

INFLUENCE OF STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT SKILLS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIALITY TEA PROJECTS IN KERICHO COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: A project is as good as the quality of leaders behind it. Project managers are very crucial in the design, development and implementation of a project. To work effectively on his day-to-day tasks, the project manager has to be well equipped with skills to enable him attain project success. Project implementation is crucial to survival of a company or organization, well-implemented projects are able to satisfy the customer and stakeholders wants and enhance the competitiveness of the organisation. This has prompted companies in the tea sector to embrace product diversification from the traditional black tea by embracing speciality teas and this require construction of new plants and installation of machinery to process it. To manage the many projects in tea industry, firms have incorporated project management skills as a means of increasing their success rate in implementation of projects, but despite this awareness, projects do fail. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the influence of stakeholder management skills on implementation of speciality tea projects in Kericho County, Kenya. A descriptive research design was embraced with target population being speciality tea projects in Kericho County where 21 projects were targeted. The unit of observation was project managers, assistant managers, engineers, general staff and supervisors working in the projects. A population of 462 individuals was targeted. The research used census to obtain a representative sample from different groups in the target population. The Statistical package SPSS was used in data analysis. Descriptive statistics which includes standard deviation, frequencies, means and percentages and inferential statistics with multiple regressions were applied in data analysis. The study established that stakeholder management skills had a positive significant influence on speciality tea projects implementation in Kericho County, Kenya. The study concludes that the Tea companies should make sure that all pertinent parties are informed about decisions pertaining to the projects that the company is working on. The study recommends that the Tea companies needs to identify and categorize the pertinent internal and external stakeholders.

Keywords: Stakeholder Management Skills, Project Implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the world today competitiveness has become a crucial factor in molding the future of a company, how a company positions itself among the competitors determines its prosperity, its survivor in the industry, or its failure. To be competitive, organization opts to ensure implementation of its projects is on top notch and investments are on effective technology. Globally, customer needs have become so dynamic prompting organizations and companies to seek new technology projects to enable new product and process development to satisfy the customer (NGO et al, 2016). Implementation of different projects has been rampant in the agricultural sector, advancement in technology has been pivotal in agricultural development and firms can be able to meet global food demand and be competitive (OECD & FAO, 2015).

Tea industry being part of the agricultural sector has had massive development in technology. Today, tea companies have highly invested on projects in product diversification to maintain the sustainability of the industry and remain competitive (FAO 2021). Tea companies around the globe are embracing speciality teas as a diversification from the common black tea which is most popular especially in Africa. These teas fetch higher prices compared to black tea with the most expensive speciality tea going for \$1.2 million per kilo i.e. the Da Hong Pao tea and other varieties fetching upto an average of \$4 compared to an average of \$2 for black tea (Akriti, 2022). Speciality teas processing require integrity, extra care and ethically sourced and processed; they are broad in number and include green tea, purple tea, oolong tea, white tea, orthodox tea, peur tea among others. According to FAO (2021) the future of tea is highly dependent on innovations which will promote product diversification which will offer alternative markets and increase income in the sector, and speciality tea is the future.

Globally acceptance of speciality teas is on a rising trajectory with the market growth expected to rise by 4% compared to projected 1.4% rise in black tea with china, Vietnam and Japan expecting an increase of 3.6%, 7% and 6.5% respectively (ITC 2023). China, being the highest exporter of speciality tea i.e.80% of the global speciality tea in the market (FAO 2021), has heavily invested on construction of speciality tea factories with Zhejiang Tea Group recently opening a fully modern Specialty Tea Center, where the factory is fully automated and robot labor is used and is heavily equipped with artificial intelligence to check on the quality and consistency of the product (Dan, 2019). The construction of speciality processing plants around the globe is on the rise and companies are heavily investing on these projects so as to grab a share of the market and remain competitive (Dan, 2019).

In Africa there has been slow growth of the speciality teas, a study by FAO (2022) on the tea sector in Mauritius pointed out on the over reliance of the industry on black tea and recommended adoptions of projects in speciality teas as diversification strategy. Other countries in Africa like Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda among others have less than 10% of their teas being speciality teas.

In Kenya there has been progressive acceptance of speciality teas and companies and individuals are constructing speciality teas production lines and cortage industries. There have been an initiative from Tea board of Kenya to encourage individuals and companies to embrace speciality teas projects (Kimuri, 2022). According to KTDA (2023) there has been an increase in quantities of speciality teas manufactured by its managed companies, where 11 million Kgs was manufactured in 2022 compared to 3 million in 2021. According to TBK (2023) more than 20 speciality processing factories have been constructed between 2019 and 2023. Those companies who traditionally were specialized in black tea are now constructing speciality processing lines in their premises or building a new factory all together to venture on the speciality market niche (Kimuri, 2022).

Project management involves initiation, planning, implementation, monitoring, controlling and closing; it helps the manager in organizing and managing the effort to accomplish a successful project (Harold, 2017). Project management has been associated with major development in different sectors. The biggest concern by a project manager is ensuring that objectives set for a project are achieved and this requires high skills from stakeholders (Crispin, 2020). Successful or effective project implementation can be defined as meeting the project's mission and still attain a high level of satisfaction by relevant stakeholders (Kamau & Mungai, 2019). A successful project implementation is attained when set targets are met by the relevant parties together or individually (Atkinson et al, 2009). Stevens (2016) acknowledges that project success can be positioned on how complex a project is, process involved in contracting, relationship between relevant parties, the leadership qualities and skills of the project manager and the competence of the stakeholders.

These are traits that a project manager exercises to ensure positive performance or returns by a project (PMDO, 2018). These skills are essential to project managers and management on how they execute their mandate. A project manager should gain budgeting, interpersonal and emotional intelligence as soft skills (Sunindijo, 2015). Soft skills alone do not make any job done; hence, there is need for technical skills in project management that is project management skills. These skills help in resources organization and management by the project manager and ensure project is completed on time; scope bound and satisfies the interest of stakeholders and customers. The project management skills include communication, leadership, monitoring & evaluation, risk management, conflict management, stakeholder management, planning skills, budget, time management and many more others (Roque & Carvalho, 2013). Project management skills remains crucial during planning as well as implementation process of the project to enable success. The tea firms require project manager with appropriate skills in social responsibility related projects as well as internal projects especially at implementation stage.

Stakeholder management skill is beneficial to an organization or project in achieving its objectives, stakeholders may become antagonistic when they work against projects objectives (Chinyio & Olomolaiye, 2010). Hence a project manager needs to be equipped with the relevant skills in handling stakeholders. Stakeholders are parties whose interests are impacted negatively or positively on how a project is executed or they can be active participants in a project (PMI, 2014). The tea industry has a big pool of stakeholders ranging from the farmer, workers, directors, politicians, buyers, management bodies, government, multinationals and many more that their input has to be put in consideration when undertaking a project. It's not always possible to involve every single stakeholder in a project due to their large number, but it's advisable to involve the key stakeholders and be able to manage their wants effectively. Maina (2013) observes the importance of involving stakeholders' in projects, but care should always be taken when handling them.

Agriculture is the main pillar, major sector and contributor to the economy of Kenya. The sector contributes 25% directly to Gross Domestic product (GDP) and 27% from interconnection with agro-based and related industries (KARI, 2014). The sector is a major source of government revenue, employment, industrial raw material and generates 60% of export earnings. Being the major cash crop in Kenya, tea contributes to around 5% of the GDP (Tea directorate, 2020). In the year 2020, the country exported 575.3 million KGs of tea, which was an increase from the previous year which was 474.9 million KGs (KNBS, 2019). This was due to increase in area under tea to 163,000 hectares in 2019 from 141,800 hectares in 2018. The average price of tea in the year 2020 was 2\$/KG which was a decrease compared to other years.

The tea industry in Kenya holds a special place in the agricultural sector as is its highest foreign exchange earner contributing upto 21% of the global tea exports and directly or indirectly provides employment to over 3 million people in the country (Kenya Tea, 2018). Increased costs and low market prices have forced the tea industry to adopt mechanization projects in farm level and processing sections so as to enhance their operation performance. Jared (2013) notes that mechanization projects by tea industry are essential in reducing production cost, but can also lead to higher productivity of labor, increased efficiency and increase the welfare of workers.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Running projects that fail to contribute their objectives is not only a waste of resources and time, but also cripples the organization competitiveness. Effective project implementation ensures success of a project (Chua, et al, 2010) and improves the standard of result by giving optimal quality products and eventually leads to satisfying the stakeholders and customer needs. Poor implementation of projects has greatly affected the performance of agriculturally based projects in Kenya. Cannon & Ali (2018) asserts that, most projects are prone to corruption, misallocation of resources and misuse of firms' infrastructure that is paying of ghost workers which affects the project success. Inadequate credit, cost of production, fluctuating trends of tea prices in export market, lack of robust marketing strategies, poor regulatory policies and lack of value added project for tea are some of the challenges that affect the performance of tea industry (Nyaga, 2017).

Across the world, the tea sector has been heavily affected by the rising cost of production and low market prices which pose as the major challenge. The average prices of black tea in 2022 for Kericho county was 1.8\$ per Kilogram compared to an average of 4\$ for the speciality teas in Kenya (KNBS, 2022). The favorable prices and increasing demand for the speciality teas has prompted tea companies and individuals to invest in construction of speciality processing factories and cottage industries aimed at gain competitive edge in the country and globally. Hence there was need to investigate how implementation of these projects is affected by project management skills.

Skills in Project management are pivotal in any project by an organization as its key to its implementation and success. Unavailability of a well elaborated substructure that implants project management skills within the cultural values of an organization may eventually open on to poor performance (Kiioh, 2015). In their study, Ling & Ma (2014) established that most project administrators are not well equipped with relevant skills and capacity to deliver the project as per standard. Lugusa & Moronge (2016) attributed poor implementation of projects in Kenya sponsored by banks to lack of project management skills. Factual data (Chamoun, 2011) shows that in achieving project success, skills in project management in a major way enjoyed significant impact regardless of how complex a project might be. For a project to have functional success, the manager running a project has to be well coached, furnished with the right skills in management of day to day activities, aggressive control of cost and minimizing of risk through use of most appropriate technologies, hiring the right team, and using elaborate management practices. Cooke-Davies, (2010) clearly demonstrates that if a team is satisfactory trained, its output is more beneficial to the project than an undertrained team. True to this many projects fail to achieve their set objectives due to limited skills by the manager, thus this research study sought to find out how skills in project management impact on project implementation.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Skills Acquisition Theory

A theory proposed by Chapelle in 2009. According to Chapelle (2009) the theory contributes to human learning theories which expands the significance of human development in skills development through knowledge, experience and training. Acquisitions of skills which can be acquired or developed over time remain crucial aspect in management especially in running mega projects. The theory is anchored on knowledge adopted from Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thoughts (ACT) model in 2007 where knowledge contributes to achievement of skills (Ellis & Shintani, 2013). It was contended that the theory utilized the ACT model which is a comprehensible instigation-response theory. Skills can be acquired through human development or experience through continuous practices.

Dekeyser & Criado (2013) viewed skill acquisition theory as a scientific based theory that is supported with psychology. It also explains the need for knowledge from behaviorism, connectionism and cognitivist concepts. Project management skills can be acquired through knowledge development through cognitive, connection and behave. Project manager should go through training, coaching, mentoring and education in communication, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder management and risk management skills.

Trofimovich & McDonough (2013) pointed out that skill acquisition theory is crucial in development of cognitive continuous exposure to specific skill. Skill acquisition theory enabled direct and indirect training and learning process which are comprised in the general learning theories. Explicit or direct learning is advantageous to adult employees who have undergone skill enhancement system of education among the project managers. The training will increase the skills and expertise knowledge of employee leading to efficiency and effectiveness. On the other hand, implicit or indirect processes make it possible to teach a new technique that is not familiar among the common or an outside the box way or skills of doing things. In project management skills can be acquired from education or special training. Hence this theory champions for the adoption of communication, monitoring and evaluation, risk management and stakeholders' management skills.

Empirical Literature Review

Rajablu, Marthndan & Yusoft (2015) examined stakeholder-based management with respect to successfulness of the project. The role of project management is crucial in improving organizational development through value creation, innovation and vision realization. The study was anchored on stakeholder theory to examine stakeholder practices on project triumph. Quantitative survey was used where data collected were analysed using Structured Equation Models statistics. Findings revealed that new flow of stakeholder authoritative attribute and models in project management which focus on the stakeholder assisted in stakeholder management. The current study examined stakeholders' management skills in relation to implementation of speciality tea projects.

Dekkar & Qing (2014) looked into the effect of stakeholders management issues on leadership in project management. The intent of the survey was to examine the purpose of project manager leadership in managing stakeholders' aspect for favourable outputs. Success of the project is viewed in different lense by stakeholders hence, there is need to assess perception of stakeholder to success of project. The traits and qualification of project maanger plays a role in stakeholders' management skills in enhancing effective communicating, consultation, collaboration and cooperation with different stakeholder. The current study examined stakeholders skills on implementation of speciality tea projects.

Zhang, Chong, & Zhang (2022) investigated the role of stakeholders as effective mediators in the relationship between implimentation of Build Information Model (BIM) and project performance. Building information modeling (BIM) has benefited project output and accomplishment significantly. Nevertheless, BIM has also contributed to growth of project intricacy. For BIM adoption to attain a beneficial influence on this revolutionaly context, research indicates that BIM must be synced with stakeholder management. Incorporating stakeholder management theory into BIM-incooperated projects and determining the part played by the theory as a mediator between achievements by the projects and BIM deployment are the objectives of this study. A comprehensive literature analysis revealed 13 key success factors (KSFs) for BIM deployment, 29 KSFs for stakeholder management, and 6 KSFs for BIM project performance. A questionnaire was used in

the surveys to evaluate these measuring items and analysis done using structural equation modeling. The study focused on megaprojects especially those run by the Chinese and complicated projects with an advanced BIM evolution, a potential indicator of the complexity of stakeholder relationships and BIM implementation for project performance. The study output demonstrated that utilizing BIM effectively is directly proportional to an increase in project performance. In addition, stakeholder management as an intermediary cannot be assumed in relation to BIM and how it is incorporated in projects or how a project achieves their objectives. The mediation is achieved through stakeholder dynamics (SD) and stakeholder engagement or empowerment (SE). The skills of stakeholder and participation are required in the engagement process where the project benefits from inputs as well as enhance the quality and scope of the project. A stakeholder is examined as a mediator rather than a direct effect on project performance. The current study tested the direct effect of stakeholder management skills in relation to implementation of the speciality tea projects.

Erkul, Yitmen, & Celik (2016) investigated stakeholder involvement in megatransport infrastructure projects. Globally, mega transport infrastructure projects (MTIPs) with deep rooted unreliability and complexity are being implemented. Regarding their sum and substance, these projects exhibit consciousness of the political environment and involve a varied range of stakeholders with conflicting wants. In such circumstances, decision-making becomes exceedingly difficult due to the absence of the requisite knowledge basis for making appropriate decisions, which is a result of uncertainty and conflicting interests. This study intended to point out characteristics of the stakeholders and their wants, as well as analyze their linkages, evaluate their influence, and implement stakeholder engagement (SE) in MTIP. Various approaches, including operational, practical, and conceptual, were examined in the SE literature. A framework model was given to give forth new views for discovering the exact correlation between the SEs, to give support to the complicated processes, and provide direction to top management in achieving project goals. The suggested framework help put in place a worthwhile SE strategy to incorporate stakeholder analysis in MTIP for project planning, decision-making, and implementation in order to define clear project priorities. Hence, the framework showed that SE enable the organization to succeed in implementation of MTIPs. The study at hand made use of primary data rather than secondary data.

Concerning stakeholder management, Buerter, Amofa, & Atsrim (2016) investigated its effect on implementation of construction projects. Stakeholder management ensures that the participation of stakeholders in terms of people's ideas, feelings, and decisions about their development are fully represented. It has been noticed that after implementation, the majority of initiatives fail not because their execution is below par, but rather due to poor skills in managing stakeholders leading to inadequate stakeholder input and involvement. This study was conducted seeking to highlight the hindrances to stakeholder participation in grassroots development initiatives and to explore the impact of stakeholder participation on good performance of executed programs. Through the distribution of standardized questionnaires to common residents, leaders, and local authority personnel in marked district assemblies in Ghana, data was collected. Analysis of the gathered data found that stakeholders were not adequately informed about the project's historical, technical, and material justifications prior to project launch. Stakeholders believed they had trouble participating in technical conversations, and there was a perception that project implementers were unwilling to include them in decision-making; hence, the contribution of stakeholders on objectives accomplishment by a project was substantial. In addressing the difficulty of stakeholder participation and its significant effects on projects, stakeholders must acquire the skills in sensibly having developmental conversations or put forward a frontman who is a professional to air their concerns. For this reason, managers who are on the front line in project implementation must recognize the importance of stakeholders and engage them professionally to elicit their participation in order to increase project success. The current study proposed to examine stakeholders skills in implementation of speciality tea projects.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was embraced with target population being speciality tea projects in Kericho County where 21 projects were targeted. The unit of observation was project managers, assistant managers, engineers, general staff and supervisors working in the projects. A population of 462 individuals was targeted. The research used census to obtain a representative sample from different groups in the target population. The Statistical package SPSS was used in data analysis. Descriptive statistics which includes standard deviation, frequencies, means and percentages and inferential statistics with multiple regressions were applied in data analysis.

5. FINDINGS

The descriptive statistics results on stakeholder management skills are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Stakeholder Management Skills

Statements	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean	SD
Stakeholder management skills is critical in implementation of projects by tea companies	0.8	9.2	8.3	35.0	46.7	4.31	0.814
There is stakeholders input in planning of the projects and decision making	0.0	0.0	0.0	30.0	70.0	4.56	0.846
Stakeholders involvement in the projects by managers promotes their satisfaction, and smooth flow of the project	0.0	12.5	0.0	33.3	54.2	4.60	0.917
Projects take care of user's needs in all outcomes.	0.0	0.0	0.0	29.2	58.3	4.53	1.006
Aggregate score						4.50	0.896

The results in Table 1 show that the majority of the respondents indicated that stakeholder management skills is critical in implementation of projects by tea companies. All the respondents agreed that there is stakeholders input in planning of the projects and decision making. The statement that stakeholders involvement in the projects by managers promotes their satisfaction, and smooth flow of the project was agreed by 87.5% of the respondents. In addition, most (87.5%) agreed that projects take care of user's needs in all outcomes. These results were supported by an aggregate mean score of 4.50 which indicates that the respondents strongly agreed to most of these statements based on 5-point likert scale. The finding agree with Rajablu, Marthndan & Yusoft (2015) who examined stakeholder-based management with respect to successfulness of the project and established that The role of project management is crucial in improving organizational development through value creation, innovation and vision realization. The findings also indicate that new flow of stakeholder authoritative attribute and models in project management which focus on the stakeholder assisted in stakeholder management. The finding also agree with Chinyio and Olomolaiye (2010) who indicated that stakeholder management skill is beneficial to an organization or project in achieving its objectives, stakeholders may become antagonistic when they work against projects objectives.

Inferential Statistics Results

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

		Stakeholder management skills
Stakeholder management skills	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	120
Project implementation	Pearson Correlation	.691 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	120

The results as presented in Table 2 show that the Pearson r value of stakeholder management skills against project management was at 0.691 with a significance value of 0.001 which is less than 0.05. This shows that there was stakeholder management skills were strongly correlated with the implementation of speciality tea projects in Kericho County, Kenya.

Regression Analysis Results

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.845 ^a	.714	.701	1.152

The results in Table 3 show that coefficient of correlation R was 0.845 an indication of strong positive correlation between the variables. The value of adjusted R square was 0.701(70.1%) which shows that the extent to which the implementation of speciality tea projects in Kericho County, Kenya was determined by the stakeholder management skills. Therefore, the remaining percentage (29.9%) account for other variables not studied.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	102.085	1	102.085	198.969	0.000 ^a
	Residual	60.542	118	0.513		
	Total	162.627	119			

The findings presented in Table 4 show that the significance value is less than 0.05 at 0.000. In addition, the statistical F value is 198.969 which is greater than the statistical mean value of 102.085. Therefore, this confirms the model was significant.

Table 5: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.709	0.182		3.896	.0011
	Stakeholder management skills	0.834	0.549	0.452	1.519	.0012

The findings in Table 5 revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between stakeholder management skills and project implementation ($\beta=0.452$, $p=0.0012$). This finding agree with a study by Dekkar & Qing (2014) who looked into the effect of stakeholders management issues on leadership in project management. The traits and qualification of project manager plays a role in stakeholders' management skills in enhancing effective communicating, consultation, collaboration and cooperation with different stakeholder.

The established regression equation was confirmed as follows;

Project implementation = 0.709 + 0.452 (stakeholder management skills)

6. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the Tea companies ensure that decisions regarding the projects they are working on are communicated to all relevant parties. Including stakeholders in the project's implementation has improved transparency, accountability, and trust—all while ideas are shared effectively and everyone is aware of their own responsibilities. Additionally, it facilitates better decision-making by outlining stakeholder needs and allowing the project to be carried out in compliance with client preferences.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the relevant internal and external stakeholders must be identified and categorized by tea companies. Consider these parties' influence or power, vested interest in the project's outcome, and ability to alter or impact the project. Assess their understanding of the initiated project plan, how they define the project, why they are motivated to

work on it, and how it impacts all stakeholders to develop an engaging strategy. Last but not least, plan key communication initiatives to execute and gauge participation.

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