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ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF PROJECT CHARTER PRACTICES ON PUBLIC SECTOR PROJECT SUCCESS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The increasing rate of project failure, abandonment, cost overruns, and implementation delays within Nigeria's public sector has generated concerns among policymakers, scholars, and development practitioners. Despite substantial public investments in infrastructure and social development projects, many government initiatives fail to achieve intended outcomes due to weak project initiation and governance mechanisms. This study examines the impact of project charter practices on public sector project success in Nigeria. Specifically, the study evaluates how project charter components such as stakeholder identification, scope definition, governance structures, risk management, and strategic alignment influence project performance outcomes. Using a qualitative review of existing literature and project management frameworks, the study argues that effective project charter practices significantly enhance project success through improved accountability, communication, planning, and stakeholder coordination. Findings reveal that inadequate project initiation processes, political interference, poor governance, and weak institutional frameworks undermine project success in Nigeria's public sector. The study concludes that institutionalizing standardized project charter practices aligned with international project management standards can improve public project delivery and national development outcomes. The study recommends capacity building, adoption of global project management frameworks, enhanced stakeholder participation, and stronger governance systems in Nigeria's public institutions.

Keywords: Project Charter, Project Success, Public Sector Projects, Project Management, Governance, Nigeria, Stakeholder Management

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Project management has become an essential tool for achieving organizational effectiveness, accountability, and sustainable development across both private and public sectors. Governments worldwide rely on projects to deliver infrastructure, healthcare services, education, transportation systems, housing, and technological innovation. In developing economies such as Nigeria, public sector projects are critical instruments for national development and socio-economic transformation. However, Nigeria continues to experience high rates of abandoned projects, implementation delays, budget overruns, poor quality delivery, and weak project sustainability (Ubani & Ononuju, 2013).

The failure of many public projects in Nigeria has been linked to poor project planning, weak governance systems, corruption, inadequate stakeholder engagement, and ineffective project management practices (Akande, 2018). One major but often neglected factor contributing to project failure is the absence or ineffective use of project charters during project initiation.

A project charter is a foundational document in project management that formally authorizes a project and establishes the framework for project execution. According to the Project Management Institute (PMI, 2021), the project charter defines project objectives, stakeholders, governance structures, resource commitments, assumptions, risks, timelines, and success criteria. It also grants the project manager authority to apply organizational resources toward achieving project goals.

Globally, project charter practices are recognized as critical success factors in project management because they provide strategic direction, accountability, stakeholder clarity, and governance structures for project implementation. In Nigeria's public sector, however, many projects commence without comprehensive project charters, resulting in scope ambiguity, conflicting stakeholder interests, poor communication, and weak monitoring systems.

This study therefore assesses the impact of project charter practices on public sector project success in Nigeria. The study contributes to project management literature by examining the role of project chartering as a governance and strategic planning tool within the context of public sector project delivery in a developing economy.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of project charter practices on public sector project success in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the role of project charter practices in public sector project implementation in Nigeria;
2. Assess the relationship between project charter components and project success outcomes;
3. Identify challenges affecting effective project charter practices in Nigeria's public sector;
4. Propose strategies for improving project charter practices toward enhancing project success.

1.3 Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What role do project charter practices play in public sector project implementation in Nigeria?
2. How do project charter components influence project success?
3. What challenges hinder effective project charter practices in Nigeria's public sector?
4. What measures can improve project charter effectiveness in public sector projects?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Project Charter

The project charter is one of the most important documents produced during project initiation. It formally authorizes the project, provides strategic direction, and grants the project manager the authority to utilize organizational resources in implementing the project (PMI, 2021).

According to the Project Management Institute (2021), a project charter is a document that defines the project's purpose, objectives, scope, major deliverables, assumptions, constraints, key stakeholders, governance structure, risks, resource requirements, and success criteria. It serves as a formal agreement between the project sponsor and the project manager regarding the expectations and strategic direction of the project.

Kerzner (2022) describes the project charter as the "birth certificate" of a project because it officially marks the beginning of project activities and establishes management commitment. A well-developed charter provides clarity regarding project priorities and reduces uncertainty during project implementation.
Recent studies have also emphasized the strategic importance of project charters. Rode, Jensby, and Svejvig (2024) argue that organizations with comprehensive project initiation documentation consistently achieve better project outcomes because clearly defined objectives and governance arrangements reduce implementation risks and improve decision-making.
Therefore, the project charter is not merely an administrative requirement; it is a strategic management tool that provides the foundation for successful project planning, execution, monitoring, and control.

2.2 Project Charter Practices

Project charter practices refer to the activities undertaken in preparing, reviewing, approving, communicating, and implementing the project charter throughout the project initiation phase. These practices ensure that projects begin with clearly defined objectives, stakeholder expectations, governance arrangements, communication structures, and performance criteria.
Effective project charter practices typically include:

- Clearly defining project objectives.
- Identifying project stakeholders.
- Defining project scope and boundaries.
- Assigning roles and responsibilities.
- Establishing governance structures.
- Documenting assumptions and constraints.
- Identifying major project risks.
- Defining project success criteria.
- Obtaining formal project authorization.
- Communicating the approved charter to stakeholders.

According to PMI (2021), these practices create a shared understanding among stakeholders, facilitate informed decision-making, and reduce uncertainty during project implementation.

2.3 Public Sector Project Success

Public sector projects differ from private sector projects because they focus primarily on public value rather than profit. Consequently, transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and effective governance become important measures of success.
Unfortunately, reports continue to show that many Nigerian public projects suffer from delays, abandoned contracts, budget overruns, and poor service delivery due to inadequate planning and weak governance structures.
Project success has traditionally been measured using the "triple constraint"of time, cost, and quality. However, contemporary project management literature recognizes that project success extends beyond these three dimensions to include stakeholder satisfaction, organizational benefits, governance effectiveness, sustainability, and value creation.
Shenhar and Dvir (2022) argue that successful projects should achieve strategic organizational objectives while delivering sustainable benefits to stakeholders.

2.4 Dimensions of Public Sector Project Success

Within the Nigerian public sector, project success can be viewed as the extent to which government projects are completed on schedule; remain within approved budgets; achieve the required quality standards; satisfy stakeholders; deliver intended socio-economic benefits; and contribute to national development.

Modern project management literature identifies several dimensions of project success beyond the traditional measures of Time Performance, Cost performance, and Quality Performance to include;

Stakeholder Satisfaction, Governance and Accountability, Achievement of Development Objectives. According to PMI (2021), these broader dimensions provide a more comprehensive assessment of project success than relying solely on the traditional iron triangle.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Project Management Theory and Stakeholder Theory.

2.5.1 Project Management Theory

This study is anchored on Project Management Theory (PMT), which explains how the application of structured project management principles, processes, and tools contributes to the successful delivery of projects. The theory evolved from the work of the Project Management Institute and is reflected in the PMBOK Guide, which provides globally accepted standards for managing projects. PMT assumes that projects are more likely to achieve their objectives when they are initiated, planned, executed, monitored, and closed using established project management practices. Recent studies continue to affirm that formal project management practices improve project performance, governance, and organizational outcomes.

Within Project Management Theory, the project charter is regarded as one of the most important project initiation documents. It formally authorizes a project, defines its objectives, scope, stakeholders, governance structure, roles and responsibilities, resource requirements, assumptions, constraints, risks, and success criteria. The project charter provides a common understanding among stakeholders and serves as the foundation for planning and project execution. Without a well-developed project charter, projects are more susceptible to scope changes, unclear responsibilities, poor communication, and weak stakeholder commitment, which often lead to project failure.

In the Nigerian public sector, where projects frequently face challenges such as inadequate planning, weak governance, political interference, cost overruns, and delayed completion, Project Management Theory provides a suitable lens for explaining how effective project charter practices can improve project outcomes. By ensuring clear project objectives, stakeholder alignment, defined authority, and measurable success criteria from the outset, project charters strengthen accountability and provide a framework for effective decision-making throughout the project life cycle.

Accordingly, this study argues that project charter practices—such as clearly defining project objectives, scope, stakeholder responsibilities, governance arrangements, risk assumptions, resource commitments, and success criteria—positively influence public sector project success in Nigeria. Project success is measured in terms of timely completion, cost performance, quality of deliverables, stakeholder satisfaction, and achievement of intended project benefits.

2.5.2 Stakeholder Theory

This study is also anchored on Stakeholder Theory, originally developed by R. Edward Freeman in 1984. The theory posits that the success of any project or organization depends on its ability to identify, engage, and manage the interests and expectations of all stakeholders who can affect or are affected by the project. Rather than focusing solely on project sponsors or organizational goals, Stakeholder Theory emphasizes balancing the needs of diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, project teams, contractors, beneficiaries, regulatory bodies, and the public.

In project management, the project charter serves as a critical document for stakeholder engagement because it formally authorizes the project, identifies key stakeholders, clarifies project objectives, defines roles and responsibilities, establishes governance structures, and outlines communication and decision-making processes. A well-developed project charter promotes transparency, accountability, and shared understanding among stakeholders from the project's inception, thereby reducing conflicts, misunderstandings, and resistance during implementation.

The application of Stakeholder Theory is particularly relevant in the Nigerian public sector, where projects involve multiple stakeholders with differing interests and expectations. Many public sector projects experience delays, cost overruns, poor quality, or abandonment due to inadequate stakeholder consultation, weak communication, political interference, and unclear project governance. By ensuring that stakeholder interests are properly identified and incorporated into the project charter, project managers can improve collaboration, strengthen stakeholder commitment, and enhance project performance.

This study therefore argues that effective project charter practices—such as clearly defining project objectives, identifying stakeholders, assigning responsibilities, establishing governance arrangements, and developing communication mechanisms—positively influence public sector project success in Nigeria. Project success is reflected in the timely completion of projects, adherence to budget, quality of deliverables, stakeholder satisfaction, and achievement of intended development outcomes. Consequently, Stakeholder Theory provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for explaining how project charter practices contribute to the success of public sector projects in Nigeria.

Recent studies have reinforced the importance of stakeholder engagement in project success. Eskerod, Ang, and Andersen (2024) observed that projects characterized by active stakeholder participation and effective communication consistently perform better than projects where stakeholders are poorly engaged. Similarly, Yang, Zou, and Wang (2023) found that stakeholder management significantly influences project quality, timely completion, stakeholder satisfaction, and overall project performance.

Applying Stakeholder Theory to this study suggests that effective project charter practices improve stakeholder identification, communication, governance, accountability, and collaboration. Consequently, projects initiated through comprehensive project charters are more likely to achieve their objectives, satisfy stakeholders, and deliver expected public value.

Therefore, Project Management Theory and Stakeholder Theory provides an appropriate theoretical lens for explaining the relationship between project charter practices (independent variable) and public sector project success (dependent variable) in Nigeria.

2.5 Empirical Review

Empirical evidence from recent project management literature indicates that project initiation practices, particularly the preparation and implementation of comprehensive project charters, significantly influence project performance.

For instance, Rode, Jensby, and Svejvig (2024) examined the influence of structured project management methodologies on project outcomes across multiple organizations. Their findings revealed that projects initiated with clearly defined objectives, governance structures, stakeholder responsibilities, and documented success criteria consistently achieved superior performance in terms of schedule, cost, and quality. The study concluded that project charter development provides a strong foundation for effective project execution.

Similarly, Musyoka and Wanyoike (2023) investigated project initiation practices in Kenyan public development projects. Using survey data from project managers and government agencies, they found that projects with comprehensive project charters experienced significantly fewer implementation challenges, better stakeholder coordination, and higher project success rates. The researchers recommended strengthening project initiation processes as a strategy for improving public project performance.

Likewise, Mwangi, Waiganjo, and Njeru (2022) assessed the relationship between project initiation and the performance of government-funded projects. Their study established that clearly documented project objectives, stakeholder roles, governance arrangements, and project authorization significantly reduced project delays, minimized budget overruns, and improved project quality.

Another study by Ahlemann et al. (2024) emphasized that organizations with mature project governance systems consistently perform better because project initiation documents, particularly project charters, establish accountability, facilitate communication, and improve strategic alignment between projects and organizational objectives.

Within the Nigerian context, Aga, Noorderhaven, and Vallejo (2016) found that project planning and stakeholder engagement significantly influence development project success. Although their study did not specifically isolate project charter practices, its findings support the argument that effective project initiation contributes to successful project implementation.

The reviewed studies collectively indicate that project charter practices positively influence project governance, stakeholder engagement, communication, accountability, resource utilization, and project success.

However, there remains limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on public sector project success in Nigeria, thereby justifying the present study. Several empirical studies have examined factors affecting project success in Nigeria and other developing economies.

Akande (2018) investigated factors influencing project management success in Nigerian public building projects and found that inadequate planning, weak stakeholder coordination, and bureaucratic delays significantly affect project outcomes.

Igwe and Ude (2018) examined project planning and implementation in Nigeria and concluded that poor project initiation processes and lack of adherence to international project management standards contribute to project failure.

Dakas (2014) studied stakeholder management in Nigerian public sector projects and found that ineffective stakeholder engagement and weak governance structures reduce project performance and sustainability.

Similarly, Ubani and Ononuju (2013) identified corruption, political interference, poor planning, and inadequate project monitoring as major causes of project abandonment in Nigeria.

Although previous studies have focused on project planning and stakeholder management, limited studies have specifically examined the impact of project charter practices on project success in Nigeria's public sector. This study therefore fills this gap by focusing on project chartering as a strategic project management tool.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the premise that Project Charter Practices influence Public Sector Project Success. The framework is supported by Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which emphasizes that effective stakeholder identification, engagement, communication, and governance enhance project outcomes.

Project Charter Practices constitute the independent variable, while Public Sector Project Success is the dependent variable.

The study conceptualizes Project Charter Practices using six dimensions commonly identified in the project management literature:

1. Project Objective Definition
2. Project Scope Definition
3. Stakeholder Identification and Engagement
4. Roles and Responsibilities
5. Governance and Communication Structure
6. Risk Identification and Assumptions

Public Sector Project Success is measured using five indicators:

1. Timely Project Completion
2. Cost Performance
3. Quality Performance
4. Stakeholder Satisfaction
5. Achievement of Project Objectives

The framework assumes that effective implementation of project charter practices positively influences these dimensions of project success.

The framework proposes a direct positive relationship between project charter practices and public sector project success in Nigeria.

3.0 IMPACT OF PROJECT CHARTER PRACTICES ON PUBLIC SECTOR PROJECT SUCCESS

Project charter practices have become increasingly recognized as an important determinant of project success because they establish the strategic foundation upon which projects are planned and executed. The project charter serves as the formal authorization for a project Consequently, projects initiated with comprehensive project charters are generally better positioned to achieve their intended outcomes than projects with weak or incomplete initiation processes.

One of the most significant impacts of project charter practices is the clarification of project objectives. Clearly defined objectives enable project teams and stakeholders to understand the project's purpose and expected outcomes from the outset. This reduces ambiguity and minimizes conflicting interpretations during implementation. Rode, Jensby, and Svejvig (2024) reported that projects with clearly documented objectives experienced better schedule performance, improved cost control, and higher-quality deliverables.

Project charter practices also enhance stakeholder alignment and participation. During project initiation, the charter identifies key stakeholders, defines their roles and responsibilities, and establishes communication channels. According to Eskerod, Ang, and Andersen (2024), early stakeholder engagement strengthens collaboration, improves decision-making, reduces resistance to project implementation, and enhances stakeholder satisfaction. In the Nigerian public sector, where projects often involve government agencies, contractors, consultants, donor organizations, host communities, and beneficiaries, effective stakeholder coordination is essential for project success.

Another important contribution of project charter practices is the strengthening of project governance. A comprehensive project charter establishes reporting relationships, approval procedures, decision-making authority, and accountability mechanisms. Strong governance reduces uncertainty, improves transparency, and ensures that project implementation remains consistent with approved objectives. Ahlemann et al. (2024) argue that organizations with mature project governance structures consistently achieve better project performance because responsibilities and authority are clearly defined from project initiation.

Project charter practices further contribute to effective risk management. The project charter identifies major assumptions, constraints, and potential risks before implementation begins.

Early identification of risks enables project teams to develop mitigation strategies, thereby reducing the likelihood of delays, cost overruns, and project failure. PMI (2021) emphasizes that proactive risk identification during project initiation is fundamental to successful project delivery.

Furthermore, effective project charter practices improve communication and coordination among project participants. By documenting project objectives, responsibilities, reporting arrangements, and communication procedures, the charter serves as a common reference document throughout the project life cycle. This reduces misunderstandings and promotes timely decision-making.

Overall, the literature indicates that effective project charter practices positively influence public sector project success by improving planning, governance, stakeholder engagement, communication, accountability, risk management, resource utilization, and project performance. These benefits ultimately increase the likelihood of completing projects on time, within budget, according to required quality standards, and with high stakeholder satisfaction

4.0 CHALLENGES AFFECTING PROJECT CHARTER PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

Despite the recognized importance of project charters, several challenges continue to limit their effective application within Nigeria's public sector.

One major challenge is inadequate project planning. Many public projects are initiated without comprehensive project charters or with poorly developed initiation documents. Consequently, project objectives, scope, and deliverables remain unclear, increasing the risk of implementation problems (PMI, 2021).

Another challenge is weak stakeholder engagement. Stakeholders are often inadequately identified or insufficiently consulted during project initiation. This leads to poor communication, conflicts, low stakeholder commitment, and implementation delays. Eskerod et al. (2024) emphasize that stakeholder participation during project initiation significantly influences project outcomes.

Political interference also poses a major challenge. Changes in government administration, political priorities, and external influence frequently result in modifications to project scope, funding, timelines, and implementation strategies. Such interference undermines the effectiveness of project charters and contributes to project delays and abandonment.

The limited availability of qualified project management professionals further weakens project charter practices. Many public institutions lack personnel with sufficient expertise in project initiation, project governance, stakeholder management, and project documentation. As a result, project charters are often treated as administrative formalities rather than strategic management tools.

Another significant challenge is poor communication and inter-agency coordination. Public projects frequently involve multiple ministries, departments, contractors, consultants, and regulatory agencies. Weak coordination among these stakeholders reduces the effectiveness of project charters and contributes to implementation challenges.

In addition, weak governance and accountability mechanisms reduce compliance with project charter provisions. Poor monitoring, inadequate supervision, and ineffective reporting structures often result in deviations from approved project objectives and governance arrangements.

Resource constraints also affect project charter implementation. Public projects are sometimes approved without adequate financial, technical, or human resources, making it difficult to implement activities as originally planned.

Finally, poor monitoring and evaluation systems limit the extent to which project charter provisions are implemented throughout the project life cycle. Continuous monitoring is

necessary to ensure compliance with project objectives, governance structures, and stakeholder commitments.
Addressing these challenges is essential for improving project initiation and enhancing public sector project success in Nigeria.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following measures:
1. Government ministries, departments, and agencies should institutionalize standardized project charter frameworks aligned with PMBOK standards
2. Public sector project managers should undergo professional certification and training in project management practices.
3. Stakeholder engagement should be mandatory during project initiation and charter development.
4. Strong governance and monitoring systems should be integrated into project charters.
5. Anti-corruption mechanisms and transparent procurement systems should be strengthened.
6. Public institutions should adopt digital project management systems for improved accountability and reporting.
7. Feasibility studies and risk assessments should be compulsory before project approval.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Project charter practices play a critical role in determining public sector project success in Nigeria. Effective project charters provide strategic direction, governance structures, stakeholder clarity, accountability systems, and risk management frameworks necessary for successful project delivery.
However, weak institutional systems, inadequate planning, corruption, political interference, and poor project governance continue to undermine project success within Nigeria's public sector.
Strengthening project charter practices through standardized frameworks, professional project management capacity, stakeholder participation, and institutional reforms can significantly improve project performance and contribute to sustainable national development.

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