

Original article

THE MEDIATION ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT IN ENHANCING PUBLIC CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS SUCCESS – THE CASE OF UGANDA

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Abstract: Developing economies rely heavily on construction projects. However, not much is known about how stakeholders' engagement and leadership styles affect public construction project success. This study examines whether, the relationship between leadership styles and the success of public construction projects in Uganda is mediated by stakeholders' engagement. Next, develops a model explaining the success of Ugandan public construction projects. In order to verify hypotheses, we adopted a cross-sectional quantitative design using structural equation modeling and SPSS. With a theoretical lens, a model that incorporates the complimentary effect of path goal and stakeholder theory helped to explain factors influencing project success. Based on a sample of 100 KCCA Construction projects, results indicate leadership style is correlated to project success; stakeholders' engagement partly mediates the connection between leadership styles and public construction project' success. Using a developing country (Uganda) in sub-Saharan Africa, the study adds to the literature on public project performance.

Keywords: Leadership styles; Public construction project; Stakeholder engagement; Success; Uganda.

1. INTRODUCTION

The impact of government construction projects in developed and developing countries cannot be under looked. For instance, construction projects contribute a total of 80% of all capital assets, creation of employment opportunities and above 50% of the money spent in fixed assets (Owoo & Lambon-Quayefio, 2018). To realise project goals needs collaboration, strategy and committed stakeholders to finish projects on time and within budget

while maintaining quality (Ssenyange, 2023).

Leadership styles and stakeholders' engagement are valuable for successful project performance for numerous reasons. Stakeholders' engagement is critical in enhancing the credibility of projects, coordination of activities, decision making, cooperation, trust, and commitment that are relevant in increasing probabilities of project success (Nangoli, Namagembe, Ntayi & Ngoma, 2012). In addition, leadership style is important because it

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influences the stakeholders' effort towards attainment of project goals (Nakato, 2019). Project managers with suitable leadership styles realise stakeholder engagement, quality and appropriate decisions (Famakin & Abisuga, 2016). The ability of a manager to engage stakeholders leads to generation of innovative ideas of change, improved output, and a decrease in stakeholder resistance and disputes (Akpoviroro et al., 2018). Resulting in advanced levels of execution for goals. To overcome Uganda's shortfalls in project performance, such project managers and strategies are needed. The research question therefore relates to how leadership styles, stakeholder engagement, and project performance interact.

Various researchers that explored project performance concentrated on other viewpoints for example Kariuki (2015) looked at teamwork, Sunindijo (2015) concentrated on project managers skills and Agile practices (Malik et al., 2021) neglecting leadership styles and stakeholder engagement. Yet studies have called for research on these variables (Podgórska & Pichlak, 2019; Ssenyange et al., 2017) which the instant study has addressed. Additionally, studies that tested stakeholder engagement's mediating effects have tested it with other business activities (Nantumbwe, 2019; Ngu & Amran, 2018) besides leadership styles and success among public construction projects, which the current study research investigates. A model was also developed specifically for project managers in Uganda, where project success is still a challenge despite several studies ignoring it (Balyejjusa, 2015). As such, the study answered calls for African studies about the link between leadership styles, stakeholders' engagement and construction project success which most scholars negated. Thus, this study supplements literature by using results from a geographically distinctive country, such as Uganda.

Methodically, studies on project performance usually adopt only case studies or a qualitative approach (Zhu & Mostafavi, 2017). In spite of the fact that case studies allow a deeper understanding of a research problem, they are not applicable to other study sceneries (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The study used a quantitative approach to generate inferential, confirmatory, and deductive findings. In addition, the quantitative approach was ideal as it helped confirm hypotheses and is generalizable to other settings. As such a questionnaire was appropriate due to the large sample we adopted.

This study is also theoretically based on two theories. We believe a multi-theoretical approach based on stakeholder theory and path-goal theory provides a better understanding of a mediating effect of stakeholders' engagement in the relationship between project success and leadership style (Nag, Hamrick & Chen, 2007). This study contributes to the ongoing performance studies debate in Africa about public construction project performance by discussing the role of leadership styles and stakeholders' engagement in explaining performance problems.. Also, the study builds on earlier research that established an impact of leadership styles on public construction projects' performance (Ssenyange, 2023; Kariuki, 2015). Using a multi-theoretical approach, the study integrates constructs from path goal and stakeholder theories to explain public construction project performances in the Ugandan context. As a result, an African context on the concept of public construction project performance will be better understood. As such, the public construction-related problems that plague Africa will be eliminated as project success will be enhanced, resulting in economic development. Again, from the theoretical perspective, the study employs path goal theory to examine how leadership styles assist public construction projects

succeed. The stakeholder theory that was adopted helps to explain the importance of stakeholders' engagement in enhancing performance of public construction projects. Policy makers may adopt results of the study to come up with suitable policies that enhance successful performance of public projects to improve the development of economies as well as standards of living in Uganda as a country.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical foundation

The study used stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) in order to identify how stakeholders' engagement correlates with leadership styles and public project's success. Stakeholder theory affirms that construction projects have various stakeholders with genuine interests, expectations, and objectives that sometimes conflict (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). It emphasises the need for project managers to balance stakeholders' aspirations as they are important in achieving stakeholders' engagement in projects (Freeman, 1984). Accordingly, stakeholders shall trust, get committed and cooperative to see that what was set out to be achieved by the project at the end is realised during project implementation. It is believed that project leaders can maximize stakeholders' engagement by managing stakeholders' expectations, concerns, and interests (Nie et al., 2019). To ensure effective stakeholder engagement, the project leaders' style is pivotal. Stakeholder theory is inadequate in explaining the appropriate leadership styles that should be adopted by project

leaders to realise successful project performance thus the need for path goal theory advanced by House (1996).

Path-goal theory advanced by House (1996) holds that no single leadership style is ideal or exceptional for every project scenario. A style adopted by a leader that matches the project's surrounds clarifies the pathway stakeholders adopt to reach individual and project goals and eradicate barriers that block their way (House, 1996). Leaders of this kind provide expectations of performance and a clear path for achieving them and guide stakeholders towards achieving their goals (Mwaisaka, 2019). While advancing participation and communication leadership styles in addition to others, the theory explains that Stakeholders can complete tasks when leaders give them sufficient information about tasks and permit them to participate in project choices (House, 1996). In this manner, a project manager lessens the obstacles that project stakeholders face and facilitates their progress to the accomplishment of project objectives (Mwaisaka et al., 2019). With this in place, when stakeholders have sufficient knowledge about how the project helps them, while working on the project, they are happy to dedicate themselves to it, have faith in it, and work together. The instant research aids the path -goal theory by providing insights on the connection between construction project success and leadership styles where project leaders that embrace appropriate leadership styles depending on the project situation realise successful projects.

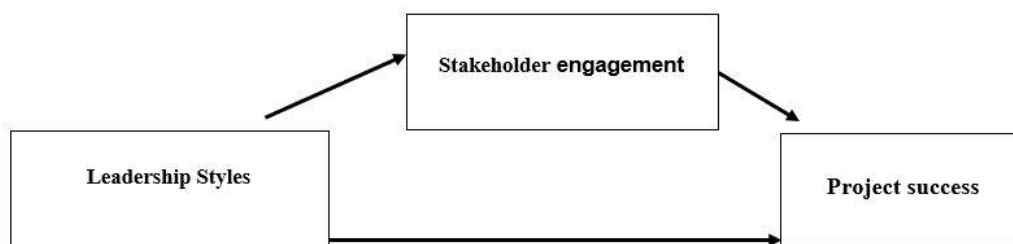


Figure 1: Proposed model for public construction project success

2.2 Empirical literature review and hypothesis formulation

2.2.1 Relationship between Leadership styles and public construction project success

The leadership approach used by a project manager while executing projects plays a vital role in construction projects whose success is assessed by finishing projects under budget, on schedule, and upholding quality standards (Ssenyange, 2023). Leadership style impacts and aids the stakeholders' effectiveness towards achieving project objectives (Cheong & Mustaffa, 2017). There are several parties involved in publicly sponsored construction projects, each with their own interests and planned actions that have beginning and ending dates (Ssenyange and Kudakwashe, 2023; Msengana, 2012). For a project to succeed, effective leadership is required to coordinate efforts, mobilize resources, convey ideas, and mobilize stakeholders (Mwaisaka, 2019). For example, Communication leadership helps stakeholders build Building harmony, trust, dedication, contentment, interactions, and mutually cooperative connections that enable execute project tasks (Ssenyange et al., 2017). Moreover, participation/involvement of stakeholders permits sharing project information, stakeholders' motivation, commitment, support, cooperation and attaining project objectives (Raziq et al., 2018). It is vital to note, project leaders dictate the performance of project members during the course of the project towards project success and to achieve their goals (Kerzner, 2013). Conversely, without effective leadership styles and abilities, projects will stall, face conflict, and produce subpar outcomes, despite the fact that many nations finance building initiatives (Liphadzi et al., 2015). Hence, we hypothesis as follows:

H1: Success of public projects is positively correlated with leadership styles

2.2.2 The relationship between leadership style and project success is mediated by stakeholders' engagement

Numerous scholars for example Okello (2018) and Shokory and Suradi (2018) confirm the mediating role of stakeholders' engagement in connection between leadership style and project success. Project leaders, who aid stakeholders all through the project life cycle, accomplish the set project objectives (Murugesan, 2012). Similar to this, the leadership style embraced by a project leader is central to engagement of stakeholders and accomplishment of projects as desired (Kuria, Namusonge, & Iravo, 2016). The acknowledgement that leadership styles may either engage or disengage stakeholders, which affects their commitment, trust, and cooperation (Dias & Borges, 2017). Numerous studies, including those already mentioned, attest that stakeholders' engagement mediates the link between project success and leadership style. However, majority studies paid attention to corporate citizenship projects within commercial banks unlike public construction projects where numerous stakeholders represent diverse interests. Not forgetting the majority of the studies were carried out in other countries. A Ugandan perspective where cases of project failure are high (Balyejusa, 2015), would add to the discourse about how stakeholders' engagement acts as a mediator in the association between project success plus leadership style. Our study will give project leaders recommendations and a model to help public construction projects succeed more. Based on the literature and theory, we propose that stakeholder engagement mediates the relationship between leadership styles and public construction project success.

H2: stakeholders' engagement mediates the relationship between leadership styles and performance of public construction projects in Uganda

3. DESIGN, POPULATION, SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The study used a cross-sectional quantitative research approach and a six likert scale self-administered questionnaire to collect data. 100 projects as a sample was drawn out of 120 public construction projects that KCCA has completed and

stratified according to the 5 divisions of KCCA was adopted (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). A contractor, project manager, local council leader and engineer were chosen from every project that was chosen, so as to obtain 400 responders for the study and 335 useable responses got returned. Table 1 exemplifies the characteristics of respondents.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Variable	Measurement	Count	Valid percentage
Age group	18-30	59	17.6
	31-45	183	54.6
	46-65	70	20.9
	66-74	19	5.7
	75+	4	1.2
	Total	335	100.0
Highest level of education	Primary	7	2.1
	O' Level	13	3.9
	A' Level	12	3.6
	Certificate	30	9.0
	Diploma	104	31.0
	Bachelors	99	29.6
	Postgraduate Degree	59	17.6
	Masters	10	3.0
	Others	1	0.3
	Total	335	100.0

Source: Primary data

3.1 Measurement of variables

Leadership style was measured by the constructs of communication and participation (Arnstein, 1969; Goldhaber & Rogers; 1979; Kanungo, 1982). Stakeholders' engagement was measured by the constructs of cooperation, commitment, and trust (Ekung, 2014; Krick et al., 2005; Singh & Avital, 2007). Success of public construction project was measured based on completion time, cost, and quality (Ssenyange and Kudakwase, 2023; Bello, 2017).

3.2 Data analysis

The inter-item test was conducted to assess a Cronbach Alpha Coefficient and results were above 0.7, an indication that the questionnaire's internal reliability was reliable (Bajpai & Bajpai, 2014). Average

Variance Extracted and composite reliability were adopted to evaluate convergence validity and results were above 0.5 and 0.7 respectively meeting the acceptable level (Henseler et al., 2015). Using a heterotrait-monotrait ratio, discriminant validity was also measured, because the results were below 0.90, discriminant validity was achieved (Henseler et al., 2015). Using SPSS version 27 software, descriptive analysis provided the population summary, while inferential statistics(structural equation modeling assessed the relationship between study variables. As proposed by Anderson and Gerbing(1988), a two-step method beginning with CFA was used to estimate a measurement model, then structural equation model was employed in estimating a hypothesized structural model.

The structural model fit aided the study to evaluate if the hypothesized theory corresponded with the collected data. As a general rule, structural equation models were validated by goodness-of-fit indices (see table 2) prior to testing whether they are consistent per theoretical prospects (Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2018). This

study followed Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation principle to assess for mediation of stakeholder engagement. This study employed exploratory factor analysis using principal component analysis (PCA) to find factors that linked and explained study variables' variance.

Table 2: Study fit indices summary adopted

Fit index	Acceptance level	Remarks
<i>Absolute fit indices</i>		
GFI	0.90 or higher	A value close to 1 signifies an optimal fit.
RMSEA	0.05 – 0.08	A value below 0.50 is considered
<i>Incremental fit indices</i>		
NFI	0.90 or higher	A value close to 1 signifies an optimal fit
TLI	0.90 or higher	A value close to 1 signifies an optimal fit
CFI	0.90 or higher	A value close to 1 signifies an optimal fit
<i>Parsimonious fit indices</i>		
CMIN/DF	$1.0 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 5$	The lower limit is 1.0, and the higher limit is either 3.0 or as high as 5.0.

Source: Ssenyange(2023); Hair et al. (2018) and Hair et al.(2010)

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive statistics of latent variables

Table 3 displays summaries of standard deviation plus mean scores for the project success variable, stakeholder engagement, and leadership styles. Table 3 illustrates that, on a 6-point Likert scale, the mean scores for project success, stakeholder engagement, and leadership styles are 3.623, 3.659, and 3.661, respectively. The

standard deviations for these scores are 0.819, 0.846, and 0.886 for the respective categories. Due to small standard deviation equated to the mean, it showed that data was widely dispersed, data points were close the mean, and as such the assessed mean greatly depicted the observed data (Field, 2018). A suggestion that respondents had a similar comprehension of the study variables and opinions regarding the questions posed (Bashir, 2018).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for latent variables

Latent variables	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Error	SD
Leadership Styles	335	1.000	5.882	3.559	0.049	0.819
Stakeholders' engagement	335	1.308	5.667	3.661	0.046	0.846
Project Success	335	1.375	5.938	3.623	0.048	0.886

Source: Researcher's own construction

4.2 Measurement estimation

We performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the Amos Program to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement models. In lieu of each construct, CFA was performed using just the dimensions of those items and the corresponding elements that were kept at

EFA. Each measurement model's fit indices; project success (GFI =.980, CFI =.992, TLI = 0.988), leadership styles (TLI = 0.995, GFI =.976, CFI =.996), and stakeholders' engagement (GFI = 0.979, TLI = 0.966, CFI = 0.988,) show that three models achieved the acceptable fit with the data (Hair et al., 2010). Figure 2, 3and 4 shows this.

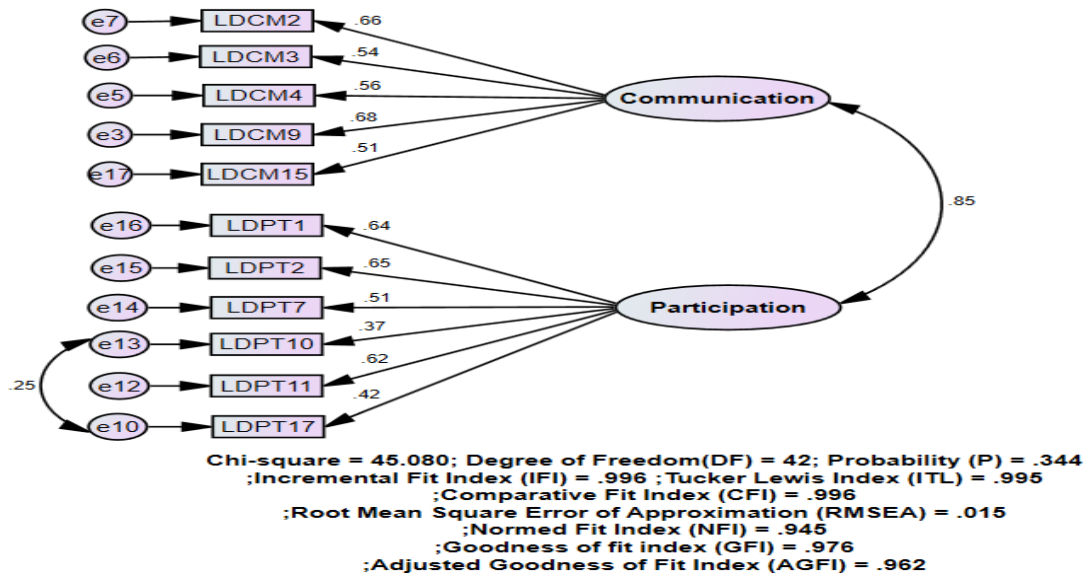


Figure 2: Confirmatory factor analysis model for leadership styles

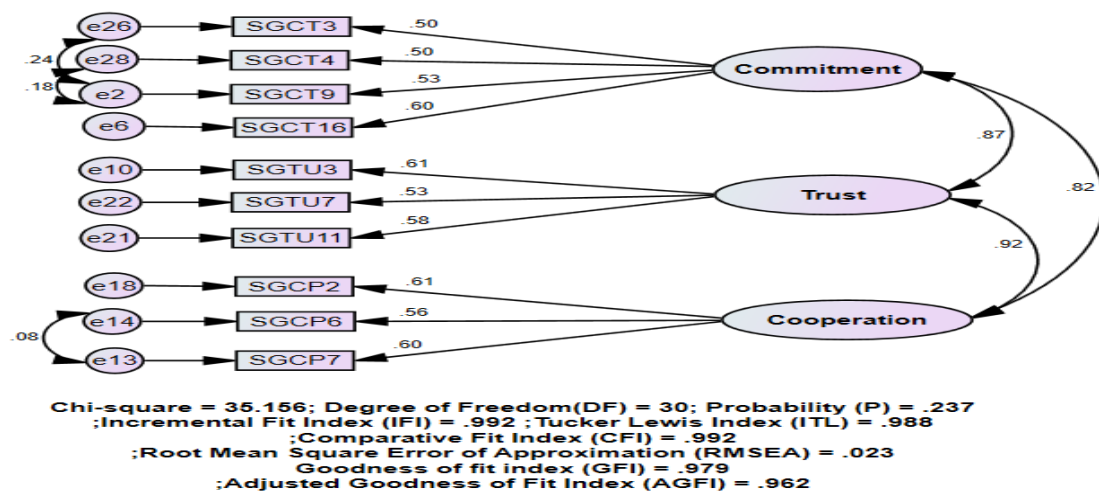


Figure 3: Confirmatory factor analysis model for stakeholder engagement

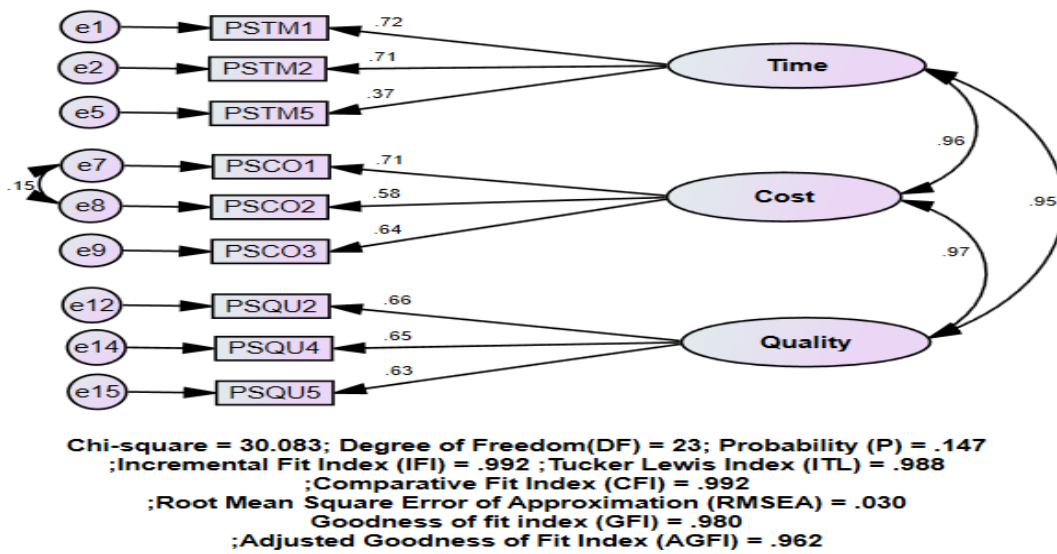


Figure 4: Confirmatory factor analysis model for project success

4.3 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

With AMOS, a structural equation model was developed to examine mediating function of stakeholders' engagement in the connection between leadership style and accomplishment of Uganda's public construction projects. According to the results, the measurement models fitted the observed data well. Hence, the independent variable, mediator, and outcome variable were combined into a single SEM model. A first model (non-mediated) was constructed to investigate the direct influence by fusing the exogenous variable of leadership style with the endogenous variable of public construction project success. By including stakeholders' engagement (mediator) in a relationship between leadership style and success of public construction projects (dependent), the second model (mediated model) was created. This model was made purposely to evaluate the indirect effect of stakeholders' engagement (mediating) in a relationship between the independent and dependent variables of leadership style and project success. Findings revealed the Baron and Kenny (1986) four principles of mediation were achieved. Table (4) illustrates a direct

relationship (Beta=0.511) between leadership styles and project success, as well as a direct relationship (Beta=0.840; S.E =.098) between leadership styles and stakeholders' engagement and the significant direct relationship (Beta=.452) between stakeholders' engagement and project success. After controlling stakeholders' engagement, the direct impact of leadership styles on project success decline but remained significant ($\beta = 0.511, p < 0.01$ to $\beta = 0.380, p < 0.01$). This revealed that stakeholders' engagement plays a partial role in mediating the association between leadership styles and project success in Ugandan public construction. This supports hypothesis (H2) of this study. Results showed a Chi-square (χ^2) 62.449 with 49 degree of freedom(df) and a probability level of 0.094 was found in the data; the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) posted 0.983 over the suggested threshold of 0.95, and incremental Fit Index (TLI) stood at 0.988 above the suggested cut-off point of 0.95. The Root mean square error (RMSEA) was 0.029 below the threshold of ≤ 0.08 , CFI (comparative Fit Index) was 0.987 over the indicated barrier of 0.90, GFI (Goodness of Fit index) was 0.971 and the Adjusted Goodness of Fit index was 0.953.

Figure 5 displays the result of the project success measurement model.

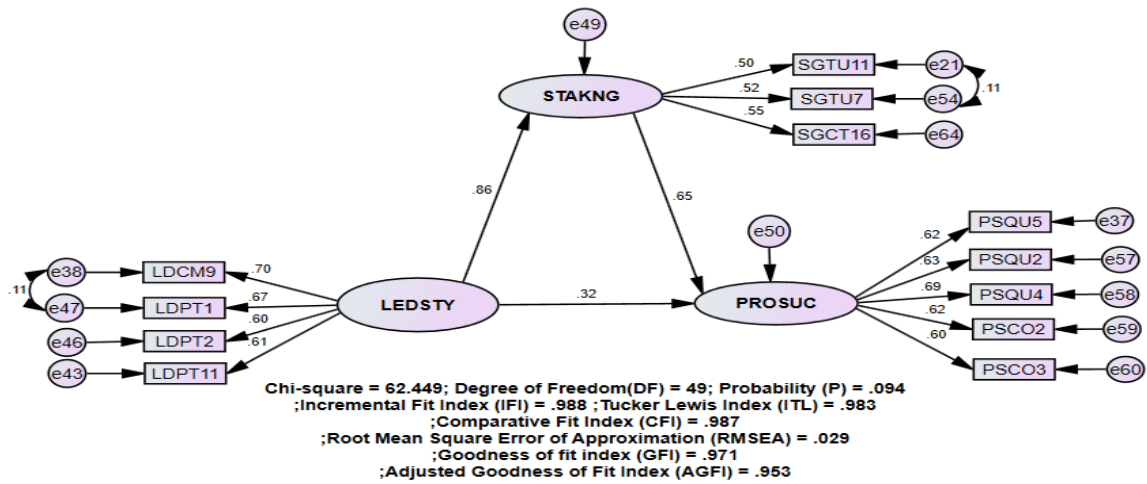


Figure 5: Overall structural model explaining project success

Furthermore, the test for direct effect was also performed on hypothesis 1 derived in this study and results (table 4) disclosed significant and positive link between leadership styles and public construction

project success in Uganda (Beta=0.511, SE=0.162, t-value=2.62, p-value=.006). This supports hypothesis (H1) of this study.

Table 4: Results on direct paths

Mediated model statistics	Unstandardized Coeff.	S.E	C.R	Standardised Coeff.	P
Stakeholder engagement ← leadership styles	.706	.098	7.178	.840	***
Project success ← leadership styles	.441	.162	2.727	.511	.006
Project success ← Stakeholder Engagement	.464	.205	2.262	.452	0.24
Direct effects					
Project success ← leadership style	.756	.090	8.440	.890	***

p (Two Tailed) *** < .01

Source: Researchers own construction

Table 5: SEM mediation results

Variable	Leadership styles	Stakeholder engagement	Project success
Standardised direct effects			
Stakeholder engagement	.840**	.000	.000
Project success	.511**	.452**	.000
Standardised indirect effects			
Stakeholder engagement	.000	.000	.000
Project success	.380**	.000	.000
Standardised total effects			

Stakeholder engagement	.840**	.000	.000
Project success	.891**	.452**	.000
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<i>p</i> (Two tailed) ** < .05			
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<i>Indirect effect for leadership styles and project success mediated by stakeholders' engagement</i>			
<i>Mediator: Stakeholder engagement</i>	<i>Leadership styles</i>	<i>Bias corrected p-value for indirect effect</i>	<i>Type of mediation</i>
Project success	.380**	.014	<i>Partial mediation</i>
<hr/>			
<i>Bootstrap confidence interval boundaries</i>			
Lower bound	.187		
Upper bound	.761		

Source: Researcher's own construction

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to determine whether stakeholder engagement mediates the relationship between leadership styles and success of public construction projects in Uganda.

5.1 Leadership style and project success

Results revealed that leadership styles and project success in Uganda are significantly and positively related (Beta=0.511, SE=0.162, p-value=.006). This supports hypothesis (H1) of this study. The study results agree with Oyaya (2016) who suggests that the styles project leaders embrace play a vital role in accomplishment construction projects as desired. Cheong and Mustafa (2017) contend that leadership style impacts the performance of stakeholders to accomplish projects as desired and meet set goals. In addition, the results validate the path goal theory, which theorises that leaders who adopt leadership styles that clarify and remove obstacles in stakeholder paths motivate them to achieve project objectives (House, 1996).

5.2 Leadership style and public construction project success: stakeholders' engagement as Mediator

The study's findings indicate that stakeholders' engagement

partly mediates a relationship between leadership style and successful completion of public construction projects in Uganda. This supports hypothesis (H2) of this study. It is on record that the styles leaders' uses while executing projects define the behaviour and path stakeholders take in projects (Nakato, 2019). Communicating with stakeholders and outlining project objectives, goals, and advantages gives stakeholders the knowledge they need to either engage or disengage, which is essential to achieving project success. Similarly, Matloob (2018) revealed that stakeholders exhibit greater trust and commitment to the project when they perceive a leader to be fair and participatory.

5.3 Study's implications

The study offers implications for theory and practice. The study supplements theoretical depth towards the bulk of knowledge concerning the mediating function of stakeholders' engagement in the connection between public project success and leadership style. Moreover, our research provides evidence that is unique in literature indicating that the association between leadership style with Uganda's public construction project success is partially mediated by stakeholder engagement. Since success of public construction projects is swayed by

stakeholder engagement, project managers must ensure that stakeholders are adequately informed about project objectives, advantages and tasks of their work through the right channels. This will make it easier for leaders and stakeholders to understand one another, reducing the likelihood of project delaying arguments.

Secondly, to facilitate a project's seamless transition transitioning between project stages, openness and continuous communication must be ensured throughout project implementation. Presence of transparent and truthful communication reduces waste, expensive reworks, litigation, and fosters increased stakeholder cooperation.

Once more, project managers should use communication and participation styles of leadership that are appropriate for the stakeholders and the circumstances of the project. For example, participation leadership promotes consultation, authority delegation, and group decision-making. Leaders and stakeholders work hard to finish high – quality standard projects on schedule and within budget.

Finally, project managers must formulate tactics that will get stakeholders engaged with their projects. This can be accomplished by using participation and communication leadership philosophies that are appropriate for the stakeholders and project circumstances. After this is set up, stakeholders will commit to the project, work together, and have faith in one another to complete it on schedule.

5.4 Limitations and research direction

While the findings from the study are significant, the data was collected from only Ugandan government\ public construction projects. Subsequent research could collect data from other developing countries for purposes of generalization of the findings from this study.

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