

## **An Investigation into Project Management Best Practices in Nigeria's Telecommunication Industry**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the study was to investigate project management best practices in Nigeria's telecommunication industry. Data was collected across 379 telecommunication firms and analyzed using the descriptive method. The study found that telecommunication firms in Nigeria adopt the best project management practices. Best project management practices are widespread in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria. The project management practices adopted by telecommunication firms include holding initial meetings of all the project stakeholders, the development of project scope management, keeping all related parties updated throughout the project's lifecycle, the creating of resource plan, the creation of a response risk team, transparency in the implementation of projects, setting realistic project milestone and review of project performance.*

**Keywords:** *Best Practices, Project, Project Management, Telecommunication Industry.*

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### **Introduction**

Nowadays, organizations are increasingly using projects to achieve organizational goals. [1] posit that currently, more and more organizations are recognizing that translating strategies into actions requires project management. [2] argues that organizations are using project management practices as a tool to achieve competitive advantage. In this contemporary world, the need to adopt best project management practices has become a matter of necessity for organizations [3]. The application of information, skills, tools, and strategies to project activities is known as project management. Project management is widely acknowledged as a critical facilitator of company transformation and crucial to long-term business success [4]. Project management has evolved over time to a sophisticated and complex process, becoming the principal means of dealing with change in modern organizations. Although it is difficult to refute the notion that project management practices

have improved fairly over the last three decades, there are still issues with the underlying assumptions and practices of project management [5]. [6] report that project management is hampered by poor project cost control, poor information flow, and lack of knowledge transfer. Again many of the studies on project management practices have focused on the construction industry in Nigeria [7], [8], [9] and have ignored the telecommunication sector. The successful completion of telecommunication projects in Nigeria depends to a large extent on effective project management practice. The aim of the study is to evaluate the extent of formal project management practices implemented by telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Project**

A project is an activity where we expend capital resources to create an asset, which we expect, benefits over an expected period of time

[10]. According to [11], a project is a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service” A project is a temporary endeavour (that has a definite beginning and end time) [12]. A project is defined as a short-term activity undertaken to produce a one-of-a-kind product, service, or outcome. A project is described as short term because there is a distinct and clear beginning and end; project management involves customized actions to support this quality; as a result, how well a project performs against its schedule that is, does it start and conclude on time is a significant measure of project success. Because of the distinctiveness of the deliverable, a unique method is required because there may not be a pre-existing document for the project’s implementation, and there may not be a requirement to replicate the project after it is done. Distinctiveness does not imply that there are no parallels with other projects; rather, a project’s scope includes deliverables that must be created within certain limitations and with specified resources. This makes the project deliverables unique from other projects.

### **Project Management**

[13] asserted that project management is about planning, organizing, controlling and directing the company’s resources effectively to complete the project on time. [14] argued that project management is the process to achieve the project objectives through certain skills, tools and controls. Project management is the utilization and incorporation of current management and project management knowledge, aptitude, and techniques to the entire organization, controlling, collaboration, supervision of all aspects of a project from start to finish and the motivation of all those involved to produce the product, service or result of the project on time, within authorized cost, and to the required quality and requirement, and to the satisfaction of stakeholders [15].

### **Best Practices, Guidelines or International Standards in Project Management**

A best practice is a technique, method, or process that is believed to be more efficient and effective in achieving a goal than any other techniques, methods and processes. The best practice is a term that describes the process of creating and adhering to a standard manner of doing things. It is based on experience.

Best practice in project management is a broad concept that encompasses:

1. Guiding principle
2. Global principles

Standards issued by specialized organizations are usually based on best practices and guidelines given by professional bodies.

### **Benefits of Adopting Project Management Best Practices**

Project management was originally acknowledged as a distinct management approach in the 1950s, distinct from other management systems used in government or private enterprise [16]. Project management has now reached a worldwide level, with project management approaches maturing into guidelines and international standards that are widely acknowledged and used.

The following are some of the benefits of employing international standards and guidelines in project management:

1. Knowledge transfer: The most common reason for project objectives and goals not being met is poor project management [16]. A standardized approach to project management assists the project manager in managing multiple projects with varying competency requirements, reducing management risk and maximizing goal achievement.
2. Improved communication: Communication is a critical component of project management, and it is a major factor that influences a project’s success or failure.

Standards are also expected to help harmonize divergent terminology and different understandings of processes and methods [17].

3. Time and cost savings: Because projects are time-sensitive, time management is an important aspect of project management. Only when you look at how much time is wasted recreating the wheel do you realize how valuable it is [18].

Best project management methods have the benefit of saving time and money when dealing with projects, which is something that all project-based firms should strive for, especially in this time of economic distress.

## Methodology

The study adopted a survey as the research design. The survey method was considered the most appropriate design for conducting this study since it describes issues in their current state [19]. According to the National Communication Commission of Nigeria, as at the end of 2020, there were 7916 telecommunication companies that have been licensed, and thus this figure formed the

population of the study. The sample size for the study was determined using the Yamane sample determination formula. Using an actual population of 7196, a sample size of 379 telecommunication firms has arrived. In selecting the participant organization for the study, a stratified and simple random sampling method was used. Stratified sampling was first used to categorize telecommunication firms. According to the National Communication Commission, telecommunication firms have been classified under 24 license classifications; hence these classifications formed the organizational strata. A sampling fraction of 4.16% was selected from each category (strata) of telecommunication organizations. Participant organization's in each classification was selected randomly. In selecting the participant's organizations, simple random sampling was used. A simple random sampling method was used so as to ensure that all the telecommunication organizations get an equal chance of being selected as part of the sample. The distribution of the strata is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the Organizational Strata

Category (strata)	Total number organizations selected
Sale and Installation	301
Repairs and maintenance of facilities	10
Cabling services	5
Telecenter	34
Public payphone services	1
Internet services	6
Non-commercial closed up group	1
Unified Access services	1
International data services	1
International gateway	1
Interconnect exchange	1
Metropolitan fiber cable	1
Mobile number portability	1
National carrier	1
National long-distance communication	1
Public mobile communication	1
International submarine cable infrastructure	1

Value added services	5
Infrastructure sharing and collation services	1
Automated vehicular tracking services	1
Open access fibre	1
Infrastructure network	1
Wholesale wireless access services	1
Private network links	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>379</b>

The research instrument used to collect data for this study was a questionnaire. Out of the 379 firms administered with a questionnaire, 315 firms, however returned the questionnaire representing a response rate of 83.11%. The technique used to analyze the data collected was the descriptive method. Specifically, the means of the response provided by the participating organizations was calculated and interpreted.

## Results

### Project Management Best Practices in the Telecommunication Industry of Nigeria

Table 2 presents the data on the project management best practices of telecommunication firms in Nigeria.

**Table 2.** Project Management Best Practices of Telecommunication Firms in Nigeria

	N	Mean	SD
Before a project is started, an initial meeting of all the project stakeholders are invited and their relevance to the primary objectives of the project is discussed	315	4.1079	.53038
My firm develop project scope management and get it approved by all relevant parties	315	4.1238	.83355
Project managers keep all related parties updated throughout the project's lifecycle.	315	3.8762	.85244
My firm creates a resource plan for projects	315	4.2317	.85601
My firm creates a response risk team for projects	315	4.3079	.46237
My firm ensures transparency in project implementation	315	3.8603	1.16457
My firm puts in place change management plan in place for projects	315	2.1079	1.16795
My firm maintain a detailed project log where every decision is explained	315	1.6159	.94181
My firm set realistic project milestone and agree on deadlines or features that are possible to achieve	315	4.2762	.64584
My firm review and reflect on the performance of projects so as to improve the implementation of future projects	315	4.2000	.99745

From Table 2, the participant organizations agreed (a mean score of 4.1079) that before a project is started, an initial meeting of all the project stakeholders is invited and their relevance to the project's primary objectives is discussed. This is to discuss the goal of the

project and the process that will be followed to execute the project.

Another project management best practice used by telecommunication firms in Nigeria is that the firms develop project scope management and get it approved by all relevant parties. This was reported via a means score of

4.12. The scope of the project is determined at the start of the project so that there is a clear definition of what the project entails. This also ensures that the project does not deviate from its initial scope or boundaries.

Also, the study found that (through a mean score of 3.87) project managers keep all related parties updated throughout the project's lifecycle. The related parties for example, management, employees, customers, National Communication Commission of Nigeria etc on the progress of projects.

Again the participants reported that (through a mean score of 4.23) their firm creates a resource plan for projects. Telecommunication projects are very expensive so before a project is initiated, the firms put in place a funding mechanism so that the project does not stall along the way. This also ensures that there are no project delays.

Further, the firms create a response risk team for projects. This was reported via a mean score of 4.30. The firms have instituted a risk team that deals with unintended outcomes or issues affecting the firm. For example, when there is an accident or safety issue in the implementation of a project, the risk team responds to control the situation.

In addition, the telecommunication firms show transparency (mean score of 3.86) in the implementation of projects. The telecommunication firms ensure that information flow runs through the execution of projects. Information flow is two ways, from implementers of the project to management and vice versa.

Other project management practices adopted by telecommunication firms are: setting realistic project milestones (mean score of 4.27) and reviewing and reflect on the performance of projects (4.20). The firms set deadlines that are realistic and possible to achieve. This ensures that project targets are achieved within the stated timeframe. In reviewing the performance of projects, the telecommunication firms are

able to enhance the execution of the current project in addition to future projects.

Although the data shows the widespread use of recognized best project management practices, there were two project management practices that the telecommunication firms have not embraced: 1) lack of change management plan (and 2) absence of a detailed project log where every decision is explained. The mean score of 2.10 implies that the participants disagreed that their firm has put in place a change management plan in place for projects. Also, the mean score of 1.61 indicates that the participants disagreed that their firm maintains a detailed project log where every decision is explained. This implies that telecommunication firms do not keep accurate records on activities taken in the implementation of projects.

## **Discussion**

Telecommunication firms in Nigeria to a large extent, adopt effective project management practices. This is, however contrary to the findings of [6], who conducted a similar study but in a different industry i.e construction industry. [6] found that project management practices fall short of the required standards in the construction industry in Nigeria. This however is not the situation in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria. Telecommunication firms are deploying best project management practices for stronger results and happier employees. Effective project management procedures help telecommunications companies to concentrate on task that are important rather of being distracted by activities that go off course or budgets that go cost overruns. It helps workers to recognize how their job contributes to the company's goals and empowers them to create outcomes that truly enhance the firm's productivity.

With the right planning, the telecommunication firms ensure that the work is delivered on time and within budget. Using best project management practices, the firms

map their project's from the start, they'll know where the deadlines - and estimated expense - will fall, allowing them to more efficiently organize their resources and minimize delay and cost. This result is in agreement with the findings of [1] who found that efficient project management processes help firms reduce the intricacies of collaboration, increase transparency, and ensure accountability. With a clearer picture of how the project is progressing, telecommunication firms get a deeper understanding of where resources are being spent, where they need to prioritize and when, and if they are at risk of going off track. Good project management means that the telecommunication firms are able to predict problems before they arise, bottlenecks can be avoided, and wiser, data-driven choices can be made.

## **Conclusion**

The study provides evidence that telecommunication firms in Nigeria adopt the best project management practices. Best project management practices are widespread in the telecommunication industry in Nigeria. The project management practices adopted by telecommunication firms include: i) before a project is started, an initial meeting of all the project stakeholders are invited and their relevance to the primary objectives of the project is discussed ii) firms develop project scope management and get it approved by all relevant parties iii) project managers keep all related parties updated throughout the project's lifecycle iv) the firm creates a resource plan for projects v) the firms create a response risk team for projects vi) the firms show transparency in the implementation of projects vii) setting realistic project milestone and viii) review and reflect on the performance of projects. However, the study found two areas that the telecommunication firms fall short: a lack of

change management plan and the absence of a detailed project log where every decision is explained. The telecommunication firms must make it a point to put in place a change management plan for project implementation. The implementation of the project comes with changes in task, attitude, work culture etc. Hence it is important that the telecommunication firms design a change management plan so that the firm can assist the workers in adapting to the demands of the project.

Also, the telecommunication firms must maintain a detailed project log where every decision is explained. The decisions of the project must be recorded in the log book so that references can be made to it for future projects. It could become a useful document for improvement in project implementation.

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## **Conflict of Interest**

The author did not receive any financial support or funding for the research. The study was financed wholly by the author; thus, I do not pose a conflict to the research objective.

The author works in the telecommunication sector of Nigeria, which facilitated getting data from industry players. However, my association with the telecommunication sector of Nigeria did not in any way influence the objectivity of the study. I conducted the study to the best of my professional abilities.

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