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Assessing the Impact of Project Management Practices on the Success of Construction Projects in Zambia: A Case Study of the Construction Projects in Lusaka between 2022 and 2023

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the influence of project management practices on the success of construction projects within Zambia, focusing on selected construction projects from 2022 to 2023. The research objectives aimed at assessing current project management practices and strategies, and identifying challenges for improvement. The study used theoretical frameworks such as Project Success Theory and Project Management Theory to analyse findings comprehensively. A qualitative approach was used for this study. Interviews were utilised to collect data from construction companies and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The research results identified key project management practices as being crucial for success, including comprehensive planning, effective risk management, clear communication, and robust performance monitoring. Challenges such as limited awareness, stakeholder engagement issues, and deficiencies in practical implementation were uncovered. The study recommends enhancing training, stakeholder engagement, risk management, and performance monitoring. Furthermore, gaps for research include exploring gender diversity, regional variations, sustainability integration, and longitudinal project performance studies. This study contributed valuable insights to the construction industry, aiming to optimise project management practices and foster sustainable development in Zambia.

KEYWORDS: Impact, Project Management Practices, Project Success, Lusaka.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Projects are important drivers to socio-economic development. According to Hapompwe et al. (2020), socio economic development is the primary pre-occupation of any nation globally in trying to enhance human welfare through various econometric strategies, techniques, and measures in order to guarantee the provision and accessibility to basic needs .... It should, however, be stressed that development projects as being among many other strategies for attaining meaningful livelihoods for the citizens of nations through job creation, poverty reduction and inequality minimization come with inherent challenges which in some cases have ended up worsening socio economic situations of intended beneficiaries. Besides, infrastructure development is critical for any sound and meaningful development to take place (Hapompwe, Banda, & Chalwe (2024) which is achieved through strategic project investments anchored on sound project management practices and strategies for effective implementation and value realization.

Effective project management is essential for the success and efficiency of construction projects. Mir and Pinnington (2022) highlight the importance of meticulous project planning, which optimises resource allocation and improves project outcomes. Aminbakhsh et al. (2021), further corroborate this by identifying resource allocation issues as significant contributors to project delays and cost overruns.

Further, Belout (2023) identified effective communication as another critical aspect of project management. Belout and Gauvreau (2023) emphasised that clear and timely communication among stakeholders' fosters collaboration, reduces misunderstandings, and enhances decision-making processes. Conversely, inadequate communication can lead to delays, rework, discord, and jeopardise project success.

Project monitoring and control are essential components of project management. Covin (2021) highlights that comprehensive monitoring systems help detect deviations early, enabling prompt corrective actions to prevent cost and time overruns. Levy and

Dvir (2022) also stress the importance of robust project planning and scheduling, which provide a structured framework for achieving project goals and mitigating risks.

Despite global insights into good project management practices, Zambia's construction industry has had numerous project failures and delays, resulting in substantial economic consequences. These mishaps highlight the critical need to improve project management methods in Zambia. KPMG (2019) found a clear link between good project management and successful project results in construction, emphasising the necessity of organised planning and resource management. As a result, improving project planning, resource allocation, communication methods, and rigorous monitoring and control systems are critical for promoting project success and economic growth in Zambia's construction industry.

Lusaka Province, in Zambia, has been actively involved in several construction projects that are critical to the country's infrastructure development and, eventually, its long-term socioeconomic advancement. Key performance factors for these projects are timely completion, budget adherence, construction quality, and the efficacy of the improvements they offer. These indicators are frequently used by industry organisations such as the Construction Industry Association to evaluate project success and guarantee that infrastructure developments fulfil the necessary criteria. By conforming to these standards, construction projects can contribute more effectively to the country's overall development objectives. Notable projects undertaken in Lusaka between 2022 and 2023 include the construction of the $210 million National Command Centre, part of the Public Security System Safe City Project, which was aimed at improving security through a unified communication system and street camera installations (Lungu, 2017). Other significant initiatives include ongoing construction projects in Chikuni, Liteta, Bweengwa, Katete, Nyimba, Mukuni, and Mkushi.

The success rate of these projects can be measured by their completion within the set timelines and budgets, as well as their impact on enhancing national security. Despite challenges such as delays and budget overruns, these projects are fundamentally transformative, playing a pivotal role in ensuring the safety and security of the Zambian people. Enhanced security fosters investor confidence, promotes tourism, supports the overall well-being of the populace, and leads to increased economic activity and job creation. However, an evaluation report by Mushota et al. (2020), found that some projects have encountered challenges due to factors such as poor planning, inadequate funding, delays in procurement processes, and contractor performance issues. For example, the Kitwe Immigration Office project faced logistical challenges and budget overruns. Despite these setbacks, the projects undertaken are crucial for enhancing the capacity to provide essential services, stimulating economic growth, and ensuring modern and efficient infrastructure to keep up with the evolving landscape.

Ultimately, leveraging effective project management practices to achieve objectives, improve service delivery, and enhance the safety and well-being of Zambian citizens is the goal.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The construction projects in Zambia are crucial for promoting economic development and achieving national infrastructure goals. Despite their importance, these projects often fail to meet optimal project management standards, facing several challenges as identified in existing literature. Common issues include inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of skilled labour, regulatory inconsistencies, delays in obtaining permits, bureaucratic obstacles, and financial constraints (Mushota et al., 2020). Additionally, deficiencies in project planning, insufficient feasibility studies, and ineffective risk management further exacerbate these problems, leading to frequent project delays, increased costs, and compromised quality. These inefficiencies not only delay the timely completion, cost-effectiveness, and quality of construction projects but also hinder the provision of essential public services and overall economic growth.

The issue under assessment is the frequency and impact of various problems on the successful completion of building projects in Zambia. These issues include inadequate infrastructure, a skilled labour scarcity, regulatory inconsistencies, permit application delays, bureaucratic roadblocks, financial limits, shortcomings in project planning, insufficient feasibility studies, and inefficient risk management. The inquiry focuses on how these challenges affect project deadlines, costs, and quality, eventually impeding the achievement of infrastructure goals and the delivery of efficient public services critical to Zambia's economic growth.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the current project management practices and strategies utilised within construction projects in Lusaka, Zambia during the period of 2022 to 2023.
2. To describe key challenges in the implementation of project management practices within the construction projects in Lusaka.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Contemporary Project Management: A Global and Zambian Perspective

Contemporary project management lacks universally agreed-upon definitions for success, as indicated by Müller and Turner (2018). Projects have unique success criteria, and there is no universal formula for success. Consequently, recent studies like Aubery et al., (2020) lack robust evidence that project management always positively impacts project success. Despite this, project management focuses on applying tools and strategies to achieve objectives, as highlighted by Aubry et al. (2020), emphasising the importance of employing the right tools at the right time (Joslin and Müller, 2018).

The effectiveness of project management tools and strategies is influenced by practitioners' training and implementation processes (Williams, 2019). Success factors often relate to human elements, termed soft project management, rather than hard project management tools. For instance, Garcia and Simpson (2021) found that only about 50% of project managers are familiar with project management tools, and just 28% implement them effectively. Similarly, Zhang and Lee (2020) noted that 42% of the practitioners do not utilise the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS), and 48% do not use the Organisation Breakdown Structure (OBS). Although some projects achieve a success rate of about 66%, project management tools and strategies do not directly influence success. Proper and timely implementation of these tools can lead to success, necessitating careful selection for each project stage (Johnson, 2019). The project manager's competence in developing execution strategies and aligning them with company objectives is crucial. Hence, professional certifications are recommended for project managers (Lee and Chen, 2020). Competence alone does not guarantee success, but it is vital for selecting the appropriate tools and strategies (Williams, 2021; Garcia and Simpson, 2019). Projects must adapt to evolving internal and external factors. Thus, proper project management education is essential for achieving top-tier success (Davis, 2019). Ongoing education and certification are fundamental for effective project management and successful outcomes (Smith, 2022).

The Project Management Institute (PMI) defines a project as a temporary endeavour with specific objectives and constraints (Project Management Institute, 2017). Each project is unique, and applying static management approaches universally is challenging. Eva et al. (2017), argue that inappropriate tools and strategies often lead to project failures

Despite the evolution of project management practices, challenges persist in adapting methodologies effectively across diverse projects (Frefer et al., 2018). The PMBOK Guide recognises that methodologies must be tailored to individual project goals and contexts. The field continues to evolve, requiring adaptive methodologies to navigate uncertainties and complexities (Al-Nady et al., 2016).

In Africa, particularly central-southern Africa, project management practices face unique challenges. These challenges include inadequate infrastructure, political instability, and economic fluctuations (Johnson and Brown, 2019). Lee et al. (2021), suggest that methodologies like Agile require cultural sensitivity and adaptability to local norms.

In Zambia, the construction industry faces significant challenges, such as ineffective project management, resource constraints, regulatory issues, and communication gaps (Mushota et al., 2020; Lungu, 2017). Inadequate risk management practices lead to project failures and delays, underscoring the need for robust risk management (Mushota et al., 2020). Additionally, poor project planning, inadequate control, and ineffective communication necessitate enhanced approaches tailored to Zambia's context (Lungu, 2017). Implementing these practices can mitigate risks, improve scheduling, and lead to better outcomes in cost-effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction.

2.2 The Success of Project Management in Construction Projects

Investigating the success of project management in construction projects in Zambia is a multifaceted and critical area of study. Scholars such as (Nyaga, 2016, Dvir & Shenhar, 2016). have explored the effectiveness of project management practices and their impact on project outcomes, highlighting both strengths and limitations.

Project management practices aim at achieving project objectives within constraints of time, cost, and quality. However, defining and measuring project success remains challenging due to its subjective nature and varying stakeholder perspectives. Besteiro et al. (2015), emphasise the significant role of project management in enhancing efficiency and mitigating risks. However, external factors beyond its control also influence outcomes. Schindler and Eppler (2018) critique the conventional view that project management dictates success metrics like time, cost, and quality, suggesting these parameters serve as benchmarks rather than definitive measures. Dvir et al. (2016), argue that traditional success measures may not fully capture stakeholder satisfaction or alignment with end-user expectations.

Baccarini (2019) integrates project management success with product success as essential components of overall project success. He stresses the importance of delivering outcomes that meet both criteria. Lim and Mohamed (2019) further distinguish between

micro and macro perspectives of success, noting that while micro project management success focuses on technical goals, macro success considers broader impacts on stakeholders and operational effectiveness.

Despite these findings, existing approaches for measuring project success are flawed. According to Atkinson (1999), depending too much on traditional metrics such as the iron triangle (time, money, and quality) fails to capture the complexities and dynamics of modern Zambian construction projects. Atkinson advocates for the creation of nuanced evaluation frameworks that consider qualitative variables including stakeholder satisfaction, sustainability, and long-term community benefit.

Strengths of existing research include comprehensive methodologies for project management and the identification of best practices that enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Rigorous project planning, clear communication, effective resource allocation, and proactive risk management are critical factors contributing to project success (Razek et al., 2015; Kaming et al., 2018). However, the literature also identifies several limitations, such as the lack of generalisability to the Zambian context due to unique challenges and the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce biases.

The relationship between project management and project success in construction projects is widely recognised. Studies from 2018 to 2023 emphasise the significant impact of project management practices on outcomes within Zambia, particularly in projects under MoHAIS. Effective project management practices provide structured frameworks for planning, execution, monitoring, and control (Pinto and Slevin, 2018).

Nguyen et al. (2020), highlight the importance of rigorous project planning and risk management in achieving cost control and schedule adherence. Smith and Jones (2019) emphasise stakeholder's engagement in enhancing project outcomes by pre-empting conflicts and aligning goals. Brown and Green (2021) underscore the positive impact of transformational leadership on team motivation and project performance.

Effective systems for monitoring risk in the construction industry remain challenging. Singh (2017) asserts that construction projects are susceptible to numerous risks, and successful projects depend on effective management and control of these risks. Studies from Tanzania and other developing nations indicate significant barriers to implementing effective risk management practices, such as lack of awareness, experience, and information (Chileshe and Kikwasi, 2016). Silungwe et al. (2015), highlight the over-reliance on traditional risk management methods and the need for integrated approaches that inspire teamwork from the project's initial stages to completion.

While project management practices are instrumental in guiding construction projects toward success, defining and measuring success remains contentious. Researchers such as Baccarini (1999), Shenhar et al. (2001), and Turner and Zolin (2012) have recommended that future research should explore innovative methodologies and evaluation criteria that reflect diverse stakeholder interests and broader societal impacts, particularly in the Zambian context. Enhanced project outcomes and sustainable development goals can be achieved by addressing these gaps and integrating local factors into project management strategies.

2.3 Empirical Studies on Project Management and Organisational Performance

Karimi (2017) investigated the impact of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementation on organisational performance within Kenya's transport industry, focusing on small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Using a descriptive research approach, the study collected data from 300 management staff through questionnaires. The study found that communication, training, top management support, and management skills significantly influenced ERP implementation success.

Further, Gachogu (2019), in a study conducted in Kenya using GBS strategic planning model, found several barriers. These included the absence of a comprehensive policy framework, inadequate strategic management knowledge among school leaders, and insufficient resource allocation, all of which impeded effective strategic planning.

Okero (2020) examined the implementation of infrastructure projects funded by the Local Authority Transfer Fund (LATF) in Mombasa County. Through a descriptive survey and questionnaires, Okero identified critical challenges such as delayed payments, political influence, technical capacity gaps, and inadequate community participation and monitoring practices. These collectively hindered project success.

Rogito (2018) conducted a study in Kenya to assess the effect of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methods on the success of Youth Enterprise Development Fund projects in the Marani district, Kisii. According to the study, variables such as insufficient M&E personnel training, poor baseline survey design, and a lack of expert engagement severely harmed the effectiveness of the frameworks. These findings highlight issues unique to the Kenyan environment, which influence project outcomes.

Hatch and Dyer (2019) investigated the role of human capital in shaping competitive advantage and firm performance within semi-conductor manufacturing. Using the Resource-Based View (RBV) framework, they found that strategic investments in firm-specific

human capital fostered continuous learning and adaptability, enhancing operational efficiency and innovation. However, challenges such as high turnover rates and difficulties acquiring skilled labour were also highlighted.

Nyaga (2016) focused on the role of project management skills in the performance of construction projects in Mombasa County. The study underscored the lack of diverse planning skills for effective project implementation and identifying inadequate planning capabilities as significant challenges.

These studies collectively provide valuable empirical insights into various sectors in Kenya, highlighting the factors influencing ERP implementation, strategic planning in education, infrastructure project challenges, Monitoring and evaluation practices, human capital in manufacturing, and project management skills in construction. Each study contributes to a deeper understanding of sector-specific dynamics and challenges, offering actionable insights for improving organisational performance and project outcomes across Kenya's diverse industries.

2.4 Research Gaps

Despite substantial research on project management and organisational performance, several gaps remain, particularly in Zambia and similar developing regions. While existing studies offer insights into the challenges faced by the construction industry in Zambia, such as ineffective management and regulatory hurdles, there is a scarcity of comprehensive research tailored specifically to Zambia's unique context. Additionally, there is limited exploration into how global project management methodologies can be adapted to local conditions or the integration and impact of soft skills in Zambian practices. Traditional success metrics often fall short of addressing project success in the Zambian context, necessitating the development of more holistic metrics. Furthermore, there are gaps in effective risk management practices and the availability of continuous education and certification programs for project managers. Addressing these gaps could enhance project management practices and contribute to sustainable development in Zambia and similar regions; thus, conducting this study.

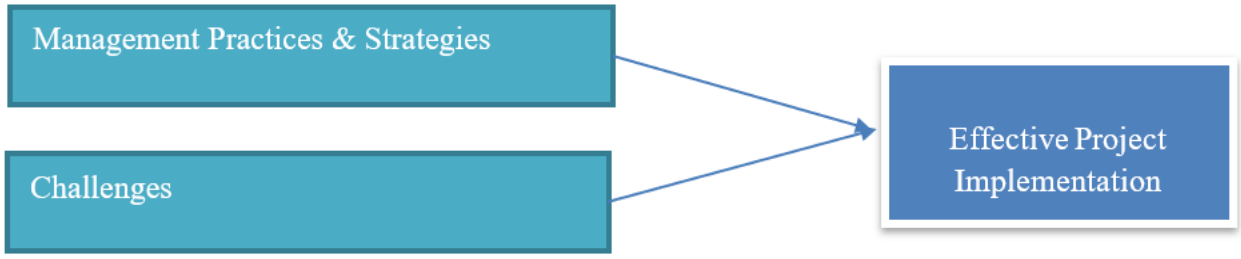
2.5 Theoretical Frameworks

2.5.1 **The Project Success Theory:** This theory was proposed by Jugdev and Müller (2005), broadens the traditional view of project success by emphasising three dimensions: meeting project objectives, stakeholder satisfaction, and alignment with organisational goals. In Australia, this theory has been effectively applied to large-scale construction projects, where success is marked by high stakeholder satisfaction, regulatory compliance, and alignment with development goals although challenges in managing project complexity and stakeholder expectations persist. In the United States of America, IT sector, the theory has been applied to software development and system upgrades, with varying success. While some projects meet user expectations and enhance efficiency, others struggle with scope creep, budget overruns, and technology adoption issues. These are also influenced by factors such as project complexity and stakeholder dynamics.

2.5.2 **Project Management Theory:** As detailed by Kerzner (2017), this theory involves systematic practices, processes, and techniques to ensure project success. In the U.S. Department of Defence, rigorous project management has successfully overseen complex defence projects like aircraft and naval vessels, though challenges like evolving requirements and budget constraints persist. Similarly, the Dubai Metro Project demonstrated effective project management in the transportation sector, achieving timely completion and operational efficiency through meticulous planning and stakeholder engagement (Kerzner, 2017).

In Zambia, applying global project management theories, such as those by Kerzner, may face unique challenges. Research needs to focus on adapting these theories to Zambia's socio-economic and institutional contexts, identifying gaps in project management capacity, addressing sector-specific issues like security and procurement, and assessing the impact of improved practices on project outcomes. Addressing these gaps could enhance project success and contribute to sustainable development in Zambia.

2.6 Conceptual Framework: The conceptual framework for this study aims at illustrating the relationships and interactions between the key elements of project management practices and their impact on the success of construction projects in Zambia. The diagram below outlines the main components of the framework.



Source: Author's Construction (2024)

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3 METHODOLOGY

This study used the interpretivist research philosophy, relying on qualitative methods to capture the complex experiences of stakeholders involved in construction projects in Lusaka. Using an inductive approach, the study collected rich, detailed data via semi-structured interviews with 100 participants from three selected construction organisations. The study used thematic analysis to discover patterns and themes in the data, assuring dependability through standardised data gathering techniques and several researchers collaborating in the coding process. The triangulation of data sources and the use of rigorous research techniques improved validity. Despite restrictions such as financial and logistical limits, participant willingness, and access to previous data, the study provided extensive insights into project management procedures. Ethical considerations were scrupulously followed throughout the research procedure, with informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data storage being prioritised. Good and to the point.

4 FINDINGS

4.1. Management Practices and Strategies

The survey highlighted many essential project management strategies that are critical for the success of building projects. Effective communication, as noted by 25% of the respondents, was viewed as critical for encouraging collaboration and decision-making, ultimately improving project efficiency. Clear scope definition, mentioned by 20% of the respondents, was praised for its role in establishing project boundaries and preventing scope creep. Robust risk management, as stated by 15% of the respondents, was critical for proactively detecting and managing risks, and reducing interruptions and cost overruns. Regular performance reviews, which were stressed by 15% of the respondents, were valued for their capacity to track progress and resolve difficulties quickly.

4.2. Challenges Encountered During Project Undertaking

Construction projects face various obstacles, impacting their success and productivity. A significant 40% of the respondents highlighted the lack of skilled personnel as a major challenge, indicating a shortage of qualified workforce as a limiting factor in project execution. Limited budget and resources were cited by 35% of the respondents, suggesting constraints in financial allocations and resource availability as impediments to project progress. Resistance from stakeholders, noted by 25% of the respondents, reflects difficulties in managing stakeholder expectations and obtaining necessary support for project initiatives. Additionally, 25% of the respondents identified inadequate training in project management as a barrier, underscoring the need for enhanced skills and knowledge among project teams. Regulatory constraints were highlighted by 20% of the respondents, indicating compliance issues and regulatory requirements as obstacles to project implementation. These findings highlight the diverse array of challenges faced by construction projects, ranging from workforce limitations and resource constraints to stakeholder resistance and regulatory hurdles, emphasising the importance of proactive mitigation strategies to address these obstacles and ensure project success.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Management Practices and Strategies

The study highlights that effective project management practices are pivotal in driving the success of construction projects in Lusaka. Key strategies identified include comprehensive planning, proactive risk management, and robust communication. The survey reveals that thorough project planning, which encompasses defining clear objectives, scope, and milestones, significantly contributes to successful project outcomes. This aligns with Turner and Müller's (2003) assertion that well-structured planning is essential for navigating project complexities. Furthermore, the importance of proactive risk management is underscored, with

respondents emphasising the need for early risk identification and mitigation strategies to avoid delays and cost overruns. Effective communication and collaboration among stakeholders is also critical, as it facilitates shared understanding and decision-making. These findings corroborate Ling and Liu's (2005) emphasis on the need for clear communication channels in project management. Overall, adopting these management practices and strategies enhances project execution, aligns with industry best practices, and addresses common project challenges.

5.2 Challenges Encountered During Project Undertaking

Despite emphasising effective management practices, several challenges persist in project undertakings. The survey identifies key issues such as inadequate resource allocation, stakeholder engagement difficulties, and inefficiencies in risk management. Specifically, respondents highlighted challenges in securing timely financial resources and overcoming political influences, which often disrupt project schedules and impact overall performance. Additionally, there are notable difficulties in engaging all relevant stakeholders effectively, leading to misaligned expectations and communication breakdowns. These challenges are consistent with findings from Okero (2011), which notes delays and political interference as significant barriers in project implementation. Furthermore, the literature indicates that practical implementation of risk management strategies often falls short, with many projects lacking adequate monitoring and control mechanisms. Addressing these challenges requires enhanced policy frameworks, improved stakeholder engagement strategies, and more robust risk management practices to ensure smoother project execution and better alignment with project goals.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive assessment of project management practices and their impact on the success of construction projects in Lusaka, Zambia, specifically focusing on the 2022 to 2023 period. The findings reveal that comprehensive project planning, proactive risk management, and effective communication are crucial factors influencing project success. The survey results corroborate existing literature on the importance of these practices, demonstrating their role in enhancing project outcomes and addressing common challenges in the construction sector.

The study underscores the need for improved management strategies to overcome persistent issues such as inadequate resource allocation, stakeholder engagement difficulties, and inefficiencies in risk management. Despite the consensus on the importance of structured planning and risk mitigation, challenges in practical implementation and stakeholder involvement remain significant concerns.

In conclusion, while the study highlights the critical role of robust management practices in achieving project success, it also reveals gaps and challenges that must be addressed to improve overall project performance. Bridging these gaps and refining management practices will contribute to more effective project execution and better alignment with organisational goals.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Enhanced Risk Management Frameworks

Future research should explore the development and implementation of more robust risk management frameworks tailored to the specific needs of the Zambian construction industry. Investigating innovative risk mitigation strategies and tools can help address the challenges identified in this study.

6.2.2. Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

Further studies should examine effective strategies for improving stakeholder engagement and communication in construction projects. Understanding how to better involve and manage stakeholder expectations can lead to more successful project outcomes and reduce conflicts.

6.2.3. Resource Allocation Optimisation

Research should be conducted and focus on optimising resource allocation processes within construction projects. This includes evaluating financial management practices and exploring ways to enhance the efficiency of resource distribution to avoid delays and cost overruns.

6.2.4. Comparative Analysis

Conduct comparative studies between different sectors and regions to identify best practices and lessons learned that could be applied to the Zambian context. Comparing findings with similar studies in other countries or industries may offer valuable insights for improving project management practices.

6.2.5. Longitudinal Studies

Long-term studies tracking the implementation of recommended practices and their impact on project success over extended periods can provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of various management strategies and their sustainability.

These recommendations aim at addressing the identified challenges, enhance project management practices, and contribute to the successful execution of construction projects in Zambia and beyond.

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