

SUSTAINABLE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STAKEHOLDERS IN MEGAPROJECTS: REVIEW OF CASES FROM AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

Megaprojects are an essential part in social, economic, and environmental developments and they attract a consortium of stakeholders ranging from governments, communities, international consumers, and suppliers. Hence, stakeholder management in these projects contributes significantly to projects' success and sustainability. The research project, on which this paper is based on, aims to identify key challenges and propose suitable strategies to manage stakeholders in megaprojects for better sustainability outcomes. In achieving this aim, the research re-viewed key concepts related to project stakeholder management in megaprojects, explored sustainable challenges and analysed appropriate stakeholder management strategies through a secondary review of two major case studies of megaprojects in Sydney, Australia. The key findings discovered that the main factors influencing stakeholders were related to social, economic and environmental impacts of the project and, the need for managing them through proactive stakeholder management strategies. The implications of this research guide project managers on managing stakeholders on megaprojects and inform on possible challenges and solutions to achieve sustainable outcomes. Further research could extend and replicate on other case studies in different contexts and project types.

Keywords: *Megaprojects; Project Management; Stakeholder Management; Sustainability.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Megaprojects are essential in the development of communities, which offer employment, economic growth, innovation and for sustainable development. Project Management Institute (2017) defined projects as a series of distinctive, multifaceted, and associated tasks, which possess a shared goal and are assigned to result in a definite time, a fixed budget and recognised requirements. Megaprojects can be identified as a significant investment of more than a few billion dollars such as large-scale engineering and infrastructure projects, which generally necessitates collaborative effort from main participants in terms of resources, skills and expertise. According to Mok, et al. (2015), in megaprojects, there is a significant chance that projects fail to meet the required outcome due the poor project stakeholder management.

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Project stakeholders are defined as the group of people, individuals and organisations that are directly or indirectly affected by project activities and outcome (Oppong, et al., 2017). Cummings and Patel (2009) found out that there are five groups of stakeholders in projects such as employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers and community. Mok, et al. (2015) explained that in megaprojects within these five stakeholders' groups, there is a considerable number of people involved, interested, and affected compared to small to medium-sized projects. In recent years, stakeholder management for megaprojects drew special research interest due to significant challenges encountered in managing stakeholders, in particular external stakeholders, who are sensitive to sustainability outcomes. Therefore, stakeholder management approaches and strategies could differ in these projects in addressing these challenges. However, the extant literature lacks in providing a thorough understanding of stakeholder management strategies that are appropriate for sustainable related challenges in megaprojects. The aim of this research project is to identify key challenges and propose suitable project stakeholder management strategies for megaprojects through review of cases in Sydney area for better sustainability outcomes.

The paper is structured in four main sections, with this first section explaining the research problem and background of the research. The second section synthesises literature findings into three key areas on 'generic' and 'modern' stakeholder management theories, including a review into current research on stakeholder management challenges and strategies as applicable for megaprojects.

2. KEY LITERATURE FINDINGS

Managing stakeholders is a key project management competency. Literature offers various theories in managing stakeholders in different types of projects as discussed in below sub-sections, followed by a review into challenges and strategies for managing stakeholders.

2.1 GENERIC STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT THEORIES

The early stakeholder management theories indicate the importance of compliance with various factors such as human rights, environment regulations, fairness and equality (Preston and Sapienza, 1990). A company's business management should reflect the ethics and morals of the business with their stakeholders (Cummings and Patel, 2009) and include 'corporate social responsibility'. Literature highlights three early stakeholder management approaches, namely, descriptive, instrumental, and normative approaches.

- The descriptive approach aided to describe the characteristics and attitudes of project organisations, including how establishments are managed and how the executive committee contemplates corporate communities (Crawford, et al., 1997).
- The instrumental approach utilised the framework building method to recognise the links, which exist between the management of stakeholder associations and the accomplishment of corporate objectives (Preston and Sapienza, 1990).
- The normative approach, labelled as the essence of the theory by Donaldson and Preston (1995), explored the appropriate function of the project organisation and classified the moral or philosophical guidelines for the operation and management of the corporation (Cummings and Patel, 2009).

The above mentioned three stakeholder management approaches confirmed why and how stakeholders are important in business regardless of the size of the project. These approaches have helped researchers study in-depth to understand the stakeholder perspective, expectations, outline moral and ethical regulations including the stakeholder management framework and has helped businesses understand their stakeholders. However, in megaprojects, many factors and tools need to be further investigated. Therefore, the following sub-section discusses some modern stakeholder management theories, which aids to understand how the knowledge on stakeholder management developed overtime and how it can be useful in megaproject contexts.

2.2 MODERN STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT THEORIES FOR MEGAPROJECTS

Modern stakeholder management theories such as resource-based view theory, institutional theory perspective and temporal model of stakeholder theory were identified as applicable to megaproject context and briefly described below.

- The resource-based view (RBV) is the project organisation's way of conceptualising the resources available including resources for choice, admittance, collection and mixture according to Verbeke and Tung (2013). In terms of megaprojects, RBV provides some strategic fundamental guidelines for project organisations to utilise the available resources at hand such as manpower, skills, and expertise from the community. Further, RBV was found to be supportive of the development of innovation process in megaprojects (García-Quevedo, et al., 2018).
- The characteristics of Institutional Theory Perspective were the tendency of being vulnerable to social influence, accustomed to old tradition and prospects (Bakhshi and Touran, 2014). According to Fong (2010), RBV has more weight on economic optimisation and normative rationality, whereas institutional theory focuses more on the social justification and social obligations.
- The temporal model of stakeholder theory is divided into two stages according to Verbeke and Tung (2013), namely: early stage and later phase due to the enormous size of stakeholders and the project lifecycle (Engwall, 2003). In order to achieve the trust of the stakeholders, it was recommended that organisations initiating megaprojects must aim to be value creating projects to the stakeholder.

While above three modern theories were found more applicable to megaprojects, RBV was observed to be the most effective as it takes into consideration sustainability aspects, which has been a major concern among stakeholders in modern days (Ninan, et al., 2019). The next section offers a literature synthesis on stakeholder management processes and tools with specific reference to megaprojects.

2.3 STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN MEGAPROJECTS

Megaprojects involve many activities before proposing the project, during operation and after the project has been completed (Ma, et al., 2021; Eskerod, et al., 2015). These activities range from practicability analysis, safety and environmental impact evaluation, project assessment and goal settings, project alternative identification, submissions for government authorisations, de-sign, tendering, construction, handover, operation and maintenance (Kakar and Khan, 2021). According to Yang, et al. (2021), megaprojects

have a complex network of stakeholders. As such, megaprojects involve dynamic stakeholders' patterns and compositions during different stages (Windsor, 2010). However, as Jergeas, et al. (2000) stated, megaprojects tend to be more problem-orientated rather than stakeholder-driven. However, at times such as nuclear power plant, external stakeholders had more power compared to governments (Banerjee and Bonnefous, 2011). Hence, stakeholder management is a must in order to acquire positive support from stakeholders for the implementation of the project and its activities (Littau, et al., 2010). Among various stages such as stakeholder identification, planning, engagement and monitoring, 'stakeholder engagement' is the most important stakeholder management step in case of megaprojects (Mok, et al., 2015).

The main purpose of stakeholder engagement in mega-projects is to acquire transparency in decision making by way of stakeholder participation and inputs of feedback. Stakeholder perspective highly depended on the communication and transparency of the megaproject because most of the stakeholders considered mega-projects as closed organisation (Zulch, 2014). Greenfield, et al. (2013) found that stakeholders perceived megaprojects as private systems and do not communicate with their stakeholders early enough. This is confirmed in a study, where project managers' incompetency to manage stakeholders through proper communication and sharing of sufficient information at early stage of projects led to project failures (Agle, et al., 2008).

Pomeranz, et al. (2014) emphasised to carry out activities such as understanding the norms, awareness of the political influence and natural environmental implications, before initiating megaprojects, which Mok, et al. (2015) suggested to obtain in terms of stakeholder expectation and behavioural attributes through a stakeholder engagement plan. However, not all stakeholders' expectations could be fulfilled due to various reasons including interest and pressure groups. It was found that environment, social and economic interests driven by sustainable principles were key areas that the stakeholders are mostly interested in megaprojects due to the size, duration and the motive of operation (Kakar and Khan, 2021). While some stakeholders, who resided close to the megaproject, mostly had concerns about the environment pollution, others were more concerned about the social benefits and the compensation provided due to different stakeholder perspectives.

The challenges discussed above in relation to megaprojects can be grouped under stakeholder identification & relationships, communication & transparency and diverse stakeholder interests as depicted in Table 1. The subsequent discussion will explain various strategies and tools that could help to overcome these challenges as revealed through the literature (see Column 2 of Table 1).

Table 1: Literature synthesis on key challenges and strategies on megaprojects

Key challenges	Strategies and tools
Stakeholder identification & relationships	Stakeholder mapping and analysis, client relation tool, SNA and ANT
Communication and transparency	Value creation, traditional and modern communication tools such as meetings, newsletters, websites and social media
Environment, social and economic interests with sustainable principles	Social responsibility, LCA, persuasion and deputation, rewards & benefits

As summarised in Table 1, various proactive strategies and tools to overcome key challenges were introduced by various scholars, which may be more applicable at certain phases and types of projects. According to Banerjee and Bonnefous (2011), there could be strengthening strategy for supportive stakeholders and/or stabilisation strategy for passive stakeholders; and/or, containment approach for obstructive stakeholders. Hence a mixture of all strategies would be required in megaprojects to deal with various types of stakeholders. Lim, et al. (2005), classify stakeholder management strategies in four ways as reactive, defensive, accommodating and proactive. The reactive strategy is referred to the reaction taken, when an unexpected event occurs. The defensive strategy is the approach, where project organisation would provide only what was promised to their stakeholders. The accommodating approach is where project organisations accommodate strategies and make frequent changes, when facing challenges. Finally, the proactive strategy approach is when the project organisation represents themselves as leaders in stakeholder management (Chinyio and Vogwell, 2007). Among these, it is the proactive strategies that are needed most for project managers to manage stakeholders in megaprojects.

The importance of stakeholder analysis methods was further confirmed by Mok, et al. (2015) for megaprojects. The stakeholder management strategy that was highlighted in a hospital was to use the client relation tool for stakeholder mapping and analysis (Collinge, 2016). Furthermore, Social Network Analysis (SNA) method was widely proposed in determining the indicators of megaprojects with stakeholder perspective (Yang, et al., 2011; Hwang and Ng, 2013), while Maqsood, et al. (2004) applied Actor Network Theory (ANT) to observe stakeholder relationships.

It was also observed that stakeholders responded positively, if transparency and communication with social, economic, and environmental sustainable benefits were presented. The value creation was observed to be a project success for megaprojects (Zulch, 2014). Jergeas, et al. (2000) supported the value creation approach that was effective due to its transparency, effective communication, and awareness. Furthermore, monthly meetings, look ahead programme, behavioural expectation cards, complains/queries database, contact photo sheet, notification of work bulletin and handouts were some of the tools used to communicate and provide project transparency (Collinge, 2016). Other common traditional communication tools were council newsletters and announcements, newspapers and radio, the project websites, signage and traffic information boards and websites (Que, et al., 2019), whereas modern methods included social media.

Megaproject social responsibility is important in managing stakeholders and covers a diverse range of challenging responsibilities, including pollution control, environmental protection, occupational health and safety, anticorruption and public participation (Ma, et al., 2021). Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) is one of the tools widely used in megaprojects to assess the environmental impact in the community (Neville and Menguc, 2006). According to Ninan, et al. (2019) the stakeholder strategies to address economic interests included persuasion, deputation, rewards and benefits to achieve positive feedback from stakeholders in megaprojects in India. Since mega-projects are generally carried out by sub-contractors mainly for government development, the best strategy to influence secondary stakeholders were through incentives and benefits (Knol and Tan, 2018). However, with stakeholders who had greater value for sustainability, project managers

found it challenging to convince and influence them alone with project benefits and rewards.

Therefore, the research question for this study is whether above discussed tools and strategies (see Table 1), including individual sustainability assessment tools, are sufficient in case of managing megaprojects, with multiple stakeholders and increasing sustainable challenges. This research attempts to fill this gap by bringing insights from two megaprojects in Sydney that had holistic stakeholder management strategies to overcome such sustainable challenges. The next section explains the research method adopted in this study.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method selected for undertaking this research was a secondary review of case studies to identify stakeholder management challenges and strategies in megaprojects around Sydney area. The specific case studies chosen included megaprojects in Sydney area on a railway project and an airport project, which satisfied the case selection criteria such as ‘megaprojects’, ‘projects in Sydney region’ ‘sustainable impacts’ and, ‘availability of secondary data.’

Government records were one of the vital sources of data collection in carrying out this secondary research. In particular, for this re-search, the relevant government website and the collection of documents on project over-view and documents published by subcontractors were reviewed along with the stakeholder and community engagement documents and newspaper articles. Furthermore, past research journals and articles on the chosen projects were evaluated using search engines such as Google Scholar, Science Direct, Elsevier, Project Management Journal (PMI) and Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM) by using specific keywords related to the selected project name. In total, around fifty files were shortlisted for the case studies. The data collected and sorted are further analysed in the case studies based on initially found challenges and strategies from the literature and later in the discussions, specific case findings. The next section presents and discusses the key findings.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings from these two projects were analysed through within-case and cross-case analysis. They are reported in this section, first with some key findings from each case followed by the cross-case analysis and discussion.

4.1 KEY FINDINGS FROM WITHIN CASE 1

The first case study used for this research project was Railway project in Sydney Australia, which was worth AUD \$12.5 billion. The project owner was the New South Wales government, who sub-contracted the project to various contractors in order to complete the project. There were three Australian construction companies, who were subcontracted to carry out the tunnels and civil works. Railway project was mainly aimed to connect various parts of Greater Sydney area with Sydney Central Business District, which included the Bankstown airport, Parramatta City and the North West area. It consisted of 31 metro stations with more than 66km of new metro rail, with underground bridges and tunnels constructed. At the time this research was carried out, the project was

on-going with completion of stage one and therefore, the challenges and strategies were identified for stage one.

Railway project followed the Construction Environmental Management Plan/Framework (CEMP/F) for New South Wales, which included air, water and soil management, construction management, heritage management, environmental management, business management and stakeholder management. For stakeholder management, an overarching stakeholder management approach was used, which ensured that the project included their stakeholder for important decision-making and satisfied stakeholders equally and fairly (Pomeranz, et al., 2014) by gathering information from their stakeholder through calls to the information line and community emails, community information sessions during exhibition periods for environmental assessment, meetings and door knocks. This proactive approach offered many benefits such as gaining the trust of the community, effective communicative strategies, development of shared solutions for complex challenges and stakeholders getting their chance to make the project hear their opinion. The specific challenges and strategies identified through the secondary review of this case are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Identified challenges and strategies in Railway project

Challenges faced in the case study	Strategies used to tackle respective challenges
Communication and engagement	Community information sessions and other communication tools & techniques
Fairness and equality	Maintain ethics and values
Availability for engagement	Attempts and documentation
Business visibility	Providing local business support program
Impact on local business performance	Local business advertisement options and campaigns
Buried heritage	Mitigation plan for heritage conservation
Flora and fauna impact	CEMF implementation
Access to public facilities	Providing alternative public facilities
Impact on utility services	Construction activity updates and notifications
Noise and vibration	CEMF guidelines
Nuisance noise by workers	Employment condition contract
Infrastructure damage due to vibration	Property damage claim

4.2 KEY FINDINGS FROM WITHIN CASE 2

Second case study, Airport project was established to deliver and operate the airport and operation after completion (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). This project was estimated to cost approximately AUD \$5.3 billion according to the budget report 2017/2018 (Western Sydney airport (WSA), 2018). Some of the main scopes of the project were meeting the high demand of aviation in the Greater Sydney area, providing value assets to the community and the state and, boosting opportunities locally and internationally in terms of employment and tourism.

Airport project stakeholders included many organisations, groups and individuals, making it a collaborative service environment and the project has prepared strategies that

were established after thorough assessment with stakeholders and the potential challenges that are likely to occur during the planning, designing, execution and operation of the project. The project aimed to use the overarching stakeholder management model with a holistic approach that covers the effective communication and engagement process including the management of transparency. This holistic management approach is a framework especially designed for decision-making, which follows the triple bottom line sustainability principles i.e., the balance between environment, economy and society (WSA, 2019). WSA also adopted the CEMP guidelines to develop standards and requirements in collaboration with the aviation, environment and social regulations with the government and international standards. While engagement strategies such as project briefings through meetings, seminars, surveys and open days were used, project communication was through websites, government website, social media such as Twitter and Facebook, newspapers, council newsletters and so on. The specific challenges and strategies identified through the secondary review of this case are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Identified challenges and strategies in airport project

Challenges faced in the case study	Strategies used to tackle respective challenges
Communication and engagement	Project briefings and other communication tools and techniques
Less concerned about socio-economic aspect	Communication and engagement plan, maximise engagement activities
Cultural heritage	Archaeologist assessment of the site, heritage management plan, stakeholder engagement
Threat to the natural environment	Environment assessment and evaluation, relocation of flora and faunas to natural reserve parks
Construction impact (air, noise and vibration)	Notification to stakeholders regarding upcoming construction activities, noise barriers, water spray system, renewable energy, turn-off machines and engines which are not operating
Heavy traffic in the area with heavy vehicle	Variable speed limit, traffic management implementation, updates and notification to stakeholders regarding heavy vehicles movement in the morning and afternoon hours
Noise pollution during airport operations	Ground rules implementation, turn-off machineries and vehicles not in use and flight pathing
Traffic getting busier due to airport operations	Wider lanes, variable speed limits, signages, RMS notification about possible delays, designated lanes to enter and exit the airport
Value of properties	Property survey, property damage claim

4.3 KEY FINDINGS FROM CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

There were several similarities in the challenges faced between the two cases, where the strategies established were somewhat similar. Common challenges and strategies related to stakeholder management of the two megaprojects are discussed in this section.

The strategies employed to mitigate and minimise these challenges were aligned with the overarching stakeholder management model utilised by both projects, which provided

stakeholders the opportunities to influence project decisions towards the development of the projects and address their sustainability concerns. Feedbacks, surveys, communications and engagements with the stakeholders and mitigation strategies for construction activities were implemented in both projects.

With more challenging stakeholders in the airport project, they seemed to have applied a resource-based view approach for its stakeholder management that is more sustainability driven. This approach aided the team to communicate, engage and provide opportunities to the local communities for their economic and skill developments, not only to institutes, unions and groups but also to individuals. The airport project's survey during stakeholder assessment revealed that the transparency and frequency of engagement and communication carried out by the project team resulted in significant number of stakeholders supporting the airport project. The reactive, accommodating and proactive strategies for stakeholder engagement were used in the stakeholder management of the airport project. Hence, this research also revealed that relationship with stakeholder was important to understand their stakeholders' expectations and influencing factors and by having a better communication and engagement plan, many stakeholder challenges could be overcome.

This finding is consistent with recent research on megaprojects conducted in different contexts. For example, Mangioni (2018) stated that it is the project organisation's responsibility to ensure that adequate communication and engagements are carried out before stakeholders take actions further to the court. As mentioned by Mok, et al. (2015), projects fail, when stakeholder management is poor and, when stakeholders not being aware of the true benefits on the development of their community from megaprojects through proper communication. Mathur, et al. (2021) observed how social media could further provide in-formation to the public about the megaprojects. Ninan, et al. (2019) confirmed that social media could be a competitive advantage for 'persuading, framing and hegemonizing' external stakeholders in megaprojects, as also observed in the case studied projects. They further recorded how different information communication technologies are used for communication and engagement with external stakeholders. Yang, et al. (2018) explain that with the development of these types of new approaches to solve stakeholder management communication and engagement in megaprojects, at times internal stakeholders tend to restrain to consider new approaches and project managers should be skilled on persuading them.

In addition to stakeholder communication and engagement, the challenges identified in Cases 1 and 2 (see Table 2 and 3) revealed that stakeholders' attitude towards megaprojects such as railway and airport construction was mostly connected with sustainability concerns such as construction and operation impacts, environmental pollution impacts and property impacts on their community, where majority of the opposing groups were among residents, businesses and institutes. However, when considering the community groups, the airport project had more negative stakeholder perspectives compared to the railway project. The reason behind this was mainly the potential environment and health implications in the surrounding areas.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to propose suitable project sustainable stakeholder management strategies grounded on a comprehensive review of two megaprojects in Sydney area. After establishing the theoretical base through a literature review into stakeholder management in megaprojects and research gaps into lack of strategies for sustainability driven stakeholder management challenges, a secondary research method was used to collect and analyse data related to the two case studies that offered significant insights and lessons learned. The limitations of the research was due to reliance on secondary sources to explore answers to the research question. However, the chosen projects had ample published documents that assisted in overcoming this limitation.

The stakeholder management strategies were proven to be effective in the case studied megaprojects, when project managers carried out the stakeholder mapping analysis to identify all their internal and external stakeholders, including the influencing sustainable factors such as social, environmental and economic impacts. Influencing factors were observed to be strongly linked with the power hierarchy of the megaproject, where the government plays a key role. The level of engagement was also proven to be the most effective way of stakeholder management as it aided to make the megaproject transparent to the public and stakeholders. The two case studies further revealed several common sustainability driven challenges associated with construction and operational impacts on the residential, business and institution stakeholders due to the noise, vibration and environment pollution. It was evident that stakeholders' interest and expectations depended highly on the environmental aspects compared to the socio-economic aspects from the megaprojects, due to increased awareness and consciousness on sustainability. Possible strategies to mitigate the challenges were identified to achieve stakeholder satisfaction as reported in the research findings.

Overall, these findings offer significant implications for project managers of megaprojects to identify influential stakeholders, their sustainability related needs and challenges and proactively utilise strategies and tools to manage them with minimum disruptions and gain positive project outcomes. Research also offers wider policy implications for government driven megaprojects in other contexts to comply with holistic stakeholder management approaches as practiced in Sydney projects. The increasing development in megaprojects in the infrastructure and transportation sector in developed countries requires intense stakeholder management approach due to the developed urbanisation. The research findings from this research project can offer useful implications for theory and practice, to foresee similar challenges and employ suggested strategies in similar mega-projects. Further research could extend and be replicated on other case studies in different contexts and project types to bring more insights and lessons-learned.

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