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# Project Management Communication Strategies to Engage Stakeholders and Improve Project Performance

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Joshua Ukoha Ukoha

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Project Management Communication Strategies to Engage Stakeholders and Improve

Project Performance

by

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MBA, Walden University, 2016

BSc, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1992




Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration



Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Project managers' ineffective stakeholder communication strategies lead to unsuccessful project performance. Project managers who fail to implement appropriate communication strategies can experience less engagement of their stakeholders, reduced project performance, and decreased sustainability. Grounded in the stakeholder theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Participants were five project managers who successfully used communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Data were collected from semistructured interviews, company archival documents, and field notes and were analyzed using thematic data analysis. Four themes emerged: clear message and written communication, frequent engagement, transparency and sincerity, and active listening and communication plan. A key recommendation for project managers is to identify project stakeholders, their communication needs, preferred methods of communication, preferred level of detail, education, and culture to provide information that meets their requirements. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase the funding of small-scale enterprises by engaging project stakeholders of organizations in the Nigerian oil and gas industry.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my wife and children, who stood by me even when it was challenging to continue my studies.

Acknowledgments

My appreciation goes to my committee members, Dr. Greg Uche, Dr. Deborah Nattress, and Dr. Mohamad S. Hammoud, for their efforts toward my completion of this program.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Communication management in project delivery is a proactive endeavor by project managers to manage the expectations and requirements of all stakeholders (Rajhans, 2018). Most projects have stakeholders who might vary in their communication requirements, which significantly influences project performance. Effective communication with stakeholders is essential for successfully delivering any project (Badewi, 2016; Rajhans, 2018). Researchers have demonstrated that cultural differences, trust, geographic distance, and stakeholder expectations significantly affect communication management (Muszyńska, 2018). Effective communication management creates a culture that promotes trust between the project manager and the stakeholders, encourages stakeholder participation in project decision making, and improves project performance (Amiri et al., 2022; Shakeri & Khalilzadek, 2020).

Project managers could improve project performance by using effective communication strategies to engage stakeholders (Lauren, 2018; Singh & Jankovitz, 2018). Conversely, if project managers fail to adopt effective communication strategies or apply incomplete or ineffective communication with the stakeholders, it could lead to project failures (Storey et al., 2017). Effective communication management is a strategic tool for managing stakeholders and their varied requirements (Rajhans, 2018; Williams, 2017). The current study addressed communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

## Background of the Problem

Inadequate communication with stakeholders in a project can lead to the failure of the project (Biganeh & Young, 2021). Therefore, project managers' identification of the respective causes of project failures is essential for improving project performance (Kiselev et al., 2020). Some completed projects do not meet stakeholder expectations because of inadequate communication to establish their requirements (Eyiah-Botwe et al., 2016). A project classified as successful by a project manager may be seen as a failed project by the stakeholders because the completed projects may not have met their expectations. The disparity between the project managers' and project stakeholders' definitions of a successful project could be due to inadequate communication and inappropriate communication strategies, leading to project failures (Badewi, 2016). Project managers must communicate with stakeholders to understand their expectations, address issues that may arise, manage conflicting interests, and promote stakeholders' commitment to improving project performance (Riahi, 2017). Knowledge of stakeholder expectations for a project is vital for improving project performance. Project managers could establish stakeholder expectations by applying appropriate communication strategies (Rajhans, 2018). Therefore, researchers should identify communication strategies project managers could use to engage stakeholders and facilitate successful project performance (Rosato, 2018; Shahzad et al., 2017).

## Problem Statement

In many organizations, project managers' ineffective stakeholder communication strategies have led to unsuccessful project performance (Gupta et al., 2019; Majeed et al.,

2021). Despite several decades of a consistent reduction in project failure rates, research showed that 5% to 42% of projects still fail (Rosato, 2018). The general business problem was that some projects failed in the Nigerian oil and gas industry due to project managers' lack of communication skills to engage stakeholders and improve project delivery and performance. The specific business problem was that some project managers in Nigerian oil and gas companies lack communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the communication strategies some project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The target population consisted of five project managers selected from a Nigerian oil and gas company who had used effective communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The implications for social change include the potential to improve provisions of social amenities, educational empowerment through university scholarship awards, and small-scale enterprises funding by organizations in the Nigerian oil and gas industry that may become more profitable through improved project performance.

## Nature of the Study

Research methods available to researchers include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Akimowicz et al., 2018; Zoellner & Harris, 2017). The selected approach for the current study was the qualitative method. Researchers use the qualitative method to explore the how, what, and why rather than explain a phenomenon or outcome

(Rymaszewska et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to explore the research problem (Saunders et al., 2016). Researchers also apply qualitative methods to explore, capture, and communicate underlying trends, patterns, and relationships of untapped areas of a topic (Albers, 2017). The qualitative method was appropriate for the current study because it provided in-depth information for probing the untapped areas of the research topic.

Quantitative researchers use closed-ended questions to empirically test stated hypotheses about variables and relationships (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). I did not select the quantitative method because it entails using closed-ended questions, preconstructed standardized instruments, and precise measurements that were not the objectives of the current study. The mixed-methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study (Almeida, 2018). A researcher uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis to enrich the study findings (Bester et al., 2017). I did not select a mixed-methods approach because the focus of my study was not to test stated hypotheses about variables and relationships.

Qualitative designs include phenomenological, ethnographic, and case study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I selected the single case study design over the ethnographic and phenomenological designs for the current study. The case study approach is the best design for conducting an in-depth and detailed investigation of a single incident, circumstance, or individual over a period (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, the single case study research design is optimal for contemporary studies, exploratory studies, and obtaining a holistic and real-world perspective by collecting data from

multiple sources (Yin, 2018). The single case study design was appropriate for establishing a robust understanding of communication strategies project managers in the Nigerian oil and gas industry use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

In contrast, researchers apply the ethnographic design to study a group's culture (Atkinson & Morriss, 2017; Saunders et al., 2016; Taylor-Hyde, 2017). I did not select the ethnographic design because the research focus was not on shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and languages but on the communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Researchers also use the phenomenological design to explore participants' lived experiences (Koskiniemi et al., 2019; Taylor-Hyde, 2017). I did not select the phenomenological design because the current study's focus was not on the meaning of participants' lived experiences.

## Research Question

What communication strategies do project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

## Interview Questions

1. What communication strategies are you using to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

2. How effective are the communication strategies you use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

3. What are the challenges you face in using the communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

4. What steps did you take to overcome the challenges you faced in using the communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

5. What additional information can you provide regarding communication strategies project managers can use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

**Conceptual Framework**

The stakeholder theory proposed by Freeman (1984) was the conceptual framework for the current study. Freeman originated the stakeholder concept and established the need to change business beneficiaries from stockholders to stakeholders. Freeman et al. (2007) developed Freeman's stakeholder theory to address the relationship between organizational performance and communications with stakeholders. Stieb (2009) reviewed Freeman's approach to create an appeal to legal, economic, and ethical constraints on stakeholder management. Through these constructs, Freeman et al. and Stieb highlighted the need for project managers to secure stakeholders' commitment to project delivery success through effective communication. Project managers' effective stakeholder communication may improve project delivery and facilitate business performance (Thompson, 2016). The findings from exploring Freeman's stakeholder theory in the current study might help readers understand the stakeholder communication strategies that project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

**Operational Definitions**

*Communication strategy*: Communication strategy is a framework developed by the project managers as part of a communication plan showing how the information will be shared and received to achieve the organization's strategic objective between the project stakeholders and the project team (Dmitriy & Ekaterina, 2018; Project Management Institute [PMI], 2017a).

*Effective communication*: Effective communication is the act of information sharing by project managers to meet the varied communication needs of diverse stakeholders by applying different communication styles, languages, and approaches (Slunge et al., 2017).

*Project communication management*: Project communications management is the process of ensuring timely and appropriate planning, collection, creation, distribution, command, control, monitoring, storage, retrieval, and disposition of project information (PMI, 2017b).

*Project performance*: Project performance measures the extent to which an implemented project meets or does not meet the requirements of the project's key stakeholders (Rosato, 2018).

*Project success*: Project success is achieving the critical success factors and realizing the strategic objective according to stakeholders' requirements, such as completing the project in a timely, high-quality, and cost-effective manner (Rosato, 2018).

*Stakeholder communication*: Stakeholder communication refers to exchanging information and instructions to overcome barriers between groups and individuals in a project environment (PMI, 2017a).

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Researchers improve their study's credibility by clearly articulating their assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, which are critical components of any study (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Assumptions are unproven statements considered true by the researcher (Beato, 2017). Limitations are constraints that restrain researchers from generalizing their findings (Forrest, 2017). Delimitations are boundaries set by the researcher to limit the scope of their study (Yin, 2018).

### Assumptions

Assumptions are claims the researcher considers relevant to the research and are plausible but lack proof (Okoye, 2017; PMI, 2017a; Williams, 2017). In the current study, the first assumption was that the participants were project managers who had used communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Second, I assumed that the selected project managers would be available when required and would be willing to participate in the interviews. A third assumption was that the chosen project managers would respond honestly to the interview questions. Finally, I assumed that participants understood the purpose and scope of the study and that their participation and responses could inform the results.

**Limitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses or challenges the researcher cannot control that could impact the study's scope, outcome, and reliability (Richardson, 2018; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The first limitation of the current study was the bias in participants' responses to interview questions to protect their organizations' interests. The second limitation was the reluctance of project managers to share sensitive information about their projects due to fear of competition. The final limitation was that the communication strategies that participating project managers shared might reflect data from their limited experiences acquired from the single organization selected for the study.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are the researcher's scope or boundaries set before the commencement of the research to ensure readers understand the extent of the study (Forrest, 2017; Grandison, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018), delimitations are limitations deliberately imposed by the researcher to control the research environment. The first delimitation for the current study was the target population, which comprised only project managers who had used communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The second delimitation was the purposeful selection of the research question to raise awareness of stakeholder communication strategies project managers could use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The final delimitation was the geographic region of the Niger Delta, Nigeria, where the selected oil and gas company was

operating. The researcher did not select project managers outside the designated oil and

gas company for the study. I selected the Niger Delta geographical region because

existing literature suggested limited research on stakeholder communication strategies to

engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

<div align="center">**Significance of the Study**</div>

The project management field is an area of study that needs further research

(Case, 2017). Despite research findings on standards and best project management

practices, projects still fail (Rosato, 2018). Project stakeholders also present the challenge

of varied interests and communication expectations (Storey et al., 2017). The different

stakeholders offer diverse knowledge, experiences, aspirations, and benefits to a project.

Project managers may need practical communication skills and strategies to benefit from

stakeholders' experiences and project delivery successes. Case (2017) stated that

investigating the diverse stakeholder communication perspectives may expand the project

management knowledge base and introduce communication strategies that project

managers may require to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

**Contribution to Business Practice**

How well the project managers understand and effectively communicate with

stakeholders can significantly influence successful project outcomes (PMI, 2017a).

Researchers have established that successful projects contribute to organizational

performance (Case, 2017), and stakeholders can influence project delivery success by

defining the success criteria for the project (Slunge et al., 2017). The stakeholders'

understanding of the project delivery plan and strategy through effective communication

by the project managers becomes essential for successful project delivery. The current study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations might provide leaders, executives, and project management practitioners with a more effective communication strategy to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The research findings might also contribute to project management communication practices.

**Implications for Social Change**

Applying the current study's findings might contribute to positive social change because effective stakeholder communication could lead to project delivery success, and project delivery success might contribute to organizational profitability. When organizations are profitable, corporate social responsibility activities might increase, leading to infrastructural and economic development in the rural communities playing host to the oil and gas companies. Profitable organizations might expand into more rural communities, leading to more employment opportunities, infrastructural and economic development, human capital development, and improvement of the country's gross domestic product.

**A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

A literature review is a source of relevant articles that provide insight into the study to support its argument and establish its importance (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The purpose of the current qualitative single case study was to explore the communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. In this section, I categorize the literature review on communication strategies and project performance into four parts. The first part of the academic literature

review focuses on stakeholder theory, which guided the study. This subsection includes relevant theories for the conceptual framework and reasons for selecting the stakeholder theory. The second part includes other related and contrasting theories to the stakeholder theory and discusses communication strategies. The third and fourth parts of the literature review focus on project performance indicators and communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

The literature review consisted of peer-reviewed articles, journals, books, and dissertations from sources such as Google Scholar, books, and Walden University Library databases, including ProQuest, Emerald, EBSCOhost, IEEE, and Sage. Most of my sources were from Walden University Library resources. The search keywords and phrases included *stakeholder management*, *stakeholder communication*, *project success*, *effective communication*, *communication strategy*, *project communication management*, and *stakeholder communication theory*. I selected 264 resources that were relevant and applicable to the research question. These resources included peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, and books. Eighty-eight percent of these sources were peer-reviewed journals published between 2018 and 2022. Twenty-two percent of the resources were non-peer-reviewed journals and books. I organized the literature review as follows: (a) stakeholder theory, (b) related and contrasting theories to stakeholder theory, (c) communication strategies, (d) project performance indicators, and (e) communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Table 1 provides a breakdown and classification of the sources used for the study.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Reviewed Literature Sources*

| Literature review content | Total | No. of peer-reviewed resources published between 2018 and 2022 | Percentage of peer-reviewed resources published between 2018 and 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Peer-reviewed articles | 206 | 183 | 89% |
| Non-peer-reviewed articles | 21 | 18 | 86% |
| Dissertations | | | |
| Books | 17 | 14 | 82% |
| Total | 20 | 16 | 80% |
| | 264 | 231 | 88% |

**Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder theory dated to 1963. Researchers introduced the notion that stakeholders, being anyone who can impact or be impacted by the activities of a corporation, were as crucial to the corporations as the traditionally recognized shareholders who were the owners of the corporations (Freeman, 1984; PMI, 2017a). The stakeholder theory was a departure from the traditional business understanding. The stockholder theory creates profit for the capital investors (Freeman et al., 2010), while the stakeholder theory challenges the share and bond owner perspective. The stakeholder theory states that because businesses exist in society and not as separate entities, business managers are responsible for both share and bond owners and the intricate societal network of parties who may be in an involuntary relationship with the company (Wood et al., 2021). Stakeholder theory also posits that managers should fulfill their moral obligations to their stakeholders. When leaders make business decisions, they must consider the interests of all stakeholders, including stockholders, employees, customers,

suppliers, and the local community in which it operates, and must fulfill their moral obligations to these stakeholders (Hunsaker, 2021).

The stakeholder theory postulates that organizational success is a function of how well project teams engage with key stakeholders. The relationship between internal and external stakeholders of a project influences the project performance (Teo & Loosemore, 2017; Vrushank & Pramod, 2019; Williams, 2017). The stakeholder theory provides a framework for project managers to identify, classify, and categorize stakeholders for more effective communication to improve project performance. Stakeholders play essential roles in ensuring improved project performance. Therefore, project managers must focus on the strategies to communicate effectively with all stakeholders and not assume that some stakeholders are more important than others (Crane, 2018). Stakeholder theory assumes that project stakeholders are motivated to contribute to improved project performance when adequately engaged and expect to benefit from the project outcomes (Eskerod & Jepsen, 2016).

Stakeholder theory focuses on solving value creation problems, the ethics of capitalism, and the managerial mindset, including how organizations work ethically to create value (Freeman et al., 2010). Stakeholder theory also assumes that project stakeholders will only contribute to a project as required when motivated. The motivation of stakeholders depends on the essential elements of their expectations around project costs, deliverables, and scope (Eskerod & Jepsen, 2016). Understanding the stakeholders' interests, motivations, and expectations could enable the project managers to establish the

best strategy for communicating with them and draw on their positive influence to facilitate project performance.

In the early period of stakeholder theory, organizations had little interaction with their environment and limited recognition of the full potential of stakeholders who can impact project performance (Freeman, 1984). As the theory evolved, it became apparent that organizations must integrate stakeholders in the decision making process (Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Stakeholders could have varied requirements yet interdependent relationships (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016). Organizational leaders and project managers should recognize and involve all project stakeholders in their communication to influence project performance.

Although project management practitioners accept stakeholder theory, different project managers interpret the concept differently, making the theory difficult to achieve global acceptance by project management practitioners (Scherer & Patzer, 2011). Despite these different interpretations of the stakeholder theory, it is a vehicle for connecting ethics and strategy (R. A. Phillips, 2003). The stakeholder theory also indicates that firms focus on economic values and stakeholder-based performance measures instead of only on economic factors and making money for the shareholders (Wood et al., 2021). Organizations that serve stakeholders' interests will create more value over time (Campbell, 1997). The stakeholder theory has evolved to ensure organizations' full consideration of stakeholder interests in their decision, thereby making the theory applicable to many industries (Freeman et al., 2010).

Stakeholder theory has a widespread application that could vary along the project life cycle, from project to project and from one industry to another (Badewi, 2016). Stakeholders' interests may change at different stages of the project delivery life cycle (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016). To satisfy stakeholders, project managers should pay attention to the different types of projects and the technical, environmental, commercial, operational, and political factors that could influence the interests of the various stakeholder groups. Project managers should also view the stakeholder theory as a cross-fertilization of the theory's descriptive, instrumental, and normative aspects (Valentinov et al., 2019; Williams, 2017).

The descriptive stakeholder theory describes the legal obligation of stakeholder fairness. The theory shows an organization's characteristics and how it interacts with its identified stakeholders (Miles, 2017). The descriptive stakeholder theory highlights the various stakeholders at different times in the life cycle of an organization. Some of the stakeholders may be more important than others at these different organizational life cycle stages depending on the needs of the organization and the possible contribution or influence of these stakeholders toward achieving the organization's purpose (Williams, 2017). Most organizations apply different strategies at different times to communicate with the various stakeholders depending on the importance of the stakeholders relative to achieving the organization's objectives.

The instrumental stakeholder theory focuses on applying organizational ethics to business management to address the concerns of selected stakeholders for improved financial performance (Jones et al., 2018). Instrumental stakeholder theory assumes that

stakeholder relationships governed by contractual norms and ethically grounded stakeholder management strategies lead to improved financial performance (Jones et al., 2018; Miles, 2017). Understanding the instrumental stakeholder theory could help project managers adopt the best communication strategies to engage their stakeholders and improve project performance.

The normative stakeholder theory integrates corporate social responsibility into the instrumental aspect of the theory. Normative stakeholder theory, also known as the ethics of care, is based on eternal values derived from ethical theory rather than observed norms and explores why project managers consider stakeholders' interest in project decisions (Miles, 2017). Normative stakeholder theory is the core of stakeholder theory and is rooted in the moral intuition that a firm's responsibilities to its stakeholders should go beyond contemporary shareholder/stockholder approaches. Project managers should adopt the normative stakeholder theory in setting organizational objectives and see stakeholders as an integral part of the organization to foster better collaboration and improved delivery (Boesso & Kumar, 2016). By applying the normative stakeholder theory, project managers could use the most appropriate communication strategies to engage their stakeholders and improve project performance.

In applying the stakeholder theory, business leaders are encouraged to develop business models that integrate stakeholders in the business decision making process to enhance value creation and organizational sustainability (Freudenreich et al., 2019). Stakeholders could play significant roles in the performance of an organization (Sancho et al., 2018). Adequately engaging stakeholders in the organization's processes could

enhance stakeholders' confidence, loyalty, and support to improve the organization's performance (Seay, 2015). The tenets of stakeholder theory include the jointness of interests, cooperative strategic posture, and the broad economic view of the firm (Shah & Guild, 2022). Jointness of interest is a tenet of stakeholder theory that advocates that firms should seek to maximize value for their stakeholders by exerting efforts to align their interests with those of the stakeholders. Cooperative strategic posture is a tenet of stakeholder theory that views businesses and their stakeholders as strategic partners. The tenet advocates that there should be interconnectivity between businesses and those with a stake in them, such as the customers, suppliers, employees, investors, and the community in which they operate. The broad economic view is a stakeholder theory tenet that advocates a downplay of an organization's financial goals balancing it against other factors such as environmental considerations and corporate social responsibility (Shah & Guild, 2022). The stakeholder theory was the appropriate conceptual framework for exploring the communication strategies that project managers use to engage their stakeholders and improve project performance.

**Related and Contrasting Theories to Stakeholder Theory**

Related and contrasting theories considered in the current study were stockholder theory, balanced scorecard theory, mass communication theory, communication theory, socio-technical systems (STS) theory, and information theory. These theories provide comprehensive information on the procedures necessary for successfully developing and deploying communication strategies. Although these related and contrasting theories had

similarities and differences to the stakeholder theory, their applications were quite

different.

***Stockholder Theory***

      The stockholder theory, also known as shareholder theory, states that the primary

duty of management is to maximize shareholder returns on investment. The theory

pushes the idea that the only responsibility of managers is to serve in the best possible

way the interests of shareholders, using the corporation's resources to increase the

shareholders' wealth by seeking profits (O'Connell & Ward, 2020). Milton Friedman

introduced the stockholder theory in the 1960s and stated that a corporation is primarily

responsible to its stockholders. These stockholders approve the salary of the business

managers, who in turn oversee the corporation's spending according to the wishes of the

stockholders (Hunsaker, 2021). The stockholder theory portrays organizations as vehicles

to generate wealth for the stockholders within legal boundaries but excludes

consideration for other stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, customers, and society

(O'Connell & Ward, 2020).

      Stockholder theory argues that managers' priority is to protect and grow the

corporation's assets for the benefit of shareholders. However, the theory fails to consider

that shareholders and corporations may have other objectives besides financial

performance, including encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation and building

communities. This broader view suggests that shareholders are interested in corporate

social responsibility in addition to financial gains establishing the relationship between

corporate social responsibility and return on capital employed (Kyriakou, 2018;

Mochales & Blanch, 2022). The stockholder theory was not appropriate for the current

study, which focused beyond the stockholders to identify the communication strategies

project managers use to engage all stakeholders to improve project performance.

*Balanced Scorecard Theory*

The balanced scorecard theory is a performance management framework that

enables organizations to translate their vision and strategy into action and improve

performance (Eisenberg, 2016). Kaplan and Norton (1992) created the balanced

scorecard theory as a performance measurement system that enables organizations to

manage the demands of their stakeholders, translate strategies into action, and answer to

criticism concerning the unilateral measurement of a company's performance. The main

objective of a balanced scorecard is to eliminate the shortfalls of the traditional

performance indicators that rely only on financial indices (Rababah & Bataineh, 2016).

The balanced scorecard model combines financial and nonfinancial measures to include

strategic and business performance measures across four interconnected viewpoints

(Singh & Arora, 2018). The four interconnected viewpoints enabled by the balanced

scorecard theory include finance, customer, internal business process, learning, and

innovation perspectives (Dincer et al., 2019).

Managers employ the balanced scorecard theory to link performance

improvement strategies with other strategies and manage organizational assets to curtail

cost overruns based on increased knowledge of the project or business environment

(Chiarini, 2016; Llach et al., 2017). Because I explored the communication strategies

project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance, the

balanced scorecard theory, a performance measurement matrix for financial and

nonfinancial indices of an organization, was not appropriate for the current study.

*Mass Communication Theory*

McQuail (2010) advanced the concept that mass communication theory requires

addressing the integration of multiple factors to ensure its application in a business

context. The mass communication theory provides a helpful lens for developing and

implementing successful strategies that project managers can embrace to strengthen

communication within project teams (Valkenburg et al., 2016). The mass communication

theory focuses on strengthening communication within the project team. Additionally, the

mass communication theory focuses on a one-way flow of public content on a large scale,

making it unsuitable for my study. The current study aimed to establish communication

strategies that foster two-way communication with stakeholders to create trust and build a

strong relationship that facilitates successful project delivery between the project

manager, project team, and internal and external stakeholders.

*Communication Theory*

Craig's (1999) communication theory utilized the principle of the communication

model to distinguish communication through an approach that defines communication

and the attendant challenges (Sanderson, 2017). Craig drew from seven communication

theory traditions to explain the concept of effective communications. These seven

traditions of communication are the semiotic, the phenomenological, the cybernetic, the

socio-psychological, the socio-cultural, the critical, and the rhetorical traditions. Each of

these traditions captures a different aspect of communication (Crane & Glozer, 2016;

Oberiri, 2018). Craig's communication theory depicts how specific communication elements relate to specific subject fields, making it inappropriate for my study.

### *Socio-Technical Systems Theory*

In the early sixties, the Tavistock Institute in London developed the socio-technical systems (STS) (Trist, 1981). The STS model explains the communication strategies that enable collaborations in an organization. The model recognizes the interaction between people and technology in an organization leading to active collaborations and efficient systems (Kim et al., 2016). The STS model envisions communication strategies necessary to promote team collaboration and foster knowledge sharing within organizational settings (Kim et al., 2016). The STS model is not appropriate for my study because it focuses on communication strategies that foster team collaboration and knowledge sharing but does not focus on the communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance which is the focus of my study.

### *Information Theory*

Shannon and Weaver's (1949) information theory focuses on communication accuracy and effectiveness from the efficiency of transmitted information between a sender and receiver (Li & Wang, 2017). Based on information theory, the communication process between project managers and stakeholders is successful when the stakeholder receives the information sent by the project manager through an agreed medium, and the receiver understands the message in the information (van Ruler, 2018). The information theory is the one-directional flow of information from the project managers to stakeholders. The theory does not consider any feedback from the stakeholders to the

project managers; hence is inappropriate for my study, which focuses on building trust and relationships to facilitate project performance.

**Project Performance and the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry**

The Nigeria oil and gas industry is laden with epic projects. The successful delivery of these epic projects is fundamental to the success, profitability, and sustainability of the companies in the industry. Therefore, project managers must implement successful projects that determine their companies' profitability and continued existence (Alhajri & Alshibani, 2018). A primary function of projects is to provide firms with the opportunity to create and retain business value, therefore making the performance of the projects critical to the success of the organizations (Horning, 2018). Organizations known for excellent project performance are more likely to attract more business patronage than others (Chou et al., 2016). The current study on the communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance could benefit project management practitioners in the Nigerian oil and gas industry by ensuring successful project delivery and attracting more business patronage leading to higher profitability.

Knowledge of project performance improvement factors is valuable to project managers, primarily as many organizations nowadays rely on project successes for organizational growth sustainability (Sarja, 2018; Scheepers et al., 2022). The traditional measure of project performance includes cost, time, and quality, sometimes referred to as the iron triangle or the triple constraint, and offers a clear definition of project success or failure by measuring the project's economic and technical dimensions (Scheuchner,

2017). Some stakeholders may consider project performance from both environmental and business perspectives in addition to the triple constraints (Abbaspour et al., 2018; Albert et al., 2017). Project success is critical in determining the extent of project performance (Mainga, 2017). Project managers should achieve the project objectives agreed with the stakeholders at the commencement of the project.

A project is said to be successful when the team has achieved the critical success factors and realized the strategic objective according to stakeholders' requirements, like completing the projects in a timely, high quality, and cost-effective manner (Rosato, 2018). Completing a project does not necessarily mean the project was successful. Instead, a project is tagged completed when the expected business value, which justifies the need for carrying out the project, has been achieved and the stakeholders' requirements have been met (Radujkovic & Sjekavica, 2017). To achieve project success, the project manager must adequately conceptualize, design, and implement the project, considering all the factors that may influence the success of a project (Nzekwe et al., 2015).

A helpful approach to determine the success of a project is by measuring the project's performance, but most importantly, determining the measurement criteria for project success considering the stakeholders' requirements. Traditionally, meeting the project's triple constraint of time, cost, and scope, implies successful project performance (Blaskovics, 2016). Still, considering the stakeholders, the project is only successful when the outcomes have met the organization's stakeholders' social and environmental requirements and the requirements of the triple constraint (Sudhakar, 2016). Regardless

of the selected project success criteria, project success depends on the perception of the persons involved in the project. Project managers must agree on their projects' critical success factors to achieve improved project performance (Dziekonski, 2017). In the Nigerian oil and gas industry, social and environmental objectives are critical success factors to consider by project managers. Therefore, knowledge of the factors contributing to improved project performance is vital to twenty-first-century project managers (Hughes et al., 2017). Factors contributing to project success include correctly identifying and categorizing internal and external stakeholders shared understanding through effective communication and knowledge transfer, strategic alignment of stakeholder requirements, and setting clear project success criteria (Roman, 2016).

Project failures have huge impacts on organizations, such as financial losses, lost investment opportunities, political damage, and other losses that may be difficult to quantify (Buettner, 2017; Hughes et al., 2017). One major cause of project performance is the lack of communication strategy to engage project stakeholders leading to poor decision making (Buettner, 2017). Project managers, therefore, must engage in effective stakeholder identification and categorization, pay adequate attention to the stakeholder requirements, and embrace clear communication strategies to engage the stakeholders and improve project performance (Acevedo, 2016).

**Communication With Project Stakeholders**

Project managers' understanding of the factors that improve project performance, like effective stakeholder management, communication, and involvement in decision making, is vital to twenty-first-century project management (Sarja, 2018). Researchers

have identified some negative impacts of project failures, including financial losses, lost investment opportunities, and political and reputational damage to organizations (Buettner, 2017; Hughes et al., 2017). Some causes of project failures include lack of trust, digital literacy, internet penetration, resistance to change, misunderstanding of stakeholders' requirements, lack of competence, incomplete mapping of stakeholders, and poor communication (Ebad, 2018; Gupta et al., 2019; Rankinen et al., 2022). Generally, over 5% of projects still fail despite several decades of improving the project delivery process (Rosato, 2018). Most project failures are due to poor communication with project stakeholders (Rosato, 2018; Shahzad et al., 2017; Suleiman, 2022). This subsection focuses on stakeholder communications, types of stakeholder communications, and how stakeholder communication facilitates successful project delivery.

Because communication is an essential process in project management, organizations, communities, and social groups should build trust between diverse stakeholders who may have diverse backgrounds, interests, expertise levels, and perspectives which can impact the overall interest of the group (PMI, 2017a). Communication plays a vital role throughout the project life cycle and significantly contributes to its success. Project managers use communication to exchange project information with stakeholders through well-defined processes to improve project performance (Shakeri & Khalilzadek, 2020). Communication with stakeholders is a two-way process whereby information is shared and received (Nguyen et al., 2018). It is necessary to plan, manage, and evaluate internal and external information flows to share

ideas, understand situations, and resolve issues that may arise (Hernández et al., 2019).

Effective communication with stakeholders in a project contributes to the project's

visibility and drives transparency with internal and external stakeholders (Ogrezeanu et

al., 2017).

Different stakeholders have unique and evolving requirements, expectations, and

communication needs, requiring project managers to apply diverse communication

strategies to meet all stakeholder needs. Traditionally, communication is an integral

component of human existence that happens consciously or unconsciously through

words, facial expressions, gestures, and other actions (Ogrezeanu et al., 2017). This

traditional communications approach is not a fit for every situation. The traditional

communication strategy fails in many circumstances, especially where the project

managers neither understand the stakeholders' communication needs nor apply the

appropriate communication strategies. Project managers must consider the various

stakeholders' information needs, including the project team, and integrate them into their

project communication strategy (PMI, 2017a).

The growing complexity of stakeholders' requirements in project management

calls for unique strategies to achieve effective communication (Bourne, 2016). Different

stakeholder groups may have to change communication needs at the various phases of the

project life cycle (Turkulainen et al., 2016). Likewise, one stakeholder group may have

different communication needs at the various phases of the project delivery cycle than the

other groups (Lohikoski et al., 2015). Project managers need a proper and adequate

communication plan to effectively manage and meet the stakeholders' communication

needs during the different project life-cycle phases and facilitate improved project performance. A strategic approach to stakeholder communication is the key to successful project performance, notwithstanding that the stakeholders might have complex communication needs (Bourne, 2016). Generally, there are three classes of project stakeholder communication: project reporting, project relations, and directed communication. Deploying these three general classes of stakeholder communication to the right stakeholders could help project managers to achieve successful project delivery.

Project reporting is a one-way communication system that project managers use to provide information about the project to the various stakeholders. The information in a report is for purposeful communication while the reporting creates a consistent set of data in a time series; however, reports are not communication (Bourne, 2016). Although some stakeholders may never read all the reports sent to them by the project managers, sending the reports reassures them that the project manager is well-organized. The stakeholders also trust that the project managers can successfully plan and implement the project and deal with any unexpected developments in delivering the project. Because project reports are legal requirements, most organizations and leaders require periodic reporting on project status. It is pertinent that project managers generate and share information on their project progress as often as agreed with the stakeholders. Bourne argued that reports are one-way communication and do not provide the project managers with the stakeholders' responses; hence, they are ineffective.

Project relations (PR), also called project marketing, includes all the media forms of communications used to provide project information to the broader stakeholder

community (Bourne, 2016). Effective PR can reduce the level of apathy or opposition experienced in a project while increasing support for the project by the engaged stakeholders and eliminating misinformation and rumor (Bourne, 2016). Project managers skilled in the PR communications process apply their skills to secure broader stakeholder buy-in and enthusiasm for their projects and expected deliverables. Project managers with good communication skills could use PR as a viable communication strategy to facilitate successful project delivery.

Directed communication is the stakeholder communication method that follows a complicated process focused on the crucial stakeholders of any project, which the project managers should impact in specific ways. Direct communication involves developing a clear communication plan for the project, highlighting the different parties' roles and responsibilities in the communication process throughout the project life cycle (Bourne, 2016). Project managers must regularly review the stakeholder list for their projects, re-evaluate existing stakeholders' interests and priorities, and identify emerging stakeholders and their communication priorities.

**Factors That Affect Communication With Project Stakeholders**

Communication is the giving and receiving of messages, the transfer of information from one person or group to one or more other people or groups. Communication is an essential life skill and a vital part of our daily routines, thus the key to effective project management (Samáková et al., 2018). Since the communication process is not independent, project managers must consider economic, legal, political, and ethical factors in establishing their communication strategies (Chan et al., 2016). To

succeed in their project management careers, project managers must be skilled in communication (Samáková et al., 2018).

Most of the communication activities of project managers involve sharing information with project team members and other stakeholders, spending 80% - 90% of their time communicating on projects (Samáková et al., 2018). Communication is one of the main elements of project management that improves project performance in any organization. Therefore, project managers must apply effective communication strategies to engage project stakeholders and improve the performance of their projects. Communication management is an essential component of project management that defines the required processes of proper planning, collecting, distributing, and retrieving project information among the project participants (Taleb et al., 2017). Project managers should apply communication management skills to plan and manage project activities.

The output of the project communication planning process is the project communication plan, which is a tool for implementing the communication strategy to ensure improved project performance (Samáková et al., 2018). Project managers should develop communication plans to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. A project communication plan is a tool project teams and project managers use to provide relevant, accurate, and consistent information to project stakeholders and share vital information within the project organization (Papke-Shields & Boyer-Wright, 2017). The communication plan that project managers use to engage stakeholders during various stages of project implementation can create value and work as an efficient tool to manage stakeholder relationships (Rajhans, 2018). Project managers create communication plans

to identify project stakeholders, prepare a strategy to manage their expectations, and provide them with the correct information at the right time through positive communication (Rajhans, 2018).

Project managers create a communications plan or strategy to foster team collaboration and effective communication with project stakeholders. In developing the project communication plan, project managers determine what information to share, who delivers the communication, who receives the communications, the communications medium, and the frequency of the communications (Meng & Boyd, 2017). Project managers must consider the communication preferences of stakeholders while developing the project communication plan (Bourne, 2016). For communication to be effective, the stakeholder perception of the message and the sender must be authentic (Taylor, 2018). Project managers should know the appropriate communication methods based on their understanding of the stakeholder communication requirements (Varajão et al., 2017).

Project team members should have a better understanding of their tasks and responsibilities and adopt a well-designed communication plan to increase their chances of achieving their project goals (Kopmann et al., 2017). Some communication tools that project managers could use to establish effective communication with the project teams and stakeholders include email, webcasts, collaboration websites, video conferences, telephone calls, texts, face-to-face discussions, and web-based dashboards (Mitchell, 2018). A clear and concise project communication plan could help project managers and the project team effectively communicate with the project stakeholders and improve their project performance.

While project managers need to develop a robust communication plan, effectively managing the communication with the stakeholders is also vital to improving project performance. Communications management entails creating, collecting, and distributing project information to the appropriate recipients following the established project plan (Taylor, 2018). Project managers use communication management as a strategic tool to manage stakeholder relations systematically at each project stage (Rajhans, 2018). Communication management is the systematic initiative directed towards monitoring and controlling all communication channels within an organization based on the communication plan developed to cover corporate communication strategies, internal and external communications designs, directives, and managing the flow of information (Rajhans, 2018).

Communication management in projects is a proactive endeavor by the project manager to manage the expectations and requirements of all stakeholder groups (Rajhans, 2018). Effective communication management signifies a process that maximally delivers communications to appropriate stakeholders to achieve the communication objective (Rajhans, 2018). Project managers and project team members must ensure that information generated and provided to customers and business owners concerning project progress and performance are appropriate and fit for purpose (Taylor, 2018). By developing an effective communication management plan, project managers could use the communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

Communication management entails effective information exchange between the project manager, the project team, and the project stakeholders in stakeholder relationship

management. The information exchange ensures effective management of stakeholder expectations. It provides critical stakeholders with appropriate information to convince them that their expectations are known and that the project team will address them while improving project performance (Bourne, 2016; Rajhans, 2018). In project communication, project managers should clarify the project scope and targets and provide information that identifies the project's purpose, products, services to deliver, and expected stakeholder benefits (Butt et al., 2016; Verghese, 2017). Effective stakeholder communication management creates motivation within the project team and is necessary for all stages in the project life cycle to improve project performance.

**Effective Communication and Project Performance**

Effective communication is fundamental to boosting organizational trust and entrenching focused communication to foster healthy relationships among team members and project stakeholders (Taylor, 2018). Through effective communication, project managers keep project stakeholders on track to achieve project objectives (Muszyńska, 2018). Effective communication is a foundation function that supports and integrates all project areas and is one of the main determinants of successful project performance (Muszyńska, 2018). To achieve effective project communication, project managers must define the criteria to determine the effectiveness of their communication and establish performance indicators to measure the effectiveness. Generally, communication is effective when it reaches its goals and accomplishes the intended purpose (Muszyńska, 2018; Rajhans, 2018).

To communicate effectively, project managers must establish a proper communication management plan that defines involved parties, determine what information to share, and the appropriate tools and methods to facilitate the sharing (Taleb et al., 2017). Effective communication with stakeholders enhances project visibility, drives transparency, and builds trust with internal and external stakeholders (Ogrezeanu et al., 2017). Effective communication occurs when project managers provide cost-effectively, correct, and relevant information to the stakeholders (Taylor, 2018). The effectiveness of a communication strategy is a function of the project sector and the stakeholders' expectations.

Effective communication enhances business operations and facilitates improved project performance. Project managers that maintain open communication channels with stakeholders tend to outperform their competitors in crucial project segments, especially in growth, profitability, and project feasibility, therefore buttressing the impact of communication in improving performance (Parks, 2018). Project teams that have adequate communication flow achieve outstanding project performances (Taylor, 2018). Some benefits of effective communication include improved project performance, improved transparency and trust in project teams, and improved collaboration with stakeholders, thereby securing the trust of the stakeholders and improving project performance (Butt et al., 2016). Project managers require practical communication management skills to sustain consistent project performance.

Communication is an essential life skill and entails getting messages from sender to recipient (Samáková et al., 2018). Getting messages to the recipients without distortion

is best achieved by applying the appropriate communication strategy, style, or methodology endorsed by the intended recipients (McBeth et al., 2016). Project managers' ability to monitor and measure the effectiveness of the communication with their project stakeholders is vital for meeting the many needs of the stakeholders and contributing to the successful delivery of projects in any organization (Smith, 2017). Project managers could achieve successful project delivery by applying communication strategies that best fit the numerous project stakeholders. Effective stakeholder communication occurs when the stakeholders receive the message sent to them by the project managers without compromising the content or intent of the message (DeVito, 1994). To achieve communication effectiveness, project managers must communicate with clarity to the stakeholders and ensure they cover the communication needs of all stakeholder groups in the communication strategy.

Formulating a communication strategy is a critical step to successfully delivering projects. To develop stakeholder communication strategies, project managers must identify the target group (stakeholders), define the context, formulate the communication objectives, and select the instruments of communication best suited for the stakeholders. Communication instruments include brochures, presentations, websites, pages on social media, newsletters, emails, and webcasts (Hamilton & Pajari, 2018). Project managers' ability to create an effective communication strategy is critical for building a bridge with the stakeholders and facilitating successful project delivery.

Effective communication is a two-way process whereby information is shared and received between the project manager and the stakeholders (Nguyen et al., 2018).

Communication in a project is effective when it contributes to its visibility, drives transparency with internal and external stakeholders, and improves project performance (Ogrezeanu et al., 2017). Communication in a project is effective when the recipient of the information confirms an understanding of the message and the intent (van Ruler, 2018). Project managers apply communication management as a proactive measure to manage the expectations and requirements of project stakeholders to improve project performance (Rajhans, 2018). Understanding the communication strategies project managers can use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance is essential to improving project management (Sarja, 2018). Through effective communication, project managers establish project success criteria and the project delivery expectations of the stakeholders (Valiga, 2019).

Effective communication is an essential skill that project managers need to improve performance. Project managers' communication activities mainly involve applying interpersonal skills to share information with project team members and other stakeholders (Samáková et al., 2018). Through effective communication, project managers speed up the information sharing process, making it accessible for improved decision making at all levels in the organization and within the project team (Al-Mamary et al., 2015). Project managers communicate their vision, expectations, and project deliverables to inspire team members to improve project performance (Valiga, 2019). The communication strategy that the project manager use in communicating with the project team members, who are also stakeholders, may determine the choice of the project team members to follow the instructions communicated to them (Oyebola, 2018).

Effective communication is one of the main elements of project management and the basis for project performance in any organization (Samáková et al., 2018). Project managers must embrace a certain level of communication to achieve improved project performance. Samáková et al. stated that underneath the communication level, project managers must embrace five main areas of project communication: communication environment, communication channel, communication cognitive, communication system, and complementary part. The communication environment involves the communication strategy, organizational structure, and project culture, while the communication channel comprises communication methods, tools, frequency, and communication support. The communication cognitive focuses on communication differences and communication skills, whereas the communication system incorporates the feedback system, system of sharing, and distribution of information. Finally, the complementary part involves the communication matrix and analysis of stakeholders.

Project managers with excellent communication skills share information that could improve project performance and pay attention to the entire communication process, not just the content of the message (Shimizu, 2017). Communication skills include listening, written communication, emotional awareness, verbal and nonverbal communication, observing, speaking, and empathizing through face-to-face interactions, digital communications like social media, email, and phone conversations (Finlay et al., 2015). Communication skills constitute tools a manager could use to ensure improved project performance. A vital element of a project manager's communication skill is considering the stakeholders' attitude, knowledge, emotions, and credibility, impacting

how the stakeholders will receive a message (van Kleef et al., 2015). To improve

performance, project managers must exhibit excellent communication skills (Sousa &

Rocha, 2019).

A lack of practical communication skills could lead to poor project performance

and a decrease in a company's growth (Atambo & Momanyi, 2016). Project managers

without practical communication skills may slightly improve their project performance.

However, with proper communication skills, project managers could assist project team

members in understanding each other and work better together to improve their project

performance (Thomas et al., 2018). One of the vital elements of effective communication

is active listening. Active listening generates mutual respect and trust between project

managers and their team members. A manager with active listening skills can effectively

assess a problem, diagnose a solution, and help minimize mistakes in the project team

and the larger organization (Sfantou et al., 2017). Therefore, project managers should be

strategic in their communication to ensure they understand the needs of their stakeholders

and communicate with them using strategies suitable for each stakeholder group.

**Communication Strategies to Engage Stakeholders and Improve Project**

**Performance**

The purpose of communication strategy in project delivery is to ensure the

effective sharing of project information. A well-developed communication strategy

allows the project manager to effectively control the project, eliminate doubts, highlight a

clear plan, and involve all project stakeholders. In the project communication strategy,

the project manager must define the project environment, communication channel and

goal, internal and external stakeholders involved in the communication, communication rules, sources of communication, and the type of information to be shared (Samáková et al., 2018). In developing the communication strategy, project managers must align project objectives with organizational goals by communicating tasks and actions toward improving project outcomes (Taylor, 2018). The ability to communicate is essential to the success of any undertaking and a critical factor in achieving project objectives. Therefore, project managers must focus on planning, work delivery capacity, and precise goals when defining a communication strategy for their projects (Samáková et al., 2018).

A good communication strategy removes doubt, emphasizes planning, involves all the project participants, and gives the project manager better control over project activities and tasks (Taylor, 2018). During the project implementation, the project manager and project team members must proactively identify, analyze, and communicate any issues that may concern stakeholders and prioritize the most effective communication strategy to outline the tasks and share the concerns (Marzagão & Carvalho, 2016). While the project managers are accountable for effective communication, team members are crucial in helping their project managers communicate project requirements and manage internal and external expectations (Blaskovics, 2016). Considering the importance of a good communication strategy to the improved performance of projects, project managers should develop the most appropriate communication strategies to meet the communication needs of their project stakeholders.

A fundamental step toward positively affecting employee motivation, attitude, and performance by the project manager is identifying the communication strategies that

fit an organization (Shannon, 2018). Effective communication from the project managers promotes loyalty of their project team members leading to superior competitive advantage because the team members feel appreciated by their leader. Effective communication strategies influence performance, engagement, and organizational effectiveness (Taylor, 2018). A leader's choice of communication strategy may affect team members' ability to function (Wade, 2019). Transformational project managers communicate well to motivate, inspire, and build trusting relationships with project team members based on a shared understanding (Shannon, 2018). The project manager's capability to leverage communication strategies to satisfy team members by meeting their psychological needs regarding purpose is essential for improved project performance.

Developing a robust communication strategy is a four-stage process that project managers must effectively address. The first step is for the project manager to analyze project proposal documents to gain insight into the project goals the project team will deliver (Kaiser et al., 2018). Secondly, the project manager must identify concerns that the project has not integrated into the proposal but are fundamental in facilitating project implementation (Kaiser et al., 2018). The third step is for the project manager and team to produce a draft strategy (Kaiser et al., 2018). The fourth step is to review possible interventions critical to linking strategy to the plan, finalize the communication strategy (Kaiser et al., 2018), and resolve any communication dispute and uncertainty (Tushman, 2017). The project manager's lack of a robust communication strategy may facilitate project underachievement because project teams may not understand the problems. Lack of a communication strategy is a significant issue that could lead to poor project

performance (Taylor, 2018). Project managers must possess the necessary practical communication competencies to manage their team, considering that communication is crucial to determining any project's success or failure (Turkulainen et al., 2016).

To improve project performance, project managers must understand the various communication strategies to engage their stakeholders to improve their project performance. A communication strategy is a framework project managers develop as part of a communication plan showing how the information will be shared and received to achieve the organization's strategic objective between the project stakeholders and the project team (Dmitriy & Ekaterina, 2018). Project managers use different communication strategies to engage stakeholders to improve their project performance. Stakeholders may prefer communication methods like sharing hard-copy documents, emails, audio and video conferencing, Webcasts, web interfaces, and collaborative portals (PMI, 2017a). As a communications strategy, project managers should communicate with the stakeholders concerning the project progress and performance at agreed frequencies using the appropriate methods that fit each stakeholder (Manojlovich et al., 2015). Frequent and effective stakeholder communication is a strategy that project managers use to ensure timely completion of projects and improved productivity (Parks, 2018).

Another stakeholder communication strategy is project managers' flexibility in their project communication. Stakeholders' communication needs can change at the different phases of the project delivery process. The project managers and their team members' ability to provide accurate information regarding process execution and adjust to these changing stakeholder communication needs are crucial to project success (Ruben

& Gigliotti, 2017). Project managers also use the communication strategy regarding transparency and accuracy of information sharing to gain the stakeholders' trust. Project managers could gain the trust of their stakeholders by timely and accurately sharing work execution, delivery, and progress information with them (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). By establishing clear communication strategies to engage their stakeholders, project managers could improve their project performance (Oppong et al., 2017).

**Project Performance Measurement**

Project performance measures the extent to which an implemented project meets the requirements of key stakeholders and the organization's strategic objectives (Rosato, 2018). Project managers should establish project performance measures to evaluate their projects' performance. The performance of a project depends on the extent to which a project team achieves the measurable indices agreed between the project manager and the stakeholders (Baird, 2017). Project performance is assessed based on pre-selected success factors, and project managers must be strategic in selecting achievable performance measurement criteria (Musawir et al., 2017). Project managers can apply industry-standard project performance measurement criteria as a benchmark to determine the performance of their projects (Kim et al., 2018). Project managers must develop performance measures to meet project, organizational, and stakeholder objectives and ensure project success (Habibi et al., 2018). Project managers should apply appropriate communication strategies to engage their project stakeholders and agree on performance measurement criteria for their projects.

Project performance measures the extent to which some pre-selected project success criteria have been achieved (Nicholds & Mo, 2016). The project managers' choice of performance measurement criteria should be project-dependent, based on the requirements of the organization and the project stakeholders (Musawir et al., 2017). The performance of a project is evaluated based on pre-selected success criteria, which guide the project team to follow the appropriate project processes to achieve improved project performance (Mesa et al., 2016). With proper project planning and strategic communication with stakeholders, project managers could achieve the desired improvement in project performance. Project performance measurement must fit with organizational elements like business strategy, organizational culture, and the external environment (Yun et al., 2016). Project managers should select project performance criteria that align with their organization's strategic objectives and meet the stakeholders' requirements.

A performance indicator is a measure of success bidding to all relevant stakeholders in a project or activity, which project managers use to identify opportunities for improving the project performance. Performance indicators measure the extent of performance in a business or project to provide project improvement opportunities (Zheng et al., 2017). To develop credible project performance indicators, project managers must understand factors that could influence project success, identify the criteria to evaluate project performance, establish the critical success factors, and agree on the performance measurement criteria with the stakeholders (Albert et al., 2017;

Wibowo et al., 2017). Project managers should develop project performance criteria that stakeholders can understand easily.

Project success has different meanings to different assessors, and project managers should specify the success criteria for their project during the project's planning phase (Davis, 2017). During the project planning stage, project managers should establish the project performance indicators to understand the critical success factors that will improve project performance (Dziekonski, 2017). Critical success factors are a few selected factors that cause overall project success (Kannan, 2018). Upfront knowledge of the critical success factors and early involvement of the stakeholders in defining the critical success factors for a project is a strategy that could dramatically influence project performance (Eskerod & Larsen, 2018).

**Transition and Summary**

Section 1 contains discussions of the background of the problem, problem and purpose statements, nature of the study, research and interview questions, and conceptual framework. Also included in this section are operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, the significance of the study, and a review of professional and academic literature. The literature review contains an extensive analysis of relevant research on the conceptual framework (stakeholder theory), alternative and contrasting theories, and effective communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. In Section 2, I restated the purpose statement. I discussed the details of the study plan to answer the research question by addressing the role of the researcher, the research method and design, the population and sampling approach, and ethical

research. Section 2 also includes a narrative on the data collection instruments and

technique, data organization technique and analysis, and the research reliability and

validity. Section 3 contains an overview of the stud, the presentation of the research

findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change,

recommendations for action and further research, my reflections on the study, and

summary and study conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

This section provides the methodology for the single qualitative case study that addressed the communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. I restate the purpose statement; discuss my role as the researcher; and describe the research participants, research method and design, study population and sampling, and ethical considerations of the study. Other subsections include data collection instruments and techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, and the reliability and validity of the study.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the communication strategies some project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The target population consisted of five project managers selected from a Nigerian oil and gas company who had used effective communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The implications for social change include the potential to improve provisions of social amenities, educational empowerment through university scholarship awards, and small-scale enterprises' funding by organizations in the Nigerian oil and gas industry that may become more profitable through improved project performance.

## Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the main instrument for conducting qualitative research and has the role of assessing the thoughts and feelings of the study participants professionally and ethically in collecting the research data (Combs, 2017; Yin, 2018). The researcher is

responsible for selecting the research participants; collecting the research data through interviews, document reviews, and observations; and analyzing the data collected (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative study and collaborates with the study participants to compile findings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). In the current study, I was the primary data collection instrument.

As the researcher for the current study, my role was to identify and select five project managers as participants from an oil and gas company in Nigeria who had used stakeholder communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve their project performance. My additional roles as the researcher included interviewing the selected participants; taking notes during the interviews; audio-recording participants' responses to interview questions; and transcribing, coding, and organizing collected data into themes. As the primary data collection instrument, I ensured the collection and analysis of rich, informative, and unbiased data for the current study. I used interview questions (see Appendix A) to answer the research question and the interview protocol (see Appendix B) to collect data from participants. I sent a letter of invitation (see Appendix C) to access the participants and secured their consent with the informed consent form.

In qualitative research, researchers must explain any prior personal or professional relationships between the researcher and participants before commencing the data collection (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). I had no prior personal or professional relationships with the participants in the current study. As a project manager delivering information technology projects in the oil and gas industry for over 15 years, I perceived that project managers struggle with establishing the appropriate communication strategies

to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Therefore, my primary motivation for the current study was to establish a robust understanding of communication strategies project managers in the Nigerian oil and gas industry use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

Personal perspectives and biases may influence data collection, analysis, and results of qualitative study interviews (Karagiozis, 2018; Yin, 2018). Researchers must clearly state their experiences, biases, and personal background so these considerations can add value to the research rather than undermine the researcher's interpretations and propositions (Kaiser et al., 2018; Karagiozis, 2018). To mitigate bias and avoid using my personal experience, assumptions, and beliefs, I stated my experiences, biases, and personal background. I used recordings from participants' interviews and data collected from company documents for data analysis in the current study. I interviewed the participants until no new themes emerged to ensure data saturation. I also avoided including my opinions in the collected data.

Qualitative researchers should ensure the protection of the ethical and moral rights of the participants by choosing a research methodology that is protective of the participants from the beginning to the end of the research process (Abdalla et al., 2018; Collins & Stockton, 2018). I informed the participants about the risk and benefits of their participation in the study and guided, respected, and protected them according to respect for persons, beneficence, and justice in the Belmont Report (1979). I also conducted the current study in full compliance with the Walden University research protocols and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations.

**Participants**

The participants for the current study were five project managers from a Nigerian oil and gas company who had successfully used communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Researchers must select participants with the requisite knowledge and experience on the research topic (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Researchers also need to ensure the participants fit the study to ensure the credibility and acceptability of the findings (Yin, 2018). To ensure the selection of participants aligns with the research question, the researcher needs to establish criteria for participants' selection (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Project managers were required to work in a Nigerian oil and gas company and to have used communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance to participate in the current study. I used a purposeful sampling technique to select participants who had used stakeholder communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Qualitative researchers use the purposeful sampling technique to choose participants who can provide in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation (McInnes et al., 2017; Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2017).

Researchers should respectfully contact and connect with the study participants (Riese, 2018; Saldana, 2018). Contact with the potential participants for the current study was through emails. Then, I made introductory phone calls to confirm that prospective participants had successfully used stakeholders' communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Following the phone discussion, I introduced my research objective and confirmed the participants' ability to provide the

required data. A researcher should create an atmosphere of trust with the participants to

get their best responses (Madikizela-Madiya, 2017). I explained the purpose of the study

and sought their willingness to participate in the study to create an atmosphere of trust

with them. I did not impose my views on the participants but engaged them in making

decisions in the conduct of the current study.

Researchers must also establish a working relationship with the participant to

encourage openness in sharing information about the research topic (Kraft et al., 2019). I

established good working relationships with all of the participants before the interviews,

respecting their views and cultural backgrounds and ensuring the protection of their

confidentiality to stimulate their confidence and build trust. Building trust with research

participants is necessary to ensure that the participants provide information to facilitate

the research outcomes (Devlin, 2018; Wall et al., 2018). Researchers use the case study

design to explore complex social practices or systems delimited by time and place (Yin,

2018). For the current single case study, I focused on a single oil and gas company with

consistent project performance records operating in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Single case studies provide valuable information about the consistency of performance in

a particular domain (e.g., a company) and give the researcher an in-depth understanding

of the subject (Diop & Liu, 2020).

## Research Method and Design

The three research methods that researchers use are qualitative, quantitative, and

mixed methods (Abutabenjeh, 2018). I used the qualitative method for the current study.

Qualitative designs include case study, phenomenological, and ethnographic designs

(Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I used the single case study design to explore the communication strategies project managers in a Nigerian oil and gas company use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

**Method**

Research methods and design are fundamental to attaining reliable and credible research outcomes, which are vital components of the research process (Abdalla et al., 2018). Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are the three research methods that researchers use (Corlett & Mavin, 2018). Researchers may select any of the methods for their study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Factors that can guide the researchers' choice of research method include the research question, study phenomenon, and personal experiences (Devlin, 2018). Researchers use the qualitative research method to identify new views on a topic under study (Chih & Zwikael, 2015). Researchers also use the qualitative method to understand problems in their natural environments, focusing on the why and how of the study phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative methodology is appropriate for analyzing social issues that are not quantifiable (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) and is based on research questions focusing on applied and theoretical findings through a field study in natural conditions (Park & Park, 2016). Additionally, the qualitative method enables the researcher to take a holistic view of the topic (Park & Park, 2016). The qualitative method was the most appropriate research methodology for the current study. Using open-ended interview questions and taking a holistic view of the topic, I sought to identify the communication strategies project managers used to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

The quantitative method involves obtaining, analyzing, and interpreting data to test hypotheses and generalize results to a broader population (Yin, 2018). Researchers use the quantitative methodology to generate proven and unproven results (Nan & Sansavini, 2017). Quantitative research focuses on testing hypotheses and numerical data collection to conduct statistical analysis (Sheppard, 2016; Yin, 2018). In the quantitative method, open-ended questions are discouraged because the study's purpose is not to offer an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Mixed-methods research involves combining quantitative and qualitative methods in a study, concurrently or sequentially, to understand the phenomenon of interest (Almeida, 2018). The mixed-methods approach requires extra time and financial investment to be effective (Ferro, 2017). I did not use quantitative or mixed methods because my intent was not to collect and analyze numerical data or test hypotheses. I used the qualitative approach appropriate for exploring social issues, obtaining in-depth information from the study participants, and identifying communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders to improve project performance.

**Research Design**

In qualitative research, alignment of the research design with the research method is essential to answer the study's research question (Yin, 2016). The research designs in a qualitative study include (a) case study, (b) narrative, (c) ethnographic, and (d) phenomenological (Yin, 2016). I considered three research designs (case study, ethnographic, and phenomenological designs) and selected the case study design for the current study. The case study is the best design for conducting an in-depth and detailed

investigation of a single incident, circumstance, or individual within a defined period to discover experiences in unique contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). The case study approach focuses on understanding the characteristics and complexities of a particular case or bounded system worth exploring (Park & Park, 2016). The case study is also suitable for exploring the components, interrelationships, and contextual conditions of the study phenomenon (Kegler et al., 2019).

The single case study design is optimal for contemporary and exploratory studies to obtain a holistic, real-world perspective by collecting data from multiple sources (Yin, 2018). The single case study design is also justifiable when the case represents a revelatory study (Yin, 2018). I chose the single case study over the ethnographic and phenomenological designs because I explored the stakeholders' communication strategies that project managers from an oil and gas company in Nigeria use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

In ethnographic research, researchers observe the participants' lived experiences and emphasize a group's culture (Bevan, 2014; Taylor-Hyde, 2017). Ethnographic research involves interpreting a phenomenon through a group's shared beliefs, behaviors, and experiences (Devlin, 2018). Ethnographic research requires long periods to gather empirical evidence (Yin, 2018). The ethnographic design was inappropriate for the current study because my intent was not to study a group's culture. The phenomenological design explores participants' lived experiences (Saunders et al., 2016; Taylor-Hyde, 2017; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). I did not select a phenomenological design because my focus was not to explore the meaning of participants' lived

experiences. I explored the communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

Data saturation occurs when no new themes emerge with additional data collection (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Data saturation is a technique qualitative researchers use to ensure the adequacy of collected data to achieve rigor and enhance the credibility of the study findings (Cypress, 2017; Florczak, 2017). To enhance data saturation, I continued collecting and analyzing data from the participants until I could no longer uncover new information and no new themes emerged. Considering sample size in qualitative research is essential to ensure adequate collection of information regarding the phenomenon of the study (Abdalla et al., 2018). The sample size for the current study consisted of five project managers from an oil and gas company in Nigeria. The study's research strategy was semistructured interviews to enhance credibility, reliability, and validity.

## Population and Sampling

Qualitative researchers need to define the target population of their study (Abdalla et al., 2018) and align the sampling techniques with the research methodology and phenomenon of the study (Schreier, 2018). Participants for the current study consisted of five project managers from an oil and gas company who had successfully used communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Using the selection criteria in the current study facilitated selecting participants who could provide the information required to achieve the research objective. Project managers must possess the technical and soft skills to facilitate successful project

delivery (PMI, 2017a). Being members of the chosen PMI chapter enabled the selection of project managers who were current with the trends in project management and could provide information to facilitate the study.

In a qualitative study, the sample selection process ensures that the chosen participants have the requisite attributes to contribute to a qualitative interview process (Boddy, 2016; Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2018). Qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to select participants who can provide in-depth, detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation (McInnes et al., 2017; Onwuegbuzie & Hitchcock, 2017). Researchers use the purposeful sampling method to choose participants with diverse experiences and knowledge of the topic under consideration (Benoot et al., 2016; Riley et al., 2018). I used the purposeful sampling method to select participants with personal experience in developing using stakeholder communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. One limitation of the purposeful sampling method is the lack of clarity on the specific sample to include in a research project (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2016). I selected project managers who worked in an oil and gas company and used communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

Qualitative researchers must select a sample size for their purposeful sampling to provide relevant knowledge, practices, and experiences that align with the phenomenon under study (Devlin, 2018). The sample size in a qualitative study is a critical consideration because it can affect the research outcomes, impact data saturation, and possibly waste time (Malterud et al., 2016). The sample size used by a researcher in a

qualitative study depends on the degree of certainty the researcher aims to achieve in the study (Schreier, 2018). The sample size suitable for a study depends on the research purpose, the intended quality of the interviews, and the research theory to enhance the research outcome (Malterud et al., 2016). The suitable sample size depends on the context and scientific paradigm and can affect the reliability of the results (Boddy, 2016; Tharenou, 2015). The sample size for the current study depends on the research purpose and knowledge of the participants.

Qualitative research focuses more on the quality of the data, the wealth of information from the participants, and the nature of the study than the size of the study population (Guest et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2015). Having fewer than ten interview participants can be sufficient, and large sample sizes do not necessarily increase the level of accuracy in a data set (Morris et al., 2015). The sample size for the current study included five project managers from an oil and gas company in Nigeria who had successfully used stakeholders' communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

Data saturation in a qualitative study is the stage in data collection when collecting additional data does not identify new themes and does not lead to new insights or ideas (Colombo et al., 2016; Faulkner & Trotter, 2017). Data saturation has become a gold standard in qualitative studies (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018). Researchers should end the data collection process once they attain data saturation (Tran et al., 2017). To achieve data saturation, I interviewed the participants and collected data from the company documents until I could not identify new themes.

**Ethical Research**

Ethical research refers to the moral principles that guide the research process to ensure the researchers, participants, and the public's protection throughout the research process (Pandya-Wood et al., 2017). The current study complied with ethical research standards and rules of conduct and aligned with the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements in participant selection, data collection, data protection, and confidentiality. Data collection began after I had obtained the IRB's approval. Walden University's regulations do not permit students to collect data before receiving approval from the IRB (Walden University Center for Research Quality, 2020). The Walden University IRB also requires that researchers ensure confidentiality of information collected or generated during the research, and I complied with this requirement. Walden University's IRB approval number for the current study is 03-28-22-0564727.

Researchers should obtain the consent of research participants before commencing data gathering for their study. Participation in research should be voluntary, and participants' recruitment should be without any form of coercion (Kanonuhwa et al., 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Syrdal & Briggs, 2018). Qualitative researchers should meet the ethical research obligation by providing adequate information about the study so that potential participants can independently decide their participation in the research (Chesser et al., 2019). I used the informed consent form to secure the commitment of potential participants for the study. The informed consent form contains the purpose of the study, nature of the study, my contact information, and participants'

signature. The informed consent form also included the procedure for consenting, right to voluntary participation, option to withdraw at any time from the study, protection of participant's right to privacy, risk, and benefit of participating in the study.

In qualitative research, participants are at liberty to withdraw before or during the data collection process by informing the researcher of their decision to withdraw (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I assured the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from participating before, during, or after the interviews if they wanted to do so. I explained to the participants that signing the informed consent form was an agreement to abide by the stipulations in the form, including their right to withdraw their participation without any recourse. Signing the informed consent form shows that the participants and the researchers have agreed to pursue the interview following the terms identified in the consent form (Dekas & McCune, 2015). None of the participants indicated an interest in withdrawing from the current study.

Each participant received the consent form through email, which they signed and returned before I interviewed them. Research participants were informed that the information they provided and all study-related data would remain confidential and kept secured for five years, in compliance with the IRB requirements, in an encrypted and password-protected device that I alone could access. After the five-year IRB retention period, I will reformat the storage device to erase the data stored permanently. The participants did not receive any incentives to participants in this research. Giving benefits and incentives to participants could lead to a compromise (Phillips, 2015). I conducted

the interviews respectfully and professionally, informed the participants that the study

poses no potential risks to their participation, and advised them to contact the IRB if they

have any concerns regarding their participation or conduct of the interview.

Qualitative researchers face ethical challenges such as withdrawal, anonymity,

and confidentiality of the participants (Ngozwana, 2018). I protected the participants' and

organization's anonymity and maintained the confidentiality of the information collected

through the current study. I used alphanumeric codes (PT1, PT2, … PT5) to identify the

participants and used a hypothetical name for the chosen company for the research.

Researchers are responsible for protecting the identity of study participants and the

companies they represent while ensuring the proper use and safekeeping of the collated

data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I ensured data security by safekeeping all collected

data on an encrypted universal serial bus (USB) device for five years. After the stated

duration, I will destroy all the collected data by reformatting and destroying the USB and

shredding all the papers. I will also shred and discard all paper documents, notes, and

journals used for the study. I ethically protected the participants' rights following the

guidance of the IRB.

## Data Collection Instruments

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection

and analysis (Karagiozis, 2018). I was the primary data collection instrument in this

qualitative single case research. Qualitative research involves observing the participants,

developing the interview questions, conducting the actual interviews, and reviewing and

interpreting the collected data (Yin, 2018). The most common case study research

methods are interviews, focus groups, reviewing documents, and observations (Yates &

Leggett, 2016). I used semistructured interviews and a review of organizational

documents for the data collection in the current study.

Semistructured interviews are qualitative study instruments for data collection,

allowing researchers to achieve consistency and flexibility (Dikko, 2016). Karagiozis

(2018) asserted that the results of semistructured interviews collaborate ideas between the

researcher and the participant, leading to a unified view of reality. For the current study, I

used semistructured interview questions as a data collection instrument (see Appendix A)

to obtain information from participants. I conducted the semistructured interviews for the

current study using open-ended interview questions to explore communication strategies

project managers used to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Open-

ended questions in semistructured interviews are ideal for exploring in-depth knowledge

and uncovering rich descriptive data from each study participant (LaDonna et al., 2018;

Rosenthal, 2016).

Each participant in the current study responded to the interview questions

designed to answer the research question. I scheduled the interviews with each

participant, informed them of the interview's expectations, and shared the interview

protocol (see Appendix B) in advance. Each interview session lasted 45-60 minutes,

scheduled at the convenience of the participants. I used the interview protocol (see

Appendix B) to facilitate the discussions during the interview process. After the

interviews, I used member checking to authenticate my understanding and capture

participants' responses. Member checking is when the researcher returns their

interpretations of the collected data to the participants asking them to review, iterate, edit, add, or delete information (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). Researchers use member checking to facilitate the elimination of anomalies by aligning the researcher's understanding of the participant's responses to the interview questions (Yin, 2018). Researchers also use member checking for quality control to enhance accuracy, validity, and credibility (Abdalla et al., 2018). The member checking process allows research participants to affirm the accuracy and completeness of the transcribed interview responses summarized by the researcher and identify any misrepresentations of their responses, thus improving data reliability (Birt et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2017).

The second data collection instrument for the current study was the project-related company documents in the chosen organization. Document review is vital in grasping the facts, history, policy environment, and operationalization of a particular initiative (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). I reviewed project-related company documentation such as project charters, policies and project delivery standards and procedures, status reports, audit reports, and after-action review (AAR) documents as secondary data collection. Collecting various documents as a secondary data source helps provide the depth of evidence in research, develop a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomena, and test validity through the convergence of information from different sources (Hussein, 2015; Yin, 2018).

In a qualitative study, data triangulation allows researchers to use multiple data resources to understand the problems they want to solve and improve their interpretation and analysis of the data they collect (Forrest, 2017; Saunders et al., 2016). The data

triangulation process enables the researcher to compare data through multiple information sources and build a comprehensive perspective of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Methodological data triangulation and member checking enhance the accuracy, strengthen the validity and reliability of research findings, and reduce biases (Abdalla et al., 2018; Devlin, 2018). For the current study, I used the methodological triangulation of multiple data sources and member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the data collected. I examined the various project-related company documents from the selected company. I used member checking to verify the accuracy of the information collected from the various participants during the interviews.

## Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques that qualitative researchers use include surveys, interviews, direct or participant observation, site visits, video recording, review of company documents, and a sample of existing data or records (Anselmi et al., 2018). For the current study, I used the semistructured interview as the primary data collection technique to answer the research question. I explored the various communication strategies project managers used to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Semistructured interviews allow researchers to extract in-depth and rich information from participants about the phenomenon under the study through open-ended questions (Oltmann, 2016). Researchers can also gain insight into the study's phenomena, and participants are allowed to describe what was essential to them (O'Keeffe et al., 2016).

A key advantage of semistructured interviews as a data collection technique is that researchers could develop open-ended questions around predetermined themes, which facilitates flexibility of the interviews and encourages follow-up questions to clarify points the participants made (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). A vital disadvantage of the semistructured interview technique is the potential to introduce bias in the study due to the poor structure of questions (Draper et al., 2018). Another disadvantage of semistructured interviews is the high cost and the potential to delay completing the interview process (Brinkmann, 2016). Researchers may influence participants' responses through interjections, especially when the participant makes statements that may imply personal opinions (Draper et al., 2018).

Due to the increasing wave of the global coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic, face-to-face interviews are not a good option for the interviews. I conducted the interviews through telephone communication and teleconferencing. Qualitative research interviews can be face-to-face or telephone conversations between the researcher and the participants (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Teleconferencing is a data collection technique with shortcomings like poor (weak) internet connections that could significantly impact video and audio quality leading to a communication breakdown during the interviews (Almalki, 2016). To mitigate this challenge of the poor network connection, I switched to direct telephone calls, which provided a more stable connection. I also had a backup internet connection and a standby telephone. I advised the participants to have a backup phone number if we lose the internet connection on the primary device.

I conducted the interviews using the same interview questions (see Appendix A) for all participants and followed the guidelines in the interview protocol (see Appendix B). I provided all participants with the informed consent form to understand the purpose of the study and sign the document as legal consent to participate in the study. Using the same interview questions and following the guidelines of the interview protocol for all participants enhances consistency in a study (Mulder & de Bruijne, 2019). During the interviews, I recorded the participants' responses using two audio recording devices to mitigate the potential risk of data loss due to device failure. Using two audio recording devices ensured the accuracy and credibility of the collected data. Recording of the interviews started after the participants had agreed to the recording. During the interview, I periodically checked the recording devices to ensure they were working correctly and politely informed the participant when it was time to move to another question, thereby maintaining focus, controlling the process, and ensuring a successful meeting. I used methodological triangulation of multiple data sources and member checking to verify the accuracy of the information collected from participants to enhance the validity and reliability of the data collection process. Researchers use member checking for quality control to enhance accuracy, validity, and credibility (Abdalla et al., 2018).

I reviewed project-related company documents to search for communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. First, I requested and secured access to the company document archive through the government parastatal regulating oil and gas companies in Nigeria. Next, I requested the project-related documents through the document archive manager. Once granted access, I

gathered relevant documents and extracted the essential data to support the data collated

during the interviews. Documents are valuable data acquisition sources with standard,

diverse, readily accessible, and reliable data. (Harrison & Walker, 2018; Walker, 2018).

Documentation review comes with advantages: constantly referring to the documents

whenever necessary, having consistent content, being inexpensive, and being a reliable

source of truth (Harrison & Walker, 2018; Walker, 2018). A significant disadvantage of

documentation review is that collecting, reviewing, and analyzing many records to

consider can be time-consuming and not necessarily a good experience for researchers

(Harry & Fenton, 2016). I mitigated this disadvantage by requesting project

communication protocol documents and other documents related to project

communication and information sharing with stakeholders.

### Data Organization Techniques

Research data organization is a process researchers use to enhance the reliability

and credibility of the study (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019). Effective organization and

documentation of research data are essential for ease of data retrieval and enhanced

confidentiality and protection of research participants (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). For

ease of accessibility, data protection, and data loss prevention, I collected, labeled, and

stored all collected data in folders on my computer, with backup copies in multiple

external hard drives.

Audio recording, taking notes, and collecting data from multiple sources enhance

qualitative data analysis and enable researchers to organize research data (Devlin, 2018).

In the interview protocol for this research, I specified the procedure for organizing data

and documents such as digital recording, notes taking, data transcription, and data analysis using NVivo 12 software. Qualitative researchers use the NVivo software to code a large volume of textual data into themes and organize data in hierarchical order (Lowe et al., 2018). I used the NVivo 12 software to code and categorized the collected data into themes and analyzed and interpreted the data to establish the communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

Participants' identity protection through coding and labeling is one primary element of the data organization process (Lindlof & Tylor, 2019). I assigned unique codes to interview data for analysis, and during the coding process, I protected the participants by not using any individual or company names. Researchers are responsible for protecting the identity of study participants and the companies they represent while ensuring the proper use and safekeeping of the collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used alphanumeric codes (PT1, PT2, …PT5) to identify the participants and protect their identities. Data masking provides data security and hides the participants' identities, and data encryption and storage in password-protected devices ensure data security (Adams, 2017; Ogigau-Neamţiu, 2017).

Researchers must maintain records to keep track of their data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I organized the research data using a research log created in Microsoft Excel to capture the participants' responses in the rows and the interview questions in the columns of the Microsoft Excel file. Organizing the participant's responses to the interview questions in the Microsoft Excel file makes it easy to import into NVivo for analysis. I safely locked all collected material from the interview, including the audio

records, notes from document reviews, and all digitized data, in a passworded electronic

storage device for five years. All data collected in hard copies were stored in a

confidential file, locked in a fireproof safe, and accessible to me alone. After five years, I

will delete all the audio records, digitized data, and electronic records and shred all the

paper documents.

## Data Analysis

Using multiple data sources in a qualitative case study ensures the findings'

richness, validity, and reliability (Yin, 2018). The data analysis process converges several

information sources, making the research findings more convincing (Archibald, 2016;

Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). The qualitative researcher analyzes data to identify

patterns and themes to help answer the research question (Devlin, 2018). Data collected

through semistructured interviews are narrative. To analyze the data collected through the

interviews and review of company documents for the current study, I used the

methodological triangulation process to enhance the credibility of the study.

Methodological triangulation includes the combination of data collection methods like

interviews, review of company documents, observations, and focus groups to compare

data from multiple sources, improve interpretation and analysis of the data and

understand a phenomenon (Abdalla et al., 2018; Forrest, 2017; Gibson, 2017). I analyzed

the data collected through the interviews and reviewed company documents to identify

common themes.

I used NVivo software to import collected interview data captured in Microsoft

Excel, organized the imported data, and evaluated and analyzed the data to develop and

record themes relevant to answering the research question. Using NVivo facilitated the reviewing, refining, and merging of the collated data into themes. The NVivo software package was user-friendly, can analyze open-ended questions, and enables the thematic coding of categories. Researchers use NVivo to process non-numeric data such as interviews, surveys, literature reviews, and data extracted from reviewed company documents (Zamawe, 2015). NVivo is also used in qualitative research to review, merge, and refine collated interview data, enhancing research information (Harif & Hoe, 2018). After establishing and recording the key themes using NVivo, I looked for emerging themes that would facilitate answering the research question and were relevant to the study's objective. I compared the emerging themes from the data analysis with the conceptual framework, which was the stakeholders' theory. Researchers must establish a correlation between the conceptual framework and the study findings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I further used member checking to authenticate the data analysis process.

## Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two significant aspects of qualitative research. Demonstrating validity and reliability in a qualitative case study helps ensure the research's correctness and accuracy (Combs, 2017; Yin, 2018). Validity and reliability are crucial to managing researchers' biases which can easily influence data interpretations and the results of qualitative research (Cypress, 2017). Reflexivity, member checking, and triangulation are strategies researchers could use to improve research validity and reliability significantly in qualitative studies (Caretta & Pérez, 2019; Madill & Sullivan, 2018).

**Reliability**

Reliability in qualitative research involves obtaining consistency in the quality of research outcomes to produce a meaningful explanation of the phenomena (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). Researchers achieve reliability in the qualitative study when the results are consistent, dependable, and replicable by other researchers over time (Cypress, 2017). Reliability in qualitative research depends on the adequacy of data that consistently supports the research procedures and analysis (Spiers et al., 2018). Data collection and analysis techniques are essential in achieving reliable and consistent results in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers must apply rigorous data collection and analysis to demonstrate research credibility (Cronin, 2014).

Research credibility is necessary because qualitative research is descriptive, subjective, and prone to biases. Researchers use the concepts of dependability, creditability, transferability, and confirmability to demonstrate credible alignment between research data and study findings (Devlin, 2018). For the current study, I used the interview protocol (see Appendix B) to ensure the consistency of the research data. I provided evidence of reliability by documenting each step of the research process. Qualitative researchers show reliability in their study by documenting the research process and demonstrating consistency using the interview protocol (Hadi & Closs, 2016). I applied member checking to foster the validity and reliability of the current study's findings.

Dependability in qualitative research reflects the transparency and accuracy of research procedures, consistency in research methodology, data collection, and data

analysis (Tong & Dew, 2016). Researchers use strategies to address the dependability of

qualitative research and improve research accuracy, validity, and reliability, including

methodological triangulation, member checking, audit trail of field notes, and interview

protocols (Combs, 2017; Dikko, 2016; Forrest, 2017). For the current study, I established

the dependability of the findings through member checking and interview protocol.

Member checking is a method for validating researcher interpretations during data

collection and analysis (Doh & Quigley, 2014). I performed member checking to enhance

the validity and reliability of the data from the interviews, deepen knowledge, and

enhance the credibility of the data.

Researchers use member checking to facilitate the elimination of anomalies by

aligning the researcher's understanding of the participant's responses to the interview

questions (Yin, 2018). The member checking process allows research participants to

affirm the accuracy and completeness of the transcribed interview responses summarized

by the researcher and identify any misrepresentations of their responses, thus improving

data reliability (Birt et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2017). I offered the participants the

opportunity to review and verify the written summary of my interpretation of their

responses to the interview questions, which I recorded on the audio devices during the

interview process.

**Validity**

In qualitative research, validity refers to truthfulness in research quality and the

state of being justifiable, relevant, meaningful, and well-founded (Cypress, 2017).

Researchers define validity as rigorously choosing a suitable research methodology and

justifiably applying the chosen methodology to answer a research question (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019). I l established validity in the current study through member checking by sharing my written summary of the transcribed interview responses with the participants to confirm the accuracy. In a qualitative study, research validity can influence reliability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Beato, 2017; Thomas et al., 2017). In the following subsection, I discussed how I established credibility, transferability, confirmability, and data saturation.

### *Credibility*

Credibility is about the research's trustworthiness and acceptability of the research findings (Hadi & Closs, 2016; Keil et al., 2014). The credibility of a study depends on the accuracy, consistency, and interconnections of the concepts with research findings (Yin, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that researchers achieve credibility and triangulation using multiple methods, multiple data sources, and cross-checking the primary data source against other sources. I achieved credibility in the current study through triangulation by comparing participants' responses to project-related company documents.

### *Transferability*

Transferability is the possibility of transferring the findings from a given context into another (Keil et al., 2014; Noble & Smith, 2015). Qualitative researchers could achieve transferability through purposeful sampling (Tran et al., 2016) and a detailed description of the phenomenon (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Transferability is also the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study apply to other contexts, settings, or

participants (Devlin, 2018). To achieve transferability, I gave a complete description of the research design, the data collection processes, the participant population, and their experiences in applying stakeholder communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

### *Confirmability*

The confirmability of research refers to the extent to which the study is unbiased and objective (Ibrahim & Edgley, 2015). Most qualitative researchers use confirmability to ascertain the data, the interpretations, the transcriptions, and the findings that originate from the information collected on the phenomenon of inquiry. Bradshaw et al. (2017) argued that member checking is one way to support confirmability. Through member checking, I achieved confirmability and precluded any biases I might introduce in the current study.

### *Data Saturation*

Data saturation enhances research validity and occurs when data and information from new themes or categories have been exhausted in data analysis (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Hennink et al., 2017; McCrae & Purssell, 2016). I achieved data saturation by exhaustively conducting the interviews following the interview protocol (see Appendix B), asking the interview questions (see Appendix A), and extracting detailed information from the participants by asking follow-up questions until no new data or themes emerged. I also extracted relevant data from company documents and conducted a detailed analysis of the collected data using the NVivo software.

**Transition and Summary**

The current study aimed to explore the stakeholder communication strategies that project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Section 2 contains discussions on the reason for the study and why a qualitative case study was the best option for the research. Section 2 covers discussions on the research methods and design, the population and sampling, the ethical research process, the data collection instruments and techniques, data analysis, data organization techniques, and data analysis. I concluded the section with the study's reliability and validity. In Section 3, I presented the overview of the study and research findings, application to professional practice, and implications for social change. Finally, I concluded the study by making recommendations for action by the project managers and future studies, reflections, and summary and study conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In this qualitative single case study, I explored project managers' communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Five project managers from an oil and gas company in Nigeria who had successfully implemented communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance participated in the current study. I identified four themes based on data analysis from participant interviews and company document reviews. These themes were (a) clear message and written communication, (b) frequent engagement, (c) transparency and sincerity, and (d) active listening and communication plan. The study findings indicated that some project managers use a combination of established communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve the project performance of their oil and gas company in Nigeria. Section 3 includes the presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and further study, reflections, and a conclusion.

## Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What communication strategies do project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance? Inadequate communication with stakeholders in a project can lead to project failure (Biganeh & Young, 2021). Therefore, project managers could establish stakeholder expectations by applying appropriate communication strategies (Rajhans, 2018). I used the triangulation method to combine the data collected from semistructured interviews and company archival documents. These documents included project charters, policies

and project delivery standards and procedures, status reports, audit reports, after-action review documents, and field notes. Upon completing the interview with the fifth participant, I concluded that no new information or themes were emerging, indicating that I had reached data saturation. Using NVivo 12 software, I organized the study data and conducted the thematic analysis to identify emerging themes and trends for data analysis and interpretation.

In many organizations, project managers' ineffective stakeholder communication strategies have led to unsuccessful project performance (Gupta et al., 2019; Majeed et al., 2021). Consequently, project managers must pay attention to communication with stakeholders to understand their expectations, address issues that may arise, manage conflicting interests, and promote stakeholders' commitment to improving project performance (Riahi, 2017). Effective communication is one of the main elements of project management and the basis for project performance in any organization (Samáková et al., 2018). The four themes I identified in the current study were (a) clear message and written communication, (b) frequent engagement, (c) transparency and sincerity, and (d) active listening and communication plan. Table 2 presents participants' responses and the themes that emerged from the data analysis.

**Table 2**

*Development of Themes*

| Theme | Question 1 | Question 2 | Question 3 | Question 4 | Question 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Clear message and written communication | P1, P4 | P1, P4 | P1, P3, P4, P5 | P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 | P4 |
| Frequent engagement | P1, P3, P5 | P1, P2, P3 | None | P1, P2, P4, P5 | P1, P3, P5 |
| Transparency and sincerity | P1, P2, P4 | P2, P4, | None | P4, P5 | P2, P4, P5 |
| Active listening and communication plan | P3, P4, P5 | P4, P5 | None | P3 | P5 |

**Theme 1: Clear Message and Written Communication**

Project managers could improve project performance by using effective

communication strategies to engage stakeholders (Lauren, 2018; Singh & Jankovitz,

2018). In project communication, project managers should clarify the project scope and

targets and provide information that identifies the project's purposes, products, services

to deliver, and expected stakeholder benefits (Butt et al., 2016; Suleiman, 2022;

Verghese, 2017). The first theme from the interview data was a clear message and written

communication, reflecting the importance of clear communication with stakeholders.

Table 3 presents the frequencies of the responses by the participants on the theme of clear

message and written communication strategies.

**Table 3**

*Clear Message and Written Communication: Participants' Responses and Frequencies*

| Participant | Frequency of use by participants |
| --- | --- |
| P1 | 9 |
| P2 | 4 |
| P3 | 2 |
| P4 | 7 |
| P5 | 4 |

The theme of a clear message and written communication emerged from the interview data. All participants affirmed using clear messages and written communications as a strategy to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Responding to Interview Question 1, P1 said "my two strongest strategies are frequent connect with and clear message to the stakeholders." According to P1, "also key to the success of my project performance is the clarity of my communication with my project stakeholders. Clarity of communication engenders the stakeholders' visibility and transparency of project progress." On further inquiry, P1 assured "with clear communication, project purpose and specific delivery expectations are well known to internal and external stakeholders leading to excellent project performance." In response to Interview Question 1, P4 explained "I make sure my communication to them is clear. I present a clear, concise, and purposeful message to them." Responding to Interview Question 2, P1 affirmed "my experience is that clear communicating help in building trust and fosters transparency and authenticity with the stakeholders." P4 stated that

stakeholders "are usually willing even to have one-on-one engagements with me to clarify any grey areas they may have."

In response to Interview Question 3, P1 noted "for some stakeholders, written communication is better since you cannot speak their language." Responding to Interview Question 3, P3 remarked "the strongest challenge I have faced is that of stakeholders misunderstanding the messages or report I sent to them. I discovered that this problem is caused mainly due to my use of too many technical words." In response to Interview Question 3, P4 attested "a major challenge I have experienced in communication is the misunderstanding of the report." P5 asserted "major challenges I have faced implementing these communication strategies are cultural differences and wrong perception of the intent of the message." The participants acknowledged that clear messages and written communications are critical in engaging stakeholders and improving project performance.

Responding to Interview Question 4, P1 opined "the challenge with language is a matter of clarity in communication." Providing further narrative, P1 added "as a project manager, I try to focus on the clarity of my language when communicating with stakeholders, and that is because I am accountable for what I say, how I say it, and even how my stakeholders understand it." On further inquiry, P1 explained "if they misunderstand it, I will be the one to correct the impressions later, and that would have possibly impacted by project negatively if not detected and corrected on time." In response to Interview Question 4, P2 asserted "I also try to make them sign that any change to the agreed expectations may require change management." P3 noted

"nowadays, I ensure the reports I send to the stakeholders are written with simple words that are easy to understand."

Responding to Interview Question 4, P4 remarked "I try to write my project reports and any communication to the stakeholders in a very simple format to understand." In response to Interview Question 4, P5 affirmed "through sending clear messages, I have been able to manage the wrong perceptions of the intent of the messages." Responding to Interview Question 5, P4 commented "I can easily refer to past communications and agreements to prevent misunderstandings of my messages." P4 noted "showing to the stakeholders what was agreed in the past that they endorsed helps prevent delays in the decision by the stakeholders, especially with multiyear projects that may have experienced some scope or timeline changes."

The company document provided by P2 was the project communication plan that contained the communication protocol. The communication protocol contained the process of communicating with the stakeholders and who is responsible for reviewing and approving the written communication before sharing it with the stakeholders. The communication protocol also contained information about what to share with each stakeholder or stakeholder group and the communication's time, method, and frequency.

The participants' responses to the interview question confirmed knowledge of the discipline aligning with Rankinen et al.'s (2022), Suleiman's (2022), and Verghese's (2017) statements that project managers use clear messages and written communications to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The current study findings demonstrated that project managers used clear messages and written communications as a

communication strategy for engaging stakeholders and improving project performance.

All participants attested to using clear messages and written communications as a

communication strategy to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

**Theme 2: Frequent Engagement**

Consistent engagement of stakeholders throughout a project life cycle is critical to

improving the project performance. Conversely, if project managers fail to adopt

effective communication strategies or apply incomplete or ineffective communication

with the stakeholders, it could lead to project failures (Storey et al., 2017). Frequent and

effective stakeholder communication is a strategy that project managers use to ensure

timely completion of projects and improved productivity (Parks, 2018). The theme of

frequent engagement emerged from Interview Questions 1–2 and 4–5. All but one

participant used frequent engagement as a communication strategy to engage

stakeholders and improve project performance. Table 4 presents the frequency of

participants' responses to the frequent engagement theme.

**Table 4**

*Frequent Engagement: Participants' Responses and Frequencies*

| Participant | Frequency of use by participants |
|---|---|
| P1 | 8 |
| P2 | 0 |
| P3 | 1 |
| P4 | 1 |
| P5 | 7 |

Project managers could gain the trust of their stakeholders by timely and accurate sharing of work execution, delivery, and progress information with them, affirming the need for project managers to build trust with their stakeholders through frequent communication (Amiri et al., 2022; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). Responding to Interview Question 1, P1 opined "my two strongest strategies are frequent connect with and clear message to the stakeholders. I ensure regular and frequent communication with my project stakeholders." According to P1, "with this strategy, I give updates on the project progress to the stakeholders and get inputs from them that help me progress my projects in the right direction, leading to success." P1 could connect with the stakeholders "through meetings, email communications, or even conference calls." In response to Interview Question 1, P3 commented "my strategy is to identify all stakeholders early in the project, engage them to understand their expectations, and establish their communication requirements, mode, and frequency." Responding to Interview Question 1, P5 remarked "during the project delivery, I make sure the communication plan is implemented effectively so that all the stakeholders are engaged according to their requirements and preferred methods."

In response to Interview Question 2, P1 attested "my experience is that communicating clearly and frequently with stakeholders helps build trust and fosters transparency and authenticity with the stakeholders." According to P1, "frequent communication with stakeholders builds a dynamic relationship between the stakeholders and the project managers to enhance stakeholder experience and align the project's goals with stakeholder expectations." Responding to Interview Question 2, P2 stated "with

regular and timely sharing of project progress updates to the stakeholders, project

managers can ensure the effectiveness of the strategy." In response to Interview Question

2, P3 noted "my experience is that I have been very successful with these strategies

because I involve them on time and communicate with them as they require."

I reviewed 2 AAR documents for recently completed projects and one project

audit report from P1. The AAR documents were detailed and specific about the

recommendation from project stakeholders on the effective management of project

communication frequency. This document review made it apparent that although

stakeholders appreciate receiving frequent updates about the project, some may not

appreciate overly frequent reporting unless there are milestone achievements to be

shared. My findings from the review of the project audit report document also received

from P1 supported this position that neither infrequent nor too frequent communication

appeals to stakeholders.

In response to Interview Question 4, P1 noted "when I sense apathy caused by the

frequency of communicating with the stakeholders, I reduce the frequency to such

stakeholders. Instead of sending them weekly updates, I may send monthly summaries."

In agreement, P2 stated "to manage the divergent expectation of the stakeholders, I

ensure timely involvement of the stakeholders and reach an agreement early in the project

of what they expect." Responding to Interview Question 4, P4 attested "where I find out

that a stakeholder has had a bitter experience in the past, … I communicate with them

more frequently to give updates." In response to Interview Question 4, P5 asserted

"through periodic communications of the project status, I have been able to manage the wrong perceptions of the intent of the messages."

Responding to Interview Question 5, P1 remarked, "I also use communication methods that the stakeholders prefer." According to P1, "recognize that each person or community is different and select the most suitable communication channel - email, online platforms, social media, phone, or in-person group meetings." P1 advised, "offer them the options and let them choose what works for them, including the frequency of communication and how detailed they want the reports." In response to Interview Question 5, P3 affirmed, "I make sure I provide periodic feedback to stakeholders on how their interest in the project is being covered and updates on how we are addressing any issues they raised." Responding to Interview Question 5, P5 affirmed, "offer the stakeholders a variety of communication channels and frequency options and establish what works best for each stakeholder group (email, social media, phone calls, and in-person group meetings.)."

Parks (2018), Rankinen et al. (2022), and Ruben and Gigliotti (2017) stated that project managers use frequent engagement as a communication strategy for engaging stakeholders, building trust, and improving project performance. The participant's responses to the interview question aligned with the assertion by Parks, Rankinen, and Gigliotti. The study findings demonstrated that project managers used frequent engagement as a communication strategy for engaging stakeholders and improving project performance. As applied in the current study, all the participants attested to using

frequent engagement as a communication strategy for engaging stakeholders and improving project performance.

**Theme 3: Transparency and Sincerity**

Effective communication with stakeholders is essential for successfully delivering any project (Badewi, 2016; Rajhans, 2018; Suleiman, 2022). Effective communications management creates a culture that promotes trust between the project manager and the stakeholders, encourages stakeholder participation in project decision making, and improves project performance (Shakeri & Khalilzadek, 2020). The theme of transparency and sincerity emerged from Interview Questions 1-2 and 4-5. Three participants recognized the importance of transparency and sincerity in engaging stakeholders and improving project performance confirming the assertion by Suleiman (2022) that poor, infrequent, and unclear communication with stakeholders is one of the root causes of project failure. Table 5 presents the frequencies of participants' responses on the theme "transparency and sincerity."

**Table 5**

*Transparency and Sincerity: Participants' Responses and Frequencies*

| Participant | Frequency of use by participants |
|---|---|
| P1 | 2 |
| P2 | 5 |
| P3 | 0 |
| P4 | 2 |
| P5 | 0 |

Effective communication with stakeholders in a project contributes to the project's visibility and drives transparency with internal and external stakeholders (Ogrezeanu et al., 2017; Van Royen et al., 2022). In response to Interview Question 1, P2 attested, "transparency in communication is the major strategy I use for communicating with my project stakeholders." According to P2, "communicating transparently with stakeholders makes them trust you and feel comfortable working with you as a project manager and make them communicate their expectations clearly with you." On further inquiry, P2 explained, "project managers use transparent communication to ensure that all stakeholders are aligned with the project objectives and their roles to ensure the achievement of the project objective." Responding to Interview Question 1, P4 said, "I also try to be sincere and consistent in my communication to the stakeholders." In response to Interview Question 2, P2 stated, "project managers gain the trust of their stakeholders by transparently and accurately sharing work execution, delivery, and progress information." Responding to Interview Question 2, P4 asserted, "because I tell them the truth about the project, they trust their interests are covered."

I reviewed the project delivery standards and procedures document provided by P4. I also reviewed the AAR and audit report documents provided by P5. Findings from the project delivery standards and procedures document I reviewed indicated transparent and sincere communication with stakeholders as a requirement for project managers. My findings from the reviewed AAR and audit report documents show that stakeholders also appreciate honest and transparent communication from project managers and the project teams. One of the recommendations in the reviewed audit report document was for

organizations to adopt project communication policies that demand honest and transparent communication from project managers.

Responding to Interview Question 4, P4 remarked, "When I find out that a stakeholder has had a bitter experience in the past, I try to be very transparent in communicating with such stakeholders." In response to Interview Question 4, P5 commented, "through transparency in communication, I managed the wrong perceptions of the intent of the messages." Responding to Interview Question 5, P2 advised, "be open-minded and curious so you can better understand the concerns and requirements of your stakeholders. Being open and curious will help to understand the stakeholders better." In response to Interview Question 5, P4 attested, "in addition, when sharing information with stakeholders, I try to be honest, factual, and present the message in a format that is easy to understand." Responding to Interview Question 5, P5 opined, "…telling the stakeholders clearly how you plan to achieve their goals on the project and cover their interests along with that of your organization."

The participant's responses to the interview question aligned with Shakeri and Khalilzadek's (2020), Rajhans's (2018), and Van Royenet al.'s (2022) statements that project managers use transparency and sincerity as a communication strategy for engaging stakeholders and improving project performance. The study findings demonstrated that project managers used transparency and sincerity as a communication strategy to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. As applied in the current study, three participants used transparency and sincerity as a communication strategy to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

**Theme 4: Active Listening and Communication Plan**

Effective communication management is a strategic tool for managing

stakeholders and their varied requirements (Rajhans, 2018; Williams, 2017). Project

managers must agree on their projects' critical success factors to achieve improved

project performance (Dziekonski, 2017). To communicate effectively, project managers

must establish a proper communication management plan that defines involved parties,

determine what information to share, and the appropriate tools and methods to facilitate

the sharing (Marcillo-Delgado et al., 2022; Taleb et al., 2017). The theme of active

listening and communication plan emerged from Interview Questions 1-2 and 4-5. Three

participants acknowledged using active listening and communication plan as a

communication strategy for engaging stakeholders and improving project performance.

Table 6 presents the frequencies of participants' responses on the theme "active listening

and communication plan."

**Table 6**

*Active Listening and Communication Plan: Participants' Responses and Frequencies*

| Participant | Frequency of use by participants |
| --- | --- |
| P1 | 0 |
| P2 | 0 |
| P3 | 2 |
| P4 | 4 |
| P5 | 5 |

Project managers create communication plans to identify project stakeholders,

prepare a strategy to manage their expectations, and provide them with the correct

information at the right time through positive communication (Marcillo-Delgado et al.,

2022; Rajhans, 2018). A manager with active listening skills can effectively assess a problem, diagnose a solution, and help minimize mistakes in the project team and the larger organization (Sfantou et al., 2017). Responding to Interview Question 1, P3 opined, "all this information gathered is what I use to develop a communication plan that addresses the communication requirement of all the stakeholders." In response to Interview Question 1, P4 commented, "I listen actively to the stakeholders. Actively listening to them gives them a sense of trust when I communicate to them." Responding to Interview Question 1, P5 remarked, "then I use this established requirement to develop a communication plan as part of my project setup."

I reviewed the project delivery plan document provided by P5. My findings indicate the need for project managers to develop a robust project communication plan to engage their stakeholders and improve project performance effectively. My review of the audit report document also provided by P5 indicates the need for project managers to listen to their stakeholders to establish communication and other requirements they can integrate into their project delivery and communication plan documents.

Project team members should have a better understanding of their tasks and responsibilities and adopt a well-designed communication plan to increase their chances of achieving their project goals (Kopmann et al., 2017; Mochales & Blanch, 2022). By establishing clear communication strategies to engage their stakeholders, project managers could improve their project performance (Oppong et al., 2017). In response to Interview Question 2, P4 noted, "that tells me they also want to listen to me just as I actively listen to them." Responding to Interview Question 2, P5 asserted, "because I

capture the stakeholder requirements in my communication plan and implement accordingly, I meet their communication needs, … they trust me, and I receive their active support which helps improve my project delivery." In response to Interview Question 4, P3 said, "I also ensure that the reports cover the requirements of each stakeholder as established in the communication plan." Responding to Interview Question 5, P5 advised project managers, "share your established communication plan with the stakeholders."

The participants' responses to the interview question aligned with Kopmann et al.'s (2017), Marcile-Delgado et al.'s (2022), and Sfantou et al.'s (2017) statements that project managers use active listening and communication plan as a communication strategy to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The study findings demonstrated that project managers used active listening and communication plan as a communication strategy for engaging stakeholders and improving project performance. As applied in the current study, three participants attested using active listening and communication plan as a communication strategy to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

**Findings Related to Stakeholder Theory**

The stakeholder theory has evolved to ensure organizations' full consideration of stakeholder interests in their decision, thereby making the theory applicable to many industries (Freeman et al., 2010). Stakeholders could play significant roles in the performance of an organization (Mahalingam, 2022; Sancho et al., 2018); hence organizations must integrate stakeholders into the decision making process (Marcillo-

Delgado et al., 2022; Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Mahalingam's and Sancho et al.'s

elements of stakeholder integration were present in the theme of transparency and

sincerity in communication, which enables project managers to gain the trust of

stakeholders and improve project performance. Stakeholders could have varied

requirements yet interdependent relationships (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016; Van Royen et

al., 2022). Project managers' effective stakeholder communication may improve project

delivery and facilitate business performance (Thompson, 2016). The theme of active

listening and communication plan was present in Aaltonen and Kujala's, Van Royen et

al.'s statement about varied stakeholder requirements and the need for project managers

to cover these varied stakeholder requirements in their communication plan adequately.

The study findings indicate that project managers could engage stakeholders and improve

project performance by implementing communication strategies based on stakeholder

theory. As applied in the current study, all participants affirmed using communication

strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

According to Thompson (2016) on stakeholder theory, effective stakeholder

communication is critical to successful business improvement through successful project

delivery. The primary purpose of communications within an organization for internal and

external stakeholders is for the stakeholders to understand and buy into the company

objectives to improve their performance and achieve the business goal. Based on the

themes presented by participants in the current study, Thompson's elements were present

regarding the impact of effective communication. Also present was Stieb's (2009)

element of securing stakeholders' commitment to project delivery success. The theme of

a clear message and written communication, as was presented by the participants critical in engaging stakeholders to improve project performance.

Stakeholders' interests may change at different stages of the project delivery life cycle (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016). Adequately engaging stakeholders in the organization's processes could enhance stakeholders' confidence, loyalty, and support to improve the organization's performance (Rankinen et al., 2022; Seay, 2015). As the current study applies, project managers should establish communication strategies for engaging stakeholders and improving project performance. Seay's assertions on the adequate engagement of stakeholders manifested in the theme of frequent engagement of stakeholders to secure their support and improve project performance. All participants confirmed the stakeholder theory regarding using communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. As applied in the current study, all participants' responses echoed Rankinen et al.'s (2022), Seay's (2015), and Thompson's (2016) statements on using communication strategies based on the stakeholder theory to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

In applying the stakeholder theory, business leaders are encouraged to develop business models that integrate stakeholders in the business decision making process to enhance value creation and organizational sustainability (Freudenreich et al., 2019). The stakeholder theory also indicates that firms focus on economic values and stakeholder-based performance measures instead of only on economic factors and making money for the shareholders (Suleiman, 2022; Wood et al., 2021). As applied in the current study, project managers used various communication strategies to engage stakeholders and

improve project performance. All participants' responses echoed Freudenreich et al.'s (2019), Suleiman's (2022), and Wood et al.'s (2021) assertions on the crucial roles project managers play in engaging stakeholders and improving project performance. All participants used a combination of strategies involving clear message and written communication, frequent engagement, transparency and sincerity, and active listening and communication plan to engage stakeholders and improve their project performance. As applied in the current study, all participants applied the stakeholder theory principles to engage the stakeholders and improve their project performance.

## Applications to Professional Practice

Identifying the communication strategies that project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance is crucial to the global economy (Biganeh &Young, 2021). Inadequate communication with stakeholders in a project can lead to the failure of the project (Biganeh & Young, 2021; Suleiman, 2022). Effective communications management creates a culture that promotes trust between the project manager and the stakeholders, encourages stakeholder participation in project decision making, and improves project performance (Shakeri & Khalilzadek, 2020). Stakeholders can influence project delivery success by defining the success criteria for the project (Slunge et al., 2017). Project managers could improve project performance by using effective communication strategies to engage stakeholders (Lauren, 2018; Singh & Jankovitz, 2018). All participants affirmed using communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The current study's findings could contribute to business practice by providing project managers with a better understanding

and knowledge of communication strategies needed to engage stakeholders for improved project performance. The findings from the current study could contribute to the literature on project management and provide project managers with new insight regarding communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. New and upcoming project managers may use the current study's findings grouped under the four themes below to understand the communication strategies for engaging stakeholders and improving their project performance.

## Clear Message and Written Communication

To deliver a clear message, project managers should clarify the project scope and targets and provide information that identifies the project's purposes, products, services to deliver, and expected stakeholder benefits (Butt et al., 2016; Rankinen et al., 2022; Verghese, 2017). Project managers may need to identify project stakeholders, their communication needs, preferred methods of communication, the level of details they want, their education, their culture, and provide information that meets such requirements. To deliver written communication, project managers need to improve their writing skills, use a template, and develop a robust communication plan to gain the trust of their stakeholders and improve their project performance (Amiri et al., 2022; Van Royen et al., 2022).

## Frequent Engagement

Project managers build trust with their stakeholders through frequent communication (Rankinen et al., 2022; Vaz-Serra et al., 2022). To improve project performance through frequent stakeholder engagement, Project managers may need to

define and identify their project stakeholders and analyze them to group them into

categories based on their established power, interest, and ability to influence the project.

Project managers may also need to establish a strategy for engaging the stakeholders

considering possible conflicts in stakeholders' expectations, and schedule the key

communication activities.

**Transparency and Sincerity**

Project managers develop trust with the stakeholders through transparent

communication to improve project performance (Amiri et al., 2022; Rankinen et al.,

2022; Shakeri & Khalilzadek, 2020). To achieve transparency in communication with

stakeholders, project managers may need to adopt the transparency functions of timely

disclosing information to the stakeholders, being clear and concise in their information

sharing, and ensuring the accuracy of communication with the stakeholders. Project

managers may also apply the strategies of being consistent with messages shared with the

stakeholders, showing vulnerability by acknowledging mistakes and taking responsibility,

and leveraging technology such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to foster

transparency.

**Active Listening and Communication Plan**

Through active listening and a well-developed communication plan, project

managers identify project stakeholders, prepare a strategy to manage their expectations,

and provide them with the correct information at the right time (Marcillo-Delgado et al.,

2022; Mochales & Blanch, 2022; Rajhans, 2018). Project managers may develop an

effective stakeholder communication plan by identifying the internal and external

stakeholders to their projects, actively listening to the stakeholders to establish their communication requirements, and setting the communication objectives that facilitate the achievement of the organization's set objective. Project managers may also need to establish the communication methods that are most appropriate for each stakeholder group, like email, bulletins, press releases, or online chat rooms. Finally, the project managers may need to create a communication plan dividing the communication by frequency (quarterly, monthly, weekly, daily) and channels according to the needs of the stakeholders

The study results could help project managers understand communication strategies' role in engaging stakeholders for improved project performance. The study findings might add value to the project management community through the dissemination of information which could significantly contribute to information sharing and networking among project managers who seek communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Some project managers with weak communication strategies may apply the current study's findings to engage stakeholders and improve their project performance. The study findings could significantly enhance project managers' performance on communication strategies for engaging stakeholders and improving project performance.

## Implications for Social Change

Knowledge of project performance improvement factors is valuable to project managers, primarily as many organizations nowadays rely on project successes for organizational growth sustainability (Sarja, 2018). By implementing excellent

communication strategies, project managers could improve their project performance and ensure the sustainability of their organizations. With improved business performance, the organizations would pay more corporate taxes, which the municipal government could use to provide social amenities to the local community. Business growth and profitability could contribute to social change by strengthening local economies, sustaining small and medium enterprises, and creating job opportunities, thereby improving the welfare and amenities of the local communities. The implications for a positive social change for the current study include improved project performance and business sustainability, thereby improving the living conditions and well-being of the local citizens.

The study findings might significantly contribute to the economy of the local community. Organizations known for excellent project performance are more likely to attract more business patronage than others (Chou et al., 2016). When organizations are profitable, corporate social responsibility activities might increase, leading to infrastructural and economic development in the rural communities playing host to the companies. Adopting communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance might assist project managers in increasing their company performance, thereby boosting the economic growth of the local community. New aspiring entrepreneurs could use the information from the current study's findings to implement new projects that could create job opportunities for local citizens, thereby promoting socioeconomic growth in the local community. As illustrated in the current study, using effective communication strategies to engage stakeholders might assist

project managers in improving project performance and continue to provide job opportunities to the local community.

A primary function of projects is to provide firms with the opportunity to create and retain business value, therefore making the performance of the projects critical to the success of the organizations (Horning, 2018). Profitable organizations might expand further into more rural communities, leading to more employment opportunities, infrastructural and economic development, human capital development, and possibly improving the country's gross domestic product. The current study's implication for positive social change was engaging stakeholders to improve project performance and sustain the business, thereby maintaining socioeconomic stability for benefiting citizens, families, and communities. By engaging stakeholders and improving project performance, businesses could accomplish their corporate social responsibilities to the local citizens through awards of scholarships, sponsorship of local events, and the building of social amenities such as healthcare, libraries, and schools. The public might learn from the communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

## Recommendations for Action

An effective communication strategy is fundamental in engaging stakeholders and improving project performance. Researchers have demonstrated that cultural differences, trust, geographic distance, and stakeholder expectations significantly affect communication management (Muszyńska, 2018). One major cause of project performance is the lack of communication strategy to engage project stakeholders leading

to poor decision making (Buettner, 2017). The growing complexity of stakeholders'

requirements in project management calls for unique strategies to achieve effective

communication (Bourne, 2016). I recommend that project managers implement a

combination of communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project

performance for their organizations' sustainability. I recommend that project managers

adopt a clear message and written communication strategy to engage stakeholders

frequently and improve their project performance.

Project managers could improve project performance by using effective

communication strategies to engage stakeholders (Lauren, 2018; Singh & Jankovitz,

2018). Despite several decades of a consistent reduction in project failure rates, research

shows that 5% to 42% of projects still fail (Rosato, 2018). Most project failures are due to

poor communication with project stakeholders (Rosato, 2018; Shahzad et al., 2017). A

strategic approach to stakeholder communication is the key to successful project

performance, notwithstanding that the stakeholders might have complex communication

needs (Bourne, 2016). I recommend that project managers establish, implement, and

maintain an effective communication plan and active listening to engage stakeholders and

improve project performance. To sustain their businesses, project managers should

establish guidelines for improving transparency and sincerity in engaging stakeholders

and improving their project performance.

Effective communication management is a strategic tool for managing

stakeholders and their varied requirements (Rajhans, 2018; Williams, 2017). Researchers

should identify communication strategies project managers could use to engage

stakeholders and facilitate successful project performance (Rosato, 2018; Shahzad et al., 2017). Researchers have identified some negative impacts of project failures, including financial losses, lost investment opportunities, and political and reputational damage to organizations (Buettner, 2017; Hughes et al., 2017). To succeed in their project management careers, project managers must be skilled in communication (Samáková et al., 2018). I recommend that project owners adopt appropriate communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve their project performance.

Project failures have huge impacts on organizations, such as financial losses, lost investment opportunities, political damage, and other losses that may be difficult to quantify (Buettner, 2017; Hughes et al., 2017). Effective communications management creates a culture that promotes trust between the project manager and the stakeholders, encourages stakeholder participation in project decision making, and improves project performance (Shakeri & Khalilzadek, 2020). The study findings indicate that project managers use communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. I recommend that project managers should have adequate skills, knowledge, experience, and competency to identify the appropriate communication strategies for engaging stakeholders and improving project performance. I will disseminate the current study's findings to interested groups through presentations in my workplace, social media and network, conferences, seminars and training, and publications in academic and business journals on project management.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the communication strategies some project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. The study findings, recommendations, and conclusions might contribute to existing and future research and close gaps in business practice regarding communication strategies that project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Effective communication is one of the main elements of project management and the basis for project performance in any organization (Samáková et al., 2018; Suleiman, 2022; Van Royen et al., 2022). The current study was limited to a qualitative exploratory single case study involving semistructured interviews to collect primary data from project managers in Nigeria's oil and gas company. I recommend that future researchers replicate the current study using qualitative multiple case studies involving project managers from multiple companies in the industry and quantitative or mixed methods involving project managers from diverse industries and varying geographical locations.

Another limitation of the current study was participants' reluctance to share sensitive information about their projects to protect their organization's interest and fear of competition. Employees' loyalty to their organization usually depends on their satisfaction with working for such an organization (Biganeh & Young, 2022). When employees are deeply committed to their organization, they may be reluctant to share any information about their projects to protect their organization's interests and for fear of competition. A similar limitation is that participants share information from limited

experiences acquired from the single organization selected for the research. I recommend that future researchers embark on multiple case study research that cuts across several organizations to mitigate these limitations.

The sample size in a qualitative study is a critical consideration because it can affect the study outcomes, impact data saturation, and possibly waste time (Malterud et al., 2016). The sample size used by researchers in a qualitative study depends on the degree of certainty the researcher aims to achieve in the study (Schreier, 2018). A significant limitation of the current study was the small sample size of five project managers from an oil and gas company in Nigeria. Researchers who use larger or smaller samples could generate different themes that might show significant differences in the study phenomenon. Therefore, I recommend further studies with a larger sample size from various geographical locations such as Asia, America, and Europe to provide helpful insight into communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance.

The Researcher is the main instrument for conducting qualitative study and has the role of assessing the thoughts and feelings of the study participants professionally and ethically in collecting the study data (Combs, 2017; Yin, 2018). Because I am a novice in academic study, my competency and knowledge of doctoral study are evolving. Therefore, the study was limited to my subjective evaluation and accurate interpretation of the participants' responses to the interview questions. Also, the study was limited to my personal beliefs and professional background with the topic involving the communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve

project performance. Finally, the study was limited to the accuracy of information from the participants and the availability of company archival data. I recommend that future researchers comprise experts from related multi-disciplines in project management to divulge some details I must have omitted in this doctoral study.

## Reflections

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the communication strategies some project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. I completed the CITI web-based training in compliance with ethical study and Walden University IRB's requirements. I secured IRB approval before engaging the participants, improving my understanding of the requirements for using human beings in the study. I used emails and telephone to contact the participants, which allowed me to improve my collaborative, empathy, inspirational, negotiation, innovation, and communication skills. Using the purposive sampling technique, I selected five project managers from an oil and gas company in Nigeria. The purposive sampling enabled me to select five project managers with relevant knowledge, experience, training, skills, and competency to answer the overarching study question.

In conducting the current study, I used the qualitative study method to explore the communication strategies that project managers use to engage stakeholders to improve project performance. I conducted semistructured interviews and interacted with the participants, which improved my self-confidence, networking, emotional intelligence, listening, observation, interpersonal, inspirational, communication, and problem-solving skills. Because I interviewed the participants at their preferred time and date, they

expressed themselves freely, enabling me to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the study problem. The organization and data analysis enabled me to understand the study problem, identify the themes and patterns, and establish the study findings. A reflection of my experiences in the current study indicates that I gained a better understanding of the doctoral study process, thereby improving my skills in conducting academic study work.

From the study findings, I gained an in-depth knowledge of the study problem from five project managers in an oil and gas company in Nigeria regarding their use of communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. I learned that project managers use a blend of communication strategies involving clear message and written communication, frequent engagement, transparency and sincerity, and active listening and communication plan to engage stakeholders and improve their project performance. My new knowledge and understanding of the study problem positively changed my preconceived beliefs, ideas and values, personal bias, and perceptions of communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve their project performance.

## Conclusion

Project managers in the oil and gas industry face challenges in using communication strategies to engage stakeholders to improve project performance. Many projects fail in the oil and gas industry because the project managers fail to use the appropriate communication strategies the engagement of their stakeholders. In this qualitative case study, I engaged five project managers with five open-ended questions to

explore communication strategies they use to engage their stakeholders to improve their project performance. The four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of data gathered were (a) clear message and written communication, (b) frequent engagement, (c) transparency and sincerity, and (d) active listening and communication plan.

These findings could potentially provide project managers with the communication strategies to engage their stakeholders and improve project performance. Application of the identified communication strategies by the project managers could facilitate increased productivity for the organization, business growth and profitability, economic growth for the government, and improved social amenities to improve the living conditions and well-being of the local citizens. The use of stakeholder theory as lenses for the current study might fill a gap in the literature on project management. The study findings align with previous scholars' conclusions regarding implementing effective communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. There is hardly a singular communication strategy that could enable project managers to achieve improved project performance through effective stakeholder engagement. Project managers need to invest time in selecting the most effective communication strategies they can use to engage their stakeholders and achieve improved project performance.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What communication strategies are you using to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

2. How effective are the communication strategies you use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

3. What are the challenges you face in using the communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

4. What steps did you take to overcome the challenges you faced in using the communication strategies to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

5. What additional information can you provide regarding communication strategies project managers can use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

My name is Joshua Ukoha. I am completing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) requirements at Walden University. I request your assistance with collecting data for my doctoral study. The purpose of this qualitative single case study is to explore communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve project performance. Your participation in the current study may provide information that would help explore communication strategies project managers use to engage stakeholders and improve the performance of their projects.

Participation in the current study is voluntary, and you can withdraw anytime.

Participation in the current study is confidential; I will not share your name, location, position, and other personal information that may identify you.

**Background Information on Interviewer:**

- I will introduce myself to the participants, send them a printed copy of the consent form by email, and review and sign the form with them as a commitment to proceed with the interview.

- I will clarify any concerns raised by participants, seek their permission to turn on the audio recording device, and turn on the audio recording device.

- I will introduce the participants with aliases (PT1, PT2, PT3, etc.) and identification codes and note the date and time.

**Background Information on Interviewee:**

**Participant's Numeric Identifier:**

**Date of Interview:**          **Gender:**

I will appreciate the participants for contributing to the study.

End of the interview protocol.

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation

November 10, 2021

**Letter of Invitation**

Dear Sir/Madam,

As part of my doctoral study at Walden University, I would like to invite you to

participate in a study to explore communication strategies project managers use to engage

stakeholders and improve project performance. The current study's findings may help

project managers in the Nigerian oil and gas industry improve project performance. The

participants for the current study will comprise five project managers from an oil and gas

company that have successfully used communication strategies to engage project

stakeholders and improve their project performance.

The mode of data collection shall be via audio/video conference and telephone interviews

of approximately 45 minutes. You may also be requested to provide documentation that

is otherwise made available to the public regarding communication strategies you have

used to engage stakeholders and improve the performance of your projects. The

audio/video conference and a telephone interview will be voice recorded. All data

collected will be treated as confidential, and your participation in the study is voluntary.

Soon after I complete the interview transcription, I will ask you to verify that I correctly

transcribed the interview. I will send you the transcript electronically via email and

request a response within three days if revisions are needed.

Enclosed with this letter is the Participant Consent Form. If you are interested in

participating in the study, kindly review the form and send an email with the words "I

consent." If you need any clarifications about the study, you may contact the researcher via phone at (+234) 8120366099 or email at ukoha53@gmail.com.

Best Regards,

Joshua Ukoha