Project Communication and Perceived Project Performance: The Mediating Influence of Individual Commitment in Uganda's Citizenship Projects

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the mediating influence of individual commitment on the relationship between project communication and perceived project performance. Many citizenship projects frequently fail to deliver on time, budget, specifications, and quality or do not deliver value to the public. This could be attributed to ineffective project communication and lack of individual commitment. Despite previous research contributions, no existing studies have investigated the mediating influence of individual commitment on this relationship. Thus, empirical research to corroborate these claims in this area remains anecdotal and scanty. Based on a cross sectional data set from 322 citizenship project stakeholders in Uganda used to validate the theoretical model, findings reveal that individual commitment elements (affectivity, normative and continuance) significantly mediate the relationship between project communication and perceived project performance. The results also suggest that affectivity and normative commitment have

a stronger influence towards perceived project performance than continuance commitment. Theoretical and practical implications are also discussed.

Keywords: *project communication, mediation, individual commitment, citizenship projects, project performance*

INTRODUCTION

In most developing countries, many organisations have devised citizenship projects as a competitive strategy to improve organisational performance (Hopkins, 2007; McDonald and Rundle-Thiele, 2008). Citizenship projects are those projects aimed at making a difference in one's community, society and country (Drucker, 1993). Many commercial banks, for instance, are becoming more involved in activities like improving education, public health, fighting poverty, rehabilitation and fighting social injustices (Barclay's Bank sustainability review report, 2012). The assumption is that superior firm performance is associated with success of citizenship projects (Hopkins, 2007; Scott, 2007). Despite an increased involvement of commercial banks in citizenship projects in Sub-Saharan Africa like Uganda, anecdotal evidence reveals that over 70% of citizenship projects fall short of the expected quality, fail to boost bank awareness, have cost overrun and are completed behind schedule (Stanbic Bank Uganda, 2009; Barclay's Bank-Uganda, 2007). This possibly could be attributed to ineffective project communication (Ramsing, 2009; Ruuska, 1996) and lack of individual commitment to such projects (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

There is need to ensure that citizenship projects that commercial banks fund achieve their objectives. While most previous studies have attempted to examine the predictors of perceived project performance using models from what may be referred to as developed world contexts (Chow and Cao, 2008; Misra et al., 2009; Raed and Cavana, 2012; Pinto and Slevin,

1988), no research has been done in Sub-Saharan Africa to corroborate these findings. Similarly, despite the contribution of various studies, the extent to which individual commitment mediates the relationship between project communication and perceived project performance remains unclear, especially in the citizenship projects of Uganda. Most of the research is still speculative, anecdotal and scanty. Therefore, this article examines the mediating influence of individual commitment between project communication and perceived project performance. The rest of this article is organised as follows: The next section reviews literature on key concepts to develop hypotheses and a conceptual framework. In section 3, methodology is described and in section 4, findings, implications, limitations, and future research are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Project Communication, Individual Commitment and Perceived Project Performance

Project communication refers to information exchanges intended to create understanding among project stakeholders (Ruuska, 1996). On the other hand, individual commitment is willingness by an individual to devote energy and loyalty to a project as expressed in three forms: affective, continuance and normative (Meyer and Allen, 1997). The net sum of a person's commitment to a project reflects each of these separable psychological states (Meyer and Allen, 1997). An affective commitment is an individual's emotional attachment with (that is, identification with and involvement in) the project. Continuance commitment refers to the individual's recognition of the benefits of continued association with the project compared to perceived cost of leaving the project. Normative commitment refers to the employee's feeling of obligation to remain in the project. All three forms of commitment affect the individual's willingness to remain with a project and their work-related behaviour.

Many studies have revealed that project communication and individual commitment are critical factors for project performance (Chow and Cao, 2008; Ntayi et al., 2011; Raed and Cavana, 2012). Oliver's (1980) cognitive and affective theory suggests that when a manager or team member with a high need for self-esteem, volunteers to work on a project and communicates their intentions to associate within the project, emotionally they get attached to ensuring that the project succeeds. This is because they derive satisfaction from the success of philanthropic engagements (Ahimbisibwe and Nangoli, 2012). This implies that effective project communication creates a feeling of responsibility and attachment between stakeholders and the project tasks that make one feel indebted to the project thereby creating an atmosphere for individual team members to act without much control and coercion. Under such circumstances, what drives a person to work is the emotional attachment to the project as fostered through communication. Therefore, H_1: there is a positive relationship between project communication and individual commitment to the project.

Furthermore, the need for adequate communication channels and effective communication has also been emphasized in previous studies as extremely important in creating an atmosphere for successful project implementation (Ahimbisibwe and Nangoli, 2012). Project communication refers not only to feedback mechanisms, but, for example the necessity of exchanging information with both clients and the rest of the organization concerning project goals, changes in policies and procedures as well as status reports (Lievens, et al., 2000; Zhong and Low, 2009). Therefore, communication is not only essential within the project team itself (intra-communication), but also between the team and the rest of the organization as well as with the clients (extra-communication). Therefore, H_2: there is a positive relationship between project communication and perceived project performance.

2.2 Individual Commitment and Perceived Project Performance

A project is usually defined as ''a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result'' (Project Management Institute-PMI, 2008, p. 5). Projects undergo a series of stages that include initiation, planning, controlling, implementation, and closing processes (PMI, 2008). Project performance is completion of the project according to desired specifications, within the specified budget, scope, and time schedule while keeping the customer and other stakeholders happy (Ika, 2009). Equally, Jugdvev and Muller (2005) argue that project success has been defined and measured differently in literature. Truly, Pinto and Slevin (1988) had earlier acknowledged three aspects of project success as the implementation process, perceived value of the project, and client satisfaction with the delivered project outcome. Shenhar et al. (1997) suggest two additional measures for business success and preparing for the future. However, empirical results by Lipovetsky et al. (1997) indicate that the importance of the latter measurement is all but negligible.

Individual commitment influences project performance (Chow and Coa, 2008; Raed and Cavana, 2012). Committed project teams more often do not have intentions to quit (Addae, et al., 2006). This saves the project costs of recruiting and orienting new team members in terms of both time and money (Gakovic and Tetrick, 2003). Similarly, costs of supervision are mitigated if the project team is committed to their project tasks (Riketta, 2002). It follows that where project stakeholders are satisfied about the project's success, the investing bank's public image will blossom, as in the case of citizenship projects run by commercial banks (Ofori and Hinson, 2007). Thus H_3: there is a positive relationship between individual commitment to the project and perceived project performance.

Furthermore, when H_1, H_2 and H_3 are connected together in the theoretical model shown in Figure 1, then there is need to investigate the mediating influence of the individual commitment existing between project

communication and perceived project performance. However, whether this mediation role is full or partial deserves more attention. Therefore, H_4: individual commitment mediates the relationship between project communication and perceived project performance. Figure 1 demonstrates the theoretical model of relationships between project communication, individual commitment and perceived project performance.

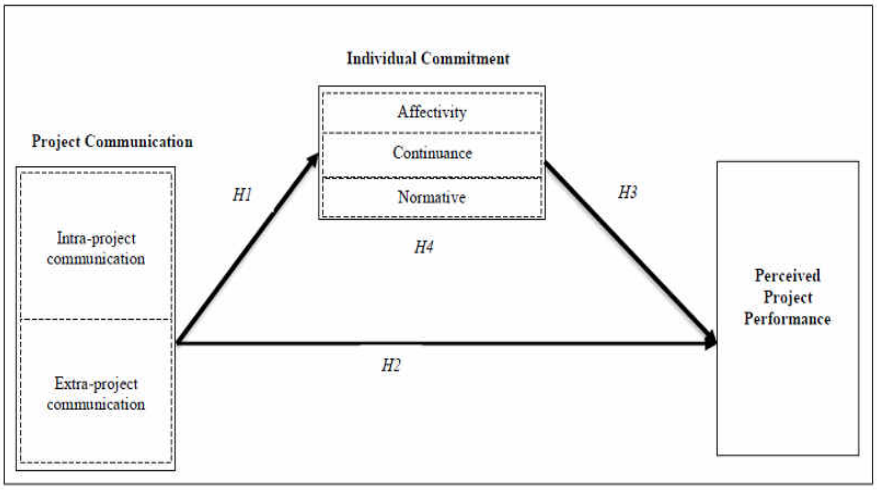

Fig. 1: *Theoretical Model*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Survey Design

The survey questions addressed only a single issue at a time and avoided phrases that could elicit socially acceptable responses. Each construct was measured by at least three questions that were relevant in terms of established theory. A cover letter was included that explained the purpose and intended use of survey data and assured anonymity of both respondent

and company in the reporting. Survey questions captured the perceptions of stakeholders about citizenship projects for which they are expected to be the most knowledgeable. Perceptual measures are frequently used in project management research since they can parallel objective data in accuracy, and cogent arguments have been advanced for using the managers as the key informant for questions regarding performance of projects within the organization. However, when using single informants, it is desirable to select the most experienced and knowledgeable person. By virtue of their roles, stakeholders are knowledgeable about the progress and benefits of projects. To reduce the possibility of single-informant bias that might result from exaggeration and self-promotion and to encourage participation, the respondents were advised that results would be completely anonymous (Podsakoff, et al., 2003).

3.2 Measures and Operationalization

Project communication was measured using an abridged version of Goldhaber and Rogers' (1979) Communication Audit Survey (CAS) questionnaire. In assessing the level of individual commitment, an abridged version of the employee Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), as developed by Meyer and Allen (1997), was modified. Perceived project performance was measured using an amalgam of the research measures used by Pinto and Slevin (1988) as well as Shenhar, et al. (1997) and competence areas defined in 'A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge' (PMI, 2008). All the responses in the questionnaire were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale of strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), not sure (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Reliability of scales was ascertained by performing the Cronbach's alpha coefficient test and all the coefficients were above 0.7 (see Table 1) hence, deemed adequate (Nannually, 1967).

Table 1: *Cronbach Alpha Values*

Variable	*Anchor*	*Cronbach Alpha Value*
Project Communication	5 Point scale	0.832
Individual Commitment	5 Point scale	0.867
Perceived Project Performance	5 Point scale	0.868

3.3 Survey Piloting and Validation

The self-administered questionnaire was first piloted on management professors from Makerere University, Kampala. Among them, four professors had worked on citizenship projects in Sub-Saharan-Africa for longer than four years and had widespread experience with this topic. The scales were also pilot-tested using 45 citizenship projects and yielded a 98% response rate. Based on these responses and comments, item scales that were unclear and ambiguous were either improved or deleted.

3.4 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The population consisted of 121 citizenship projects conducted by at least 16 commercial banks in Uganda (Bank of Uganda, 2011). Simple random sampling method was adopted and the 121 citizenship projects were written down on small pieces of paper and mixed in a box and then 92 of them were randomly picked in accordance with Krejcie and Morgan (1970) criteria for sample determination. This method of sampling gives an equal chance to each project in the sampling frame that was chosen. From each selected bank, at least three project managers, two of whom were from any two conveniently selected branches of the bank and one was from the bank's head office, were sampled. Five employees from each of the bank branches were also purposively targeted. Similarly, at least five beneficiaries for each project were also targeted. This finally added up to a total of 392 target respondents. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were that where a person

was picked and found not to have participated in the selected projects, he/she was discarded from the data and replaced with the next convenient person. The final responses were 322 usable questionnaires representing an 82% response rate.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The results showed that 54% of respondents had been involved in execution of citizenship projects for a period of three to six years; 6.4% and 1.7% had spent seven to 10 and more than 10 years, respectively. The findings further indicated that most of projects existed for about three to six years (48.8%), less than three years (43.6%), or more than 10 years (2.9%). Majority of respondents were females (51.7%), which could imply that more females take up citizenship activities than their male counterparts. Majority of respondents were either married (52%) or single (46%), with those in the age bracket of 20 to 30 years representing 73.3%. Of the respondents, 72.7% had attained at least a bachelor's degree, and 4% and 15% had master degrees and professional qualifications, respectively. Regarding positions held in execution of citizenship projects by individual respondents, majority (78.5%) of them revealed that they were team members, while 10.5% were project managers and 4.1% were project beneficiaries. The project types included categories of health (31.7%), education (19%), environment (11.1%), economic (25.4%), and rehabilitation (12.7%).

4.2 Factor Analysis

A factor analysis was conducted using the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) approach with varimax rotation to confirm suitability of the construct

indicators. The PCA was chosen because it is the simplest of the true eigenvector-based multivariate analyses that often reveals the internal structure of the data in a way that best explains variance by providing the user with a lower-dimensional picture when viewed from its most informative viewpoint (Hair, et al., 2009). A number of meaningful factors explaining a larger percentage of the common item variance emerged and most items loaded on the hypothesized constructs exceeding 0.50 as presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Factor analysis results for project communication yielded two components which were interpreted as intra-project communication (variance = 53%) and extra-project communication (variance = 12%), both explaining 64% of total variance in project communication. Individual commitment yielded three components, which were interpreted as continuance commitment (variance = 38%), affective commitment (variance = 16%) and normative commitment (variance = 12%). The three factors together explained 66% of the variance in individual commitment. Finally, perceived project performance yielded one component with explained variance of 64% of the variance in perceived project performance. All the items, whose factor loadings were below 0.5 or had cross loadings were dropped and not considered in subsequent analyses because this demonstrated lack of construct validity.

Table 2: *Factor Analysis Results for Project Communication*

	Intraproject Communicatio	Extraproject Communicatio
The amount of information disseminated by project supervisors is satisfactory	.758	
The language we use in our correspondences is familiar to all team members	.847	
I like the channels that we use to share information amongst team members	.844	
I frequently use electronic means to exchange information with team members	.727	
Informal communication amongst team members is usually active	.701	
New information usually circulates amongst project team members in time	.664	
Supervisors are always attentive to what their subordinates have to say	.562	
We have reliable avenues for receiving reactions about our activities in the community		.860
We have always maintained timely communications with external stakeholders		.682
Information concerning our citizenship activities is widely availed to the public		.667
Our external stakeholders like the way we communicate with them		.652
Our information is largely shaped by preferences of the communities we serve		.651
Our external stakeholders are reliably informed of the progress of our citizenship projects		.540
Eigen value	3.526	1.157
Variance %	52.886	11.571
Cumulative %	52.886	64.457

Table 3: *Factor Analysis Results for Individual Commitment*

	Continuanc Commitme	Affective Commitme	Normative Commitmen
I think no other activities can match the benefits that citizenship activities present to me	.666		
It would be very hard for me to abandon citizenship activities even if I wanted to	.723		
My life would be upset if I decided not to engage in citizenship activities	.695		
It would be too costly for me to quit citizenship activities right now	.814		
Taking part in citizenship projects is a matter of necessity as much as desire	.600		
I would proudly accept any job assignments related to serving community		.704	
I find that my personal values and those of citizenship projects are very similar		.746	
I feel like part of the family of the citizenship project teams		.603	
I feel emotionally attached to citizenship projects		.859	
I feel a strong sense of belonging to citizenship projects		.710	
I feel I have an obligation to keep performing citizenship activities			.527
I have a sense of obligation to the recipients of citizenship projects			.769
I owe a great deal to citizenship projects			.756
Eigen value	3.433	1.442	1.063
Variance %	38.146	16.022	11.809
Cumulative %	38.146	54.168	65.977

4.3 Zero-Order Correlations and Multiple Regression Analysis Results

The results indicated significant positive relationships between all the predictor values and perceived project performance supporting H_1, H_2, and H_3. The results in Table 4 indicate that there exists a significant positive relationship between project communication and individual commitment ($r = 0.623^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). The results further reveal that intra-project communication ($r = 0.667^{**}$, $p <. 0.01$) and extra-project communication ($r = 0.640^{**}$, $p< 0.01$) are both positively related to individual commitment. Then, it also demonstrate that project communication had a much stronger relationship with normative commitment ($r = 0.560^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) than the other components of individual commitment, that is, continuance and affective commitment whose correlation coefficients were ($r = 0.325^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and ($r = 0.547^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), respectively supporting H_1. There is a significant and positive relationship between individual commitment and perceived project performance ($r = 0.672^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). Specifically, it was shown that improvements in continuance commitment, affective and normative commitment are likely to result in improvements in perceived project performance ($r = 0.478^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), ($r = 0.557^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and ($r = 0.530^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), respectively.

These results highlight the fact that if individual team members on a given citizenship project are committed to execution of project tasks, the project in question usually succeeds and hence, supporting H_3. The results reveal that where project members willingly exert more effort to guarantee success of, say, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDs) reduction campaigns; they will perceive their efforts to have enabled the bank to incur lower costs of operation. This statement was supported by a coefficient of ($r = 0.530^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). These findings also imply that there are individuals within project management teams who find it just too hard to exclude themselves from execution of citizenship projects and they

perceive their efforts to positively contribute to performance. This contribution could be in terms of ensuring that activities are completed on time and at minimal cost. The results further reveal a positive and significant relationship between project communication ($r = 0.722^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), intra-project communication ($r = 0.730^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and extra-project communication ($r = 0.734^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and perceived project performance providing support for H_2.

Table 4: *Zero-Order Correlations*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Intra-project communication-1	1.000							
Extra-project communication-2	.697**	1.000						
Project communication-3	.858**	.838**	1.000					
Continuance-4	.345**	.443**	.325**	1.000				
Affective-5	.589**	.478**	.547**	.238**	1.000			
Normative-6	.598**	.562**	.560**	.405**	.514**	1.000		
Individual commitment-7	.667**	.640**	.623**	.777**	.767**	.809**	1.000	
Perceived project Performance-8	.730**	.734**	.722**	.478**	.557**	.530**	.672**	1.000
*Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*								

Consistent with results in Table 4, the regression model shown in Table 5 also revealed that project communication ($\hat{a} = 0.466$, sig < 0.01) and individual commitment ($\hat{a} = 0.303$, sig < 0.01) are significant predictors of perceived project performance and account for 59.3% of the variance in perceived project performance (Adjusted R Square = .587). The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was less than 4 and tolerance ratio was above 0.1 indicating that multi-collinearity in this study was not a problem (Garson, 2010) and as such the interpretations of the beta weights and R-squares were reliable.

Table 5: *Regression Model Summary of Coefficients*

	Unstandardized Coefficients		*Standardized Coefficients*	*t*	*Sig.*	*Collinearity Statistics*	
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.855	.218		3.914	.000		
Project Communication	.466	.072	.493	6.472	.000	.557	1.796
Individual Commitment	.303	.066	.349	4.581	.000	.557	1.796
Dependent Variable: Perceived Project Performance							
R Square	.593						
Adjusted R Square	.587		Sig.	0.000			

4.4 Testing for Mediation Effects

Consistent with Baron and Kennys (1986), four conditions for existence of mediation effects were tested. Overall, the regression results support all these conditions for mediation as summarized in Table 6. Table 6 indicates that all four conditions for mediating influence are met according to Baron and Kenny (1986).

Table 6: *Mediating Influence of Individual Commitment on the Relationship Between Project Communication and Perceived Project Success*

				Dependent variable					
	Individual commitment			Perceived project success					
	Model 1			*Model 2*			*Model 3*		
Predictor	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
Intercept	1.489	.151		1.401	.201		1.032	.163	
Project communication	.612**	.039	.655	.619**	.052	.727	.283**	0.54	.333
Individual commitment							.444**	.048	.587
Note: *N=322, *p<0.05, **p<0.01*									

First, there is an effect to be mediated ($\hat{a} = 0.619$, $p < 0.01$). Second, there is a significant relationship between project communication and

mediator (individual commitment) (â = 0.612, $p < 0.01$), and third, the coefficient of the mediator (that is, individual commitment) is significant in regression model three (â = 0.444, $p < 0.01$) with both project communication and mediator (individual commitment) as predictors. Additionally, the total effect of project communication on perceived project success is less in regression three (standardized beta coefficient = 0.333, $p > 0.01$) than in regression model two (standardized beta coefficient = 0.727, $p > 0.01$). Hence, providing support for H_4: individual commitment significantly mediates the relationship between internal project communication and perceived project success. Since the coefficient of the predictor is other than zero when the mediator is introduced in the final model, these findings indicate that partial mediation exists on this relationship.

DISCUSSION

This paper examined the mediating influence of individual commitment on the relationship between project communication and perceived project performance. As initially hypothesised, results revealed that individual commitment is a partial mediator on the relationship between project communication and perceived project performance. Project communication is positively related to all three individual commitment elements (affectivity, normative and commitment). This means that effective project communication creates a feeling of responsibility and attachment between the stakeholder and the project tasks that makes one indebted to the project thereby creating an atmosphere for individual team members to act without much control and coercion (Ahimbisibwe andNangoli, 2012). This is consistent and mirror Ntayi, et al.'s (2010) findings that workers with positive attitude about the task carry out certain role behaviors well beyond the basic minimum levels required of them. The emotional attachment to the project drives a person to work as influenced by communication (Ahimbisibwe and Nangoli, 2012). Similarly, these results

concur and reflect Yammarino and Naughton's (1988) study that found a positive relationship between amounts of time spent communicating and the level of effort expended by each project team member on execution of tasks.

The results further indicate that project communication influences perceived project success through the partial mediation of individual commitment. It means that project communication must work through individual commitment in order to achieve significant influence on project performance. The results also suggest that affectivity and normative commitment have a stronger influence towards perceived project performance than continuance commitment. Therefore, this study makes a significant contribution by concluding that individual commitment partially mediates the relationship between project communication and perceived project performance. This means that projects need individual commitment to be successful in addition to project communication.

5.1 Practical and Theoretical Implications

All efforts whether financial or otherwise invested into citizenship projects could be fruitless, unless project sponsors and champions ensure that other project stakeholders have been provided with and are satisfied with the availed project information. In addition, where project supervisors are not as attentive to their subordinates' views and no appropriate avenues have been designated to capture feedback from implementers and beneficiaries of the project, there will be a high likelihood of chances of failure of citizenship projects. The project managers in charge of citizenship projects in commercial banks ought to ensure commitment of project staff to achievement of objects by creating an atmosphere of feeling like they are part of the family of the project implementation team. This could be through fulfilling promises that top management sets forth. In this way, various stakeholders involved in implementation are likely to perceive the project as a success.

This study extends the research frontiers in understanding the role of interpersonal factors (project communication and individual commitment) in perceived project performance. Despite previous research contributions in project management, very few have focused on the role of interpersonal factors and yet as indicated by findings, these factors play a significant role. Moreover, no previous study has examined how these concepts are linked together by examining the mediation influence of individual commitment on the relationship between project communication and perceived project performance. As noted, projects are about managing expectations that have to do with perceptions of success. When researchers are conceptualizing and building theories, they should not ignore interpersonal (soft) factors.

5.2 Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Although the study provides some findings that are important in project performance literature, there are some limitations worth noting. The study used behavioural constructs, which originated from literature review of commonly cited 'soft' factors in the project management literature. Although the three constructs are robust and sufficiently represent the behavioural aspects, the multidimensional nature of behavioural practises in perceived project performance can be investigated further. Furthemore, since the future of project management practises go through evolution, additional 'soft' factors may be incorporated into the validated model.

The data collection instrument was a standard questionnaire, which usually limits the ability to collect views about information outside asked questions. Similarly, the study used a cross sectional research design. However, time series variables could not be completely analysed and this restricts applicability of the findings as a longitudinal study may give different results from those obtained. Future research should employ a bigger sample involving other stakeholders like regulators, customers, and local population,

among others. This is so because the study only captured perceptions of bank staff that had taken part in executing citizenship projects and was intended to justify the continued investment in citizenship projects by commercial banks. Yet accommodation of various stakeholders could give a different view. In addition, future studies should try to obtain measurements of the independent and dependent variables from different sources and at different times. Conclusively, this study results suggest that individual commitment partially mediates the relationship between project communication and perceived project performance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors acknowledgement Prof. Joseph Ntayi and Dr. Mohammed Ngoma both from Makerere University Business School, Kampala, Uganda for initial guidance on this research. Special thanks are also extended to the leadership of Makerere University Business School, which partly funded this study.

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