

The Impact of Stakeholder Management Practices on Project Success in Construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia

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1. Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The construction industry plays a vital role in the economic development of Saudi Arabia, serving as a cornerstone of the Kingdom's Vision 2030 transformation agenda. With billions of riyals invested in infrastructure, housing, and mega-projects, the demand for effective project management practices has never been greater. At the heart of successful project delivery lies the ability to manage stakeholders — the individuals, groups, and organizations that have an interest in or are affected by a project's outcomes.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) represent the backbone of the Saudi construction sector, constituting the majority of active contractors across the Kingdom. Despite their numerical dominance, construction SMEs consistently face challenges in delivering projects on time, within budget, and to the required scope and quality. Studies have long established that stakeholder mismanagement is among the primary drivers of project failure, leading to delays, cost overruns, scope creep, and deteriorating relationships between project parties (Bourne, 2016; Eskerod & Jepsen, 2016).

Project Management Institute (PMI, 2021) identifies stakeholder engagement as one of ten core knowledge areas in professional project management. Research by Musawir et al. (2017) confirms that organizations with mature stakeholder management practices consistently outperform their peers in delivering successful projects. Furthermore, Freeman (1984), whose seminal stakeholder theory established the foundation for modern stakeholder management, argues that organizations must systematically identify, analyze, and engage stakeholders to achieve their objectives.

However, the majority of existing research on stakeholder management in construction focuses on large-scale or international projects, leaving a significant gap in understanding how these practices operate within the SME context, particularly in developing and rapidly transforming economies such

as Saudi Arabia. The Kingdom's construction SMEs operate in a unique environment shaped by Vision 2030 mandates, Saudization policies, and an influx of large-scale national projects that require SMEs to coordinate with a growing and increasingly complex web of stakeholders.

Therefore, this study aims to empirically examine the impact of stakeholder management practices on project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia. By doing so, it seeks to provide project managers in this sector with evidence-based insights to improve their stakeholder strategies and ultimately enhance project delivery outcomes.

1.2. Research Problem

Despite the critical role of stakeholder management in project success, construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia largely operate without formal or structured stakeholder management frameworks. This gap results in recurring project failures characterized by delays, budget overruns, and unresolved conflicts among project parties. While large corporations invest in dedicated stakeholder management systems and tools, SMEs often lack the resources, expertise, and awareness needed to implement such practices effectively.

1.2.1. Theoretical Gaps

The existing body of literature on stakeholder management in construction projects is predominantly centered on large-scale, multinational, or mega-projects. Very few studies have specifically investigated how stakeholder management practices influence project success within the SME context in the Arab Gulf region. This leaves a significant theoretical gap in understanding the applicability and effectiveness of existing stakeholder management frameworks in smaller organizational settings within Saudi Arabia's rapidly evolving construction sector.

1.2.2. Practical Gaps

In practice, construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia face significant stakeholder-related challenges, including inadequate communication with clients and subcontractors, poor conflict resolution mechanisms, inconsistent stakeholder identification processes, and limited engagement strategies. These shortcomings directly contribute to project delays, scope changes, and cost overruns. Yet, no empirical study has measured which specific stakeholder management practices have the greatest impact on project success within this context, leaving project managers without data-driven guidance to prioritize their efforts and improve outcomes.

Therefore, the main research question is: What is the impact of stakeholder management practices on project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia?

1.3. Research Significance

This study is significant at both the theoretical and practical levels, contributing meaningful insights to the field of project management within the Saudi construction SME sector.

1.3.1. At the Theoretical Level

This study contributes to the academic literature by extending stakeholder management theory into the under-researched context of construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia. It fills a notable gap in existing research by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between stakeholder management practices and project success within this specific organizational and national context. The findings will enrich the body of knowledge in project management and offer a foundation for future research in the Gulf region and beyond.

1.3.2. At the Practical Level

From a practical standpoint, this study provides construction SME project managers in Saudi Arabia with actionable, data-backed recommendations to improve their stakeholder management practices. By identifying which practices most significantly drive project success, the findings enable SMEs to allocate their limited resources more strategically. Additionally, the study's findings are relevant to policymakers, industry associations, and training institutions seeking to strengthen project management capabilities within Saudi Arabia's SME sector in alignment with Vision 2030 goals.

1.4. Research Questions

- What stakeholder management practices are currently adopted by construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia?
- To what extent does stakeholder identification affect project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia?
- How does the quality of stakeholder communication impact project delivery outcomes in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia?
- What is the relationship between stakeholder engagement levels and project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia?
- How does stakeholder conflict resolution influence project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia?

1.5. Research Objectives

To answer the research questions, the following research objectives have been identified:

- To examine the stakeholder management practices currently adopted by construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia.
- To assess the impact of stakeholder identification on project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia.

- To investigate the effect of stakeholder communication quality on project delivery outcomes.
- To analyze the relationship between stakeholder engagement levels and project success.
- To evaluate the influence of stakeholder conflict resolution practices on project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia.

1.6. Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are proposed based on the research objectives and existing literature:

- H1: Effective stakeholder identification has a significant positive impact on project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia.
- H2: The quality of stakeholder communication has a significant positive impact on project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia.
- H3: The level of stakeholder engagement has a significant positive impact on project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia.
- H4: Effective stakeholder conflict resolution has a significant positive impact on project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia.

1.7. Research Model

The research model is illustrated in Figure 1. The model positions stakeholder management practices as the independent variable, comprising four key dimensions: stakeholder identification, stakeholder communication, stakeholder engagement, and stakeholder conflict resolution. Project success serves as the dependent variable, measured across four dimensions: time performance, cost performance, scope adherence, and quality outcomes. The model proposes that each dimension of stakeholder management practices directly influences project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia.

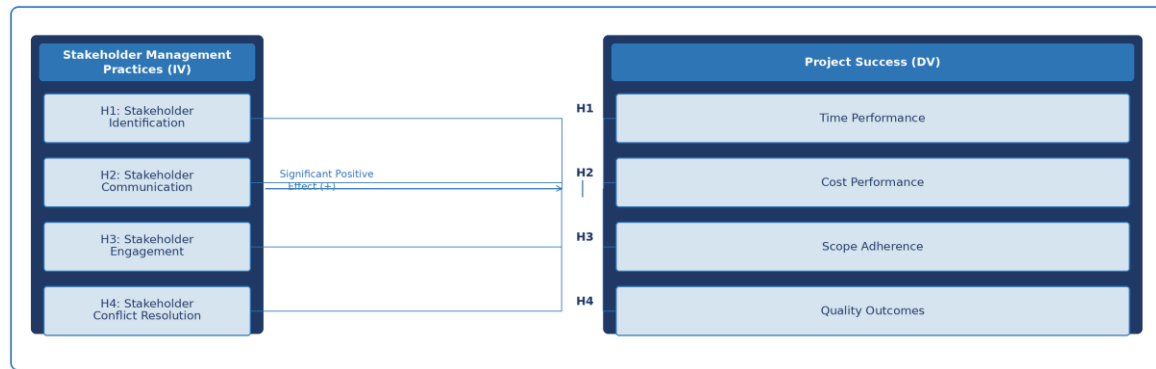


Figure 1. The Research Model Diagram.

1.8. Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to empirically examine the relationship between stakeholder management practices and project success. A descriptive-correlational research design will be used, which is well-suited for measuring the strength and direction of relationships between variables in a defined population (Creswell, 2014).

Primary data will be collected through a structured online survey questionnaire distributed to project managers and project team members working in construction SMEs across Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire will be developed based on validated scales from existing literature, adapted to the Saudi construction SME context. It will measure respondents' perceptions of stakeholder management practices (identification, communication, engagement, and conflict resolution) and project success outcomes (time, cost, scope, and quality).

The target population consists of project managers and senior project staff employed in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia. A convenience sampling approach will be used given the accessibility constraints associated with the SME sector. A minimum sample size of 100 respondents is targeted to ensure statistical reliability. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis using SPSS software to test the proposed hypotheses.

Ethical considerations will be strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation will be entirely voluntary, all responses will remain anonymous and confidential, and no personal identifying information will be collected. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants prior to survey completion.

1.9. Scope of The Study

This study focuses on construction SMEs operating in Saudi Arabia, defined in accordance with the General Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (Monsha'at) classification criteria. The study specifically targets organizations involved in construction project delivery, including building contractors, subcontractors, and project management firms operating at the SME scale.

Specifically, the scope of this study covers the following dimensions:

- The stakeholder management practices adopted by construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia, including identification, communication, engagement, and conflict resolution.
- The project success outcomes as perceived by project managers, measured across time, cost, scope, and quality dimensions.
- Projects completed or ongoing within the past three to five years to ensure relevance to the current market environment shaped by Vision 2030 initiatives.
- The study does not extend to large construction corporations, government project owners, or international firms operating in Saudi Arabia.

1.10. The Suggested Project Structure

The proposed structure for the research project is as follows:

- **Introduction:** provides an overview of the study including the research background, research problem, research significance, research questions, research objectives, research hypotheses, research model, research methodology, scope of the study, and the suggested project structure.
- **Literature Review:** presents a critical analysis of existing research and literature relevant to stakeholder management, project success, and SMEs in the construction sector.
- **Research Methodology:** details the research design, data collection methods, sample selection, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.
- **Analysis and Results:** presents and discusses the statistical findings from the survey data, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression results.
- **Discussion:** connects the research findings with the existing literature and interprets the results in the context of Saudi construction SMEs.
- **Conclusion and Recommendations:** summarizes the key findings, highlights the study's contributions, and provides recommendations for practitioners and suggestions for future research.
- **References:** provides a comprehensive list of all academic sources cited throughout the study in APA format.
- **Appendices:** includes the survey questionnaire and any other relevant supporting documents.

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

Effective stakeholder management has long been recognized as a critical determinant of project success. This chapter reviews the existing academic literature on stakeholder management practices and their relationship to project success, with a particular focus on the construction sector and the SME context. The chapter examines the independent variable — stakeholder management practices — and the dependent variable — project success — before exploring the documented relationship between the two, culminating in the identification of gaps that this study seeks to address.

2.2. The Independent Variable: Stakeholder Management Practices

Stakeholder management refers to the systematic process of identifying, analyzing, planning, and engaging individuals or groups who have an interest in or can influence the outcomes of a project (Freeman, 1984; PMI, 2021). In the construction industry, stakeholders typically include clients, contractors, subcontractors, government regulators, local communities, financial institutions, and end-users — each with distinct interests and levels of influence over project outcomes.

The first dimension of stakeholder management is stakeholder identification, which involves systematically recognizing all parties with a stake in the project. Bourne and Walker (2005) emphasize that failure to identify key stakeholders early in a project significantly increases the risk of project disruption and failure. In construction SMEs, limited resources often lead to incomplete stakeholder mapping, which results in unaddressed interests and unforeseen conflicts later in the project lifecycle.

The second dimension is stakeholder communication, which encompasses the processes of sharing relevant information with stakeholders in a timely, accurate, and appropriate manner. Mok et al. (2015) found that poor communication is consistently cited as one of the top causes of construction

project failure. Effective communication ensures that stakeholders remain informed, aligned, and supportive throughout project execution.

The third dimension is stakeholder engagement, defined as the active involvement of stakeholders in project decision-making processes. Eskerod and Jepsen (2016) argue that genuine engagement, as opposed to mere information dissemination, builds stakeholder commitment and reduces resistance. In SME contexts, engagement is often informal and reactive rather than structured and proactive, limiting its effectiveness.

The fourth dimension is stakeholder conflict resolution, which refers to the mechanisms used to manage and resolve disagreements between stakeholders. Conflicts in construction projects are common and can arise from competing interests, resource constraints, design changes, or contractual disputes (Cheung & Yiu, 2006). SMEs with weak conflict resolution mechanisms are particularly vulnerable to project disruptions caused by unresolved stakeholder disputes.

2.3. The Dependent Variable: Project Success

Project success is a multi-dimensional concept that has evolved significantly in the project management literature over the past decades. The traditional iron triangle — time, cost, and scope — was long considered the primary measure of project success (Atkinson, 1999). However, more contemporary frameworks have expanded this definition to include quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and strategic alignment as additional success criteria (Shenhar & Dvir, 2007; PMI, 2021).

In the context of construction SMEs, project success is most commonly measured against four dimensions: time performance (completing the project within the agreed schedule), cost performance (delivering within the approved budget), scope adherence (meeting the defined project specifications), and

quality outcomes (achieving the required standards of workmanship and deliverables). These dimensions are well established in the construction project management literature and provide a practical and measurable framework for assessing success in an SME setting (Iyer & Jha, 2005).

Al-Tmeemy et al. (2011) highlight that in developing construction markets, including those in the Gulf region, project success is particularly sensitive to relationship quality between project parties — suggesting that stakeholder management practices may play an even more significant role in these contexts than in mature construction markets.

2.4. The Relationship Between the Independent and the Dependent Variables

A substantial body of literature supports a positive and significant relationship between effective stakeholder management practices and improved project success outcomes. Yang et al. (2011) conducted a comprehensive study on stakeholder management in construction projects and found that projects with higher levels of stakeholder engagement and communication consistency demonstrated significantly better performance across time, cost, and quality dimensions.

Bourne (2016) further established that stakeholder identification and proactive engagement are the strongest predictors of project success, particularly in complex project environments with multiple competing stakeholder interests. Similarly, Musawir et al. (2017) demonstrated through structural equation modeling that stakeholder management capability has a direct and statistically significant positive effect on project success in developing economies.

In the construction sector specifically, Mok et al. (2015) found that stakeholder communication quality was the single most impactful factor in determining project schedule and cost performance. Projects with structured communication protocols experienced fewer delays compared to those relying

on ad hoc communication practices. These findings are particularly relevant to Saudi construction SMEs, where communication processes are often unstructured.

However, the majority of these studies were conducted in large-scale or international project contexts. Research specifically examining this relationship within construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia remains scarce. Alashwal et al. (2017) noted that Gulf construction projects exhibit unique stakeholder dynamics driven by cultural factors, regulatory environments, and the rapid pace of development — dynamics that may not be fully captured by Western-derived stakeholder management frameworks. This study therefore addresses a critical gap by empirically testing this relationship in the under-researched Saudi construction SME context.

2.5. Conclusion

The literature review demonstrates a well-established theoretical and empirical link between stakeholder management practices and project success. Key dimensions of stakeholder management — identification, communication, engagement, and conflict resolution — have each been shown to positively influence project outcomes across time, cost, scope, and quality. However, a clear gap exists in applying these findings to the context of construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia. Given the Kingdom's ambitious development agenda under Vision 2030 and the central role of SMEs in the construction sector, understanding this relationship is both timely and essential. This study is positioned to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence that can guide stakeholder management improvements in Saudi construction SMEs.

2.6. Research Gaps and Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature reviewed, several critical gaps emerge that justify the current study. First, the vast majority of stakeholder management research has been conducted in Western or large-scale project contexts, leaving a significant deficit in empirically grounded knowledge about how these practices function within the cultural and regulatory environment of Saudi Arabia. Second, the SME-specific application of stakeholder management frameworks remains underexplored globally, and particularly so within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. Third, no quantitative study has simultaneously examined all four key dimensions of stakeholder management — identification, communication, engagement, and conflict resolution — in relation to multi-dimensional project success outcomes within Saudi construction SMEs.

The conceptual framework developed for this study addresses these gaps by drawing on Freeman's (1984) foundational stakeholder theory, the Project Management Institute's (2021) stakeholder engagement knowledge area, and empirical findings from Bourne (2016), Yang et al. (2011), and Musawir et al. (2017). The framework proposes four direct relationships between stakeholder management practice dimensions and project success outcomes, operationalized through hypotheses H1 through H4.

This structured approach allows for both individual hypothesis testing and an integrated assessment of how stakeholder management as a whole influences project success. The framework is deliberately context-specific, designed to reflect the unique characteristics of construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia, including limited resources, informal management structures, and the dynamic stakeholder environment created by Vision 2030 development priorities.

3. Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive description of the research methodology adopted for this study. It outlines the philosophical underpinning of the research, the chosen research design, the data collection procedures, the sampling strategy, the measurement instruments, and the data analysis techniques. The methodological choices made in this study are guided by the research objectives and the nature of the relationships being investigated, ensuring that the findings are both rigorous and relevant to the Saudi construction SME context.

3.2. Research Philosophy

This study is grounded in the positivist research philosophy, which holds that knowledge is derived from measurable, observable phenomena and that reality exists independently of the researcher. Positivism is the most appropriate philosophical stance for this study given its aim to empirically test hypotheses about the relationship between stakeholder management practices and project success using quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). This stance supports the use of structured instruments, statistical analysis, and generalizable findings across the target population of construction SME project managers in Saudi Arabia.

3.3. Research Design

A descriptive-correlational research design is adopted for this study. The descriptive component allows for an accurate characterization of the stakeholder management practices currently employed by construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia, while the correlational component enables the investigation of the strength and direction of relationships between these practices and project success outcomes. This design is well-suited to studies that seek to establish the extent to which two or more variables are related without manipulating any of them (Creswell, 2014).

The study employs a cross-sectional approach, meaning data will be collected at a single point in time from a sample of project managers and senior project staff across construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia. While a longitudinal approach would provide richer insights into how these relationships evolve over time, the cross-sectional design is appropriate given the practical constraints of the current research phase and the focus on measuring current perceptions and practices.

3.4. Data Collection Instrument

Primary data will be collected using a structured online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to measure respondents' perceptions of stakeholder management practices and project success outcomes using validated Likert-scale items adapted from existing literature. Specifically:

- Stakeholder Identification will be measured using items adapted from Bourne and Walker (2005), focusing on the extent to which SMEs systematically identify and document all relevant stakeholders at the project initiation stage.
- Stakeholder Communication will be assessed using items adapted from Mok et al. (2015), measuring the frequency, clarity, and appropriateness of communication with key stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle.
- Stakeholder Engagement will be measured using items adapted from Eskerod and Jepsen (2016), capturing the depth and consistency of stakeholder involvement in project decision-making processes.
- Stakeholder Conflict Resolution will be assessed using items adapted from Cheung and Yiu (2006), examining the mechanisms and effectiveness of dispute resolution between stakeholder groups.

- Project Success will be measured across four dimensions: time performance, cost performance, scope adherence, and quality outcomes, using items adapted from Iyer and Jha (2005) and Atkinson (1999).

All items will be scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire will be reviewed by academic experts and pilot-tested with a small group of construction project managers prior to full deployment to ensure clarity, validity, and reliability.

3.5. Population and Sampling

The target population for this study consists of project managers and senior project staff employed in construction SMEs operating in Saudi Arabia. For the purpose of this study, SMEs are defined in accordance with the General Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (Monsha'at) classification, which categorizes SMEs based on number of employees and annual revenue.

A convenience sampling approach will be employed given the practical challenges of accessing a comprehensive sampling frame for construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia. Participants will be recruited through professional networks, industry associations such as the Saudi Contractors Authority (SCA), and direct outreach to SME contractors registered with Monsha'at. A minimum sample size of 100 completed responses is targeted. This threshold is considered sufficient for conducting multiple regression analysis with four independent predictor variables, consistent with the rule of thumb of at least 10–20 observations per predictor variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data collected through the survey will be analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. The following analytical procedures will be employed:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions will be computed for all variables to characterize the sample and describe the current state of stakeholder management practices among Saudi construction SMEs.
- **Reliability Analysis:** Cronbach's alpha coefficients will be calculated for each scale to assess internal consistency and confirm the reliability of the measurement instrument.
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson correlation coefficients will be computed to examine the bivariate relationships between each stakeholder management practice dimension and project success, providing initial evidence for or against the proposed hypotheses.
- **Multiple Regression Analysis:** A multiple regression model will be estimated to assess the simultaneous predictive power of all four stakeholder management practice dimensions on project success, and to identify which dimensions have the greatest impact. This analysis will directly test hypotheses H1 through H4.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The study will strictly adhere to ethical research principles throughout the data collection and analysis process. Participation in the survey will be entirely voluntary, and respondents will be free to withdraw at any time without consequence. All responses will be treated with complete confidentiality, and no personally identifiable information will be collected or disclosed. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants prior to survey completion through a consent statement included at the beginning of the questionnaire. Data will be stored securely and used solely for the purposes of this academic research.

3.8. Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework for the study, justifying the adoption of a positivist philosophy, descriptive-correlational design, and quantitative survey-based approach. The measurement instruments, sampling strategy, and analytical techniques described herein are appropriate for rigorously testing the four hypotheses proposed in Chapter 1 and generating reliable, generalizable insights into the impact of stakeholder management practices on project success in construction SMEs in Saudi Arabia. The following chapter will present and discuss the results of this analysis upon data collection.

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