



PROJECT MANAGERS' SOFT SKILLS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF DONOR-FUNDED ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Project management in its entirety has branched out in many fields and taken on new meanings in the 21st century. A project manager is mandated to coordinate and oversee all phases of the project including managing team members, communicating with stakeholders, motivating staff, prioritizing tasks, facilitating communication, etc. As such, project managers must have a wide range of skills under their belt. The general objective of this study was to investigate the influence of project management soft skills on the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County, Kenya. The specific objectives include: to assess the influence of leadership skills on the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects; and to investigate the influence of conflict management skills on the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County, Kenya. This study used purposive sampling to sample 99 road supervisors, road engineers, and road inspectors of completed donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County overseen by KenHA. The study collected data using structured questionnaires and interview guides. The collected data was fed in SPSS program and Microsoft Excel for analysis. Descriptive statistics including mean, percentages, and frequencies were used to summarise the findings. Inferential statistics including multiple regression and correlation was used to test the association between the variables. The findings were presented using tables and bar graphs. The study revealed that Leadership Skills, and Conflict Management Skills influence the Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects. There was a strongly positive correlation between Leadership Skills, and Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects. There was also a moderately positive correlation between Conflict Management Skills and Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects. It was concluded that leadership attributes enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of project execution and foster a work environment conducive to meeting project goals within stipulated timelines and budgets and effective conflict resolution reduces the potential for disputes to disrupt project workflows, fosters collaboration among stakeholders, and contributes to the smooth progression of project activities. It was recommended that organizations involved in donor-funded projects should invest in leadership development programs for project managers focused on enhancing soft skills.

Key Words: Project Management Soft Skills, Leadership Skills, Donor-Funded Infrastructure Projects, Conflict Management Skills

Background of the Study

Project management in its entirety has branched out in many fields and taken on new meanings in the 21st century. According to Ninan (2020), project management is the new form of 'general management', which calls for increased use of teams, beating deadlines, and reducing costs without compromising quality. A project manager is mandated to coordinate and oversee all phases of the project including managing team members, communicating with stakeholders, motivating staff, prioritizing tasks, facilitating communication, etc. (Alvarenga et al., 2019). Therefore, project managers must have a wide range of skills under their belt. As stated by Hendarman & Cantner (2018), to ensure that a project is successful, both hard skills and soft skills are required to facilitate its planning, implementation and evaluation. While hard skills are the vocational skills required to implement project activities successfully, soft skills help project managers to work effectively with other people or rather to address the people side of things in such a way that it leads to expected performance.

Alvarenga et al. (2019) explain that hard skills are the specific, teachable knowledge sets that can be measured. These skills are often job-specific and are typically developed through education, training programs, or on-the-job experience. Examples of hard skills include technical proficiencies like programming, data analysis, language proficiency, accounting, and other concrete, specialized abilities. Hard skills are crucial for performing tasks related to a particular job and are often included in job requirements and qualifications (Asbari et al., 2020). Conversely, soft skills are interpersonal or people skills that are more challenging to quantify and measure (Ramsoomair & Howey, 2004). These skills relate to how individuals interact with others, communicate, and navigate the social and professional world. Examples of soft skills include leadership (Hendarman & Cantner, 2018). Soft skills are crucial for personal and professional success as they enhance an individual's ability to work well with others and navigate diverse situations (Gale et al., 2017). In project management, Vogler et al. (2018) describe hard skills as processes, procedures, tools and techniques, while Alias et al. (2014) describes soft skills as those that are typically developed through a combination of experiences, interactions, and continuous self-improvement efforts.

While technical skills are essential for managing the technical aspects of a project, soft skills are equally crucial for effective leadership, collaboration, and successful project outcomes (Jena & Satpathy, 2017). These skills are often intangible and revolve around how individuals interact with others and navigate various challenges throughout the project lifecycle. Engaging in diverse experiences, both personally and professionally, exposes individuals to different situations and challenges, contributing to the development of adaptability, resilience, and other soft skills (Marando 2012). The key soft skills relevant to project implementation, include leadership, and conflict management among others (Hendarman & Cantner, 2018). Soft skills are integral to successful project management, enhancing the project manager's ability to navigate complex human interactions and lead teams towards project success. The combination of technical expertise and strong soft skills is key to achieving optimal results in project management (Ramsoomair & Howey, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Donor-funded infrastructure projects play a vital role in contributing to economic growth and improved living conditions. While the successful implementation of these projects is critical to the region's socio-economic development, many face significant challenges, leading to delays, cost overruns, and substandard work. While technical expertise and financial resources are essential, the role of project managers' soft skills in overcoming these challenges is often underestimated. The past decade has seen a rapid increase in donor-funded projects, with Kenya receiving over Kshs 9.5 billion in 2011 (Gnes & Vermeulen, 2019). In Nairobi County, there are a number of donor-funded road construction projects: Nairobi-Naivasha Highway, JKIA-Westlands Highway, James Gichuru-Rironi Road, Outer Ring Road, among others. In their study assessing the successful implementation of road construction projects, Onyango (2023) found that the road projects experience delays due to poor planning, which is also contingent upon project managers' skills and expertise.

Project managers play a key role in ensuring that infrastructure projects meet their goals and deliver the intended benefits to the community. In a study conducted by Zuo et al. (2018), the successful

implementation of these projects is contingent upon the soft skills of project managers. Even with the increasing demand for competent project managers, many still lack the relevant skills for successfully delivering projects (Kerzner, 2017). In their study, Vogler et al. (2018) asserted that when allocating project management resources, disregarding soft skills could potentially bring about cost overruns and time constraints. A study by Magano et al. (2020) revealed that inadequate soft skills can lead to misunderstandings, poor team cohesion, unresolved conflicts, and ultimately, project failure. Despite the importance of these skills, there is limited empirical research on how specific soft skills of project managers influence the implementation of donor-funded road infrastructure projects in Nairobi County. This gap in knowledge hinders the development of targeted training programs and policies that could enhance project success rates.

Kenya National Highways Authority (KeNHA) is a road management agency mandated to develop, manage, and maintain trunk roads linking important commercial centres locally and internationally. Major infrastructure projects overseen by KeNHA have a history of problems such as lack of financiers, project delays, cost overruns, and failed procurement (Wandiri & James, 2020). Over the last decade, KeNHA has overseen 52 donor-funded infrastructure projects, but only 26% have been fully completed (KeNHA website, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by providing empirical evidence and insights that can inform project management practices and contribute to the successful execution of infrastructure projects overseen by KeNHA in Nairobi County.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to establish the influence of project management soft skills on the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Specific Objectives

- i. To ascertain the influence of leadership skills on the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County, Kenya.
- ii. To determine the influence of conflict management skills on the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Skills Leadership Theory

Robert Katz's Skills Leadership Theory, introduced in 1955, outlines three fundamental types of skills that leaders should possess: technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. These skills collectively contribute to effective leadership in various organizational contexts, and the theory remains influential in leadership studies. Katz identified technical skills as the ability to use specific methods and techniques to perform a task. In project management, technical skills involve a deep understanding of the tools, methodologies, and processes relevant to the project. Project managers require technical skills to comprehend the intricacies of the project, make informed decisions, and provide guidance to the team. This could include knowledge of project management software, industry-specific practices, and technical aspects related to the project's objectives (Katz, 1955).

Human skills, as proposed by Katz, pertain to the ability to work effectively with people. In project management, human skills are crucial for building and maintaining positive relationships with team members, stakeholders, and other project participants. Project managers with strong human skills can navigate interpersonal dynamics, resolve conflicts, and foster a collaborative and supportive project environment. This is particularly important in donor-funded infrastructure projects where effective collaboration and communication are vital for project success. Conceptual skills involve the ability to understand the organization as a whole, envision how the project fits into the broader strategic context, and think strategically. Project managers with strong conceptual skills can analyse complex situations, anticipate potential challenges, and develop innovative solutions. This skill is essential for aligning

project goals with the overarching objectives of the organization and for adapting to changes in the external environment, such as shifts in donor priorities or economic conditions (Mumford et al., 2000).

Proponents of Katz's Skills Leadership Theory argue that effective leaders possess a balance of these three skill sets. While the emphasis on each skill may vary depending on the level of management, all three are essential for successful leadership. In assessing project managers' leadership skills, the theory offers a comprehensive framework to evaluate their technical competence, interpersonal abilities, and strategic thinking. This is particularly relevant in the context of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County, where project managers need a diverse skill set to navigate the complexities of both project management and stakeholder relations. Therefore, Katz's Skills Leadership Theory remains significant in assessing project managers' leadership capabilities, providing a timeless framework that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of effective leadership. By recognizing and developing technical, human, and conceptual skills, project managers can enhance their ability to lead successful and impactful projects, especially in the challenging and dynamic context of donor-funded infrastructure projects.

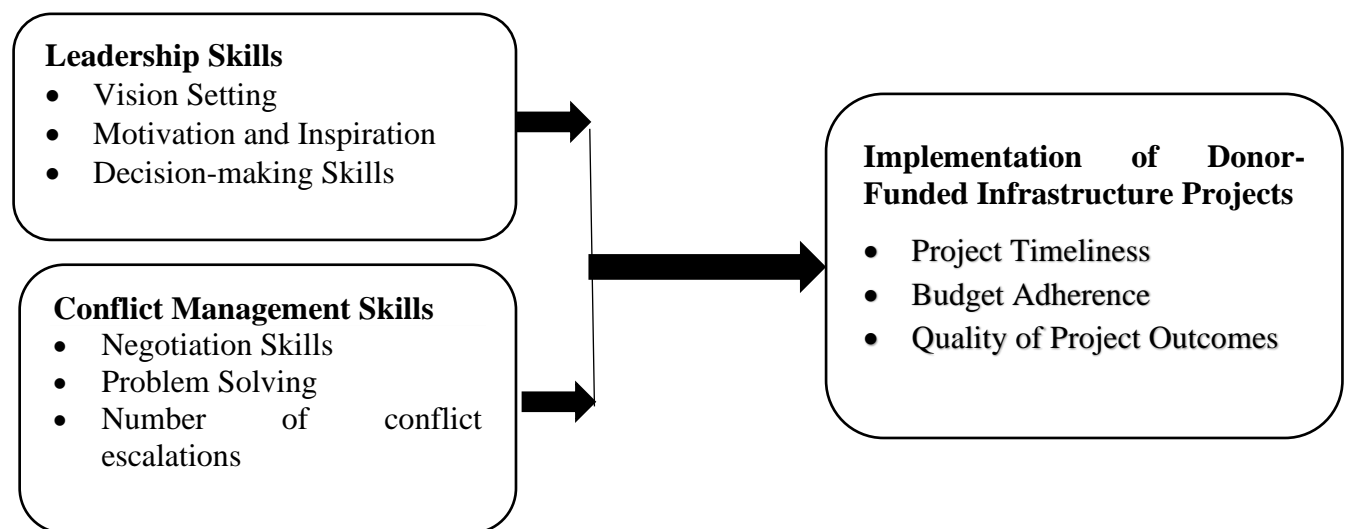
Modern Theory

The term "Modern Theory" in project management typically refers to contemporary approaches and frameworks that have evolved beyond traditional methodologies. Unlike classical methods that often follow a linear and rigid approach, modern theories emphasize adaptability, collaboration, and iterative processes. One prominent modern theory is the agile approach, which has gained widespread popularity in project management. Agile project management is characterized by its iterative and incremental nature. Key figures associated with the agile movement include Jeff Sutherland and Ken Schwaber, who co-developed the Scrum framework, a widely used agile methodology (Beck et al., 2001).

The significance of modern theories like Agile in project management lies in their ability to address the challenges posed by dynamic and complex projects. Traditional project management methodologies may struggle to accommodate changing requirements, customer feedback, and evolving project scopes. Modern theories, on the other hand, promote flexibility, continuous improvement, and customer satisfaction. Agile, for example, enables project teams to respond quickly to changes, encourages collaboration between team members and stakeholders, and emphasizes delivering incremental value throughout the project lifecycle. Moreover, modern theories often align with the principles of adaptive project management, acknowledging that project environments are inherently uncertain and subject to change. By embracing adaptive practices, project managers can better navigate the uncertainties and complexities associated with contemporary projects. This approach is particularly relevant in sectors such as technology, where rapid advancements and changing market demands require a more dynamic and responsive project management approach (Chin, 2004). As project management continues to evolve, the principles and methodologies associated with modern theories are likely to play a crucial role in ensuring project success in dynamic and fast-paced environments.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework in a research study is a structure or a visual representation that outlines the key concepts, variables, relationships, and theoretical perspectives relevant to the research topic. It provides a roadmap for understanding and investigating the phenomenon under study. The conceptual framework below helped organize thoughts, defined the scope of the study, and guided the development of research questions. (Varpio et al., 2020).

Independent Variables**Dependent Variable****Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework****Leadership Skills**

The independent variable “Leadership Skills” is crucial for understanding the role of project managers in the success of donor-funded infrastructure projects. This variable has three key indicators: Vision Setting, Motivation and Inspiration, and Decision-making Skill. Vision setting involves the ability of project managers to articulate a clear vision and direction for the donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County. A well-defined vision provides a roadmap that aligns stakeholders, motivates team members, and guides decision-making throughout the project lifecycle. Project managers who can effectively communicate and translate the project's objectives into a compelling vision inspire confidence and commitment among stakeholders. This clarity of purpose helps in maintaining focus, managing expectations, and adapting strategies to achieve project goals amidst challenges and changing conditions (Eskerod & Jepsen, 2016).

Motivation and inspiration refer to the capacity of project managers to motivate and inspire their teams working on donor-funded road infrastructure projects in Nairobi County. Building and sustaining motivation among team members is essential for maintaining productivity, fostering collaboration, and overcoming project hurdles. Project managers who demonstrate empathy, communicate effectively, and recognize team achievements create a positive work environment that encourages innovation and commitment. In donor-funded projects, where resources and timelines are often constrained, motivating teams through effective leadership can enhance morale, resilience, and ultimately project success (Abyad., 2018).

Decision-making skills are fundamental to project success. Project managers must make informed and timely decisions that align with project goals and stakeholder expectations. In the context of donor-funded projects, decisions related to resource allocation, risk management, and project adjustments can significantly impact outcomes (Jena & Satpathy, 2017). Evaluating project managers’ decision-making skills provides insights into their ability to navigate the complexities of donor-funded projects in Nairobi County. It helps determine if decisions are strategic, well-informed, and aligned with the goals of infrastructure development.

Conflict Management Skills

The independent variable of Conflict Management Skills aims to explore the impact of project managers’ abilities to effectively handle conflicts on the successful implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects. The indicators in this study are Negotiation Skills, Problem Solving Skills, and Stress Management. Negotiation skills are crucial for project managers involved in donor-funded infrastructure projects. These projects often involve multiple stakeholders with diverse interests and priorities. Project managers need to negotiate agreements, contracts, and compromises among stakeholders to ensure the smooth progression of the project (Hudson et al., 2005). The study may

assess how well project managers can navigate these negotiations, reach mutually beneficial outcomes, and maintain positive relationships with donors and other stakeholders.

Infrastructure projects can encounter various challenges and unexpected issues. The ability of project managers to effectively solve problems is vital for ensuring that the project stays on course (Gido et al, 2008). This includes identifying and addressing obstacles promptly, finding innovative solutions, and adapting strategies as needed. Examining problem-solving skills within the context of the study helps understand how project managers' capacity to overcome obstacles influences the overall success of donor-funded projects.

Number of conflict escalations is a key indicator of conflict management skills. This is measured by counting the number of conflicts that escalate to higher levels of management or external parties. If there is a high number of conflict escalations, this may indicate ineffective conflict resolution skills.

Empirical Literature Review

Leadership Skills

Mary (2018) conducted a study on project leadership and how it influences project implementation in Kitui County. The study examines factors such as leadership, funding, capacity building, and stakeholder involvement and their influence on project sustainability. The findings suggest that stakeholder involvement as well as the source of funds significantly affect project sustainability, while capacity building, leadership, and government policy have less significant impacts. The study highlights the importance of involving stakeholders throughout the project and ensuring adequate funds. It was concluded that understanding the leadership skills of project managers helps evaluate the ethical considerations in the execution of infrastructure projects, particularly when dealing with donor funds and the expectations of the local community. The study recommends conducting evaluations of capacity building and leadership impacts in broader geographical scopes.

Yang et al. (2013) undertook a study that sought to prove a model that inspects the relationship between a project manager's leadership style and project performance. The study analyses through a survey in the construction industry the connections between leadership style, teamwork, project outcomes, and stakeholder satisfaction. The findings showed that those project managers who use a transactional and transformational leadership method can develop teamwork and better project performance. The investigation demonstrated that superior levels of project success in relation to schedule, cost, and quality result in stakeholder satisfaction. In addition, the data showed that teamwork partially moderates the association between leadership style and project performance. This work enhances insight into leadership's significance for project success and points out the role of teamwork in effecting positive project results.

The study by Alvarenga et al. (2019) aimed to find out which competencies are crucial for successful projects and to examine those relationships. The aim was to determine through survey the importance of 28 competencies for achieving project success. The careful application of both univariate and multivariate techniques discovered that communication, commitment, and decision-making were the leading important factors. Multivariate analysis further distinguished seven competency groups: leadership, communication, people skills, managerial skills, efficiency, managing one's self, and technical competence. The results point to the burgeoning significance of soft skills and underline the need to change project management education to better integrate theory with practical tasks.

Conflict Management Skills

Prieto-Remón et al. (2015) investigated the management of conflicts among internal stakeholders in projects and the role and responsibilities of project managers in handling conflicts. The researchers identified differentiated focuses for conflict management depending on the cause, and found that project managers' role influences the approach to conflict resolution independent of the origin of the conflict. The study suggested implications for training future project managers and emphasised on the need to use different conflict management strategies. Data analysis involved screening incomplete surveys and conducting statistical analysis. The study also compares the conflict management strategies of students and PM professionals and explores the relationship between conflict management strategies and project success, although no conclusive results were obtained. Overall, the study

provided insights into conflict management in projects and highlights areas for further research and training.

The study by Mwangi and Ragui (2015) examined the consequences of workplace conflicts on performance of employees in Kenya's air transport industry. Using a descriptive research method, the researchers collected data via questionnaires, at a response rate of 90%. Data analysis consisted of Excel along with statistical methods and descriptive statistics that included frequencies and percentages. Results found that workplace conflicts have a strong effect on employee performance. According to the study, the degree of education among the respondents differed, yet the majority maintained a first degree. In addition, the research showed a discrepancy in gender ratios, presenting a greater number of female staff than male in the industry. The research pointed out the necessity of handling workplace discord to improve employee performance in Kenya's aviation industry.

The aim of the research by Tabassi et al. (2019) was to study how team coordination and the management of conflict relate to performance within multicultural project teams. The research studied team leaders and supervisors from the Malaysian construction industry. The finding demonstrated that, in contrast to previous results, an avoiding strategy in conflict management yielded positive results for multicultural project groups. This is because opting for the avoidance style allows team members to temporarily set aside contentious issues, providing an opportunity for emotions to cool and individuals to reflect on alternative perspectives. This approach can foster a more harmonious team environment, encouraging collaboration and preventing conflicts from escalating. The study contributes to the understanding of conflict management and coordination in multicultural team contexts, particularly in the construction industry, which presents complex and dynamic environments for effective teamwork.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was used. On this study, the target population comprised of completed road construction projects in Nairobi, Kenya, which are 11 in number. This study used census, which is a comprehensive study of a population where every individual or unit in the population is examined. While the road construction projects have many individuals that oversee their implementation, the researcher selected one (1) Road Supervisor, three (3) Road Inspectors, and five (5) Road Engineers from each of the 11 completed donor-funded road construction projects overseen by KenHA. The sample size comprised of 99 respondents. The study used structured questionnaires to collect data. Before conducting the data analysis, the researcher first cleaned up the collected data to remove data entry errors, inconsistencies and gaps. The collected data was fed in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program and Microsoft Excel for analysis. Descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation and frequencies was used to analyse the data. Inferential statistics including multiple regression and correlation was also be used to analyse association between the variables. The findings were presented using tables and bar graphs.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Since the study sampled 99 respondents to participate in the study, the same number of questionnaires were distributed, and 78 of them were filled and returned. This represented a 78.8% response rate. A study that yields a response rate of 70% and above is adequate for analysis of findings (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Descriptive Statistics

This subsection presents the descriptive statistics for each of the variables used in the study. A 5-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the findings, where 5-Strongly Agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree; 2- Disagree; 1- Strongly Disagree.

Leadership Skills

The respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with various statements regarding leadership skills and the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County, Kenya. The respondents agreed that the decision-making process is transparent, and stakeholders are informed

about project decisions ($M=3.99$, $SD=0.601$); project leaders consistently demonstrate trust, ethical behaviour and integrity ($M=3.93$, $SD=0.840$); project decisions are made efficiently, taking into account project goals and stakeholder input ($M=3.88$, $SD=0.466$); the project manager maintains positive relationships with project stakeholders ($M=3.80$, $SD=0.622$); and stakeholder feedback is regularly sought and incorporated into project decisions ($M=3.75$, $SD=0.693$). Overall, the respondents agreed that leadership skills influence the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County, Kenya. ($M=3.87$, $SD=0.644$). Table 1 summarises the findings:

Table 1: Leadership Skills

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
The project manager maintains positive relationships with project stakeholders.	4.0%	10.7%	20.0%	32.0%	33.3%	3.80	.622
Project leaders consistently demonstrate trust, ethical behaviour and integrity.	5.3%	14.7%	8.0%	25.3%	46.7%	3.93	.840
Project decisions are made efficiently, taking into account project goals and stakeholder input.	0%	13.3%	22.7%	26.7%	37.3%	3.88	.466
The decision-making process is transparent, and stakeholders are informed about project decisions.	1.4%	12.0%	13.3%	33.3%	40.0%	3.99	.601
Stakeholder feedback is regularly sought and incorporated into project decisions.	8.0%	12.0%	8.0%	41.3%	30.7	3.75	.693
Average						3.87	.644

Conflict Management Skills

The respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with various statements regarding conflict management skills and the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects. The respondents strongly agreed that problem-solving skills play a crucial role in addressing conflicts in donor-funded projects. ($M=4.17$, $SD=0.754$); and several project related conflicts have escalated to higher levels of management ($M=4.17$, $SD=0.888$). The respondents also agreed that negotiation skills are important for resolving conflicts in donor-funded projects ($M=3.99$, $SD=0.511$); I am skilled in problem-solving and can effectively address conflicts in my projects ($M=3.93$, $SD=0.717$); and I am confident in my ability to negotiate effectively in project-related conflicts ($M=3.88$, $SD=0.654$). Generally, the respondents strongly agreed that conflict management skills influence the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi County, Kenya ($M=4.02$, $SD=0.741$). Table 4.5 summarises the findings:

Table 2: Conflict Management Skills

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
Negotiation skills are important for resolving conflicts in donor-funded projects.	1.3%	12.0%	13.3%	33.3%	40.0%	3.99	.511
I am confident in my ability to negotiate effectively in project-related conflicts.	0%	13.3%	22.7%	26.7%	37.3%	3.88	.654
Problem-solving skills play a crucial role in addressing conflicts in donor-funded projects.	10.7%	9.3%	16.0%	33.3%	41.3%	4.17	.754
I am skilled in problem-solving and can effectively address conflicts in my projects.	0%	12.0%	13.3%	44.0%	30.7%	3.93	.717
Several project related conflicts have escalated to higher levels of management.	1.3%	6.7%	6.7%	44.0%	41.3%	4.17	.888
Average						4.02	.741

Implementation of Donor-funded Road Construction Projects

The respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with various statements regarding the implementation of donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County, Kenya. The respondents strongly agreed that the quality of output in donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County meets international standards ($M=4.06$, $SD=0.817$). The respondents also agreed that the completion rate of donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County has improved over time. ($M=3.98$, $SD=0.704$); the number of completed donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County is satisfactory ($M=3.92$, $SD=0.677$); there is a sufficient number of new donor-funded road construction projects initiated in Nairobi County ($M=3.63$, $SD=0.557$); and donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County are generally successful in achieving their objectives ($M=3.59$, $SD=0.765$). Generally, the respondents strongly agreed that donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County are well implemented ($M=3.84$, $SD=0.765$). Table 4.6 summarises the findings:

Table 3: Implementation of Donor-funded Road Construction Projects

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
The number of completed donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County is satisfactory.	43.1%	25.5%	17.7%	7.8%	5.9%	3.92	.677
The completion rate of donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County has improved over time.	45.1%	31.4%	7.9%	7.8%	7.8%	3.98	.704
There is a sufficient number of new donor-funded road construction projects initiated in Nairobi County.	39.2%	15.7%	27.5%	3.9%	13.7%	3.63	.557
The quality of output in donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County meets international standards.	49.0%	25.5%	13.7%	5.9%	5.9%	4.06	.817
Donor-funded road construction projects in Nairobi County are generally successful in achieving their objectives.	19.6%	39.2%	23.5%	15.7%	2.0%	3.59	.765
Average						3.84	.704

Correlation Analysis

The study used Spearman rank correlation to analyse the relationship between the independent variables (Leadership Skills, and Conflict Management Skills) and the dependent variable (Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects). Table 4.7 summarises the findings.

Table 4.: Correlation Matrix

		Implementation of Donor-funded Projects	Leadership Skills	Conflict Management Skills
Implementation of Donor- funded Infrastructure Projects	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	102		
Leadership Skills	Pearson Correlation	.856*	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	.000 102	.000 102	
Conflict Management Skills	Pearson Correlation	.677*	.562	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	.000 102	.000 102	102

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

According to the results of the Pearson's correlation test, there was a strongly positive correlation between Leadership Skills and Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects ($r=0.856$, $p<0.05$). There was also a moderately positive correlation between Conflict Management Skills and Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects ($r=0.677$, $p<0.05$). Since the p-value in all the results is less than 0.05, it was concluded that the relationship between Project Managers' Soft Skills and Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects is statistically significant.

Linear Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.023	.177		5.766	.000
Leadership Skills	.447	.121	.414	3.702	.000
Conflict Management Skills	.201	.088	.191	2.277	.024

a. Dependent Variable: Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects

Based on the study results, the relationship between the project managers' soft skills and the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects can be expressed using the equation:

$$Y = 1.023 + 0.447 (\text{Leadership Skills}) + 0.201 (\text{Conflict Management Skills})$$

The significance levels (p-values) for Leadership Skills (0.000) and Conflict Management Skills (0.024) are below 0.05, indicating strong evidence of their impact on the implementation of donor-funded infrastructure projects in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

Discussion

Leadership Skills and Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects

The findings revealed that leadership skills influence the implementation of donor-funded projects. The majority of the respondents agreed that the decision-making process is transparent, and stakeholders are informed about project decisions. This finding echoes those of Alvarenga et al. (2019) who found that communication, commitment, and decision-making are one of the top three vital factors that are crucial for updating project management education and bridging the gap between theory and practical application. As explained by Jena & Satpathy (2017) decision-making skills are vital in any

project management as they determine how stakeholders including project managers come to a given decision. Project managers need to make accurate and timely decisions regarding a project whilst steering the project towards its goal as is expected by the stakeholders. This has the effect of influencing the attainment of objectives of a project that is funded by a donor especially when it comes to matters concerning resource management, decision making on risks, and changes in the project.

Robert Katz's Skills Leadership Theory corroborates the findings as it outlines three fundamental types of skills that leaders should possess: technical skills, human skills, and conceptual skills. The majority of the respondents agreed that project decisions are made efficiently, taking into account project goals and stakeholder input. As argued by Katz (1955), human skills, which are crucial in engaging with stakeholders, pertain to the ability to work effectively with people. In project management, human skills are crucial for building and maintaining positive relationships with team members, stakeholders, and other project participants. Project managers with strong human skills can navigate interpersonal dynamics, resolve conflicts, and foster a collaborative and supportive project environment. Project managers who make informed and timely decisions that align with project goals and stakeholder expectations can significantly impact outcomes related to resource allocation, risk management, and project adjustments (Jena & Satpathy, 2017).

Conflict Management Skills and Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects

The findings revealed that conflict management skills influence the implementation of donor-funded projects. The majority of the respondents agreed that strongly agreed that problem-solving skills play a crucial role in addressing conflicts in donor-funded projects, and several project related conflicts have escalated to higher levels of management. Tabassi et al. (2019) study was based on the notion that team coordination, conflict management style, and performance are interlinked. As argued by Wandiri, & James (2020), there are numerous factors that may influence infrastructure projects and different problems may occur on the way. The implication of this process is that the opportunity of project managers to solve problems is a major determinant of the fact that a project will remain on the right track (Żuchowski, 2019). This includes being able to eliminate hurdles on time, seek new ways of working and altering one's approach when called for. Therefore, the study findings emphasise the importance of analysing problem-solving skills and project managers' conflict management skills to mitigate the challenges in donor-funded projects.

The significance of modern theories like Agile in project management lies in their ability to address the challenges posed by dynamic and complex projects (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). This theory supports the findings, as it highlights the importance of embracing adaptive practices so that project managers can better navigate the uncertainties and complexities associated with contemporary projects. Agile enables project teams to respond quickly to changes, encourages collaboration between team members and stakeholders, and emphasizes delivering incremental value throughout the project lifecycle. The respondents agreed that they are skilled in problem-solving and can effectively address conflicts in my projects. They were also confident in their ability to negotiate effectively in project-related conflicts. Therefore, the theory corroborates the findings by confirming that conflict management skills enhance the implementation of donor-funded projects.

Conclusions

The findings revealed a strongly positive correlation between Leadership Skills and Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects in Nairobi County. It was concluded that the ability of project managers to set a clear vision, inspire and motivate teams, and make timely and effective decisions is strongly correlated with key performance indicators such as project timeliness, budget adherence, quality of output, and overall project outcomes. These leadership attributes not only enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of project execution but also foster a work environment conducive to meeting project goals within stipulated timelines and budgets. Therefore, strengthening leadership competencies among project managers is vital for improving the overall success and sustainability of donor-funded infrastructure projects.

The findings revealed a strongly positive correlation between Conflict Management Skills and Implementation of Donor-funded Infrastructure Projects in Nairobi County. It was concluded that the strong positive correlation between conflict management skills and project implementation suggests

that project managers who are adept in negotiation, problem-solving, and managing conflict escalation are more likely to achieve project goals, including timeliness, budget adherence, and quality of output. Effective conflict resolution reduces the potential for disputes to disrupt project workflows, fosters collaboration among stakeholders, and contributes to the smooth progression of project activities. Therefore, enhancing project managers' abilities in these areas is essential for the optimal delivery of infrastructure projects.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion that leadership skills are crucial for the successful implementation of donor-funded road infrastructure projects, it is recommended that organizations involved in such projects invest in leadership development programs for project managers. These programs should focus on enhancing key competencies such as vision setting, team motivation, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Workshops and training sessions can be introduced to improve skills in communication, strategic thinking, and emotional intelligence, which are essential for effective leadership. Additionally, organizations should implement mentorship and training initiatives where experienced project managers can guide less-experienced counterparts in honing their leadership abilities. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and leadership excellence, project managers will be better equipped to navigate the complexities of project execution, ensuring adherence to timelines and budgets, while improving the quality and sustainability of project outcomes. Finally, leadership performance metrics should be incorporated into project evaluations, ensuring that leadership effectiveness is tracked and rewarded, further motivating project managers to develop and apply these essential skills.

Based on the conclusion that conflict management skills have a strong positive correlation with the successful implementation of donor-funded road infrastructure projects, it is recommended that organizations and stakeholders involved in such projects invest in targeted training and development programs for project managers. These programs should focus on enhancing negotiation techniques, advanced problem-solving skills, and strategies for managing conflict escalation effectively. Additionally, integrating conflict management frameworks within the project management process, such as regular conflict assessments and communication protocols, can further minimize disruptions. Encouraging a collaborative project culture, where open communication and proactive conflict resolution are emphasized, will also help in mitigating potential issues before they escalate. Establishing clear conflict resolution mechanisms, such as third-party mediation and stakeholder forums, can provide structured pathways to resolve disputes quickly. Prioritizing the development of conflict management competencies can ensure smoother project execution, adherence to timelines and budgets, and higher-quality outcomes.

Suggestions for Further Research

Future research could explore the integration of soft skills with technical project management skills and their combined impact on the success of donor-funded infrastructure projects. Investigating how cultural and organizational contexts influence the effectiveness of leadership and conflict management skills could provide deeper insights. Additionally, examining the role of soft skills in stakeholder engagement and its impact on project outcomes might reveal strategies for improving donor relationships and project sustainability. Comparative studies across different regions or types of projects could also shed light on best practices and highlight unique challenges faced in various settings.

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