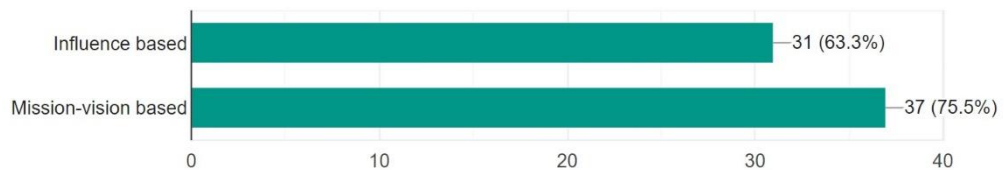


Figure 4 displays the basis for prioritizing stakeholders as reported by respondents. The majority of respondents (63.3%) selected both “Influence” and “Mission-vision” as prioritization criteria, with the latter option being slightly more prevalent among 37 respondents (75.5%).

Figure 4: Basis for Prioritizing Stakeholders³



Stakeholder Communication

The overall high mean score (>3) shown in Table 11 indicates that respondents agree to the proposed parameters for the stakeholder communication variable. The “Timely updates

² Source (Google Forms): This figure is generated from a question that allowed respondents to select multiple responses (“Mark all that apply”). Hence, the sum of counts across bars far exceeds the total number of respondents.

³ Source (Google Forms): This figure is generated from a question that allowed respondents to select multiple responses (“Mark all that apply”). Hence, the sum of counts across bars far exceeds the total number of respondents.

are provided to stakeholders on project progress, changes and milestones” and “The approach and channels of communication are clear to the project staff” statements obtained the highest agreement (4.27 and 4.14 respectively) from respondents. In contrast, the “There is an established mechanism for stakeholders to provide feedback to the project team” and “Information to be distributed to stakeholders, including the language, format, content, and level of detail is identified” statements gained the least agreement (3.82 and 3.84 respectively), indicating that more emphasis should be given to nuances of information delivery, establish mechanisms to receive feedback from stakeholders and document all communications. These results were partially argued and partially explained by the General Manager at Zerihun Associates in the interview as follows (Interview with the General Manager, June 2 2024).

“In regards to other in-person and phone communications, everyone prefers to use their own language. Therefore, as much as possible, we try to make these communications through personnel who came from that region and speak the language. Overall, high level officials are usually communicated in Amharic but at the lower administrative level, every region is communicated with their respective language. The content and format [of communication] depends on the stage of the project. That means, during the initial stages, you have to mention the implementing partners of the research - and show [support letters] - whenever you have communications at various levels. You also use formal letters to solicit approvals. Later on, communication is carried out informally through phone calls and other [channels].”

“Throughout the project implementation process, we rely on feedback from stakeholders on what letters we should prepare, which people to contact and what locations to avoid

due to [security] issues. However, it is information from the client that we prioritize. So we forward feedback from other stakeholders to the client and it is only the feedback approved by the client that we execute.”

“There is a survey report that we generate [at the end of the projects] that captures the whole process. We document the processes we went through on that [report]. But if you ask me to put a percent on it, I would say that we don’t capture even 50% of it in the report. This is caused by many things. First, since this is a for-profit organization, we produce and document curated content for the client. Half the knowledge obtained stays with individual employees/team members. We go through a lot of ups and downs during project implementation but clients are usually not interested in [documenting] all of that. It is well known that such and such are encountered during survey [projects]. That is why we are very selective in documentation.”

Table 11: Descriptive Statistics for Stakeholder Communication

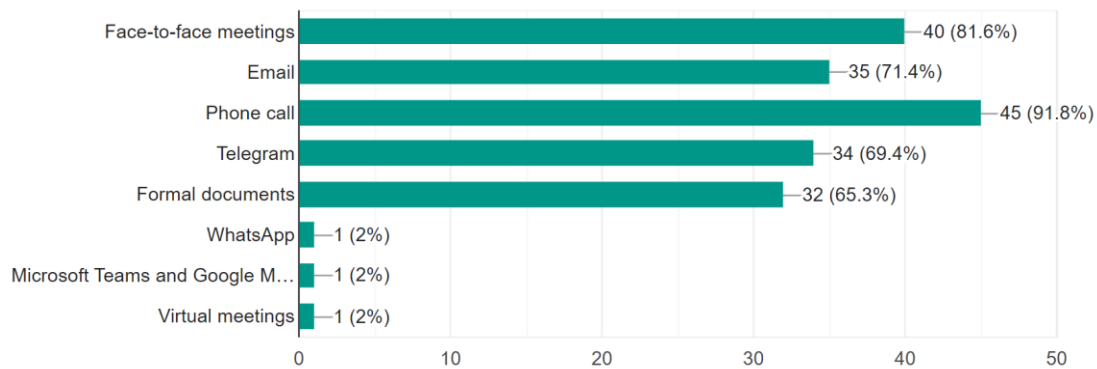
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Plans/strategies are developed for tailored communication with stakeholders.	49	4.02	.946
The approach and channels of communication are clear to the project staff.	49	4.14	1.061
Information to be distributed to stakeholders, including the language, format, content, and level of detail is identified.	49	3.84	1.087

Timely updates are provided to stakeholders on project progress, changes and milestones.	49	4.27	.884
There is an established mechanism for stakeholders to provide feedback to the project team.	49	3.82	1.167
All stakeholder communications, decisions and feedback are accurately recorded for future reference.	49	3.88	.992
Valid N (listwise)	49		

Source (SPSS, 2026)

As shown in Figure 5, a wide range of channels are used by project team members to communicate with stakeholders. Phone calls are the most dominant channel of communication as reported by 45 respondents (91.8%), followed by face-to-face meetings at 81.6%. In addition, Email, Telegram and formal documents are observed to be common channels of sharing information. These findings are, more or less, iterated by both the General Manager and the Research Director in their respective interviews as they highlighted formal letters, in-person meetings, emails, phone conversations and social media such as Telegram and WhatsApp as the major communication channels.

Figure 5: Channels of Communication with Stakeholders⁴



Stakeholder Engagement

Mean scores of proposed parameters under the stakeholder engagement variable are presented in Table 12, along with their respective standard deviations. The “Stakeholders’ concerns and conflicts of interest are resolved throughout the project lifecycle” statement stood out as the most agreed (4.06) while the “Appropriate strategies are clearly developed to effectively engage stakeholders throughout the project life cycle” statement triggered a relatively low agreement at a mean score of 3.82.

Findings from the qualitative interviews provide further insight into the above observations. While admitting that there is no written strategy for engaging stakeholders at Zerihun Associates, both the General Manager and the Research Director emphasized that stakeholders are engaged through a rather informal, flexible and proactive approach. In regards to enabling stakeholders to define project success factors and success criteria, both

⁴ Source (Google Forms): This figure is generated from a question that allowed respondents to select multiple responses (“Mark all that apply”). Hence, the sum of counts across bars far exceeds the total number of respondents.

the General Manager and the Research Director indicated that the client gets the lion's share as they are the project owners.

Table 12: Descriptive Statistics for Stakeholder Engagement

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Appropriate strategies are clearly developed to effectively engage stakeholders throughout the project life cycle.	49	3.82	.905
Inputs from stakeholders are elicited and included in project planning.	49	3.98	.854
Stakeholders are enabled to define project success factors and success criteria at the project inception.	49	3.86	.842
Stakeholders' concerns and conflicts of interest are resolved throughout the project lifecycle.	49	4.06	.689
Valid N (listwise)	49		

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Figure 6 presents the techniques employed to manage conflicts with stakeholders. The majority of respondents selected collaboration as the primary method of conflict resolution (81.6%), followed by compromise (65.3%) and accommodation (57.1%). Further insights into the conflict resolution methods at Zerihun Associates were provided by the Research Director as follows (Interview with the Research Director, May 31 2024).

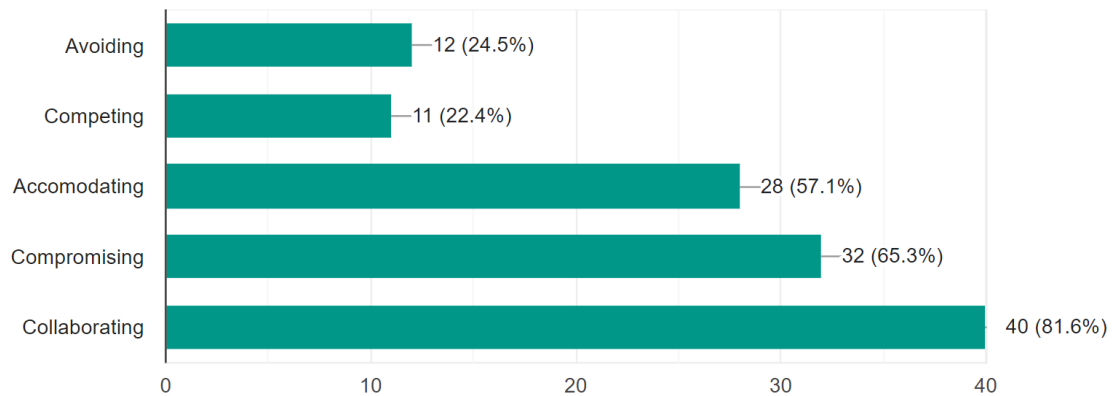
“Most of our clients are foreigners and as such, they may not properly understand the local context and what is happening in the country. They may underrate or exaggerate the things

we communicate with them. I believe that Ethiopian personnel from the client side play a key role in such situations, especially if they are positive, empathic and willing to balance things both on our side and that of the client. These are usually local field coordinators of the project. They make things very easy because they understand the country's context and, therefore, they properly understand what we go through. And then they also know the client-side demand. Sometimes, clients trust what people within their team tell them more than what we tell them."

"For example, a client might demand to get a certain deliverable within two weeks but there could be a violent war in [some parts] of the country. We then tell them that we couldn't get it done because there were [armed] conflicts. Or during the questionnaire development, their researchers may include items that don't take the local context into consideration. So, when we say such and such questions need to be removed, or this is not a viable way of managing things, they may hold a firm stand. In those situations, those [Ethiopian intermediaries] serve as our bridge. They helped us a lot. Whenever there are well meaning Ethiopians among clients, our task of managing stakeholders gets easier."

"It varies from project to project depending on the size of the project, the issue causing conflict of interest and on which is the gap. For example, whether the mistake or gaps happen on the client's side or on our side during project implementation determines the conflict management strategy we employ. But one thing I can say for sure is that, as a company, we don't employ an avoidant conflict management strategy. We either accommodate or collaborate. In fact, I think we mostly accommodate because, as I told you earlier, we are very flexible when we work with other organizations."

Figure 6: Techniques for Managing Conflicts with Stakeholders⁵



Project Success

All proposed parameters under the project success variable obtained high agreement from respondents as shown in Table 13. The “Stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates positively and significantly contributes to delivering the projects to the desired quality” statement, in particular, had a maximum mean score of 4.57. These findings suggest that the study respondents consider the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates to have a positive and significant impact on overall project success. The responses given by the Client-side Project Lead during the interview also support these results. In her capacity as the project advisors for one of the projects under study, she underlined the overall project success in terms of quality of deliverables, meeting project deadlines, staying within the agreed budget and managing the scope (Interview with Client-side Project Lead, June 5 2024).

⁵ Source (Google Forms): This figure is generated from a question that allowed respondents to select multiple responses (“Mark all that apply”). Hence, the sum of counts across bars far exceeds the total number of respondents.

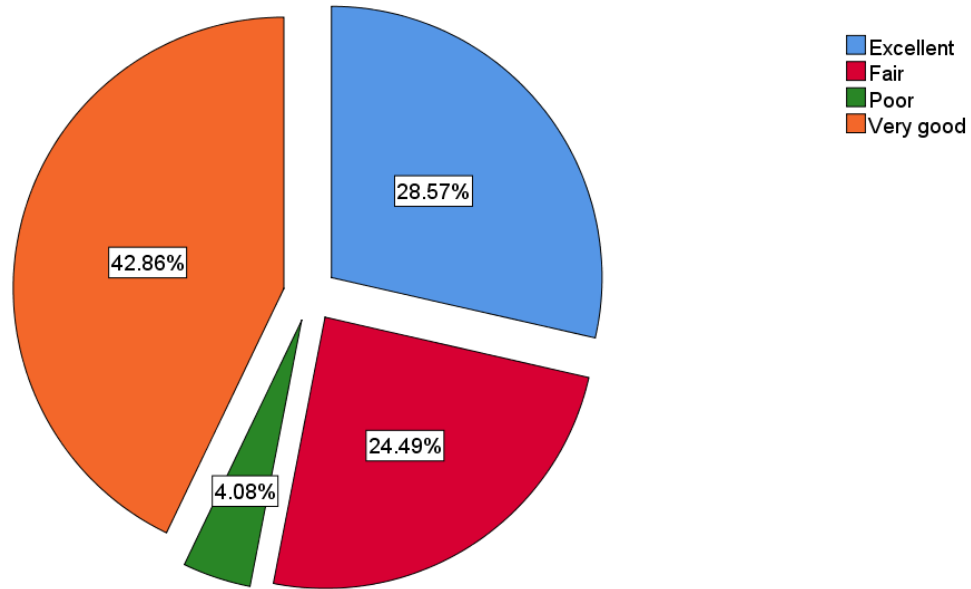
Table 13: Descriptive Statistics for Project Success

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates positively and significantly contributes to managing scope of projects.	49	4.47	.767
The stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates positively and significantly contributes to meeting project deadlines.	49	4.20	.763
The stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates positively and significantly contributes to completing the projects within their allocated budget.	49	3.90	.941
The stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates positively and significantly contributes to delivering the projects to the desired quality.	49	4.57	.791
Valid N (listwise)	49		

Source (SPSS, 2026)

The pie chart in Figure 7 displays the rating given by respondents on the overall stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates. A positive impression was held by the majority of respondents with approximately 28.6% and 42.9% of them describing the stakeholder management practice at the firm as “Excellent” and “Very good” respectively.

Figure 7: Overall Rating of Stakeholder Management Practice at Zerihun Associates



Source (SPSS, 2026)

4.4. Correlation Analysis of Variables

The Pearson correlation coefficient is one of the widely used statistical tools to quantify the linear relationship between two continuous variables. According to Schober, Boer, and Schwarte (2018), the scale ranges from -1 to +1, where +1 indicates a perfect positive linear correlation, -1 indicates a perfect negative linear correlation and 0 indicates no linear correlation. The researcher generated Table 14 using SPSS 26 to examine the correlation between the independent variables (stakeholder identification and prioritization, stakeholder communication and stakeholder engagement) and the dependent variable (project success).

Table 14: Correlation between Variables using Pearson's Coefficient

		Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization	Stakeholder Communication	Stakeholder Engagement	Project Success
Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization	Pearson Correlation	1	.397**	.321*	.289*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005	.025	.044
	N	49	49	49	49
Stakeholder Communication	Pearson Correlation	.397**	1	.731**	.574**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005		.000	.000
	N	49	49	49	49
Stakeholder Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.321*	.731**	1	.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	.000		.000
	N	49	49	49	49
Project Success	Pearson Correlation	.289*	.574**	.612**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.044	.000	.000	
	N	49	49	49	49

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Results of the correlation analysis show that stakeholder communication has a significant positive correlation with project success ($r = 0.574$, $p < 0.01$) along with a strong positive correlation with stakeholder engagement ($r = 0.731$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that effective communication with stakeholders is crucial for their engagement and the overall success of the project. In addition, there is a significant correlation between stakeholder engagement and project success ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that a high level of

stakeholder engagement is associated with better project success rates. On the other hand, the identification and prioritization of stakeholders, while important, showed a weak correlation with project success ($r = 0.289$, $p > 0.01$).

4.5. Multiple Regression Analysis

According to Woodridge (2016), the regression analysis can be used to predict the values of the dependent variable based on the values of the independent variable. When there are two or more independent variables, the equation describing their relationship with the dependent variable is called a multiple regression equation. Since more than two independent variables were adopted in this study, a multiple regression equation was used to test the relationship between stakeholder management and project success.

$$PS = \beta^{\circ} + \beta_{SIP} + \beta_{SC} + \beta_{SE} + \varepsilon$$

Where:

PS stands for project success,

β° stands for the intercept (constant),

SIP stands for stakeholder identification and prioritization,

SC stands for stakeholder communication,

SE stands for stakeholder engagement and

ε stands for standard error.

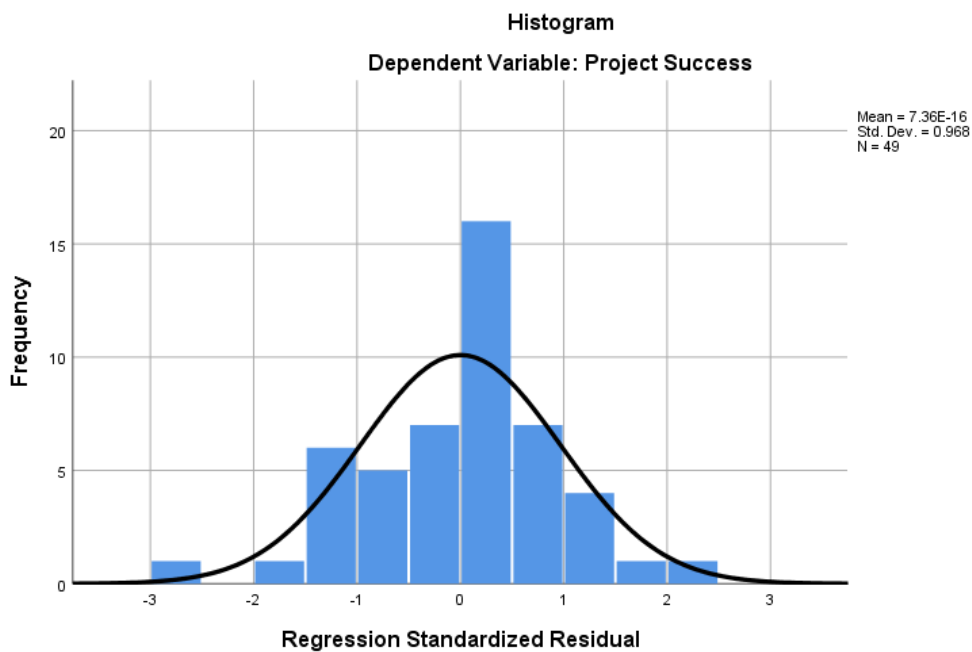
To ensure that the regression model fulfilled the underlying assumptions, the researcher ran diagnostic tests including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity and absence of autocorrelation. The results of these assumption checks are presented as follows.

4.5.1. Diagnostic Tests

Normality and Linearity

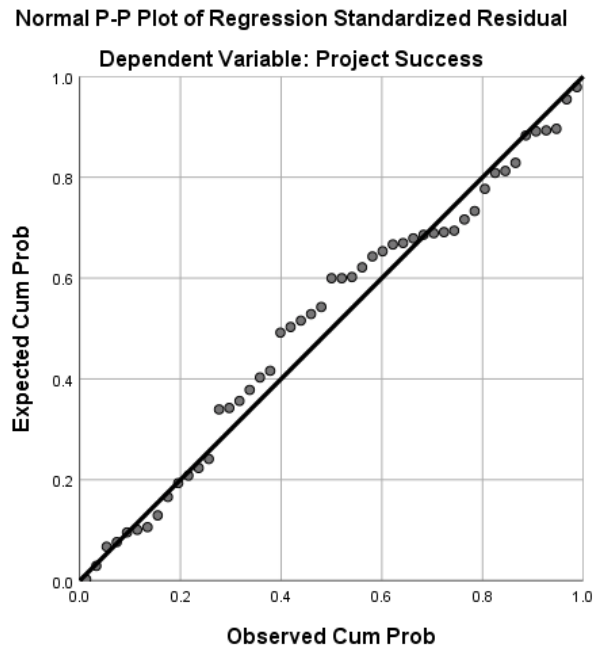
Figure 8 presents a histogram of data distribution generated by the researcher using SPSS 26. The majority of data falls within the bell-curved curve, exhibiting a normal distribution of data around the mean. Hence, it can be concluded that the assumption of normality is met. In addition, the P-P plot in Figure 9 indicate that the dataset is clustered along the straight-line, without significant outliers, thereby fulfilling the linearity assumption.

Figure 8: Histogram of Data Distribution



Source (SPSS, 2026)

Figure 9: P-P Plot to Demonstrate Linearity



Source (SPSS, 2026)

Multicollinearity

To ensure that no multicollinearity exists among the explanatory variables, the researcher generated collinearity statistics including tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) using SPSS 26. The results presented in Table 15 show that the tolerance level of independent variables lies between 0.437 and 0.841 while the VIF for each variable is less than 10, indicating that there is no multicollinearity among independent variables.

Table 15: Collinearity Statistics

Model	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		
Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization	.841	1.190

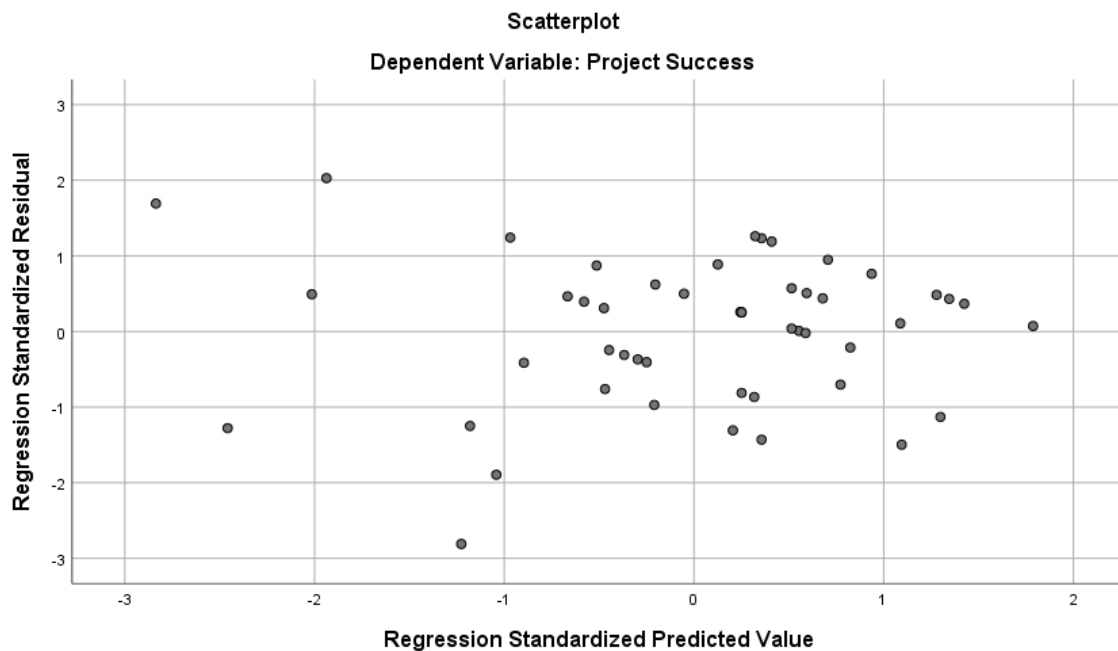
Stakeholder Communication	.437	2.290
Stakeholder Engagement	.465	2.151

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Homoscedasticity

The other basic assumption of multiple regression that was checked by the researcher is homoscedasticity. A scatterplot comparing the residuals against the dependent variable (project success) was produced using SPSS 26 and, as shown in Figure 10, the spots don't form a specific pattern and are well dispersed horizontally. Therefore, the regression model is not suspected of homoscedasticity issues.

Figure 10: Scatterplot to Check Homoscedasticity



Source (SPSS, 2026)

Autocorrelation

Since the independence of the residuals is one of the fundamental assumptions of multiple regression analysis, the researcher assessed whether observations and their error terms are independent using the Durbin-Watson (DW) test scores generated by SPSS 26. As per Kinyua et al. (2015), the DW statistic verifies that the model residuals are not autocorrelated through scores ranging from 0 to 4, where independent observations are indicated by DW scores falling between 1.5 and 2.5. The results shown in Table 16 suggest that there is no autocorrelation in the observations, with a DW score of 1.670.

Table 16: Autocorrelation Test using the Durbin-Watson (DW) Test

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.642a	.412	.373	.46942	1.670

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder Engagement, Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization, Stakeholder Communication

b. Dependent Variable: Project Success

Source (SPSS, 2026)

4.5.2. Results of the Regression Analysis

Model Fit

The researcher calculated goodness-of-fit statistics including R^2 and F test scores to assess how well the multiple regression model fits the data. As shown in Table 17, the R^2 and adjusted R^2 values for the model are 41.2% and 37.3% respectively. This indicates that the independent variables (stakeholder identification and prioritization, stakeholder

communication and stakeholder engagement) explain 37.3% of the variation in project success.

Table 17: Goodness- of-fit Test

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.642a	.412	.373	.46942

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder Engagement, Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization, Stakeholder Communication

b. Dependent Variable: Project Success

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) indicates the overall significance of all independent variables in explaining the dependent variable. The P-value should not exceed 0.05 and the F value has to be greater than zero to reject the null hypothesis that independent variables are approximated by zero. Table 18 shows that the F value is 10.527 with a P value less than 0.05. Hence, it can be concluded that the independent variables can jointly explain the dependent variable in this study and that the linear regression model is a good fit.

Table 18: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.959	3	2.320	10.527	.000b
	Residual	9.916	45	.220		
	Total	16.875	48			

a. Dependent Variable: Project Success

b. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder Engagement, Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization, Stakeholder Communication

Source (SPSS, 2026)

Coefficients of Regression

The researcher generated the coefficient estimate (β), standard error and p-value for each of the independent variables using SPSS 26 to determine the direction and significance levels of the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable.

Table 19: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.740	.580		2.999	.004
	Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization	.063	.135	.058	.466	.644
	Stakeholder Communication	.181	.124	.252	1.455	.153
	Stakeholder Engagement	.401	.164	.410	2.446	.018

a. Dependent Variable: Project Success

Source (SPSS, 2026)

As shown in Table 19, the Beta (β) values for stakeholder identification and prioritization, stakeholder communication and stakeholder engagement are 0.063, 1.181 and 0.401 respectively. Hence, the multiple regression equation calculated based on the collected data is specified as follows.

$$PS = 1.74 + 0.063 \text{ SIP} + 1.181 \text{ SC} + 0.401 \text{ SE} + \varepsilon$$

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the key research findings along with conclusions and recommendations based on study results. Areas for further research are also suggested for future study.

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The descriptive analysis based on mean score values of both the independent and dependent variables indicate that respondents are generally in agreement with the parameters proposed under each variable. Diagnostic tests run prior to the regression analysis verified that the regression model fulfills the normality, linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity and autocorrelation assumptions. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) also indicated that the independent variables can jointly explain the dependent variable in the study and that the linear regression model is a good fit with an F value of 10.527 and a P-value less than 0.05.

Key findings were also obtained from the qualitative interviews. While the Client-side Project Lead pointed out that no major difficulties were encountered during project implementation, the General Manager at Zerihun Associates mentioned mistrust of local communities as well as initial communications with government bodies and program implementers as recurring obstacles the company faces in relation to stakeholder management. On the other hand, the Research Director reported that the main challenges

related to managing stakeholders at Zerihun Associates include balancing between the competing interests of various stakeholders, winning the trust of local communities and adjusting to cultural nuances. A summary of additional findings under each of the study variables is presented as follows.

Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization

- The majority of respondents (79.6% each) selected “Meeting with the client” and “Experience from past projects” as the primary mechanisms for identifying project stakeholders, followed by “From solicitation documents” (69.4%).
- Almost all respondents (91.8%) indicated that stakeholders are identified during the inception phase of projects, with 26 respondents (53.1%) additionally indicating that the stakeholder identification process continues well into the implementation phase.
- The majority of respondents (63.3%) selected both “Influence” and “Mission-vision” as prioritization criteria, with the latter option being slightly more prevalent among 37 respondents (75.5%).
- The major challenges reported by field supervisors and project coordinators in relation to stakeholder identification and prioritization include:
 - Stakeholders sometimes have contradicting interests and the lack of clarity makes stakeholder prioritization difficult.
 - Sometimes, solicitation documents such as ToRs and RFPs don’t clearly outline the project stakeholders, their roles and level of engagement.
 - Influential stakeholders that were not initially identified and taken into account might be encountered during project implementation.

Stakeholder Communication

- Phone calls are the most dominant channel of communication as reported by 45 respondents (91.8%), followed by face-to-face meetings at 81.6%. In addition, Email, Telegram and formal documents are observed to be common channels of sharing information.
- The major challenges reported by field supervisors and project coordinators in relation to stakeholder communication include:
 - Striking a balance between open communication with stakeholders and maintaining confidentiality of sensitive data is at times difficult.
 - Connectivity issues hinder communication in some remote areas due to poor infrastructure.
 - Stakeholders at lower administrative levels are fatigued from dealing with numerous research projects which leads to their passive engagement.

Stakeholder Engagement

- The “Stakeholders’ concerns and conflicts of interest are resolved throughout the project lifecycle” statement stood out as the most agreed (4.06) while “Appropriate strategies are clearly developed to effectively engage stakeholders throughout the project life cycle” triggered a relatively low agreement at a mean score of 3.82.
- The majority of respondents selected collaboration as the primary method of conflict resolution (81.6%), followed by compromise (65.3%) and accommodation (57.1%).

- The major challenges reported by field supervisors and project coordinators in relation to stakeholder engagement include:
 - Managing expectations of stakeholders between underperformance and overpromise is a difficult task.
 - Stakeholders are at times inflexible in the face of dynamic circumstances on the ground.
 - Some stakeholders, especially respondents and government officials, demand incentives for engagement in research projects.

Project Success

- All proposed parameters under the project success variable obtained high agreement from respondents.
- A positive impression was held by the majority of respondents with approximately 28.6% and 42.9% of them describing the stakeholder management practice at the firm as “Excellent” and “Very good” respectively.

5.2. Conclusions

The study aimed to examine the effect of stakeholder management on project success in the case of Zerihun Associates. The independent variables of the study were stakeholder identification and communication, stakeholder communication and stakeholder engagement while project success was the single higher order dependent variable. Data was collected through a questionnaire, consisting of both close-ended and open-ended items, administered to a total of 49 field supervisors and project coordinators in addition to a semi-structured interview with a client-side Project Lead as well as the General Manager

and Research Director at Zerihun Associates. SPSS 26 was used to conduct both descriptive and inferential analysis. The descriptive analysis consisted of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation calculations while Pearson's correlation coefficient and a multiple regression model were employed to assess the relation between study variables.

Findings of the descriptive analysis suggest that the study respondents have a positive impression about the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates. It was seen that project teams at Zerihun Associates employ a wide range of channels to communicate with stakeholders. While admitting that there is no written engagement strategy for stakeholders at Zerihun Associates, both the General Manager and the Research Director emphasized that stakeholders are engaged through a rather informal, flexible and proactive approach.

The identification and prioritization of stakeholders, while important, showed a weak correlation with project success ($r = 0.289$, $p > 0.01$). Results of the correlation analysis also showed that stakeholder communication has a significant positive correlation with project success ($r = 0.574$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, there is a significant correlation between stakeholder engagement and project success ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that effective communication with stakeholders and high levels of stakeholder engagement are crucial for the overall success of projects.

The R^2 and adjusted R^2 values for the regression model were found to be 41.2% and 37.3% respectively, suggesting that the independent variables (stakeholder identification and prioritization, stakeholder communication and stakeholder engagement) explain 37.3% of

the variation in project success. Results of the regression analysis indicated that stakeholder identification and prioritization, stakeholder communication and stakeholder engagement had Beta (β) values of 0.063, 1.181 and 0.401 respectively, suggesting that stakeholder engagement had the most effect on variations in project success with a one-unit increase in stakeholder engagement resulting in a 40.1% increment in project success. These results are in agreement with the existing literature and previous studies conducted by Waris et al. (2022), Nauman & Piracha (2016) and Melaku, N. (2023) who also concluded that stakeholder management has a positive and significant effect on project success.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the descriptive, correlation and regression analyses conducted and building from responses given in the questionnaire as well as the interviews, the researcher proposes the following measures to be taken towards enhancing the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates and its impact on project success.

- ★ An exhaustive stakeholder mapping needs to be carried out prior to project implementation to avoid late identification of stakeholders. These shall include multiple discussions with potential stakeholders, establishing initial contact as early as possible, learning best practices from other organizations and following a standard approach in prioritizing stakeholders. In addition, project team members need to put more effort in analyzing the interests and influences of each stakeholder at the inception phase in addition to allocating resources according to the assessed importance of prioritized stakeholders.

- ★ A written communication strategy promoting a more proactive approach should be prepared to standardize practices and streamline information sharing both within project teams and with external stakeholders. This strategy shall also emphasize nuances of information delivery (language, format, content and level of detail), establish mechanisms to receive feedback from stakeholders and facilitate the documentation of all communications. Moreover, there is a need for a dedicated communication personnel/team specifically tasked with ensuring that all communications, decisions and feedback from stakeholders are properly recorded throughout project implementation.
- ★ A well-documented strategy with standard procedures needs to be developed to effectively engage project stakeholders, while making room for flexibility to accommodate contextual nuances of each project and changing realities on the ground. Awareness creation efforts prior to project implementation have also been identified as a foundational step towards ensuring maximal engagement from stakeholders.

5.4. Areas for Future Research

Results of the correlation and regression analysis suggest the relatively low effect of stakeholder identification and prioritization on project success, compared to the other two independent variables (stakeholder communication and stakeholder engagement). While this discrepancy can partially be attributed to the small sample size of this study, the researcher suggests further investigation on the relationship between stakeholder identification and prioritization and project success. In addition, due to logistic

considerations, this study focused the analysis on responses obtained from project team members and a client-side representative. A similar study that explores the research topic from the perspective of other stakeholders such as government bodies and research respondents is recommended by the researcher.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear participants,

The researcher - Selman Hussein - is a student of Masters of Arts in the Project management department at the school of commerce, Addis Ababa University. You are invited to participate in a study entitled “The effect of Stakeholder Management on Project Success: In the Case of Zerihun Associates”. This questionnaire consists of 36 items categorized under five (5) sections and it is expected to take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

You are selected to participate in this study because you had a supervisory role related to stakeholder management in several research projects implemented by Zerihun Associates over the past two years (January 2022 - December 2023).

The researcher needs your truthful responses for this study. The researcher would greatly appreciate it if you could take a few minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire. The researcher promises you that the information you provide will be kept private. The data collected will only be utilized for scholarly research and statistical analysis.

The following operational definitions are adopted for the purpose of this study.

- **PROJECT:** is operationally defined as research projects started and completed by Zeri hun Associates over the past two years (January 2022 - December 2023).
- **PROJECT STAKEHOLDERS:** are operationally defined to include clients, beneficiaries, government authorities and other stakeholders involved in the research projects under study.
- **PROJECT SUCCESS:** is defined in terms of managing the project scope, meeting project deadlines, completing the project within the allocated budget and delivering the project to the desired quality.

Should you have any question regarding this study, please contact me via:

E-mail: selmanhhussein@gmail.com

Tel: (+251) 915536071

Thank you very much!

NB: Please make sure that you read the instructions under each section carefully before submitting your responses.

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION [Please mark in the boxes to indicate your responses. Make sure that you only choose one response option for each question.]

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Age (in years): _____

3. Educational Level

Diploma

BA/BSc

MA/MSc

PhD

Other: _____

4. Professional Experience (in years): _____

5. Role during Project Implementation

Project Coordinator

Field Supervisor

SECTION 2: STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION AND PRIORITIZATION

[Please think of the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates and mark the option that best corresponds with how you feel about the statements. Make sure that you only choose one response option for each question.]

No	Statements/Response Options	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
6.	All project stakeholders are mapped at the inception phase.					
7.	The interests and influence of each stakeholder are analyzed at the inception phase.					
8.	Identified stakeholders are prioritized.					
9.	Resources (time, budget, communication) are allocated to the prioritized					

	stakeholders based on their assessed importance.					
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

10. How are stakeholders identified? [Mark all that apply]

From solicitation documents (ToRs/RFPs)

Meetings with the client

Project team brainstorming

Experience from past projects

Other: _____

11. At what phase of the project life are stakeholders identified? [Mark all that apply]

Inception phase

Implementation phase

12. What is the basis for prioritizing stakeholders?

Influence based

Mission-vision based

Other: _____

13. What particular challenges have you faced in relation to the stakeholder identification and prioritization practice at Zerihun Associates between January 2022 and December 2023? [Open ended question]

14. What suggestions would you make, based on your experience, to enhance the stakeholder identification and prioritization practice at Zerihun Associates? [Open ended question]

SECTION 3: STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION [Please think of the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates and mark the option that best corresponds with how you feel about the statements. Make sure that you only choose one response option for each question.]

No	Statements/Response Options	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
15.	Plans and strategies are developed for tailored communication with stakeholders.					
16.	The approach and channels of communication are clear to the project staff.					

17.	Information to be distributed to stakeholders, including the language, format, content, and level of detail is identified.					
18.	Timely updates are provided to stakeholders on project progress, changes and milestones.					
19.	There is an established mechanism for stakeholders to provide feedback to the project team.					
20.	All stakeholder communications, decisions and feedback are accurately recorded for future reference.					

21. What channel is used to communicate with stakeholders? [Mark all that apply]

Face-to-face meetings

Email

Phone call

Telegram

Formal documents

Other: _____

22. What particular challenges have you faced in relation to the stakeholder communication practice at Zerihun Associates between January 2022 and December 2023?
[Open ended question]

23. What suggestions would you make, based on your experience, to enhance the stakeholder communication practice at Zerihun Associates? [Open ended question]

SECTION 4: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT [Please think of the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates and mark the option that best corresponds with how you feel about the statements. Make sure that you only choose one response option for each question.]

No	Statements/Response Options	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
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24.	Appropriate strategies are clearly developed to effectively engage stakeholders throughout the project life cycle.					
25.	Inputs from stakeholders are elicited and included in project planning.					
26.	Stakeholders were enabled to define project success factors and success criteria at the project inception.					
27.	Relevant stakeholders are included in meetings, training, workshops and project events.					
28.	Stakeholders' concerns and conflicts of interest are resolved throughout the project lifecycle.					

29. What techniques are used to manage conflicts with stakeholders? [Mark all that apply]

Avoiding

Competing

Accommodating

Compromising

Collaborating

30. What particular challenges have you faced in relation to the stakeholder engagement practice at Zerihun Associates between January 2022 and December 2023? [Open ended question]

31. What suggestions would you make, based on your experience, to enhance the stakeholder engagement practice at Zerihun Associates? [Open ended question]

SECTION 5: PROJECT SUCCESS [Please think of the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates and mark the option that best corresponds with how you feel about the statements. Make sure that you only choose one response option for each question.]

No	Statements/Response Options	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
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32.	The stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates positively and significantly contributes to managing <i>scope of projects.</i>					
33.	The stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates positively and significantly contributes to <i>meeting project deadlines.</i>					
34.	The stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates positively and significantly contributes to completing the projects within their <i>allocated budget.</i>					
35.	The stakeholder management practice at					

	Zerihun Associates positively and significantly contributes to delivering the projects to the <i>desired</i> <i>quality</i>.					
--	---	--	--	--	--	--

36. How would you rate the overall stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates?

Excellent

Very good

Fair

Poor

Very poor

INTERVIEW GUIDE [with Research Director]

Protocols Before the Interview

- Choose a venue with minimal auditory and visual distractions
- Describe the purpose and expected length (approximately 30 minutes) of the interview
- Assure the confidentiality and anonymity of responses
- Obtain the informed consent of the respondent to participate in the interview
- Obtain the informed consent of the respondent to be audio-recorded for later transcription
- Ask the respondent if they have any questions before proceeding to the interview

Question 1 - How would you describe your role at Zerihun Associates between January 2022 and December 2023?

Question 2 - What particular difficulties have you faced in relation to managing project stakeholders at Zerihun Associates in the aforementioned period?

Question 3 - How would you describe the stakeholder identification and prioritization practice at Zerihun Associates and its effect on project success?

Question 4 - What suggestions would you make, based on your experience, to enhance the stakeholder identification and prioritization practice at Zerihun Associates?

Question 5 - How would you describe the stakeholder communication practice at Zerihun Associates and its effect on project success?

Question 6 - What suggestions would you make, based on your experience, to enhance the stakeholder communication practice at Zerihun Associates?

Question 7 - How would you describe the stakeholder engagement practice at Zerihun Associates and its effect on project success?

Question 8 - What suggestions would you make, based on your experience, to enhance the stakeholder engagement practice at Zerihun Associates?

INTERVIEW GUIDE [with Client-side Project Lead]

Protocols Before the Interview

- Choose a venue with minimal auditory and visual distractions
- Describe the purpose and expected length (approximately 30 minutes) of the interview
- Assure the confidentiality and anonymity of responses
- Obtain the informed consent of the respondent to participate in the interview
- Obtain the informed consent of the respondent to be audio-recorded for later transcription
- Ask the respondent if they have any questions before proceeding to the interview

Question 1 - How would you describe your role during the [*Project Title*] implemented between January 2022 and December 2023?

Question 2 - What particular difficulties have you faced in relation to project stakeholders' management in the aforementioned period?

Question 3 - How would you evaluate the success of the [*Project Title*]?

Probe: In relation to managing the project scope

Probe: In relation to meeting project deadlines

Probe: In relation to completing the project within the allocated budget

Probe: In relation to delivering the project to the desired quality

Question 4 - How would you describe the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates and its effect on project success?

Probe: In terms of stakeholder identification and prioritization

Probe: In terms of stakeholder communication

Probe: In terms of stakeholder engagement

Question 5 - What suggestions would you make, based on your experience, to enhance the stakeholder management practice at Zerihun Associates?

Probe: In terms of stakeholder identification and prioritization

Probe: In terms of stakeholder communication

Probe: In terms of stakeholder engagement