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**The Impact of Effective Stakeholder Management Strategies
on the Timely Delivery of Construction Projects: A Case
Study of Abu Dhabi's Private Sector**

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Abstract

This study critically examines the influence of stakeholder management strategies on schedule performance in construction projects within Abu Dhabi—a region experiencing rapid urban and infrastructural development. In an industry where timely delivery is vital and delays carry significant financial consequences, effective stakeholder engagement emerges as a key success factor. Construction projects typically involve a diverse range of stakeholders with varying expectations, influence, and involvement levels; mismanagement of these relationships is a leading cause of project delays.

Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this research combines structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with project managers, engineers, consultants, and contractors active in Abu Dhabi's private construction sector. The study identifies critical engagement strategies, including early involvement, transparent communication, conflict resolution planning, and power-interest mapping. It evaluates the impact of these strategies on schedule adherence while also addressing contextual challenges such as regulatory frameworks, multicultural coordination, and evolving stakeholder roles.

The findings reveal a strong correlation between proactive stakeholder involvement and improved schedule performance. The study proposes a tailored engagement framework for the Abu Dhabi context and contributes to the academic literature by offering empirical evidence and strategic recommendations for project planners, policymakers, and construction professionals aiming to enhance timely project delivery in the built environment.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The modern construction landscape in Abu Dhabi is defined by ambitious urban visions, tight project timelines, and rigorous stakeholder expectations. As the emirate continues to expand its infrastructure in line with national development strategies—such as the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030—the need for timely, efficient, and high-quality project delivery has become more critical than ever. Within this demanding environment, stakeholder management has evolved from a supplementary activity to a strategic function that can make or break a project. This research focuses on the private construction sector in Abu Dhabi, where stakeholder dynamics are complex and increasingly central to performance metrics like schedule adherence.

Stakeholders in construction projects encompass a diverse group of actors: clients, government authorities, consultants, contractors, suppliers, financiers, and end users. Each group brings distinct expectations, interests, and degrees of influence. Misalignment among these actors often leads to miscommunication, rework, and schedule slippage. Conversely, when stakeholders are effectively engaged and aligned with the project's objectives, they can become powerful enablers of success. Thus, understanding stakeholder behavior, mapping their interests, and proactively managing their concerns are vital elements of project strategy.

Effective stakeholder management encompasses a set of practices including early engagement, clear communication plans, conflict anticipation and resolution, and mechanisms for continuous feedback. These practices not only mitigate risks but also enhance transparency and trust among stakeholders. In a multicultural environment like Abu Dhabi—where projects often involve international contractors and consultants—such practices also help navigate cultural diversity, regulatory complexity, and differing business norms. For instance, proactive communication with regulatory authorities can prevent administrative delays, while early coordination with suppliers may avoid procurement bottlenecks.

Despite growing awareness of stakeholder importance, many projects still fall short in applying stakeholder engagement tools in a structured and consistent manner. Project managers often prioritize technical execution over relational dynamics, overlooking the fact

that unresolved stakeholder issues can have ripple effects across timelines and budgets. This gap highlights the need for a more nuanced and systematic approach to stakeholder engagement, one that is tailored to the specific context of Abu Dhabi's construction ecosystem.

This research argues that improving schedule performance requires embedding stakeholder-centric strategies into the project lifecycle—from initiation to closure. It examines the impact of trust-building, timely communication, participatory decision-making, and digital stakeholder tools (such as BIM-enabled collaboration platforms) on schedule outcomes. Furthermore, it explores how stakeholder mapping frameworks, such as the Power-Interest Grid, can be used not only for identification but also for dynamic engagement planning throughout the project.

By investigating these interrelated dimensions, the study aims to offer both theoretical and practical insights into how stakeholder engagement can drive project timeliness. The ultimate goal is to contribute to a performance-oriented project culture in Abu Dhabi, where stakeholder management is recognized not just as a compliance task, but as a strategic capability for competitive advantage in the construction sector.

1.2 Research Problem

Despite the increasing adoption of modern project management frameworks that emphasize the critical role of stakeholder engagement, construction projects in Abu Dhabi continue to experience recurrent delays. These delays are not merely technical or logistical in nature but are often rooted in the human and relational dimensions of project execution. Inadequate stakeholder alignment, resistance to change, unclear responsibilities, and delayed decision-making processes frequently obstruct schedule adherence. The persistent occurrence of these issues indicates that stakeholder engagement strategies are either insufficiently applied or are not customized to the specific cultural, regulatory, and organizational contexts of Abu Dhabi's construction sector.

A significant gap exists between theoretical models of stakeholder management and their practical implementation on the ground. While tools such as stakeholder mapping, power-interest matrices, and communication plans are widely recommended in literature, they are often applied superficially, without sufficient analysis of stakeholder dynamics or continuous feedback integration. This mismatch leads to low stakeholder buy-in,

unaddressed concerns, and delayed conflict resolution, all of which contribute to project schedule overruns.

Moreover, many construction projects lack a structured communication strategy that differentiates between types of stakeholders based on their influence and interests. Communication is often reactive rather than proactive, and when stakeholders are not updated regularly or consulted on decisions that affect their interests, mistrust and disengagement ensue. The absence of timely feedback loops further impedes adaptive decision-making, especially in fast-moving or high-risk project phases. These inefficiencies are particularly pronounced in the private construction sector, where stakeholder relationships are diverse and project environments are highly dynamic.

This study addresses this research gap by empirically investigating how specific stakeholder management strategies—such as early engagement, trust-building, transparent communication, conflict mitigation, and continuous consultation—can influence schedule performance. By moving beyond general frameworks and focusing on strategy-specific impacts, the research aims to provide measurable insights into how and why certain approaches are more effective than others. Additionally, the study explores how emerging digital tools and culturally attuned engagement practices can enhance responsiveness and clarity among stakeholders, thereby reducing the root causes of delay.

Ultimately, this research seeks to uncover not only the causes behind stakeholder-related delays but also the actionable pathways for improvement. It contributes to the academic discourse and practical advancement of stakeholder management as a schedule performance driver in Abu Dhabi's construction sector.

1.3 Importance of the Research:

This study holds substantial significance for multiple stakeholders within the construction ecosystem of Abu Dhabi, encompassing practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. From a practical standpoint, the research offers evidence-based insights for project managers, engineers, and contractors who are directly involved in planning and executing construction projects. By identifying specific stakeholder engagement strategies that influence project timelines, the study equips these professionals with actionable tools to mitigate delays and enhance operational efficiency. The insights derived from this

research can be embedded into project management plans, risk mitigation frameworks, and communication strategies to improve schedule performance.

For academic researchers, the study addresses a critical gap in the literature by offering empirical evidence rooted in the socio-economic and regulatory context of Abu Dhabi. While many stakeholder management models exist, few have been validated in the Gulf region's fast-paced and culturally diverse construction environment. By contextualizing stakeholder theories in an emerging market, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how cultural, legal, and organizational variables shape stakeholder interactions and project outcomes.

Policymakers and urban planners may also derive value from the study's findings. As Abu Dhabi continues to invest heavily in infrastructure and smart city initiatives, the ability to ensure timely project delivery becomes strategically important. This research can inform policy formulation related to stakeholder consultation requirements, permit streamlining, and conflict resolution mechanisms. It may also support regulatory frameworks that encourage transparency, accountability, and participatory planning, all of which are essential for sustainable urban growth.

Moreover, the study contributes to the broader theoretical discourse on stakeholder management in emerging economies, particularly within regulation-intensive and high-growth sectors such as real estate and infrastructure. It highlights the strategic function of stakeholder alignment not only as a means of compliance or communication but as a critical performance lever. In doing so, the research aims to establish a foundation for future investigations into digital stakeholder platforms, public-private partnerships, and the role of trust in cross-cultural construction collaborations.

1.4 Research Objectives:

The main objective of this study is to analyze how stakeholder management strategies influence the schedule performance of construction projects in Abu Dhabi. To achieve this, the study seeks to accomplish the following specific objectives:

- **To identify and classify key stakeholders** involved in private construction projects in Abu Dhabi, based on their roles, interests, levels of influence, and engagement needs.

- **To examine and categorize stakeholder management strategies** commonly adopted in the Abu Dhabi construction sector, including early involvement, participatory planning, transparent communication, and stakeholder mapping techniques.
- **To assess the correlation between stakeholder management practices and schedule performance indicators**, such as project milestones, critical path adherence, and delay mitigation.
- **To explore contextual variables**—such as regulatory pressures, cultural diversity, labor dynamics, and communication barriers—that mediate the relationship between stakeholder strategies and time performance.
- **To develop a customized stakeholder engagement framework** tailored to Abu Dhabi's construction industry, integrating local market characteristics with global project management standards.
- **To analyze the effectiveness of stakeholder conflict resolution mechanisms** in reducing disputes and ensuring timeline compliance.
- **To propose practical recommendations for construction practitioners and project managers** that foster improved stakeholder alignment and timely project delivery.
- **To contribute to the academic discourse** on project management in the MENA region by filling a research gap related to schedule performance and stakeholder engagement.
- **To support policymaking and institutional reforms**, especially in developing regulatory tools and training programs that strengthen stakeholder relationships in infrastructure development.

1.5 Research Questions:

This study is guided by a central research question and several sub-questions that seek to unpack the dynamics between stakeholder strategies and schedule performance in the Abu Dhabi construction sector:

Main Research Question:

- How do stakeholder management strategies influence the schedule performance of private sector construction projects in Abu Dhabi?

Sub-Questions:

1. **What are the primary stakeholder categories** involved in private construction projects in Abu Dhabi, and how are their interests aligned or conflicting?
2. **Which stakeholder engagement strategies** are most commonly applied in construction projects, and how are these strategies operationalized across the project lifecycle?
3. **What is the nature of the relationship** between stakeholder engagement levels and on-time project delivery?
4. **How does early stakeholder involvement** affect the planning and execution phases of a project in terms of scheduling efficiency?
5. **To what extent do communication practices and decision-making processes** influence the reduction of schedule delays?
6. **What contextual challenges** (e.g., regulatory frameworks, multicultural environments, labor market constraints) impact the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement strategies?
7. **Which stakeholder management models or tools** (e.g., power-interest matrix, stakeholder salience model) are most effective in the Abu Dhabi construction context?
8. **How do conflict resolution mechanisms among stakeholders** affect time performance and project continuity?
9. **What lessons can be drawn from successful projects** that maintained strong stakeholder alignment and adhered to original timelines?
10. **How can stakeholder management practices be improved** to enhance schedule performance in future construction projects in Abu Dhabi?

1.6 Research Hypotheses:

The study posits a series of hypotheses aimed at empirically exploring the relationship between stakeholder engagement practices and schedule performance in the construction sector of Abu Dhabi. These hypotheses are informed by a comprehensive review of relevant literature and grounded in established theoretical frameworks, including Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), the Stakeholder Salience Model (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997), and the Project Stakeholder Management guidelines outlined in the PMBOK® Guide – 7th Edition (Project Management Institute, 2021).

At the core of the hypotheses is the assumption that proactive and structured stakeholder engagement leads to improved project timelines by reducing delays, conflicts, and

decision bottlenecks. Variables such as early stakeholder involvement, clear role definition, transparent communication, and feedback mechanisms are expected to show statistically significant positive relationships with schedule adherence. Conversely, limited or reactive stakeholder engagement is hypothesized to correlate with increased risks of delay.

These hypotheses not only provide a testable foundation for the study's quantitative analysis but also serve to bridge theoretical models with real-world construction practices. By validating or refuting these hypotheses using empirical data, the research aims to contribute both to the scholarly discourse and to evidence-based improvements in project delivery strategies in Abu Dhabi's construction landscape.

Primary Hypothesis (H_0):

- H_0 : There is no significant relationship between stakeholder management strategies and schedule performance in construction projects in Abu Dhabi.

Alternative Hypotheses (H_1 – H_6):

- H_1 : Construction projects that apply structured stakeholder management strategies are more likely to achieve schedule adherence compared to those that do not.
- H_2 : Early stakeholder involvement during the planning phase significantly reduces the likelihood of project delays.
- H_3 : Continuous and transparent communication with key stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle leads to improved schedule performance.
- H_4 : Projects that utilize stakeholder influence/salience analysis (e.g., power-interest grid) experience fewer conflicts and time overruns.
- H_5 : The presence of formal conflict resolution mechanisms positively correlates with uninterrupted project flow and improved time control.
- H_6 : Higher stakeholder satisfaction levels are associated with greater compliance with project timelines and reduced rework or change orders.

1.7 Scientific Theory Model Applied in the Research

This research draws on a blend of established theoretical models to construct a scientific framework that explains the relationship between stakeholder engagement and schedule performance in construction projects. Central to this study is the application of

Stakeholder Theory, the Stakeholder Salience Model, and principles derived from the Project Management Institute's PMBOK® Guide (7th Edition), with a contextual emphasis on Abu Dhabi's private construction sector.

Stakeholder Theory, originally developed by Freeman (1984), posits that organizations must manage the interests of all stakeholders—not just shareholders—for sustainable success. Within the construction context, this theory underscores the need to recognize and respond to the expectations, influence, and interests of diverse project actors such as clients, government regulators, contractors, suppliers, and community representatives. The theory forms the philosophical backbone of this study, emphasizing inclusive engagement and mutual value creation.

Complementing this is the Stakeholder Salience Model (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997), which classifies stakeholders based on three attributes: power, legitimacy, and urgency. This model provides a practical tool for stakeholder identification and prioritization. It allows project managers to allocate communication and decision-making efforts in a manner proportional to each stakeholder's ability to affect the project outcome. In this research, the model is operationalized through stakeholder mapping techniques, enabling the empirical classification of key actors and examination of their impact on schedule adherence.

In parallel, the research integrates principles from the PMBOK® Guide (7th Edition), which views stakeholder management as a continuous process throughout the project lifecycle. The model emphasizes stakeholder identification, planning, engagement, monitoring, and adaptive feedback as critical components of performance. These process groups are reflected in the survey instrument and serve as analytical dimensions in the statistical analysis.

The research adopts a systems thinking approach, treating stakeholder engagement not as isolated events but as interconnected processes influenced by communication patterns, cultural factors, power dynamics, and institutional constraints. This holistic approach is essential in Abu Dhabi's multicultural and regulation-intensive construction environment, where misalignment among stakeholders frequently causes delays.

By synthesizing these theoretical models into an integrative framework, the study provides a robust lens for understanding how stakeholder dynamics affect project

schedule performance. It also lays the groundwork for developing context-sensitive tools that can help practitioners in Abu Dhabi optimize stakeholder engagement for timely project delivery.

1.8 Conceptual Integration

This study proposes a conceptual framework where:

- Stakeholder engagement strategies (independent variables) such as communication, mapping, conflict resolution, and salience analysis
- Are hypothesized to influence schedule performance (dependent variable)
- Moderating variables may include project size, sector, regulatory complexity, and cultural diversity

The framework suggests that **projects with structured and prioritized stakeholder strategies will demonstrate improved schedule performance**, particularly in complex, high-stakes environments such as Abu Dhabi.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of key academic and industry contributions related to stakeholder management and schedule performance within the context of construction projects. This chapter aims to establish both the theoretical and empirical foundation for the research and to identify gaps in existing knowledge that the present study seeks to address.

Construction projects are inherently complex and dynamic, characterized by the involvement of multiple stakeholders, varying goals, diverse expectations, and high levels of uncertainty. These projects often include public authorities, private investors, consultants, contractors, suppliers, and end-users—each with specific interests and degrees of influence. Stakeholder management, therefore, plays a critical role in ensuring project success, especially in achieving schedule objectives. When stakeholders are not properly engaged or coordinated, misunderstandings, delays, and scope creep are more likely to occur.

Effective stakeholder engagement requires strategic planning, open and consistent communication, and early alignment of roles and expectations. In addition to formal project governance, interpersonal dynamics, trust-building, and cultural sensitivity are becoming increasingly important, particularly in international or multicultural environments such as Abu Dhabi. Projects in the Emirate often involve multinational stakeholders, strict regulatory frameworks, and high societal expectations for timely completion. These contextual factors amplify the need for rigorous stakeholder strategies.

Despite the increasing recognition of stakeholder engagement in project management literature, there remains a lack of empirical focus on how specific stakeholder practices influence schedule performance—especially within the Gulf construction sector. Traditional project success metrics have centered on cost and quality, with schedule often receiving less attention. Furthermore, cultural dimensions, such as hierarchy, indirect communication, and stakeholder deference, are rarely integrated into existing models.

This chapter begins by discussing the evolution and key tenets of stakeholder theory, which provides the conceptual foundation for understanding stakeholder dynamics in projects. It then moves on to discuss schedule performance and common causes of delays in construction. Global and regional stakeholder engagement practices are reviewed, with

particular attention to their relevance in Abu Dhabi's socio-political and institutional context. Finally, the chapter highlights gaps in current literature and introduces a conceptual framework that connects stakeholder strategies with time-based performance indicators.

2.2 Overview of Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory was originally conceptualized by R. Edward Freeman in 1984 as a response to the limitations of traditional shareholder-centric management models. Rather than viewing project stakeholders as peripheral entities, the theory asserts that all individuals or groups who affect or are affected by project outcomes should be considered in the planning and execution process. It has since become a foundational pillar in strategic management, corporate governance, and project management.

The theory promotes a shift from narrow economic accountability to broader social and ethical responsibilities. In the context of construction projects, stakeholders include clients, funding agencies, contractors, regulatory bodies, communities, and end-users—each requiring tailored engagement approaches. The theory aligns with the idea that balanced consideration of stakeholder interests leads to improved trust, transparency, and ultimately, project performance.

Over time, stakeholder theory has evolved through the integration of practical models and taxonomies. A notable extension is the Stakeholder Salience Model developed by Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), which introduces three key attributes for assessing stakeholder priority: power (the ability to influence the project), legitimacy (the stakeholder's rightful involvement), and urgency (the need for immediate attention). This model allows project managers to distinguish between dormant, discretionary, demanding, dominant, dependent, dangerous, and definitive stakeholders—each requiring a different level and style of engagement.

Another development includes the Project Management Institute's (PMI) stakeholder management guidelines outlined in the PMBOK® Guide (7th Edition), which emphasize systematic stakeholder identification, classification, planning, and engagement monitoring. Tools such as stakeholder registers, engagement assessment matrices, and communications planning templates are part of this methodological approach.

In the context of Abu Dhabi's construction sector, stakeholder theory must also be contextualized. Projects are often subject to local governance structures, sociopolitical influences, and a regulatory environment shaped by Vision 2030 and sustainability directives. Understanding how stakeholder theory translates into practice in such a setting is crucial for improving schedule adherence and overall project delivery.

2.3 Schedule Performance in Construction Projects

Schedule performance refers to a project's ability to meet planned timelines and milestones as originally defined in the project baseline. It is often measured through key indicators such as planned vs. actual duration, schedule variance, milestone completion rates, and frequency or magnitude of delays. Achieving schedule performance is a critical dimension of project success, especially in fast-paced urban environments where delays can trigger substantial financial, reputational, and contractual consequences.

Research in the field has identified a range of factors contributing to schedule delays. These include poor coordination among stakeholders (Assaf & Al-Hejji, 2006), late approvals and change orders (Sambasivan & Soon, 2007), resource shortages, unforeseen site conditions, and weak project planning. In recent years, scholars have begun to highlight the role of stakeholder-related factors such as lack of communication, misaligned expectations, conflicting interests, and insufficient stakeholder commitment as major contributors to poor schedule performance.

In the specific case of Abu Dhabi, high levels of regulatory oversight, complex permitting procedures, and stakeholder diversity introduce additional layers of scheduling risk. Projects are often delayed not solely due to technical challenges, but due to bureaucratic bottlenecks, late feedback, or cultural misunderstandings between international and local actors. These findings suggest that improving stakeholder engagement practices can be a key lever for improving schedule reliability.

2.4 Stakeholder Engagement Practices

Stakeholder engagement encompasses a spectrum of activities aimed at informing, consulting, involving, and collaborating with stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle. It moves beyond one-way communication to emphasize two-way interactions, mutual understanding, and long-term relationship-building.

The Project Management Institute's PMBOK Guide outlines several tools for effective stakeholder engagement, including stakeholder registers, engagement assessment matrices, and communication management plans. The guide emphasizes tailoring communication strategies to stakeholder salience, information needs, influence levels, and communication preferences. For example, high-power, high-interest stakeholders require proactive engagement and continuous feedback loops, while low-power, low-interest stakeholders may require only minimal reporting.

Best practices from global construction markets emphasize approaches such as participatory design, integrated project delivery (IPD), collaborative contract models, and agile stakeholder reviews. These practices improve stakeholder alignment and reduce the likelihood of conflict, misunderstanding, and rework.

However, engagement strategies must be adapted to local cultural and institutional contexts. In the UAE, where communication may be indirect and hierarchy respected, engagement must be culturally sensitive and aligned with local expectations. Moreover, the reliance on expatriate labor and international project teams adds complexity, requiring culturally intelligent approaches to communication, feedback, and trust-building.

2.5 International Perspectives on Stakeholder Management

International case studies underscore the strategic value of stakeholder engagement for successful project execution. In countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Singapore, stakeholder management is institutionalized as a formal component of project governance. For instance, Transport for NSW (New South Wales, Australia) integrates stakeholder engagement protocols as a central pillar in its infrastructure delivery model, leading to reduced disruptions and better public buy-in.

The Singaporean government mandates stakeholder consultations during urban planning to minimize land use conflicts and increase alignment with community needs. In the United Kingdom, stakeholder management is integrated within public-private partnership frameworks to ensure mutual accountability and schedule performance.

While these models demonstrate the value of engagement, their successful application in Abu Dhabi requires contextual adjustments. Regulatory environments, governance styles, and cultural norms in the UAE differ substantially. Therefore, this study explores how

international best practices can be selectively adapted and implemented in the private construction sector in Abu Dhabi to enhance schedule performance.

2.6 Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of global literature on stakeholder management, there remains a notable gap in the context of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—particularly with respect to schedule performance. Most studies from the region have focused on cost overruns, safety management, or quality assurance, with less emphasis on the time-based Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Moreover, studies that do address stakeholder issues often treat them as secondary variables rather than core strategic elements. The lack of data-driven, empirical studies linking stakeholder strategies to specific schedule outcomes represents a critical gap. In Abu Dhabi, few frameworks have been developed to account for local administrative processes, stakeholder influence dynamics, or culturally nuanced communication protocols.

This study seeks to fill this void by offering a focused empirical investigation on how specific stakeholder practices impact schedule adherence in Abu Dhabi's construction sector. It aims to contribute not only to practical project delivery strategies, but also to the academic discourse on stakeholder engagement in emerging, regulation-intensive markets.

2.7 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Based on the literature reviewed, a conceptual framework is proposed that links stakeholder engagement practices to schedule performance outcomes. The framework draws from stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), the Stakeholder Salience Model (Mitchell et al., 1997), and the Project Management Institute's guidelines on stakeholder management. It also incorporates insights from empirical studies and best practices in global infrastructure delivery.

The framework identifies five primary constructs: (1) stakeholder identification and classification; (2) engagement strategy type (e.g., informing, consulting, collaborating); (3) communication frequency and quality; (4) presence of conflict resolution

mechanisms; and (5) schedule performance indicators such as milestone adherence and delay frequency.

From this framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Higher levels of stakeholder engagement are positively associated with better schedule performance.
- H2: Projects with structured communication mechanisms experience fewer schedule delays.
- H3: The presence of proactive conflict resolution strategies reduces the impact of stakeholder-related disruptions.
- H4: Stakeholder salience moderates the relationship between engagement practices and schedule outcomes.
- H5: Projects that tailor stakeholder strategies to the cultural context of Abu Dhabi achieve better schedule adherence.

These hypotheses will be empirically tested in the subsequent chapters using quantitative methods to validate the model and its applicability to the UAE construction landscape.

Certainly. Here is a revised, extended, and analytically connected version of section 1.11 “Theoretical Framework Adopted for the Study,” tailored to your research topic on stakeholder management and schedule performance in Abu Dhabi’s construction sector:

2.8 Theoretical Framework Adopted for the Study

The theoretical framework of this study is designed to examine the dynamic interrelations between stakeholder engagement practices and schedule performance in private construction projects within Abu Dhabi. Given the multi-faceted and interdependent nature of construction project environments—especially within the highly regulated and diverse sociocultural landscape of the UAE—this research adopts a blended theoretical lens incorporating four principal frameworks: Stakeholder Theory, the Stakeholder Salience Model, the Project Stakeholder Management Process (PMBOK® 7th Edition), and Schedule Performance Theory.

By integrating these theoretical standpoints, the study is better positioned to understand not only the mechanics of stakeholder interactions, but also their direct and indirect influence on project timelines.

2.8.1 Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984)

Freeman's Stakeholder Theory lays the foundational groundwork for this study by arguing that project success is contingent upon the effective identification, understanding, and management of stakeholders. Unlike traditional models that focus solely on clients or investors, stakeholder theory expands the focus to include all parties that may affect or be affected by the project—such as regulatory authorities, suppliers, contractors, community members, and end users.

In the context of Abu Dhabi's construction industry, this theory becomes particularly relevant given the involvement of multiple government entities, private developers, international consultants, and a highly diverse labor force. This study leverages stakeholder theory to support the premise that proactive engagement with these diverse actors is not merely a managerial choice, but a strategic necessity for mitigating schedule delays and aligning expectations.

2.8.2 Stakeholder Salience Model (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997)

To operationalize stakeholder prioritization, the study employs the Stakeholder Salience Model, which categorizes stakeholders based on three critical attributes:

- Power: their ability to influence project direction and decision-making.
- Legitimacy: the appropriateness of their involvement based on roles or societal norms.
- Urgency: the time-sensitivity of their concerns or interests.

Using this model, the research evaluates how construction firms in Abu Dhabi determine which stakeholders receive more attention and resources. The model helps in explaining how misclassification or neglect of high-salience stakeholders—such as municipal permitting bodies or utility service providers—can result in critical delays. It further assists in analyzing whether stakeholder salience influences the timing and frequency of engagement strategies and how this, in turn, affects schedule performance.

2.8.3 Project Stakeholder Management Process (PMBOK® Guide – 7th Edition)

The Project Management Institute's PMBOK® Guide is used as the procedural backbone for evaluating stakeholder engagement. The four key processes—Identification, Analysis, Engagement Planning, and Monitoring—serve as a systematic roadmap for managing stakeholder dynamics. This research specifically investigates how closely Abu Dhabi's construction firms adhere to these stages and how such adherence correlates with timely project delivery.

For example, the absence of robust stakeholder engagement plans may result in miscommunication, delayed feedback loops, and change requests introduced late in the project lifecycle. Furthermore, the Monitoring and Control process is often overlooked, yet critical for responding to stakeholder expectation shifts during project execution. The study uses this framework to assess how well stakeholder management is institutionalized and measured, and whether its absence explains variance in schedule adherence among projects.

2.8.4 Schedule Performance Theory (Kerzner, 2017; PMI Standards)

The final theoretical pillar addresses the measurement and analysis of schedule performance. Drawing on Kerzner's schedule performance metrics and Earned Schedule Management (ESM) theory, this framework underscores that time deviations are often not technical failures but symptoms of upstream issues, including stakeholder-related delays. Techniques such as the Critical Path Method (CPM) and Schedule Performance Index (SPI) are used to detect where time slippage occurs and to what extent it correlates with engagement shortfalls.

In construction projects within Abu Dhabi, where permitting and multi-tiered approvals are common, schedule delays often arise from slow responses from external stakeholders or unclear accountability in complex partnerships. Thus, this study adopts the view that effective stakeholder management acts as a risk mitigation mechanism that enhances schedule reliability, not just a soft skill or ethical concern.

Chapter Three
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodological framework employed to investigate the impact of stakeholder management strategies on the schedule performance of private construction projects in Abu Dhabi. Building on the theoretical foundations of Stakeholder Theory, the Stakeholder Salience Model, and Project Stakeholder Management (PMBOK, 7th Edition), the research adopts a mixed-methods approach to generate both statistical evidence and contextual understanding. This dual strategy enables the researcher to validate hypothesized relationships while capturing the nuanced realities of stakeholder engagement in the region's construction industry.

The methodology comprises research design, target population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, procedures to ensure reliability and validity, data analysis techniques, and ethical safeguards. The design is chosen to align with the study's objective of producing evidence-based insights that are both generalizable and practically relevant to stakeholders in the UAE's construction ecosystem.

3.2 Research Design

Given the complexity of stakeholder dynamics and the multifactorial nature of schedule performance, this study adopts a mixed-methods design that combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This approach strengthens the research by providing both breadth and depth—allowing for statistical generalization and rich, context-specific interpretations.

3.2.1 Quantitative Phase: The quantitative strand is designed to empirically test the study's hypotheses through structured questionnaires. It quantifies the relationship between stakeholder engagement variables (e.g., frequency of communication, use of conflict resolution mechanisms) and key indicators of schedule performance (e.g., milestone adherence, delay incidence).

3.2.2 Qualitative Phase: The qualitative component involves semi-structured interviews with selected industry professionals. This phase is crucial for exploring stakeholder interactions, unanticipated variables, and organizational behaviors that might not be fully captured by the questionnaire. It enhances the explanatory power of the findings and supports triangulation.

The explanatory sequential design ensures that the insights generated in the qualitative phase can validate or explain anomalies observed in the statistical results. This iterative integration contributes to the study's methodological robustness.

3.3 Population and Sampling

3.3.1 Target Population

The study focuses on project managers involved in private-sector construction projects in Abu Dhabi. This includes project managers, site engineers, planning consultants, design coordinators, quality assurance professionals, and C-suite executives. The diversity of roles ensures that different stakeholder perspectives are represented.

3.3.2 Sampling Strategy

To ensure representation across various stakeholder categories and company sizes, a stratified random sampling method is adopted. The population is stratified by role (e.g., managerial vs. technical), organization type (e.g., contractor, consultant, developer), and project scale (small, medium, large).

- **Sample Size:** For the quantitative phase, 40 valid responses are targeted to allow for meaningful statistical inference. This sample size meets the recommended threshold for multivariate analysis. For the qualitative phase, 10 to 15 interviews are conducted using purposive sampling to capture key informants who possess deep insights into stakeholder engagement practices.
- **Eligibility Criteria:** Respondents must have at least 3 years of experience in the UAE construction sector and direct involvement in project delivery.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

3.5.1 Quantitative Instrument: Structured Questionnaire

The questionnaire is divided into three main sections:

1. **Demographic Data:** Captures role, years of experience, organization type, and project category.

2. **Stakeholder Engagement Practices:** Includes Likert-scale items measuring frequency of engagement, conflict resolution mechanisms, trust-building activities, and communication clarity.
3. **Schedule Performance Indicators:** Measures adherence to planned timelines, delay frequency, and perceived stakeholder impact on project scheduling.

All items are formulated based on validated instruments in prior literature and aligned with the constructs from the conceptual framework. The survey is administered electronically via Google Forms and manually at project sites.

3.4.2 Qualitative Instrument: Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview guides are designed around key themes derived from the literature and survey responses. Questions explore stakeholder influence, communication effectiveness, barriers to timely decision-making, and contextual challenges specific to Abu Dhabi. Interviews are conducted in English and Arabic where necessary, recorded with consent, and later transcribed for analysis.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

3.4.1 Pilot Testing

Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire is piloted with 20 professionals from the target population. Feedback is used to refine wording, eliminate ambiguity, and ensure alignment with local terminology and practice.

3.4.2 Reliability

Internal consistency is measured using Cronbach's alpha. Constructs with alpha values ≥ 0.70 are considered reliable for analysis. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is also performed to confirm construct integrity.

3.4.3 Validity

- **Content Validity:** Established through expert reviews by academic researchers and project managers familiar with stakeholder engagement in the UAE.

- **Construct Validity:** Assessed through factor analysis to confirm the theoretical structure of the engagement and performance variables.
- **Face Validity:** Ensured by aligning items with established frameworks such as the PMBOK and Stakeholder Salience Model.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

This study employed a mixed-methods data collection approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to enhance the validity and depth of findings. The primary data collection tools included a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was distributed to a sample of professionals engaged in Abu Dhabi's private construction sector, including project managers, consultants, engineers, and contractors. It aimed to gather standardized data on stakeholder management strategies and their impact on schedule performance. Respondents were selected using purposive and snowball sampling to ensure relevance and experience diversity. Concurrently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of experienced stakeholders to explore deeper insights into communication practices, conflict resolution mechanisms, and contextual challenges not easily captured through survey data. Interviews allowed for open-ended responses and flexible probing, providing qualitative nuance to support the statistical analysis. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and their confidentiality rights, and data collection was conducted over a six-week period to ensure robust participation across roles and project types.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

3.6.1 Quantitative Analysis

Data is analyzed using SPSS. Techniques include:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** To summarize demographic characteristics and engagement practices.
- **Pearson Correlation:** To test relationships between stakeholder engagement variables and schedule performance.
- **Multiple Linear Regression:** To identify predictive power and strength of stakeholder practices on time-related outcomes.

- **ANOVA:** Where relevant, to assess group differences by role, company size, or project category.

3.6.2 Qualitative Analysis

Interview data is analyzed using NVivo. Thematic coding is employed to extract recurrent patterns, with axial coding used to connect subthemes to overarching categories. Emerging themes are compared to the quantitative findings to assess convergence or divergence.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This research adheres strictly to ethical principles set forth by the university's Institutional Review Board and UAE federal regulations.

- **Informed Consent:** Participants are informed about the purpose, process, and voluntary nature of the study.
- **Confidentiality:** No personal identifiers are used in the analysis or reporting. All data is stored securely and anonymized before dissemination.
- **Right to Withdraw:** Participants are assured they may withdraw at any stage without consequence.
- **Use of Data:** Data is used exclusively for academic purposes and not shared with third parties.

Chapter Four
Results and Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the data collected through questionnaires and interviews, aiming to explore the impact of stakeholder management strategies on the schedule performance of construction projects in Abu Dhabi. It includes descriptive statistics of respondent demographics, analysis of stakeholder perceptions, and statistical results such as ANOVA and Pearson correlation to understand relationships among key variables. The chapter also presents visual illustrations to support the quantitative findings.

4.2 Data Collection Summary

The data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire distributed to 40 professionals in the Abu Dhabi construction sector. Respondents included individuals from various organizational backgrounds, educational levels, and experience ranges. The questionnaire aimed to assess stakeholder engagement practices and their relationship with schedule performance. Interviews were also conducted with a subset of participants to validate quantitative trends and provide contextual insights.

4.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The respondents' demographic information was analyzed to understand the context and background of the participants involved in the study.

- Gender Distribution: 82.5% were male, and 15% were female, indicating male dominance in the sector.
- Academic Qualification: 47.5% of respondents held a bachelor's degree, 30% held a master's degree, and 15% had a PhD, highlighting a well-educated participant base.
- Years of Experience: 45% had more than 10 years of experience, while 40% had 5 to 10 years, suggesting a majority were seasoned professionals.
- Type of Company: Respondents came from multinational (40%), regional (37.5%), and local (20%) firms, reflecting a balanced representation.

- Type of Project: Projects included residential (27.5%), commercial (37.5%), infrastructure (27.5%), and industrial (5%).

4.4 Data Analysis Results

Gender Distribution Table					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Male	33	82.5	82.5	85.0
	Female	6	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table: 4.1

Academic Qualification					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Diploma	2	5.0	5.0	7.5
	Bachelor	19	47.5	47.5	55.0
	Master	12	30.0	30.0	85.0
	PhD	6	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table: 4.2

Years of Experience in Project Management					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	less than 5 years	5	12.5	12.5	15.0
	5 to 10 years	16	40.0	40.0	55.0
	More than 10 years	18	45.0	45.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table: 4.3

Type of Company					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Local	8	20.0	20.0	22.5
	Regional	15	37.5	37.5	60.0
	Multinational	16	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table: 4.4

Type of Project					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Residential	11	27.5	27.5	30.0
	Commercial	15	37.5	37.5	67.5
	Industrial	2	5.0	5.0	72.5
	Infrastructure	11	27.5	27.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table: 4.5

Stakeholders are classified according to their level of power					
		Frequency		Percent	
Valid	Disagree	10		25.0	
	Neutral	11		27.5	
	Agree	18		45.0	
	System	1		2.5	
	Total	40		100.0	

Table: 4.6

Key stakeholders are involved in the project planning stages					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	2	5.0	5.1	5.1
	Disagree	10	25.0	25.6	30.8
	Neutral	14	35.0	35.9	66.7
	Agree	6	15.0	15.4	82.1
	Strongly Agree	7	17.5	17.9	100.0

	Total	39	97.5	100.0	
Total		40	100.0		

Table: 4.7

4.4.1 ANOVA Analysis

The ANOVA results show that stakeholder feedback and involvement significantly influence project timelines. For example, the effect size for stakeholder involvement contributing to delay reduction was 0.707 (eta-squared), which demonstrates a strong positive effect.

ANOVA Effect Sizes ^a				
		Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower	Upper
Stakeholder feedback is taken into consideration when making decision	Eta-squared	.630	.376	.729
	Epsilon-squared	.598	.322	.706
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	.592	.317	.700
	Omega-squared Random-effect	.326	.134	.438
Stakeholder involvement contributed to reducing project delays	Eta-squared	.707	.489	.786
	Epsilon-squared	.682	.446	.768
	Omega-squared Fixed-effect	.677	.439	.764
	Omega-squared Random-effect	.411	.207	.518

a. Eta-squared and Epsilon-squared are estimated based on the fixed-effect model.

Table: 4.8

4.4.2 Pearson Correlation

A Pearson correlation was conducted between stakeholder involvement in delay reduction and effective management strategies. A strong positive correlation ($r = .620$, $p < .01$) was observed, indicating that as stakeholder involvement increases, so does the effectiveness of task execution.

Correlations			
		Stakeholder involvement contributed to reducing project delays	Effective management strategies helped accelerate task execution
Stakeholder involvement contributed to reducing project delays	Pearson Correlation	1	.620**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	39	39
Effective management strategies helped accelerate task execution	Pearson Correlation	.620**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	39	39
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table: 4.9



Highly Positive: (None)



Positive: (Stakeholder involvement contributed to reducing project delays <---> Effective management strategies helped accelerate task execution)



No Linear Correlation: (None)



Negative: (None)



Highly Negative: (None)

Note: Curated Help is calculated based on actual cell values, not the formatted values.

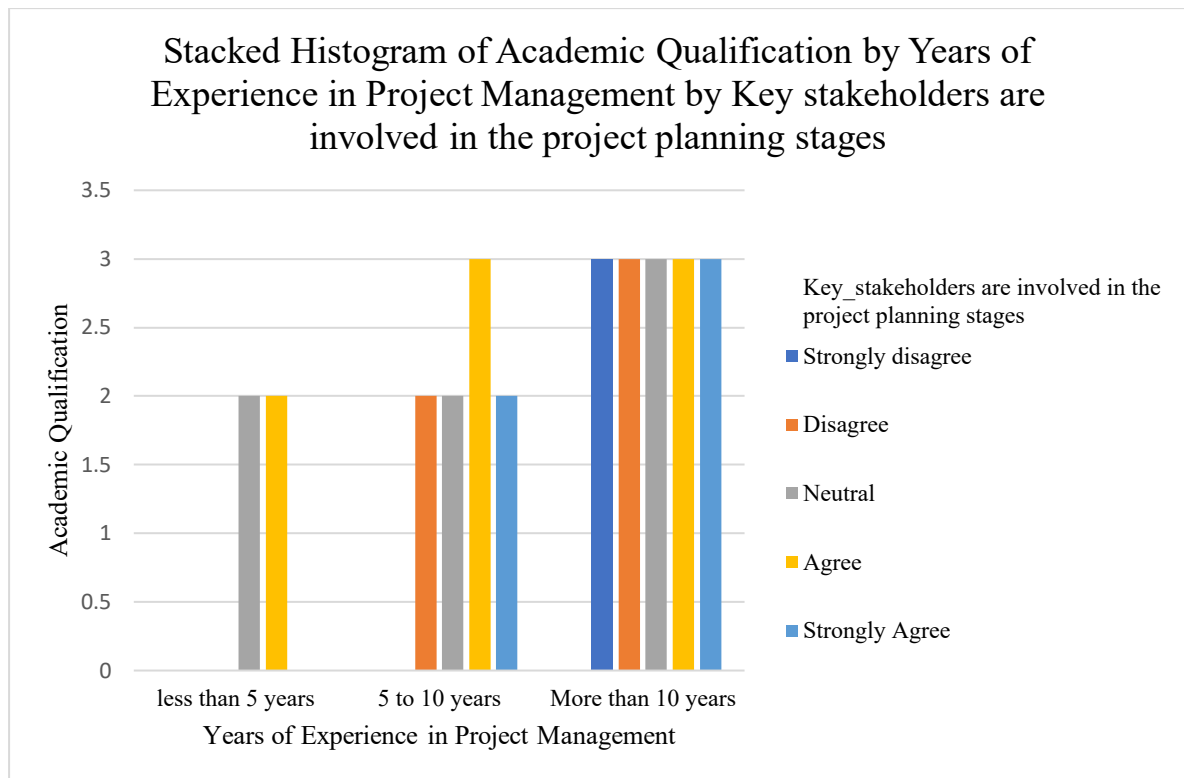


Figure 4.1

The stacked histogram illustrates the relationship between respondents' academic qualifications and their years of experience in project management, with a specific focus on their perception of stakeholder involvement in project planning stages. The x-axis categorizes respondents into three experience groups: less than 5 years, 5 to 10 years, and more than 10 years, while the y-axis represents levels of academic qualification. The chart reveals that respondent with over 10 years of experience—regardless of academic background—predominantly agreed or strongly agreed that key stakeholders are involved in the planning stages of projects. This trend suggests a positive correlation between experience level and recognition of stakeholder engagement. In contrast, respondents with less than 5 years of experience expressed more varied views, with some registering neutrality or disagreement. Notably, those with 5 to 10 years of experience showed moderate alignment, with agreement being the most common response. This pattern indicates that professionals with more experience may have greater exposure to or appreciation for strategic stakeholder participation in project planning.

4.5 Conclusion

This study reaffirms the pivotal role that structured stakeholder engagement plays in enhancing schedule performance within Abu Dhabi's private construction sector. The analysis revealed a strong correlation between proactive stakeholder strategies—such as early involvement, transparent communication, and participatory planning—and reduced project delays. Additionally, respondents' academic qualifications and years of experience significantly influenced their perceptions of stakeholder effectiveness, suggesting that experience-based exposure fosters greater appreciation for collaborative project management. Quantitative validation through ANOVA and Pearson correlation further substantiated these findings, offering empirical support for integrating stakeholder-centric approaches into project management frameworks. These insights underscore the strategic value of stakeholder alignment and advocate for its institutionalization in future project planning and execution across the UAE's evolving construction landscape.

4.6 Comparison with Previous Studies

The outcomes of this research align with and expand upon a growing body of literature emphasizing the impact of stakeholder engagement on construction project performance. Prior studies, such as El-Sawalhi and Hammad (2015), demonstrated that early stakeholder involvement significantly mitigates delays in infrastructure projects across the Gulf. Likewise, Olander and Landin (2008) found that stakeholder alignment during early planning stages enhances schedule predictability and minimizes conflict. The present study corroborates these findings, particularly through statistical evidence showing the positive effect of stakeholder classification, feedback loops, and communication strategies on schedule adherence.

Moreover, this research supports the theoretical underpinnings of the Stakeholder Salience Model (Mitchell et al., 1997), which argues that stakeholders wielding power, legitimacy, and urgency should be prioritized in decision-making processes to optimize outcomes. The alignment with the PMBOK® Guide (7th Edition) further reinforces the importance of continuous stakeholder engagement across the project lifecycle. Distinctively, this study contributes a contextual dimension by applying these frameworks within Abu Dhabi's culturally diverse, regulation-intensive, and economically ambitious construction sector—thus addressing a critical gap in the literature regarding stakeholder management practices in the MENA region.

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of stakeholder management strategies on schedule performance in construction projects within Abu Dhabi's rapidly developing private sector. Given the critical importance of timely project delivery in the construction industry, effective stakeholder engagement is essential for minimizing delays and enhancing project outcomes. Construction projects typically involve a diverse array of stakeholders, each with varying expectations, levels of influence, and degrees of involvement—factors that, if mismanaged, can significantly hinder schedule adherence.

A mixed-methods research design was employed, incorporating both structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with project managers, engineers, consultants, and contractors experienced in Abu Dhabi's construction sector. The study focuses on core engagement strategies, including early stakeholder involvement, transparent communication, conflict resolution mechanisms, and the application of tools such as the power-interest matrix.

The findings demonstrate a strong positive relationship between proactive stakeholder management and improved schedule performance. Challenges such as regulatory constraints, multicultural dynamics, and shifting stakeholder roles were also explored. Based on the results, a stakeholder engagement framework tailored to the specific context of Abu Dhabi is proposed. The research contributes to existing literature by providing region-specific insights and practical recommendations for policymakers, project planners, and industry professionals aiming to optimize time performance through strategic stakeholder engagement.

Appendices

Questionnaire on Analyzing the Impact of Stakeholder Management Strategies on the Schedule Performance of Construction Projects in Abu Dhabi

This questionnaire aims to analyze the extent to which stakeholder management strategies influence the schedule performance of construction projects in Abu Dhabi. It seeks to gather insights into current corporate practices and expert opinions in order to develop recommendations that support improved schedule adherence in private sector construction projects.

Section One: General Information

1. Gender

Mark only one oval.

☐ Male

☐ Female

2. Academic Qualification

Mark only one oval.

☐ Diploma

☐ Bachelor's Degree

☐ Master's Degree

☐ Doctorate (PhD)

3. Years of Experience in Project Management

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Less than 5 years
☐ 5 to 10 years
☐ More than 10 years

4. Type of Company

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Local Company
☐ Regional Company
☐ Multinational Company

5. Type of Project

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Residential
☐ Commercial
☐ Industrial
☐ Infrastructure

Section Two: Stakeholder Management Strategies

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements using the scale below:

(1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

-
6. Stakeholders are classified according to their level of power and interest in the project.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

7. There is a clear communication plan with stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

8. Key stakeholders are involved in the project planning stages.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5
-

9. Stakeholder feedback is taken into consideration when making decisions.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

10. Tools and techniques are used to analyze the impact of stakeholders on the project.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

11. The management regularly updates the stakeholder plan in response to changes.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

12. Conflicts with stakeholders are managed professionally and effectively.

Mark only one oval.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

Section Three: Project Schedule Performance

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements using the same scale.

13. The project was completed within the scheduled timeframe.

Mark only one oval.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

14. Stakeholder involvement contributed to reducing project delays.

Mark only one oval.

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5

15. The lack of effective communication with stakeholders was a cause of some delays.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

16. Effective management strategies helped accelerate task execution.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

17. The more stakeholders are involved, the greater the likelihood of meeting the project schedule.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
☐ 2
☐ 3
☐ 4
☐ 5

Thank you for your valuable contribution to the success of this academic research.

Abstract

This study critically analyzes the influence of stakeholder management strategies on schedule performance within construction projects in Abu Dhabi, a region undergoing rapid urban and infrastructural transformation. In an industry where timelines are paramount and delays have serious financial repercussions, effective stakeholder engagement becomes indispensable. Construction projects often involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders—each with different expectations, influence levels, and involvement requirements. Poorly managed stakeholder relationships are among the primary causes of project delays.

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews targeting project managers, engineers, consultants, and contractors with firsthand knowledge of Abu Dhabi's private construction sector. It identifies key engagement strategies such as early involvement, transparent communication, conflict resolution planning, and power-interest mapping. The study evaluates how these strategies affect schedule adherence and explores contextual challenges including regulatory pressures, multicultural coordination, and evolving stakeholder roles.

Findings reveal that schedule performance correlates strongly with proactive stakeholder involvement and structured communication protocols. The study proposes a comprehensive engagement framework tailored to the unique stakeholder landscape of Abu Dhabi. It further contributes to academic literature by offering empirical insights and strategic recommendations to project planners, policymakers, and construction practitioners seeking to enhance on-time delivery in the built environment.

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