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The Impact of Stakeholder Engagement and Project Diplomacy on Transport Megaprojects a Case Study of Amman Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

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Abstract

This study focuses on the Amman Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, introduced in 2009 as Jordan's first public transport megaproject, which aimed at cost-effectively addressing transportation issues in Amman, but was shut down in 2011 and resumed in 2014. This research aims to investigate the reasons for the project's shutdown in 2011 and identify the potential causes of failure by examining the aspects of political dynamics and stakeholder engagement. The study reveals that political risks and dynamics played a crucial role in determining the project's success or failure, which the project team failed to recognize. The team's preconceived notions and neglect of stakeholder engagement and education increased the project's vulnerability. As a result, decision-makers scapegoated the project, disregarding its financial consequences and contractual relationships in favor of their stakeholders' interests and satisfaction. This research emphasizes the need for a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process and a diplomatic plan to ensure the project's success.

Keywords: Amman, BRT, Megaproject, Stakeholder, Decision Making, Diplomacy, Engagement, Threats.

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Amman BRT

This study examines the circumstances leading to the suspension of the Amman Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project in 2011, Jordan's first public transport megaproject launched in 2009, and aimed at improving transportation issues in Amman (BRT+ Centre of Excellence, 2011). Despite initial support from political leaders and the successful acquisition of financing from the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) (AFD, 2018; Al Bawaba, 2010; Al-Rawashdeh, 2012; BRT+ Centre of Excellence, 2011), the project faced significant obstacles in its implementation that stemmed from political dynamics, stakeholder interests, and perceptions of corruption, leading to its eventual shutdown in 2011. The study reveals that the project's failure was not due to technical risk, budgetary constraints, or scheduling issues but to a lack of effective stakeholder engagement and diplomatic efforts.

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The Mayor of Greater Amman Municipality (GAM), Omar Maani, was appointed[1] in 2006 and spearheaded the project. He was a "Western-educated technocrat" with a vision to modernize the city's infrastructure, including introducing the ambitious Transport and Mobility Master Plan and new practices to the work of GAM, such as the automation of services (Beauregard & Marpillero-Colomina, 2011; Shami, 2014; Zureiqat, 2012).

The project commenced construction in early 2009, with GAM aiming to complete construction and begin operations by 2012 (Zureiqat, 2018). However, in early 2011, minor technical problems and traffic congestion on a busy transport lane led to negative media coverage -championed by a prominent daily newspaper- and social media criticism of the project. These criticisms alleged a lack of feasibility studies, contracting, and legal complications, possibly losing AFD funding, and corruption in the tendering process (Al-Rawashdeh, 2012; Shami, 2014; Zureiqat, 2012). Additionally, in March 2011, the GAM council was dissolved, and Omar Maani, the Mayor, stepped down from his position (Ammon News, 2011).

In April 2011, some Members of Parliament (MPs) called for the project's suspension based on citizen complaints, which led to the formation of a parliamentary committee to investigate the project's file, then pushed to establish a government-specialized committee to study the project as well (Al-Rawashdeh, 2012; Zureiqat, 2012). In August 2011, the Audit Bureau issued a report highlighting fundamental discrepancies in the bidding and technical issues despite being part of the tendering process (Al-Rawashdeh, 2012). The government-specialized committee also issued a report in September 2011 that recommended suspending all construction work pending further independent review (Zureiqat, 2012). Based on these findings, the Prime Minister decided to suspend the project, despite the project's contractual relationship with the contractors and AFD (Al-Rawashdeh, 2012; Amman Net, 2014). As stated by Al-Rawashdeh (2012), afterward, the Amman BRT project underwent a complex process of auditing and re-auditing. It was referred from one committee to another, resulting in inconsistent decisions by various institutions involved.

The Amman BRT project was suspended during a sensitive period when the Jordanian government and parliament were vulnerable to public pressure during the Arab Spring. Citizens participated in protests against corruption in public spending, including the Amman BRT project, with the Muslim Brotherhood party staging demonstrations against the project. The party's symbolic protest involved bringing a donkey with a sign reading "the rapid donkey" to the project site, which amplified concerns about the project's integrity (Ammon News, 2011). The negative sentiments towards the project were further aggravated by the imprisonment of the former Mayor of Greater Amman Municipality, Omar Maani, in December 2011 on charges of failing to perform his official duties. Despite Maani's

[1] According to Jordan Law on Municipalities, the GAM Mayor and 25% of its council members are appointed by the Cabinet (IEC, 2015).

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subsequent release due to a lack of evidence on pointed charges, the citizens' suspicions of corruption in the Amman BRT project persisted.

The project's suspension lasted two years until the new Mayor re-launched the project in January 2014 (Shami, 2014). However, the BRT's suspension and the allegations of corruption still resonated with many citizens.

Stakeholder Engagement: A Vital Need for Social License

The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system has been implemented in various countries worldwide, including the UK, South Africa, India, the USA, Belgium, Germany, Australia, and countries in Latin America (Cervero & Kang, 2011; Mahadevia, Joshi, & Datey, 2017, 2017). Due to its potential for integration into a city's structure without significant highway reconstruction and being a cost-effective, environmentally friendly solution that provides low-cost mobility for users, the demand for BRT systems has been increasing (Levinson et al., 2003; Cervero & Kang, 2011; Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo, 2014; Mahadevia, Joshi, & Datey, 2017, 2017).

However, as BRT systems intersect with different stakeholders' interests, such as land use planning and housing, integration networks of parking and walking spaces and facilities, and private transit operators, obtaining a high social license from stakeholders is essential to avoid conflicts and minimize the impact of changes in political administrations and dynamics on project implementation (Connor, 1988; Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo, 2014; Quick and Zhao, 2011; Watkins & Bazerman, 2003; Levinson et al, 2003; Mahadevia, Joshi, & Datey, 2017, 2017). Yet, stakeholder engagement is often underestimated in transit projects, including BRT, particularly in emerging economies (Casello et al., 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2017; Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo, 2014; Quick and Zhao, 2011). Given the increasing demand for BRT systems, institutionalizing stakeholder engagement is necessary to obtain their social license, which refers to stakeholders' perception and acceptance of the project's legitimacy.

This study aims to evaluate whether the failure of the Amman BRT project during its early stages was due to inefficient stakeholder engagement and an underestimation of the political threats and dynamics the project faced, where such threats were exacerbated by a lack of project diplomacy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Defining Megaprojects

Megaprojects are complex and extensive initiatives that require significant resources and investment. Flyvbjerg (2017) defines Megaprojects as initiatives that typically necessitate an expenditure of over US$1 billion, extend over multiple years for planning and implementation, involve a diverse range of public and private stakeholders, are transformative, and have a profound impact on millions of individuals. Similarly, Ansar et al. (2016) describe Megaprojects as "large, complex, and high profile"

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projects that often face significant challenges due to their size and complexity. Common examples of Megaprojects include large-scale transportation infrastructure, energy facilities, and other major public works projects.

Success Factors in Megaprojects

Megaproject management poses unique challenges, prompting the need to reevaluate traditional notions of project success. The "iron rule of megaprojects," coined by Flyvbjerg (2014), underscores the consistent tendency of such projects to exceed their budgets and schedules due to their inherent complexity, which makes it difficult to meet the "iron triangle" of time, cost, and quality. However, Dimitriou et al.'s (2014) study of 30 mega transport projects suggests that traditional project performance criteria are insufficient in assessing the success of megaprojects. Instead, successful megaprojects must address risks, uncertainties, and complexities in decision-making and embrace context-sensitive decision-making. To this end, comprehensive models that go beyond the traditional "iron triangle," such as Davis's (2018), which includes accountability and benefit to stakeholder groups, are needed as illustrated in Figure 1.

Effective stakeholder management is crucial in project planning to ensure success. Project managers must establish critical success criteria that consider the diverse values, aims, and expectations of stakeholders (Turner & Zolin, 2012). Successful megaprojects should also involve incorporating the views of residents as key stakeholders and evaluating social, environmental, and cost-benefit factors throughout the project's lifetime, given their significant role in the development of local economies and impact on society and the environment (Turner & Zolin, 2012).

Figure 1: Success Factors of Megaprojects

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Stakeholder Management Versus Megaproject Management

Stakeholder Management in Megaprojects

Stakeholder management is a critical component of project management, especially in megaprojects that involve numerous public and private parties and have a significant impact on many people. The Project Management Institute PMI (2018) defines stakeholder management as recognizing the many individuals involved, creating a strategy for managing stakeholder relationships and communicating with all stakeholders while maintaining control over stakeholder management.

Effective stakeholder management in megaprojects has led to better project outcomes, including improved schedule and budget performance, enhanced project quality, and increased stakeholder satisfaction (Pellegrinelli et al., 2014). Studies have demonstrated that proper stakeholder management can reduce stakeholder resistance and conflicts, decreasing the chances of project disruptions and delays (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997, 2015; Shenhar et al., 2007). Conversely, inadequate stakeholder management can result in project delays, cost overruns, and harm to reputation (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Shenhar et al., 2007).

While project teams often attribute the lack of stakeholder engagement to external factors, such as the project's complexity, lack of suitable environment and context, and stakeholders' lack of interest, knowledge, and experience (Casello et al., 2015; Connor, 1988; Flyvbjerg, 2017; Henisz, 2017; Levinson et al., 2003), successful engagement in megaprojects has been achieved through several examples, even in conflict areas, where engagement led to a holistic behavioral change in the community (Henisz, 2017). The literature has also demonstrated that such engagement enormously benefited from alliances with non-government organizations (NGOs) and the media (Aula, 2010; Connor, 1988; Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo, 2014).

Managing stakeholders is a continuous process that requires ongoing monitoring and adaptation to changing stakeholder needs and expectations. Many projects struggle with stakeholder management due to the number and diversity of stakeholders involved in megaprojects, making it challenging to identify and prioritize stakeholder needs and expectations. Additionally, stakeholders may have conflicting interests, making it difficult to develop strategies that satisfy all parties involved (Flyvbjerg, 2014). Furthermore, megaprojects' unique aims, structure, and relationships require a distinct set of norms and guidelines for stakeholder management (Turner & Zolin, 2012).

To meet the needs of stakeholders and predict their future behavior, project managers should adopt a comprehensive Stakeholder Management Framework that includes stakeholder classification, stakeholder dynamics, stakeholder salience, and stakeholder typology (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Freeman, 1984) and use various techniques, such as the development of project management standards, which recognize stakeholder management as a distinct field of competence. Also, using a social network strategy for megaproject stakeholder management considers the variability in country contexts not accommodated by existing stakeholder management techniques (Mok et al., 2015).

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Stakeholder analysis is also an essential aspect of stakeholder management, and it involves identifying stakeholders' requests and concerns and examining the possible implications if they are not satisfied (Olander & Landin, 2008). The power/interest matrix is another tool that can be used to determine stakeholders' relative power, and participation strategies can be developed based on stakeholders' impact and initiative. The salience model (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997) advises that management strategies should be rated according to their strength, validity, and urgency before deciding which to implement. Stakeholders can be categorized as "dormant, discretionary, demanding, controlling, potentially harmful, reliant, and definite" based on their characteristics. Project managers can determine the level of attention each stakeholder requires based on their involvement in the project.

Diplomacy In Megaprojects

The field of diplomacy in projects or organizations is growing in importance due to the increasing complexity of projects, challenging social and political environments, and pressure from stakeholders, as well as the broad access to media tools (Aula, 2010; Henisz, 2017; Ordeix-Rigo & Duarte, 2009; Payne, 2009; Saner & Søndergaard, 2000; Westermann-Behaylo, Rehbein, & Fort, 2015). The concept was first defined in the 1990s by Watkins (as cited in Macnamara, 2012) as "The role senior executives play in advancing the corporate interest by negotiating and creating alliances with key external players including governments, analysts, the media, and NGOs." Business success is no longer limited to business factors alone but to other factors, such as reputation (Henisz, 2017) and power dynamics of government and decision-makers (Henisz, 2017; Khanna, Palepu and Sinha, 2005; Saner & Søndergaard, 2000).

Empirical evidence shows that companies' financial valuation increases if they enjoy strong political and social support for their operations, compared to a decline if they face conflicts with stakeholders (Saner & Søndergaard, 2000; Westermann-Behaylo, Rehbein, & Fort, 2015). Henisz (2017) provides various examples of projects that lost billions of dollars for a lack of diplomacy. He confirms in his book, which bears the title of this section, that diplomacy is not limited to a corporate setting but can also be used in NGO and government projects.

According to Henisz (2017), active project diplomacy should ensure six elements: "due diligence" through a process of stakeholder mapping and needs analysis; "Integration" by ensuring that the project's financial and operating systems incorporate the stakeholders' needs (Khanna, Palepu and Sinha, 2005; Westermann-Behaylo, Rehbein, & Fort, 2015); "Personal" through open communication with powerless and powerful stakeholders and readiness for different conflict resolution mechanisms (Casello et al., 2015; Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo, 2014; Saner & Søndergaard, 2000); "Learning" through pursuing changes in the project design based on the stakeholders' feedback, which requires adapting organizational changes to incentivize the approach; "Openness" through reliable and accountable communication with stakeholders and negotiation over realistic expectations, and creating alliances with them. Project teams often make mistakes by assuming that external stakeholders know what the team knows about the project, using the wrong communication channels or messages, or

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making late engagement perfunctory (Casello et al., 2015; Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo, 2014).

Political Threats And Dynamics Vs Stakeholders Management

Political Threats and Dynamics in Megaprojects

Megaprojects are often faced with political threats and discontinuities due to changing political dynamics and agenda-driven decisions by public authorities (Flyvbjerg, 2017). Decision-makers tend to rely on their own experiences and views, leading to delusional optimism and strategic misrepresentation, resulting in incorrect information and lack of education (Buehler, Griffin, and Ross, 1994; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2017; Pollack et al., 2018). Authorities justify their decisions, even when they entail financial losses, by citing their belief in rationality and saving public money, protecting democracy, and posterity (Flyvbjerg, 2017; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter, 2003; Flyvbjerg, Garbuio and Lovallo, 2009) and rarely learning from previous experiences (Buehler, Griffin and Ross, 1994), using these justifications to legitimize their ignorance of risks (Hubbard, 2009) and their setbacks for new business ideas (Flyvbjerg, Garbuio and Lovallo, 2009).

BRT projects, in particular, face other political threats, such as the gap in knowledge and expectations among internal and external stakeholders, the lack of alignment between stakeholders' interests (e.g., service users, existing bus operators, politicians, and business owners), the arguments used by project opponents regarding the impact on reducing the roads and parks spaces, and the lack of stakeholder engagement and education (Mahadevia, Joshi, & Datey, 2017, 2017). Early stakeholder education is necessary to increase understanding and prevent negative influences and project opponents from defining the project instead of the project leaders (Connor, 1988; Flyvbjerg, 2017). Connor (1988) states, "Once anxiety and hostility reach high levels, educating those affected becomes almost impossible."

Stakeholder Management for Mitigating Potential Threats

The effective management of an organization's reputation is crucial to its local positioning, legitimacy of operations, and social license among its stakeholders. Early reputation management is essential in averting disasters that could result in long-term losses or damages to the business's image (Aula, 2010; Hensiz, 2017). Barnett, Jermier, and Lafferty (2006) describe reputation as "observers' collective judgments of a corporation based on assessments of the financial, social, and environmental impacts attributed to the corporation over time." Watkins and Bazerman (2003) propose three steps to avoid reputation disasters: recognition, prioritization, and mobilization. The first step involves unbiased risk analysis of potential threats through engagement with internal and external stakeholders. The second step requires prioritizing resources for the disaster's resolution, while the third step demands sufficient resources and actions to halt the disaster, focusing on a broader context.

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According to Watkins and Bazerman (2003), managers in business and government often fail to predict threats due to psychological, organizational, and political vulnerabilities. Psychological vulnerabilities result from biased perceptions that divert attention from potential disasters, with engineers, for example, focusing more on operations than stakeholder relations and political dynamics. Organizational vulnerabilities result from a need for more open communication and internal accountability. In contrast, political vulnerabilities arise from a deficit in decision-making influenced by political agenda and interests, leading to an imbalance in the valuation of stakeholder interests and support. Governments may abandon support for a project in exchange for their political agenda. Political leaders may lack the courage to stand by the project when a disaster occurs due to concerns about their political image.

Organizations should proactively communicate openly with stakeholders to mitigate reputation vulnerabilities before a disaster occurs (Aula, 2010; Jones, Temperley, and Lima, 2009). Proactive interaction before a disaster is crucial to avoid losing influence on stakeholders' perceptions. Stakeholders may question why there was no communication before and why they should trust it now (Henisz, 2017).

Using traditional and online media tools is critical, with online media having a vital role in expanding the spectrum of reputation risks. Watkins and Bazerman (2003) suggest that stakeholder interaction can take four forms: "absence," "presence," "attendance," and "omnipresence." "Absence" involves proactively avoiding conversations and only providing stakeholders with information. "Presence" uses traditional public relations tools to inform specific stakeholders. "Attendance" involves following up on stakeholders' discussions on social media but not actively engaging in those discussions. Finally, "omnipresence" involves continuously interacting with stakeholders' discussions and is considered the best approach to managing reputation. Traditional and online media tools are critical for communicating reputation among stakeholders, focusing on online media given its vital role in expanding the spectrum of reputation risks (Aula, 2010; Khanna, Palepu, & Sinha, 2005; Saner & Søndergaard, 2000). Effective threat management in organizations also requires a mindset that allows open communication among team members and encourages internal discussions as team members may be reluctant to speak up about perceived threats for fear of being seen as troublemakers (Aula, 2010; Watkins & Bazerman, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study employed qualitative and quantitative research methods to investigate a particular case study of Amman BRT to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the problem, an in-depth review of data, and an overview of various stakeholders' perspectives.

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Research Methods

The case study approach is commonly used in organizational behavior research to understand complex topics in their actual setting (Maylor, Blackmon, & Huemann, 2016). According to Crabtree and Miller (1999), case studies have several advantages, allowing respondents and researchers to express their thoughts and share their personal experiences in a safe environment. The author employed a "method of dependency on the theoretical premise" to analyze this case study and used an "explanation building" technique to accomplish this (Yin, 2018, p. 300 & 322). The research framework employed in this study is depicted in Figure 2 below:

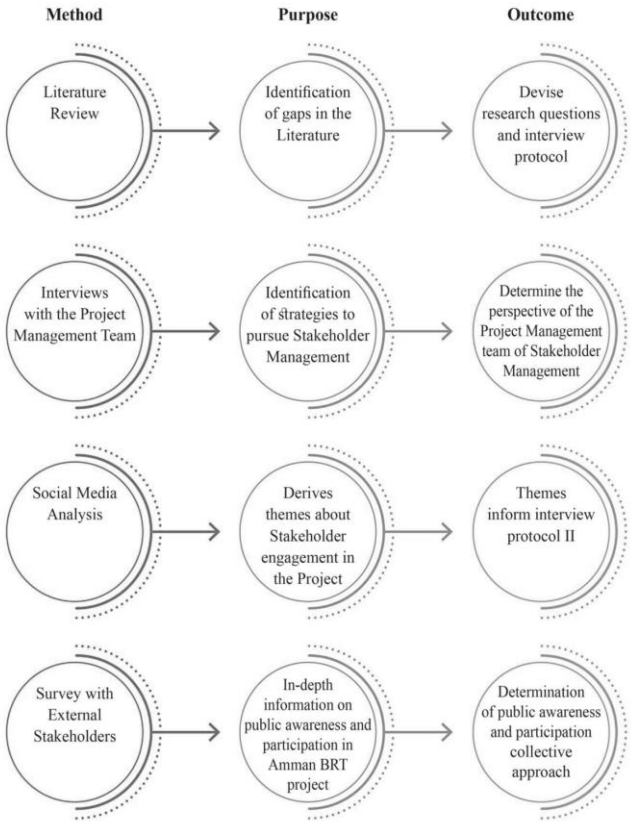

Figure 2: Research Methods

DATA COLLECTION AND COMPILATION

Partially Structured Interviews (PSIs)

The author conducted PSIs with seven crucial leaders from the project team who worked on the project from 2009 to 2011 and again from 2014 to the present. The author also interviewed a representative

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from the agency that provided financial support for the project. The participants were selected based on their prior or current engagement in the decision-making process and as observers and influencers of the organizational behavior (Maylor, Blackmon, & Huemann, 2016; Ritchie et al., 2013). The PSI method is recommended for studies that look into the perception, observation, and opinion of stakeholders in highly social and complex contexts with high flexibility and openness between the researcher and the respondents to provide comprehensive and high-quality data (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Hannabuss, 1996; Smith, 2015; York, 1998).

The author conducted interviews with participants who had given their written consent, following the method recommended by Maylor, Blackmon, & Huemann (2016). A total of seven interviews were conducted in person, while one was done over the phone between July and August of 2019. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants, and permission to record was granted. Five interviews were recorded, while notes were taken for the other two. One interview was conducted in English, while the rest were in Arabic. The transcripts were securely stored in an encrypted file for further analysis.

Survey

A survey technique was used to gather information from external participants involved in the project. Twenty-five respondents, including NGOs, academics, political parties, and other significant stakeholders who work or live near construction sites, were selected using nonprobability quota sampling, as provided in Table 1. The author invited potential respondents to participate in the study and provided them with information about the research. Participants had ten days to complete an Arabic-language questionnaire in July and August 2019, which took an average of 23 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire was created based on the principles outlined by Maylor, Blackmon, & Huemann (2016), focusing on clarity, brevity, and impartiality. It included closed and multiple-choice questions with an "others" option. Participants could not skip questions due to internet peculiarities, so no partially completed surveys were completed. Signed consent forms were collected from participants before filling out the survey. The small sample size limited the extent of the conclusions that could be drawn from the survey results. Nonetheless, the survey was designed to test the author's hypothesis and corroborate the findings from the PSIs conducted with project insiders.

Table 1: Survey respondents' background

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
NGOs	7	28%
Academics	4	16%
Political Parties	3	12%
Households that live close to the construction sites	6	24%

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University students who pass by the constructions' sites on their way to the university.	3	12%
Private aector workers who pass by the constructions' sites on their way to work	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Data Investigation, and Evaluation

The study employed a similar approach to that provided by Maylor, Blackmon, & Huemann (2016), Miles et al. (1994), and Yin (2018) for both the PSIs and the survey. By comparing and contrasting the responses from internal and external stakeholders, the author identified any discrepancies in expectations and attitudes between the two groups. Additionally, the data was compared to relevant literature, specifically focusing on two primary models: the Watkins and Bazerman (2003) RPM process of avoiding business disasters and Henisz's (2017) model of corporate diplomacy.

The PSIs were analyzed using standard data input approaches, and the data was categorized according to significant themes that emerged throughout the study. The author utilized these categories to organize the data obtained from the interviews based on the conceptual model developed for the research. For the survey, the collected data was entered into Microsoft Excel for further analysis, where frequency counts were used to evaluate the participants' opinions and perceptions. The findings were then summarized, and visual representations were provided where appropriate to facilitate better understanding of the information.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Analysis of Stakeholder's Engagement and Diplomacy Performance in the Case of Amman BRT

Insufficient Stakeholder Education and Access to Information

The Amman BRT project was initiated in 2009 without adequate public or stakeholder education, as reported by interviewed internal respondents. The project aimed to address public transit issues in Amman, yet the public had limited comprehension of its objectives or implementation. Although local media covered the project, the coverage did not provide strategic information or answer fundamental questions, leading to confusion and misperceptions among the public. Some information disclosed by GAM to the media or on their website was incomplete, inaccurate, or ineffective due to a lack of authority among team members or difficulty communicating technical engineering information. For example, the project website contained incomplete and inaccurate information, including financial data contradicting the AFD website's information. Additionally, some content was available only in English.

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The lack of education and communication continued into later stages, resulting in limited stakeholder engagement and negative perceptions of the project.

The internal respondents maintained that the project should have received more attention and pre-education of stakeholders was essential due to its significance as the first project of its kind in Jordan, requiring a shift in public mindset towards public transit. These approaches were necessary to rectify misperceptions about the BRT, such as concerns about the lane reducing road space or negatively impacting Amman's architecture. It was also crucial to improve citizens' trust in public projects, given their lack of confidence in public performance. Moreover, the context of Amman's residents, who tend to be passive and lack the motivation to engage, necessitated more effective communication strategies to improve their engagement with the project. However, communication and pre-education of stakeholders did not occur for various reasons, including a lack of resources, project complexity, difficulty in communicating technical information, the complex context of Jordan's community, and poor relationships with the media.

During the construction phase, however, the education process improved, with GAM implementing a concrete marketing plan, including a promotional video, posters, 3-D model illustrations, media articles, a website, and a Facebook page. GAM also held meetings with a few NGOs and MPs and used initiatives such as the GAM Children's Council to discuss the project. However, these efforts were inadequate and came too late to impact stakeholder perceptions. They failed to engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including political powers and direct stakeholders such as shop owners near the construction sites and private transit operators.

External respondents surveyed reported having little access to information and relying primarily on social media, as illustrated in Table 2, with the project website used by only four respondents. The perception of respondents who had visited the website or the Facebook page was not highly valued in terms of the accuracy and effectiveness of information, indicating a lack of stakeholder engagement.

Table 2: Sources of Information about the Amman BRT Project

Rank	Sources of Information	Number of Answers
1	Social media	17
2	Electronic agency	17
3	Online discussions among friends and family	9
4	Newspaper	8
5	Government officials' direct statements	8
6	Offline discussions among friends and family	7
7	Direct observation, TV, direct communication	6

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8	Project website	4
9	MPs' direct statements	4
10	Political parties' direct statements	1

Insufficient Stakeholder Communication and Engagement

The BRT project encountered difficulties due to inadequate interaction between the GAM and external stakeholders. According to the internal stakeholders interviewed, the project faced significant criticism and allegations of corruption from external stakeholders, with limited participation from GAM in these discussions. They also highlight that despite various audits conducted by different authorities, external stakeholders continued to raise concerns, highlighting poor stakeholder engagement by GAM. The lack of response from GAM was confirmed by the majority of external respondents surveyed (24/25), revealing a communication breakdown between the project team and external stakeholders.

Furthermore, internal and external stakeholders' perceptions differed regarding the reasons for the project's shutdown in 2011, as seen in Tables 3 and 4. Internal respondents cited the new mindset and business model introduced by Mayor Maani and the Public Transport Operators' (PTOs) financial interests. In contrast, external respondents believed the project was unsuitable for Amman's topography and raised concerns about its capacity and integrity. Despite undergoing a lengthy verification and auditing process, as discussed earlier, some external respondents surveyed still perceived the project as corrupt (10/25). This inconsistency underscores the need for effective communication and dialogue between the project team and all stakeholders.

In conclusion, limited stakeholder engagement and poor communication between GAM and external stakeholders led to challenges faced by the Amman BRT project. Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for any project's success, and future projects should prioritize transparent communication and active engagement with all stakeholders.

Table 3: Internal Respondents' Perceptions of Factors Contributing to the Shutdown of the Amman BRT in 2011

Factor	No Influence	Low Influence	Medium Influence	High Influence	Significant Influence
GAM grew authorities at that time, i.e., moving the authority of transit in Amman to them.[2]	8	4	8	3	2

[2] In 2007 a decision was published in the gazette providing that GAM is the authority to manage the public transport within the borders of Amman. This authority was earlier in the hand of the Land Transport Regulatory Commission (LTRC). (Sulafah Shami, 2014)

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The new mindset and business module that Mayor Maani introduced to GAM.	4	8	4	7	2
Voices in government saw a negative financial impact on the annual budget as the BRT system will introduce less fuel consumption.	8	6	5	5	1
The PTOs financial interests used their political influence on the government and the parliament.	3	8	1	8	5
The fact that engineers have led the project where they usually lack the skills and capacity in government and political dynamics.	1	8	6	7	0
The timing of Omar Maani's leaving his position at GAM in March 2011, especially considering the dissolution of the GAM council around the same time	6	6	6	5	2
The Arab Spring	13	4	6	0	2

Table 4: External Respondents' Perceptions of Factors Contributing to the Shutdown of the Amman BRT in 2011

Factor	Number of Answers
Project team's lack of capacity	12
The project is unsuitable for Amman's infrastructure	12
Corruption in its tendering and contracting	10

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A lack of feasibility studies	9
Contracting and legal complications with vendors	5
Technical problems	4
Political powers who wanted to fail the project for personal interests	4
Other factors include financial situation, planning policies, lack of strategic vision and consideration for stakeholder needs, and response to sudden events.	3

Inadequate Performance in Project Diplomacy

The author utilized Henisz's (2017) six elements of corporate diplomacy, presented in Table 5, to assess the project's diplomacy. The literature discussed in this study confirmed that these elements are not limited to corporate environments and may apply to public institutions. The subsequent analysis is based on the results of PSIs carried out with internal stakeholders.

Table 5: Analysis of Amman BRT Project Diplomacy using Henisz's (2017) Six Elements of Corporate Diplomacy

Elements	GAM Performance
Due Diligence	All respondents reported a stakeholder mapping and need analysis process using focus groups and surveys by an external contractor. However, they did not feel the process was constructive or had real implications for the project. This was due to the accelerated project inception and GAM's focus on prioritizing the process, given their overwhelming involvement in other initiatives, such as the first urban Planning Institute in Jordan and the first master plan for Amman transit.
Integration	Most respondents reported weak stakeholder needs integration into the project plan, despite some attempts at stakeholder engagement, such as meetings with government officials, MPs, NGOs, and PTOs. Stakeholder engagement was not systematically planned and depended on the team's availability and capacity, project complexity, and operational progress. Some respondents noted that their efforts to integrate stakeholders' needs did not succeed. For instance, GAM attempted to negotiate settlements with PTOs; however, some

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	demands were unrealistic, and some did not understand the BRT concept and how it would impact their businesses.
Personal	Most respondents acknowledged that their communication with stakeholders was ad-hoc. They conceded that stakeholders' lack of understanding of the project's objectives failed to convey the message of the project's benefit to the public.
Learning	Most respondents did not recall any changes made to the project design due to stakeholders' needs. Some changes were made to accommodate the interests of lane construction while minimizing the impact on stakeholders' business, as mentioned by one respondent. Guarantees were made to ensure that such changes would not lead to an increase in the project budget.
Openness	Some respondents confirmed that GAM lacked effective management of external stakeholder expectations by promoting the project as a singular solution for Amman's transit issues rather than as one component of a comprehensive solution. Additionally, GAM failed to create strong allies to defend the project during the Arab Spring. Based on their feedback, the Arab Spring's time constraints made it difficult to form strong alliances capable of withstanding public criticism and overcoming more powerful and influential opposing forces.
Mindset	Most respondents attested to the challenges in changing the mindset of GAM employees to manage infrastructure projects serving the public interest, compounded by the lack of human resources for public transit megaprojects. They discussed the different mindsets of GAM's employees at that time in 2011, including those who were capable and believed in stakeholder engagement but lacked the authority and support from management to raise the issue, those who claimed they knew the stakeholders' culture of continuous dissatisfaction and low interest of participation and advised ignoring their needs, those who saw project diplomacy as a fake relationship, those who were powerful and believed in the process but could not influence their junior team who lacked capacity, and those who were opponents to the concept itself, especially engineers whose focus was on the delivery of construction according to the budget and timeline.

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Threats To The Implementation Of The Amman BRT

Political Obstacles and Dynamics Impacting the Amman BRT

Effective management of threats was critical to successfully implementing the Amman BRT system. All internal respondents acknowledged that the Arab Spring significantly impacted the project's fate, leading to its shutdown in 2011. Decision-makers in the government and parliament scapegoated the project to take credit for supporting public demand to fight corruption and hold GAM accountable.

Respondents identified various political powers and interests that resisted the project during the Arab Spring. These included a local media agency whose partner had signed an memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the government for a train project between Amman and Zarqa. After the government began promoting the BRT system as a cost-effective alternative to the train idea, the media agency used leaked information from some GAM employees to undermine the project and influence public perception. Similarly, PTOs were primarily concerned with financial gain and used their political influence to exert considerable pressure on the government and parliament.

Respondents also reported that some government and GAM personnel opposed Mayor Maani's growing authority. While respondents widely acknowledged Mayor Maani's visionary leadership and qualifications, they attributed his unpopularity among some GAM and public authorities, particularly MPs, to his new mindset, business model, and administrative changes such as service automation, especially given Jordanian context and mindset. Mayor Maani's lack of diplomacy when communicating with government officials and MPs prevented him from building alliances and effectively defending GAM's interests.

Additionally, officials not involved in the Amman BRT project, such as the Ministry of Transport, felt excluded and expressed their dissatisfaction. Some voices in the government also believed that the BRT system would lead to a negative financial impact on the annual budget due to reduced fuel consumption.

Respondents claimed that the interest of these political powers was accompanied by poor media relations, posing additional challenges to the project. The project had a precarious relationship with several media outlets due to bias from perceived correlations between GAM and Mayor Maani's character, the pressure of political powers whose personal interests are against the project, and the media's preference for sensationalism over accuracy by reporting on corruption rather than factual information. Despite the project management's efforts to establish good media relations, they could not create strategic alliances with journalists to defend the project effectively.

GAM's Performance in Managing Threats: Delayed Recognition and Ad-Hoc Mobilization

Most internal respondents concurred that GAM's management of the threats faced was ineffective, resulting in severe reputation attacks and the project's shutdown in 2011. This was also confirmed by

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external respondents surveyed, where 19/25 respondents rated GAM's threat management performance as weak (9/25) to very weak (10/25), and 5/25 described it as moderate.

To compare GAM's performance with the RPM process of Watkins and Bazerman (2003), which involves anticipating and avoiding business disasters through Recognition, Prioritisation, and Mobilisation, the author examined internal respondents' interviews and presented the findings in Table 6.

Table 6: Analysis of GAM's performance to anticipate and avoid threats using Watkins and Bazerman's (2003) "RPM Process"

Process	GAM Performance
Recognition	Internal respondents exhibited varied levels of familiarity with having a risk plan before the Amman BRT project's inception. Some were uncertain whether the previously discussed threats were included in the plan. Some respondents referred to the plan by various names such as risk plan, economic and social studies, and assessment report. Some reported that this document was prepared for financing purposes rather than being an integral part of the project mindset, with greater emphasis on technical risks and complications and under pressure from the government to initiate construction. Regarding the project team's recognition of threats, respondents provided mixed views, with some stating that GAM's recognition was late-stage before the project's shutdown. Others noted that although the threats were discussed, they were not taken seriously, or individuals who recognized them were unwilling to raise them for discussion.
Prioritization	Respondents indicated that prioritizing the threats was not feasible, particularly given the urgency of the situation in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the internal technical challenges, and GAM's organizational mindset.
Mobilization	The respondents pointed out that the absence of a shared vision and the fear of accountability among team members were hindrances to mitigating threats. Some team members disclosed information and documents to media, government, and parliament investigations, which further fueled opposition to the project. The dissolution of the GAM council adversely affected mobilization, as no elected members were present to advocate for the project, and the government-

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appointed committee did not intervene in support of the BRT during the transitional period.

Government and parliament officials were biased against the project during the investigation. Despite attempts to communicate with MPs during the corruption investigation, most were already prejudiced and inclined towards shutting down the project due to the influence of the head of the parliament's investigative committee, who actively rallied against the project, and the media coverages.

DISCUSSION

The Arab Spring and the Vulnerabilities of Public Projects: A Needle in the Balloon, Not a Black Swan

The Arab Spring, contrary to popular belief, was not a Black Swan event that abruptly altered the course of the project and led to its closure, where Black Swan refers to unpredictable, unavoidable, and rare disasters (Taleb, 2007). Instead, it was akin to a needle in a balloon, where the balloon symbolizes the overall environment encompassing the project's lack of education, stakeholder engagement, access to information, and political threats management, and the needle represents the Arab Spring, which, fueled by existing political vulnerabilities, and magnified the situation's inherent risks.

According to Flyvbjerg (2017); Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, and Rothengatter (2003); and Flyvbjerg, Garbuio, and Lovallo (2009), public authorities' decision-making regarding public projects is often driven by irrational political motives justified by public interests. Politicians in the government and parliament, lacking adequate knowledge of the project or influenced by strategic misrepresentation, fear of harming their public image, pursuing personal interests, or a political agenda to combat corruption, scapegoated the Amman BRT project during that period, as revealed by the interviewees. The above drivers have been observed to exist in public megaprojects and have been utilized to disregard risks, as evidenced by several studies (Hubbard, 2009; Casello et al., 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2017; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, and Rothengatter, 2003; Flyvbjerg, Garbuio, and Lovallo 2009; Lindau, Hidalgo, & de Almeida Lobo 2014; Pollack et al., 2018; and Watkins and Bazerman 2003). The Arab Spring's impact on the project resulted from pre-existing political vulnerabilities, and it did not represent an unforeseeable and unprecedented event that disrupted the project's course.

Perception Gaps and Loss of Social License; Stakeholders Judge Because They Do Not Know, and They Are Not Engaged

The lack of early education regarding a project's scope and objectives poses a significant risk of negatively influencing stakeholders' perceptions, particularly in the face of specific threats (Connor, 1988; Flyvbjerg, 2017; Henisz, 2017). This void enables the project's opponents to shape the narrative and obscure the project leader's message, expediting stakeholders' opposition and compromising their

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ownership and trust in the project's accountability and management. These shortcomings ultimately result in losing external stakeholders' social license (Connor, 1988; Lindau, Hidalgo, & de Almeida Lobo, 2014; Quick and Zhao, 2011; Watkins & Bazerman, 2003). The Amman BRT project is an example of this: Stakeholders either converted their neutral opinions into opposition or discovered legitimacy for their doubts amid the Arab Spring chaos.

Additionally, the GAM's lack of transparent communication and validation of non-evident information and corruption accusations facilitated their spread to the broader community, driven by stakeholders' intentions to combat corruption and enhance public accountability. As noted by Henisz (2017); Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo (2014), such actions compromised the project's reputation for an extended period, even after the situation's conclusion. Internal and external stakeholders maintain different perspectives on the project's shutdown and corruption allegations, and GAM's failure to invest in a reliable information source, such as the project website, exacerbates this perception gap. The author suggests that publishing the rigorous internal control process described by the internal respondents during the interviews on the website could have increased public trust and project accountability.

The Project Team's Mindset: The Fallacy of Control and Knowledge in Project Management

Internal respondents stated that while no specific political powers sought to shut down the Amman BRT project during its initial period, GAM failed to manage political threats and prevent the project's shutdown, risking its reputation. The internal respondents' failure to adequately estimate and analyze potential political threats that could undermine the Amman BRT project, in conjunction with GAM's risk management approach, reveals psychological, organizational, and political vulnerabilities in the project's management, as described by Watkins and Bazerman (2003). These vulnerabilities demonstrate a low capacity to handle potential political threats, reputation crises, and stakeholder engagement, highlighting the necessity for improvement.

Although the Amman BRT project is currently operational, its future is uncertain. The possibility of a new parliamentary election introducing MPs opposed to the project, a new government with an anti-project agenda, a shift in public perception due to a campaign of corruption accusations, or actions by the PTOs to renegotiate GAM's settlement, such as demonstrations, boycotts, or damage to constructions, means that the project remains vulnerable. Transit megaprojects have faced similar situations (Aula, 2010; Casello et al., 2015; Cervero & Kang, 2011; Henisz, 2017; Jones, Temperley, and Lima, 2009; Levinson et al., 2003; Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo, 2014; Mahadevia, Joshi, & Datey, 2017, 2017; Ordeix-Rigo & Duarte, 2009; Payne, 2009; Saner & Søndergaard, 2000; Watkins & Bazerman, 2003; Westermann-Behaylo, Rehbein, & Fort, 2015). While these possibilities may not result in the project's shutdown again, they may cause delays and financial losses, harm GAM's reputation, and decrease stakeholders' confidence in the project's success. Furthermore, such setbacks can have implications for new business ideas, as Flyvbjerg, Garbuio, and Lovallo (2009) observed.

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Inadequate diplomacy was a key reason for GAM's Amman BRT project shutdown, common in transit projects (Casello et al., 2015; Connor, 1988; Henisz, 2017; Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo, 2014; Quick and Zhao, 2011). The study exhibited several shortcomings that hindered effective diplomacy, including the lack of meaningful stakeholder analysis, bias towards stakeholders with interest or direct support, and delayed engagement of critical stakeholders (such as MPs, engineering syndicates, relevant government institutions, political parties, NGOs, and media). Additionally, the project team failed to integrate some stakeholders' needs, particularly the PTOs, even five years after the project's relaunch. The team's heavy reliance on the local context to justify a lack of engagement, where the misconception of "people know what we know" further contributed to inadequate diplomacy. Other factors that exacerbated the problem included the absence of a shared vision and organizational mindset that promote stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process, encourages internal discussions and problem-solving, and protects team members against scapegoating, failure to create allies against political threats, and a misleading perception that visionary leadership is immune to harm from the local context.

These factors made external stakeholders vulnerable to the threat of media and political interests influence, leading to either silent or active reactions by citizens towards the project shut down, as is typical in such situations (Aula, 2010; Casello et al., 2015; Connor, 1988; Flyvbjerg, 2017; Henisz, 2017; Lindau, Hidalgo, and de Almeida Lobo, 2014; Quick and Zhao, 2011).

Key Recommendations for Effective Project Management and Meeting Stakeholders' Expectations

Referring to the research findings, the author puts forward crucial recommendations for managing public projects by actively involving stakeholders. By embracing these recommendations, project management teams can enhance the probability of achieving successful outcomes for public projects, foster stakeholder trust, and support, and mitigate the adverse effects of political threats and perception gaps.

1. ***Stakeholders' Engagement:*** Effectively managing a project necessitates stakeholder involvement across the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases. This entails early education, granting access to project information, maintaining transparent communication through appropriate channels, and actively soliciting and integrating feedback into the decision-making process. The use of participatory tools can facilitate these efforts. GAM can also benefit from investing in a reliable information source, such as a project website and social media account, and publishing rigorous internal control processes to increase public trust and project accountability. Having meaningful stakeholder engagement can address perception gaps, mitigate the loss of social license, and create influencing aliases to defend the project against possible reputation crises and political threats.

2. ***Diplomacy:*** The project management team should develop effective diplomacy strategies to address the challenges of stakeholder engagement, mainly when dealing with influential and political

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stakeholders. This involves meaningful stakeholder mapping and analysis, integrating stakeholder needs, open communication, adopting stakeholders' needs and priorities, developing a shared vision and organizational mindset that promotes stakeholder involvement, and protecting team members against scapegoating. Henisz's (2017) Six Elements of Corporate Diplomacy provides an excellent working framework to adopt.

3. ***Political Threats Management:*** The project management team should develop robust strategies to identify and mitigate potential political threats that may undermine the project's success. This involves adequate analysis of the local context and stakeholder engagement during the planning phase, constantly providing accurate and relevant project information, and establishing frameworks to monitor and refute misinformation or reputation accusations. Also, institutionalize an agile framework to recognize, prioritize, and mobilize actions against possible threats. Adopting such measures can increase the likelihood of successful outcomes for public projects and mitigate the impact of unforeseeable events like the Arab Spring. Watkins and Bazerman's (2003) "RPM process" provides a beneficial working framework to utilize.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

In transit megaprojects, political threats and dynamics are crucial factors that can determine the success or failure of a project. This study and existing literature provide evidence that neglecting political threats and dynamics can lead to the scapegoating of the project, regardless of its contractual and financial arrangements. The study also demonstrates that overvaluing the sustainability of decision-makers support and underestimating the need for broader stakeholder engagement is a fatal mistake. Government approval does not equate to active support, and decision-makers are susceptible to making irrational, agenda-driven decisions under certain circumstances, using societal interest as justification. The study also proves that the impact of political threats and dynamics on megaprojects can be mitigated through robust social support from the project's stakeholders. In contrast, a lack of stakeholder engagement and proper project diplomacy can significantly increase the risk of these political threats.

The study concludes that the management of transit megaprojects commonly falls under certain stereotypes regarding stakeholder engagement and communication, contributing to the project's physiological, organizational, and political vulnerabilities and may result in delays and financial losses if not addressed. Stereotypes include (i) the assumption that stakeholders already possess the necessary knowledge, which leads to a lack of investment in early education and verification of misinformation; (ii) the perception that stakeholders are hesitant to engage with public projects due to a lack of trust, which justifies their inadequate stakeholder engagement and risk ignorance; (iii) the belief that stakeholders will only support the project once they witness tangible results, resulting in a focus on technical operation rather than incorporating stakeholder needs; and (iv) the notion that visionary

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leadership is immune to harm from the local context, which hinders proper communication with stakeholders.

This study provides recommendations and frameworks that can benefit the management of the Amman BRT and other public megaprojects. These recommendations focus on pursuing meaningful Stakeholder Engagement and project diplomacy, which is crucial for predicting and managing project's threats.

Managerial Implications

This study provides recommendations for improving the success of megaprojects by effectively managing stakeholders and ensuring social license. To bridge the trust gap with stakeholders, project managers should invest in the development of their team's skills to perform productive project diplomacy and engage with stakeholder skepticism. Project managers should also learn from the lessons and recommendations provided in this study. The issue of trust and passiveness is not unique to Jordan, as many international initiatives have also discussed tools to increase people's trust in government and promote accountability and citizen engagement in decision-making processes. These include the Open Government Partnership (OGP, 2019) and open government strategies and initiatives by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This section discusses the limitations faced by the study, including the restricted availability of information on the "Amman BRT" project, necessitating reliance on media reports and expert evaluations. Furthermore, the author could not interview the mayor of the GAM, who was a key decision-maker during the project shut down. To address these limitations, the author undertook several measures, such as double-checking data for bias, interviewing all project senior team members, surveying a limited sample of external stakeholders, and supplementing the findings with direct observations of the project's online presence.

Future research should focus on understanding the processes and mindsets of decision-making related to public megaprojects to overcome anxieties related to decision-making and avoid scapegoating under particular agendas. Researchers in megaproject stakeholder management can use the insights gained in this study to further develop the field by conducting case studies on additional countries in the MENA region, given the similarities in their contexts.

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