

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS OF POOR PROJECT GOVERNANCE IN A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PROJECT ENVIRONMENT: STAKEHOLDER INSIGHTS

Thabo Khafiso¹, Siyamthanda Makhwabe², Sizolwakhe Mtetwa³, Motheo Meta Tjebane⁴, Miranda Mvusi⁵ and Molusiwa Ramabodu⁶

^{1&4-6}Department of Construction Management and Quantity Surveying, Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, Durban University of Technology, South Africa

²Department of Built Environment, Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, Central University of Technology, Free State, South Africa

³Department of Building Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

DOI: 10.36108/cbpm/2026.0163

Abstract

Good governance in construction projects improves project performance by reducing risks, enhancing transparency and stakeholder trust, preventing disputes and cost overruns, and ensuring timely delivery and quality outcomes. The purpose of this study is to examine how poor project governance affects project performance, relationships, and decision-making within multi-stakeholder project environments from the perspectives of the involved stakeholders. The study used a mixed-method research approach, including both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A total of 83 construction professionals participated in the survey, while 15 additionally took part in the interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, whilst qualitative data were assessed using thematic analysis. The study found that a lack of good project governance negatively impacts the project performance and compromises project objectives. Due to poor communication and inadequate project governance, the projects mostly fall behind on their milestones. The study suggests that enhancing stakeholder collaboration, clarifying roles, and strengthening communication channels can significantly improve governance effectiveness and project outcomes in complex construction environments

Keywords: Project Governance, Stakeholder Engagement, Multi-Stakeholder Environment, Construction Projects, Governance Challenges

1. Introduction

Project governance is a critical aspect of project success, particularly in multi-stakeholder environments where diverse actors, interests, responsibilities, and expectations must be coordinated to achieve common objectives (Woldesenbet 2020). Dick-Sagoe et al. (2023) assert that Ineffective governance structures often lead to weak accountability, poor decision-making, communication breakdowns, stakeholder conflicts, delays, cost overruns, and reduced project performance. In complex project environments, governance provides the framework through which roles are clarified, decisions are made, risks are managed, and stakeholders are aligned (Gamlati et al. 2024). However, dealing with project governance in a multi-stakeholder setting is inherently difficult because projects involve diverse participants such as clients, consultants, contractors, project managers, government bodies, communities, and end-users, each with different priorities and levels of influence. These differences can create power imbalances, fragmented

communication, unclear authority structures, and competing interests, making it challenging to maintain transparency, coordination, and accountability throughout the project lifecycle.

Project Governance refers to the frameworks of rules, relationships, systems, and processes through which projects are directed and through which decision-making, accountability, and productivity are controlled (Too and Weaver 2014; Garland 2009; Muller 2017). Kerzner (2025) argues that it guides in terms of how the project objectives are set, responsibilities are allocated, and monitoring is achieved throughout the project lifecycle. In the construction industry, projects are often large, complex, and of high risk, which necessitates effective project governance to ensure that the project becomes a success (Datta et al. 2025; Famoti et al. 2025). Construction projects frequently involve significant investment, tight schedules, regulatory scrutiny, and quality expectations, all of which demand robust governance mechanisms to guide execution, manage risks, and ensure accountability. Ominde et al.

¹ Corresponding Author

Email address: khafisothabo@gmail.com

(2025) state that, since the construction industry involves multiple stakeholders with different backgrounds and interests, governance is vital to ensure all stakeholders are of one mind and one interest, thereby enhancing the achievement of project objectives.

These stakeholders typically include clients, contractors, consultants, suppliers, regulatory bodies, and affected communities (Musonda et al. 2025). Their dynamic interactions influence the success or failure of governance systems. Stakeholder engagement in governance is not merely administrative but strategic, as it fosters transparency, promotes shared decision-making, and enhances trust and legitimacy (Vickneswaran 2025). Anjum (2025) states that poor stakeholder alignment or exclusion from governance processes can lead to conflict, project delays, or even failure. Therefore, understanding stakeholder dynamics is critical to the design and implementation of governance structures in construction projects. Despite the known benefits of governance, there remains a significant gap in implementing effective governance in construction projects. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring stakeholder insights into impacts of project governance in multi-stakeholder construction environments. By gathering qualitative data from professionals across various roles, such as project managers, quantity surveyors, engineers, and contractors, the study aims to understand how governance is practiced, perceived, and influenced on the ground.

2. Literature review

2.1. Role of stakeholders in project success and governance

Construction projects, like any other projects, involve various stakeholders, including clients, project managers, consultants, contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, regulatory bodies, and community representatives (Olanrewaju 2025; Kadan and Wium 2025). Stakeholders play a very critical role in project success and the effectiveness of project governance in construction projects. The involvement of stakeholders is crucial from the planning phase through subsequent project phases to commissioning and handover (Frommweiler and Poirier 2025). Therefore, stakeholder engagement is not just a good practice but a necessity and a critical element of project governance, ensuring accountability, transparency, and alignment with project objectives. One of the key contributions by the stakeholders in decision-making and governance guidelines often relies on multiple stakeholders' contributions to enhance balanced and informed decisions (Vickneswaran 2025). Clients and sponsors typically provide strategic direction and financial support, while contractors and consultants contribute technical expertise (Sonkar 2025). Furthermore, stakeholders contribute to effective risk management

and compliance, which are very critical components of governance. By involving stakeholders early in the project, project stakeholders can identify potential legal, environmental, financial, and operational risks (Osifo et al. 2025).

Moreover, regulatory authorities assist in compliance with safety and environmental standards and zoning laws (Xu et al. 2025). Contractors, on the other hand, as stakeholders, contribute information on project feasibility and resource availability, while the community can highlight potential social and cultural issues (Li et al. 2025). Stakeholder engagement enhances project communication and knowledge sharing. Project governance mainly depends on clear, timely, and structured communication channels that stakeholders help maintain, and when stakeholders are well informed and regularly consulted, misunderstandings are avoided (Wood et al. 2025). According to Enechi and Pattberg (2025), communication with stakeholders helps align expectations and fosters mutual understanding, especially in multi-stakeholder environments where interests may conflict. Transparent communication practices should be embedded in governance frameworks so that they have a positive impact on the project outcomes

3. Research methodology

Research methodology is a systematic approach and strategy for gathering data from respondents (Kumar and Praveenakumar 2025). It includes a philosophical stance, methods of data collection, analytical tools, and steps to validate and assess the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, research design is a guideline that outlines how data will be collected, measured, and analyzed to address the research question and research objectives (Dharavath 2025, Apriani et al. 2025, Ariyandy et al. 2025). Common research designs include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The chosen research methodology for this study was mixed-methods research. This methodology aimed to integrate qualitative and quantitative research methods to leverage the strengths of both approaches and address their limitations, while providing more comprehensive insights into the research problem and questions. The study purposively selected professionals affiliated with construction-related professional bodies, namely the South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP), the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), and the Project Management Institute (PMI). Due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, it involved construction and consulting companies in Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa. Respondents were from 70 companies that were actively registered with the CIDB and operated in Bloemfontein, Free State, indicating that

they were drawn from formally recognized and geographically concentrated construction firms. Their gradings ranged from Grades 5 to 9 across several construction categories, particularly civil engineering, general building, mechanical engineering, and electrical engineering, reflecting varied levels of capacity, experience, and project execution capability. The questionnaires were distributed electronically via email to enhance accessibility and convenience. The respondents were given a month to complete the dispatched questionnaire, with weekly reminders to enhance participation. Only 83 completed and returned the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 81%. According to the study conducted by Babbie (2010) and Dillman et al. (2014), states that sample size above 70% is regarded as excellent. Data gathered for the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively. According to the studies by Kaushik and Mathur (2014) and Dong (2023), descriptive analysis helps identify trends, patterns, and the importance of the variables under investigation, providing a clear understanding of their significance. For the qualitative component, data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis with the aid of ATLAS.ti software. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis provides a flexible and systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data, allowing for rich, detailed, and varied perspectives from respondents on the specific topic.

Table 1 illustrates the coding of the respondents that were included in the study.

4. Findings

In this section, the study presents findings from the perspectives of the participating construction professionals. These findings are twofold: quantitative, from the questionnaires, and qualitative, from the interviews with the construction professionals. Firstly, under quantitative findings, the section unpacks demographic data on the respondents, and secondly, it delves into barriers to the adoption of Sound project governance in construction projects. Thirdly, it unpacks the impacts of Poor Governance on Construction Projects, and lastly, it outlines the drivers of the adoption of effective project governance in construction projects. The rest of the section will be delineated according to the following themes: Theme 1: Knowledge of Project governance by the respondents; Theme 2: Barriers to the adoption of effective project governance in construction projects; Theme 3: Impacts of Poor Governance on Construction Projects; Theme 4: Drivers to the adoption of effective project governance in construction projects

4.1. Demographic Data of the Respondents

Nature of the organizations

Figure 1 shows the nature of organizations that the 83 respondents in the study belonged to, and among the 83

Table 1: Coding of the interview respondents

No.	Code	Participant
1.	Pr CM 1	Construction Management Professional
2.	Pr QS 1	Quantity Surveying Professional
3.	Pr ENG ELE 1	Electrical Engineer Professional
4.	Pr ENG MECH 1	Mechanical Engineer Professional
5.	Pr PM 1	Project Management Professional
6.	Pr QS 2	Quantity Surveying Professional
7.	Pr QS 3	Quantity Surveying Professional
8.	Pr CM 2	Construction Management Professional
9.	Pr CM 3	Construction Management Professional
10.	Pr PM 2	Project Management Professional
11.	Pr PM 3	Project Management Professional
12.	Pr ENG ELE 2	Electrical Engineer Professional
13.	Pr QS 4	Quantity Surveying Professional
14.	Pr ENG MECH 2	Mechanical Engineer Professional
15.	Pr PM 4	Project Management Professional

Source: Authors

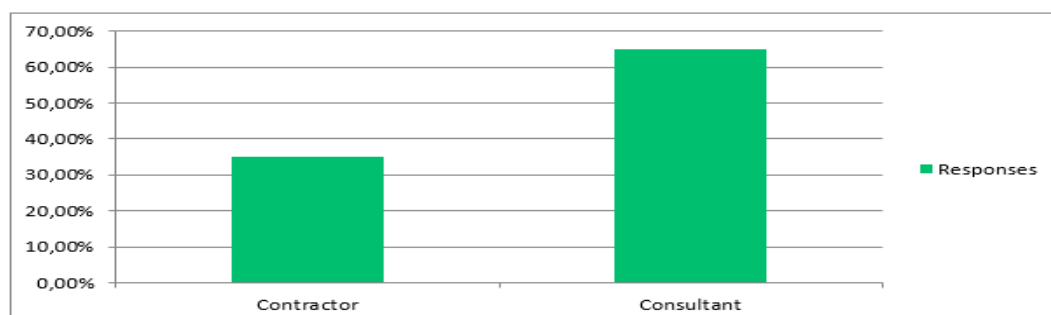


Figure 1: Nature of the organization

Source: Authors

respondents, 54 were from the consulting firms, which accounted for 65.4%, while 29 were from the contracting firms, which amounted to 34.6%. Most of the respondents were from the consulting firms.

Years of organization existence

According to Figure 2, most of the organizations that the respondents were working on, 22 out of 83 (26.9%), were in operation for 5 to 10 years, followed closely by 19 organizations (23.1%) in the 11 to 15 years category. Another 19 organizations (23.1%) existed for 20 years or more, indicating a strong presence of long-established firms. A total of 18 organizations (21.2%) reported having less than 5 years of operational experience, reflecting the participation of newer entrants into the industry. Only 5 organizations (5.8%) had been operating for 16 to 20 years, making this the least represented category.

Qualifications of the respondents

Figure 3 presents the highest qualifications of the 83 respondents, reflecting a well-educated sample of

construction professionals. Most respondents, 45 out of 83 (53.8%), held qualifications at NQF Level 7, which typically includes BSc and BTech degrees. This indicates a strong representation of bachelor's degree holders in the sample. Additionally, 19 respondents (23.1%) completed NQF Level 8 qualifications, such as Honours degrees and Postgraduate Diplomas, while 13 respondents (15.5%) possessed NQF Level 9 qualifications, including master's degrees (MSc, MTech, or MCON). A smaller proportion, 6 respondents (7.6%), held qualifications at NQF Level 6 (e.g., National Diploma), and no respondents reported having only Matric or a doctoral-level qualification (NQF Level 10).

4.2. Impacts of Poor Governance on Construction Projects

Based on Table 2 on the impacts of poor governance on construction projects, the highest-ranked impacts were project performance and compromise of project goals, both receiving the highest mean score of 2.60. Although this is not a surprise, a weak governance

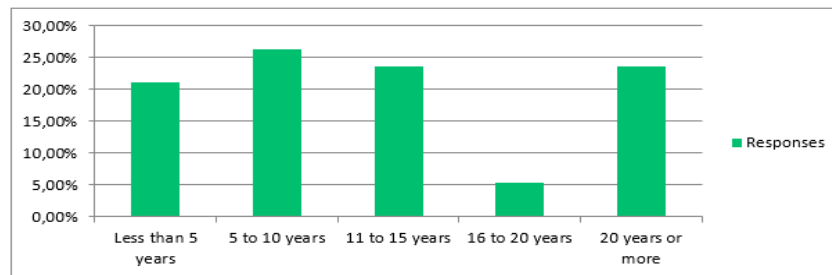


Figure 2: years of organisation's existence
Source: researcher

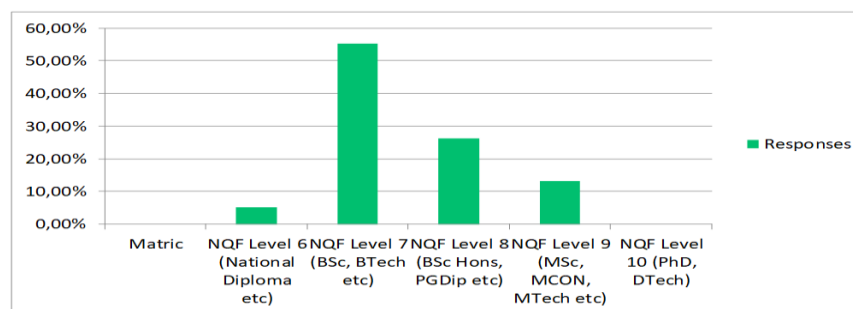


Figure 3: Qualifications of the respondents

Table 2: Impacts of Poor Governance on Construction Projects (source: Researchers)

Descriptive Statistics									
Impacts	5- Likert Scale					No. of Respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)				
Reduces project performance	18	25	20	12	8	83	2.60	1.209	1
Compromise project objectives	17	26	21	11	8	83	2.60	1.257	2
Impacts the project governance	20	27	18	10	8	83	2.50	1.229	3
Compromise project milestones	24	24	16	11	8	83	2.46	1.290	4
Compromises the project communication	26	23	15	11	8	83	2.42	1.226	5

structure contributes to unreasonable decision-making, scope creep, and project delays. Cantarelli et al. (2025) assert that ineffective planning and governance breakdowns contribute to time overruns and cost overruns. Furthermore, Marzouk and Hisham (2020) state that a lack of accountability and unclear leadership contribute highly to the project outcomes. Similarly, the compromise in project governance, with a mean of 2.50, indicates that a lack of guidelines or a framework contributes to project failures. Muller et al. (2021) define this phenomenon as a “governance capacity trap” in which structural and human initiatives are unable to recover from a governance collapse.

Moreover, governance deficiencies with a mean of 2.46 compromise the project milestones and compromise the communication with a mean of 2.42, which are highlighted as the factors for project execution. Delayed milestones are commonly caused by a lack of communication or ineffective communication, which affects decision-making and productivity of the construction projects. Haled et al. (2023) found that weak planning and communication frequently cause delays, rework, and cost inflation. Likewise, Hoezen et al. (2022) argue that ineffective communication is a root cause of construction defects, with breakdowns in information flow often stemming from insufficient governance protocols. The respondents’ perspectives reinforce these claims, showing that a lack of structured communication channels and governance integration results in fragmented team efforts and weakened project delivery.

Qualitative Data

This section unpacks the data gathered from respondents through interviews on the impacts of poor project governance in construction projects.

Theme 1: Impacts of Poor Governance on Construction Projects

According to the findings, poor project governance mostly leads to inefficiency in coordination and decision-making. Without proper project governance, project role players lack direction, which can lead to delays, conflicts, and confusion in project delivery and ultimately to project failure. *Pr PM 3* highlighted this challenge, stating, “*In some of our projects, decisions are made on the spot without consulting the broader team, and that causes a lot of confusion later.*” Too and Weaver (2014) stated that poor governance affects the coordination between the project teams and organizational objectives, which affects the project performance. Furthermore, poor governance contributes to financial mismanagement, which can lead to cost overruns and time overruns. *Pr QS 3* remarked, “*We’ve had situations where there was no proper control over changes in scope, and that led to major cost escalations.*” Similarly, *Pr CM 2* noted, “*Budgets are rarely followed because no one enforces the financial governance properly.*” These findings are

in line with the study by Owusu et al. (2019), which states that poor project governance leads to inadequate risk management, a lack of financial accountability, and unethical practices in construction projects.

Poor project governance hinders stakeholder collaboration and erodes trust among stakeholders, which in turn affects project productivity. When communication channels and responsibilities are not discussed, stakeholders end up working in silos, leading to more disputes and disagreements among them. *Pr QS 1* explained, “*Sometimes clients and contractors clash because there’s no clear governance process outlining who does what.*” *Pr ENG ELE 2* added, “*Without a structured governance plan, everyone ends up blaming each other when issues arise.*” These findings are supported by Derakhshan et al. (2019), which state that poor project governance leads to mixed stakeholder expectations and discourages collaboration among stakeholders. Lastly, a lack of governance practices compromises project quality and regulatory compliance. When quality assurance is not integrated into the governance structure, projects are prone to defects, safety risks, and potential legal consequences. *Pr ENG MECH 2* reflected, “*Governance is often overlooked, and that’s when mistakes happen, especially on site.*” Similarly, *Pr CM 3* stated, “*Quality gets compromised when no one is accountable for overseeing compliance.*” To support this finding, Prasanna et al. (2024), state that proper governance is key in safeguarding the quality control of the project and regulatory compliance

This study reveals that poor project governance has a significant negative impact on project performance in multi-stakeholder project environments, particularly through weak coordination, ineffective decision-making, financial mismanagement, poor stakeholder collaboration, and compromised quality control. A unique finding from the study is that governance failure not only affects formal project processes but also creates confusion among project role players, weakens accountability, and causes stakeholders to operate without a shared direction. Participants indicated that decisions are often made without consulting the broader project team, resulting in delays, conflicts, and uncertainty during project delivery. For example, *Pr PM 3* noted that decisions made “on the spot without consulting the broader team” often create confusion later in the project. The study further found that poor governance contributes to uncontrolled scope changes, weak budget enforcement, cost escalations, and time overruns, as reflected in the views of *Pr QS 3* and *Pr CM 2*. Another important finding is that poor governance damages stakeholder trust and collaboration, as unclear communication channels and undefined responsibilities cause clients, contractors, and consultants to work in silos and blame one another when problems arise. This was evident in the comments of *Pr QS 1* and *Pr ENG ELE 2*, who highlighted the

absence of clear governance processes and structured governance plans. The study also found that weak governance compromises project quality and regulatory compliance because no single party is clearly accountable for monitoring standards, site practices, and compliance requirements

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that poor project governance has a significant negative impact on project performance in multi-stakeholder project environments, particularly through weak coordination, ineffective decision-making, unclear accountability, financial mismanagement, poor stakeholder collaboration, reduced trust, and compromised quality and regulatory compliance. The findings show that governance is not only an administrative function, but a critical mechanism for aligning stakeholders, controlling project resources, managing risks, and ensuring that project objectives are achieved. A key conclusion is that when governance structures are weak or poorly implemented, project participants often work in silos, decisions are made without sufficient consultation, and responsibilities become unclear, leading to delays, cost overruns, disputes, and reduced project outcomes. An alternative conclusion is that some governance failures may not result from the absence of governance

frameworks alone, but from poor enforcement, weak leadership, limited stakeholder commitment, and contextual pressures within the project environment. Theoretically, the study contributes to project governance literature by showing that governance in multi-stakeholder projects should be understood as both a structural and relational process, where formal systems, accountability mechanisms, communication practices, and stakeholder trust interact to influence project success. Practically, the findings imply that project managers, clients, consultants, and contractors should strengthen governance processes by clearly defining roles, improving communication channels, enforcing financial controls, integrating quality assurance into governance systems, and ensuring inclusive decision-making throughout the project lifecycle. However, the findings should be interpreted within the study's parameters, as the data were drawn from stakeholder insights in a specific project environment and may therefore not be fully generalizable across all countries, sectors, professions, or project types. Future research should test these findings across sectors and with larger samples, while practitioners should prioritize governance frameworks that promote accountability, transparency, collaboration, and compliance to improve project delivery in complex, multi-stakeholder environments.

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