

## **The role of culture in stakeholder engagement: Its implication for open innovation**

Keywords: Stakeholder engagement; culture, cultural dimensions; multicultural; multinational, inter-national; open innovation.

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## **Abstract**

Appropriate and effective stakeholder engagement remains a critical success factor for successful project and project management, especially in multicultural settings such as in the case of international subsidiaries of multinational organisations. Using in-depth qualitative interviews, this study examines the influence of culture on stakeholder engagement in a multicultural context from the perspective of project practitioners working for multinational corporations in the Nigerian oil and gas industry. The study findings revealed how the influence of different cultural dimensions on stakeholder engagement impact policies and decision-making. The study emphasised the need for project practitioners to integrate a culture that fosters open innovation in their project implementation processes to enhance their capacity to engage effectively in a multicultural setting.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder engagement; culture; cultural dimensions; multicultural.

## **Introduction**

Managing stakeholders' expectations and requirements is a fundamental concern in today's dynamic and complex project environment. Management literature has emphasised the need for businesses to engage with stakeholders who may be affected by the decisions they make or can influence the implementation of their decisions (Freeman, 2010). This is essential for organisations in capturing and translating the needs of their stakeholders into business decisions and forms a basis for developing an all-inclusive business strategy (Scott et al., 2015). Stakeholder engagement involves seeking stakeholders' views on their relationship with the organisation in a manner that may realistically be expected to elicit them. This is consistent with Greenwood's (2007) definition of stakeholder engagement as involving an organisation's stakeholders in project activities and decision-making. These views suggest that stakeholder engagement allows organisations to interact with and understand their project stakeholders.

Due to internationalisation and globalisation, multinational corporations (MNCs) are now implementing projects in countries other than their home country (Konanahalli et al., 2014). This generally involves MNCs having offices in different countries while maintaining a centralised head office in their home country, where global project management activities are coordinated. Each national context in which MNCs operate is subjected to different institutional and cultural factors, such as language and values, influencing how organisations implement their business and interact with various stakeholders (Hofsted, 2001; Deephouse et al., 2016; Breuer et al., 2018).

In conducting and managing their local activities and operations successfully, MNCs must engage with different project stakeholders, which naturally comes with the challenge of intercultural collaboration (Mühlbacher et al., 1999; West et al., 2016). This is because a country's culture influences the nature of the relationship(s) an organisation has with its stakeholders and the environment (Schneider, 1989). Even within the same geographic or country boundary, project

practitioners encounter diversity factors in their domestic teams because of subcultures (Khalid et al., 2020). This is consistent with Lu et al.'s (2016) assertion that the activities and operations of an organisation are not just impacted by the laws and regulations of the different countries in which they operate but also affected by the country's culture which is inherently an essential driver of innovation (Lam et al., 2021). This is consistent with Yun et al. (2020) assertion that culture enables organisations to control open innovation complexity.

Earlier studies have acknowledged the influence of culture on the project management process (Shore & Cross, 2005); identified cultural differences in project management style (Zwikael et al., 2005); examined the influence of national culture on the integrity of planning processes (Rees-Caldwell & Pinnington, 2013); cultural practices of governance (van Marrewijk & Smits, 2016), why cultural intelligence matters on global project teams (Henderson et al., 2018), the influence of culture on diverse project teams (Khalid et al., 2020) and the influence of culture on project performance (Battistella et al., 2023). However, the relevance of culture to stakeholder engagement has not been sufficiently explored in the project management literature. Considering the increasing rate of project failure and the call to embed sustainability in project management practices, there is a need for project practitioners to develop innovative stakeholders engagement culture, particularly in co-designing projects that align with their expectations. Thus, this study examines how culture influences stakeholder engagement in a multicultural international setting. Specifically, the study explores how the national culture and different cultural dimensions impact MNCs' engagement with project stakeholders in a multicultural setting.

This study is designed in response to the previous calls to extend the studies on culture, particularly within the project management environment (Smith, 2010; Verbeke et al., 2016; van Marrewijk & Smits, 2016; Khalid et al., 2020; Battistella et al., 2023). This study focuses on national culture, as professional and organisational cultures are not considered due to the effects of national culture on

organisational culture, meaning that organisations often modelled their culture after the culture of the nations they operate.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. First, we review the literature on stakeholder engagement and culture to provide the theoretical lens for the study by showing the relationship between the dimensions of culture and stakeholder engagement. Subsequently, we describe the data collection and analysis process. We go on to present and discuss the study findings. After that, we present the study implications and managerial practice. We conclude by outlining the study's limitations and future research agenda.

### **Stakeholder and stakeholder engagement**

Due to globalisation, MNCs implement projects in countries other than their home country. These projects are often motivated by factors such as an organisation's desire to influence the market, desire for political influence, desire to increase global market share, increase in geographical presence, efficiency gains realisation, improved effectiveness, risk reduction and access to resources (Köster, 2009). International projects typically involve parties from different countries (Turner, 1999), comprising stakeholders with diverse sociocultural backgrounds and across country borders (Binder, 2007). According to Ochieng and Price (2010), international projects are often used to describe projects implemented in a multicultural environment and culture as a variable has a way of influencing project outcomes. Thus, understanding the complex modalities of projects undertaken in multicultural settings is needed (Mikhieieva, 2017).

Considering the complexity of managing projects across country borders, the stakeholder theory provides a useful theoretical lens to understand the project and business environment. A stakeholder is "any group or individual who can be affected or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). Also, Savage et al. (1991) perceived stakeholders as groups or individuals with vested interests in and can influence the activities of an organisation. These views suggest the need for interdependence and collaboration between an organisation and its stakeholders. Consistent with the stakeholder theory, seeking stakeholders' support through adequate and appropriate engagement during project implementation becomes imperative. Stakeholder engagement is aimed at optimising project management processes to enhance stakeholders' involvement in projects (Tengan and Aigbavboa, 2017). This is consistent with Mysoreet et al. (2016) description of stakeholder engagement to entail interaction with project stakeholders to influence the project outcomes. Thus, stakeholder engagement can be understood from interaction and involvement with stakeholders within the project. Further studies by Zuofa and Ochieng (2016) have argued that stakeholder engagement can be perceived from the len of influence. Despite the different perspectives, one could argue that effective engagement must consider the opinions of relevant project stakeholders.

Effective stakeholder engagement can break or make a project and involves an organisation fostering continuous communication with its shareholders (Gao & Zhang, 2001). The process entails organisations involving their stakeholders in decision-making through dialogue, information sharing and mutual responsibility (Svendsen, 1998; Waddock, 2002). Consistent with Andriof and Waddock (2002), the stakeholder engagement process avoids a unilateral approach but creates a dynamic environment for interaction, mutual respect, dialogue and change. Arguably, stakeholder engagement involves attempts made by an organisation to involve its stakeholders in its project activities (Greenwood, 2007). This process requires individuals, groups and organisations to take an active role

in making project decisions that affect them (Reed, 2008). Thus, project failure and success have been linked to inappropriate stakeholder interactions (Molwus et al., 2017).

Effectively engaging different stakeholders in international projects is becoming more important than ever (Aaltonen et al., 2008). Project managers have experienced challenges in international projects due to managerial, technical, political, social and cultural aspects (Grün, 2004; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003). However, Aaltonen et al. (2008) and Erkul et al. (2016) considered the institutional environment, comprising customs, regulations, and norms prevalent in project management contexts, pertinent to international project success. Understanding the institutional environment in which culture is embedded is important in the context where various stakeholders with differing sociocultural backgrounds work together. This aligns with Binder's (2007) proposition that culture is a useful dimension in evaluating the complexity of the institutional environment of international projects. Hence, Leal Filho and Brandli (2016) concluded that understanding culture is imperative to foster successful stakeholder engagement in international projects.

### **Overview of culture**

According to Assael (1987), culture refers to the norms, beliefs, values, language, and customs learned from society, resulting in acceptable common behaviour. Likewise, Schneider (1989) defines culture as a system of shared meaning governing collective perceptions, thoughts, and actions. These views suggest that culture influences the achievement of a shared and common set of values while dictating acceptable behaviour for the members of the culture. Hofstede (2001) describes culture as a collective mental programming of the mind in a countrywide context. This view suggests that each country has unique characteristics influencing organisations' decisions (Pagell, 2004). Culture influences action by shaping skills, habits and styles through which people construct meaning. Some scholars have argued the need to foster open innovation to overcome cultural barriers (Bhabha, 2012), underpinned by immeasurable values such as creativity, curiosity, diversity and flexibility

(Matricano, 2018). While globalisation has brought the business world closer, cultural disparity remains challenging for MNCs, which could be decisive in engaging and managing project stakeholders. Halkos and Tzeremes (2008) concluded that the role of culture and its influence on MNCs remains debatable and sometimes underestimated.

While scholars have yet to agree on the definition of organisational culture, the concept has received much attention. It significantly influences the understanding of how organisations operate (Hofstede, 2001). Pascale and Athos (1982) perceived organisational culture as the ideology upon which an organisation built its policies and guidelines towards stakeholders. Likewise, Gundrykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) added that organisational culture represents a "social force" that drives people's actions. If organisational culture is a set of unstated underlying assumptions developed that have been useful in aiding an organisation to cope with internal and external challenges (Schein, 1990; 2000; Hofstede, 1997), the organisation must be proactive and innovative in engaging both internal and external stakeholders. Despite the different approaches taken on board by these scholars, it could be argued that organisational culture is inward looking. This is because the concept promotes practices, values, behavioural norms, beliefs and assumptions to guide appropriate behaviour and how things are done within an organisation (Yazici, 2009; Wiewiora et al., 2014). This argument is evident in various studies that are well aligned with organisational culture as instrumental in fostering cooperation and effective communication among project team members, creation of knowledge sharing, improved performance, competitive advantage and strong leadership (Doolen et al., 2003; Belassi et al., 2007; Yazici, 2009).

Projects, by their nature, transform or create change within an organisation. As a result, organisational culture often significantly influences projects, project management processes and the people involved. An understanding of organisational culture is critical to running successful projects. Hofstede (1999) observed that organisational culture develops within the context of national culture.



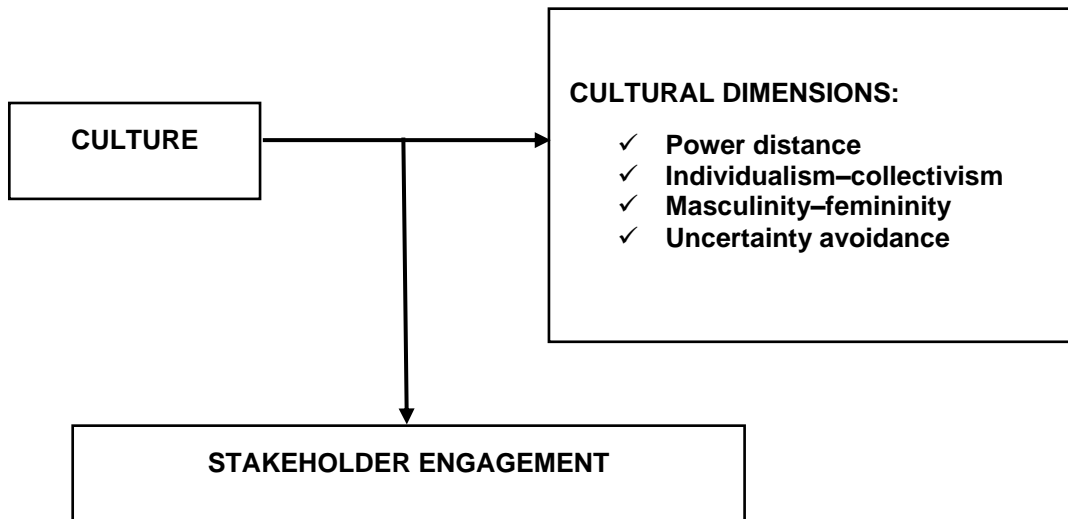
This aligns with Ajmal and Koskinen's (2008) argument and conclusion that external forces, such as the national culture in which an organisation operates, also shape organisational culture. As a result, it becomes important for organisations to reflect other beliefs that may impact their operation but may not have originated from within the organisation when making a decision.

Scholars (such as Wang & Liu, 2007; Shore & Cross, 2005) have emphasised the need for project managers to recognise the impact of national culture on projects and project management, especially projects implemented in an international environment. Schein (1985, p.29) defined national culture as "the sum total of all the shared, taken-for-granted assumptions that a group has learned throughout history". Likewise, Hofstede (1999) defined national culture as the belief and values systems held by a group of individuals, which are learned and often difficult to change. Whichever way these definitions are considered, both emphasise shared values and behaviour among a specific set of people, which are considered external to an organisation. The diversity of the project stakeholders, team members, and the environment poses further uncertainty in projects and project management due to the effects of national culture on organisational culture and, consequently, on project performance.

Milosevic (1999) noted that national culture might impact the project manager's performance. Likewise, Shore and Cross (2005) observed that national culture affects project management work. As a result, Zwikael (2009) emphasises the need for project managers to familiarise themselves with all relevant international project stakeholders' cultures. Marco et al. (2012) and Okhuysen and Bechy (2009) added that a lack of appropriate national culture understanding limits successful collaborations during project implementation. Wang and Liu (2007) and Shore and Cross (2005) concluded that due to the increase in projects implemented globally, the current project management practices should address the influence of national culture on the management of projects. This is because national culture impacts project stakeholders' perception, thinking and communication

(Huang, 2016; Fellows & Liu, 2016). How an organisation engage with relevant project stakeholders determines the efficiency of managing external information, affecting an organisation's ability to implement open innovation. Open innovation implies the development of new values generated by integrating the markets and innovations of an organisation's diverse stakeholders and implementing new and combined business models (Yun et al., 2020; Lam et al., 2021).

Even though organisations implement projects aligned with their respective organisation and national context to create value (Unger et al., 2014), they need to focus more on national culture as projects become more cross-cultural and multinational (Fellows & Liu, 2016). At the same time, scholars have offered different definitions of national culture. However, only a few have suggested how to measure it, especially when the focus is on assessing the beliefs and shared values that are often neglected or taken for granted. Among the scholars identifying and discussing different dimensions are Hofstede and GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) for conceptualising and operationalising culture (Steenkamp, 2001; Brooks, 2003). The Hofstede model of national culture demonstrates the impacts that culture has on the values of its members and how these values relate to behaviour. Although this framework has been criticised, scholars in the field of management and marketing have used it successfully in formulating hypotheses (Dickson et al., 2003; Soares et al., 2007). In addition, other cultural frameworks, such as GLOBE, were uncovered based on Hofstede's cultural dimension. Considering that other cultural models are underpinned by Hofstede's model of national culture (Hsu, Woodside, and Marshall 2013) based on factors that influence how people's values are constructed, the Hofstede model is considered most appropriate for this study. Specifically, we build on Hofstede's original four dimensions (Figure 1) of power distance (PDI), individualism–collectivism (IDV), masculinity–femininity (MAS), and uncertainty avoidance (UAI) to explain the roles of national culture in stakeholder engagement within a multicultural project setting.



**Figure 1:** Research model

The relationship between national culture and stakeholder engagement is subject to the dimensions of culture: power distance, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. Each dimension symbolises the different state of affairs that makes a culture unique. The ability of MNCs to effectively engage the community stakeholder during project implementation depends on the perceived understanding of the different dimensions of culture. The power distance reflects the consequences of power inequality and authority relations among the society stakeholder (Hofstede, 1991). It articulates the extent to which power is distributed and how inequalities among the community stakeholder group could impact effective engagement. The presumed link between power distance and stakeholder engagement is noted in the ability of MNCs to consider the inequality among community stakeholders. MNCs achieve this by building and managing relationships with powerful and less powerful stakeholders to help moderate the social inequalities among the community stakeholder group.

The individualism–collectivism dimension reflects how people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we" (Hofstede, 1991). It expresses how the bond among community stakeholder groups could impact effective engagement. The presumed link between individualism–collectivism and stakeholder engagement lay emphasis on the need to moderate the disparity among individuals to

foster a sense of belonging among the community stakeholder group. The masculinity–femininity dimension expresses people's orientation concerning competition and consensus (Hofstede, 1991), which is also explained as a “concept of self” (Inkeles & Levinson, 1969). It articulates the extent to which the existence of competition among the community stakeholder group could impact effective engagement. The presumed link between masculinity–femininity and stakeholder engagement is noted in the ability of MNCs to moderate the competition among individuals in the community while fostering cooperation. The uncertainty avoidance dimension of national culture reflects how people respond to ambiguity and uncertainty (Hofstede, 1991). It articulates how the community stakeholder group deals with the fact that the future can never be known. This resonates with the argument that uncertainties underpin project implementation. Hence, effectively engaging stakeholders involves an iterative and continuous process to moderate the uncertainty among the community stakeholder group.

## **Methods**

To achieve the goal of this study, the main research question is:

How does culture influence MNCs' engagement with community stakeholders in a multicultural setting?

As a result, we adopted a qualitative research design which has been proven in different contexts for theory building (Winn, 2001). Qualitative research was preferred due to the exploratory nature of this study, providing the opportunity to explore perceptions and experiences (Hennink et al., 2020) of project practitioners more in-depth regarding how they engage with stakeholders in a multicultural setting. Individual project practitioners with about at least five years of professional experience within a multinational oil and gas company in Nigeria were chosen to explore their perceptions and answer the research question. Consistent with qualitative research, purposive sampling allowed us to

select participants due to their relevance in achieving the purpose of this research by answering the research questions based on their direct involvement in project management activities within their respective organisations. Due to the specific traits and attributes of participants required to answer the research question and achieve the research purpose, we adopted snowball sampling technique (Hennink et al., 2020) to recruit participants for this study. Using this approach, the first participant from the authors' professional connection was asked to recommend potential participants who meet the eligibility criteria and might be interested in providing useful information about their stakeholder management experience.

During the data collection, consent form introducing the research topic, research purpose, ethics including anonymity and the participant's right to withdraw at any stage of the research process was signed by each participant. Data was collected online, through Zoom, using semi-structured interviews to explore issues and gain insights into the effects of culture on stakeholder engagement (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Hennink et al., 2020). Although the interview protocol was designed with key questions to proffer answers to the research question, the adopted semi-structured interviews allowed for the collection of rich information on stakeholder management by probing participants' experiences and views more in-depth. A total of twelve project practitioners who were selected due to their extensive involvement and engagement with different project stakeholders participated in the study.

The number of interviews conducted was not predetermined. Instead, it was decided to continue until the researchers reached the point of saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Bowen, 2008), a point where the information was sufficient to answer the research question. Although Nigeria is a multicultural country with about 371 ethnic groups and over 500 languages (Vanguard, 2017), interviews were conducted in English because it is the national language. Each interview session lasted between about sixty minutes. The use of online platform, Zoom, allowed for each interview to be recorded and

automatically transcribed. Each transcript was reviewed to correct typos and misplaced sentences, and cross-checked with notes taken during the interviews to ensure that the transcripts reflect the participants' views. The interview transcripts were analysed using NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software package for in-depth thematic analysis (Bazeley, 2007) and to capture key themes from the transcripts (Webber, 1990; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### Analysis of data and findings

This section examined and categorised the data gathered to address the goal of this study using thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Each interview was read multiple times independently by the authors to identify themes salient to the research purpose and questions. Each author's codes and themes were compared by the lead author and discussed for consensus regarding the extent to which the identified themes align with the research purpose. This approach allowed us to reduce any form of subjectivity in the interpretation of the participants' views and experiences about the effects of culture on multicultural stakeholder management in a project management environment.

**Tale 1:** Description of interviewees

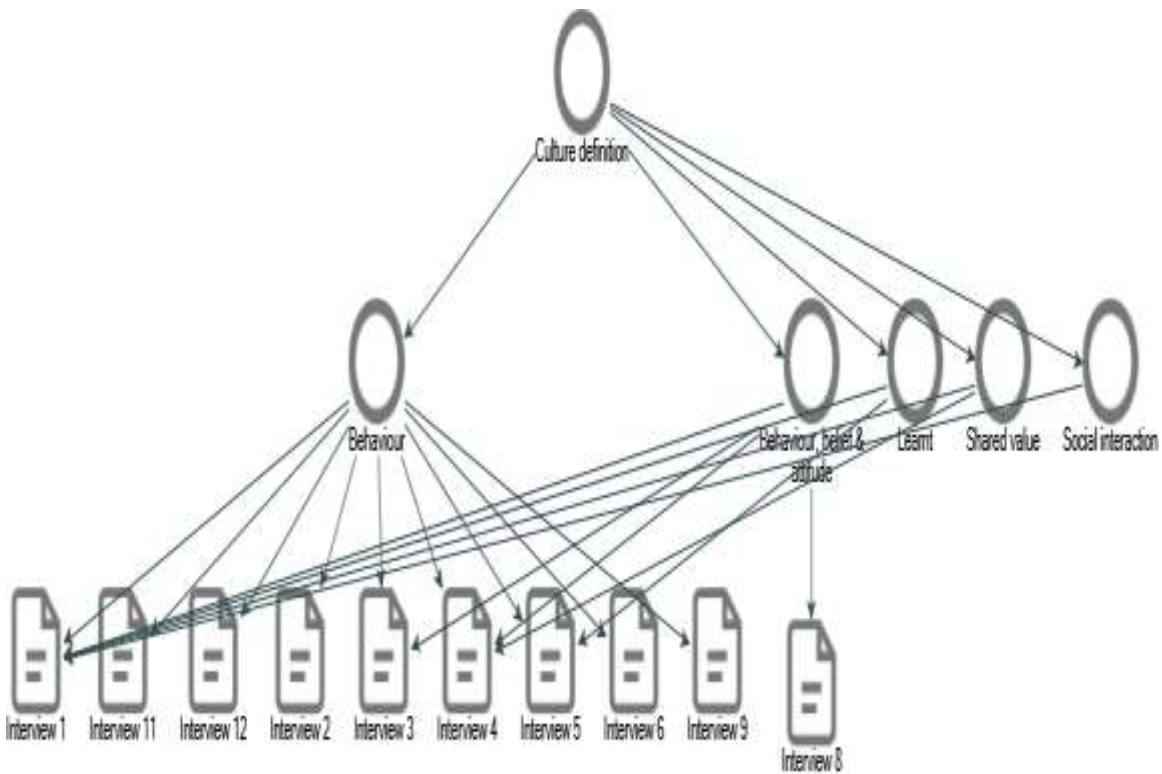
Participants	Gender	Years of Experience	Qualification	Role/Position
Int/Part 1	Male	6-10 Years	Bachelor Degree+Professional Affiliate	Team Member
Int/Part 2	Male	6-10 Years	Masters Degree	Manager
Int/Part 3	Male	6-10 Years	Bachelor Degree	Team Lead
Int/Part 4	Male	0-5 Years	Masters Degree	Team Member
Int/Part 5	Male	11-15 Years	Masters Degree	Project Manager
Int/Part 6	Male	6-10 Years	Masters Degree	Project Manager
Int/Part 7	Male	0-5 Years	Bachelor Degree	Team Member
Int/Part 8	Male	6-10 Years	Masters Degree	Team Lead
Int/Part 9	Male	6-10 Years	Masters Degree	Team Member
Int/Part 10	Male	15 Years +	PhD	Project Manager
Int/Part 11	Male	15 Years +	Masters Degree	Project

				Manager
<b>Int/Part 12</b>	Male	6-10 Years	Masters Degree+Professional Affiliate	Team Lead

The descriptive analysis (Table 1) showed that all interviewed participants were male. This could be attributed to the fact that the selected industry of study is dominated by males (John & Anunuonwu, 2019). Also, all interviewees are full-time employees of different MNCs operating and implementing projects in Nigeria at the time of data collection. The study findings are discussed further in the subsequent sections.

### **Understanding culture**

To ascertain the research participants understanding and knowledge of the research area, they were asked for their opinion and view about culture. Figure 2 depicts participants' responses to the question asked.



**Figure 2:** Definition of culture.

Table 2 presents research participants' views and opinions regarding culture. While most of the research participants perceived culture as in line with the behaviour exhibited by people within a society, others considered culture as a way of life underpinned by values and beliefs engrained in people's minds.

**Table 2:** Excerpts in support of behavioural approach to culture definition.

Themes	Excerpts	Participants
Behavioural	It is arrived by reason of members in specific geographic location behaving and acting in an identifiable manner.	Int/Part 1
	The way people do the things they do why they do the things they do.	Int/Part 4
	Culture is the predominant way of existence, a way of life of a group of people.	Int/Part 11
Behavior, beliefs and attitude	Culture is the way of life, values, beliefs and behaviors of a group of people.	Int/Part 8
	Culture is first may be the tradition and the way the people there do their thing.	Int/Part 9
Learning	There are not inherent in an individual but picked via learnt responses in the environment.	Int/Part 1
	It is something that is already crafted and ingrained in the hearts of people.	Int/Part 5
Shared value	It also includes shared values held by members of the community.	Int/Part 1



	What governs people, a group of people what governs them, what makes them do the things they do.	Int/Part 4
Social interaction	Culture arises as a result of social interactions in a society.	Int/Part 1

Research participants' responses revealed they have a proper understanding and knowledge of what culture connotes and entails. This awareness is essential as it evidences the research participants understanding of differences among different stakeholders from different backgrounds or countries, especially differences in values and attitudes.

### Stakeholder definition

Likewise, research participants' knowledge of what constitutes a stakeholder was explored. This understanding is necessary to establish how project practitioners perceive stakeholders, which may influence how stakeholders are engaged and managed. The following excerpts, as shown in table 3, present the participants understanding.

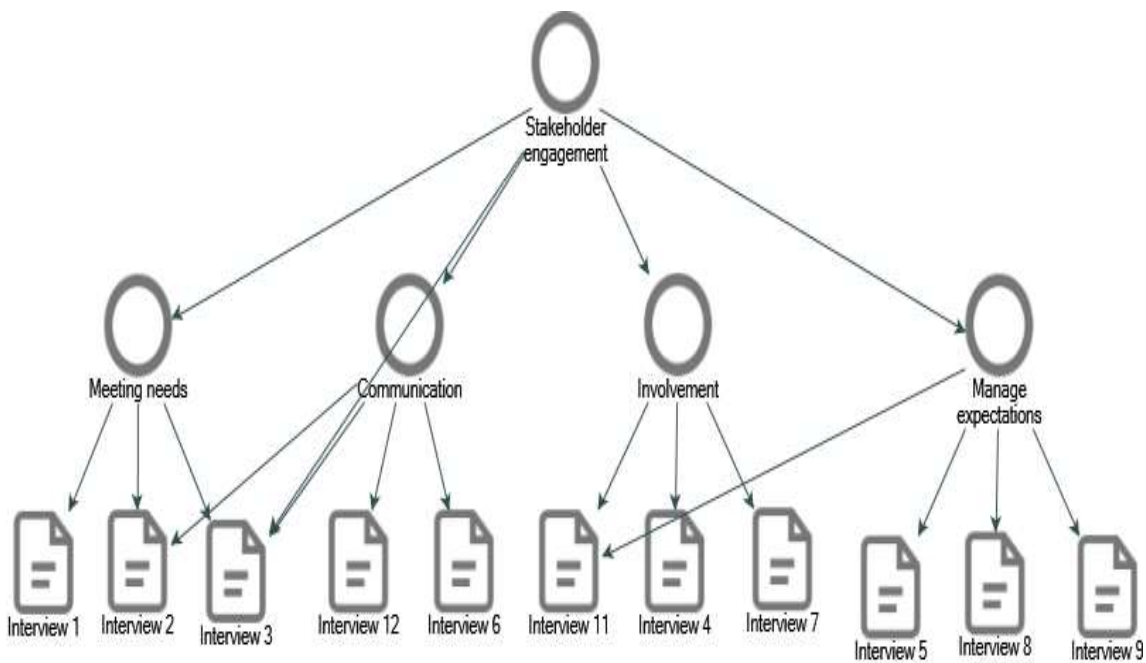
**Table 3:** Excerpts in support of stakeholder definition.

Stakeholders are people that enable you to deliver. Stakeholders could also be a beneficiary of the activities you are doing.	Int/Part 2
A stakeholder is someone who has direct or indirect involvement in the delivery of a product or service.	Int/Part 3
A stakeholder is basically every unit, every participants, in this context that are having stake or interest in the production of oil and gas business everybody that have a part either directly or indirectly.	Int/Part 5
A group of people or persons with mutual and individual interests coming together to achieve both a common and individual goals.	Int/Part 7
A stakeholder is anyone who has an interest or influence on a project or whose support is required for the project success.	Int/Part 8
Stakeholder as anyone group of people, or maybe even organisation that have an influence on outcomes.	Int/Part 9
A stakeholder is any individual in your organisation anybody within or outside of an organisation that could impact or will be influenced by my project by project status is being executed.	Int/Part 12

Research participants evidencing appropriate knowledge and understanding of who is a stakeholder affirms their ability to identify relevant individuals, groups of individuals or institutions that could have a negative and/or positive influence and interest in the success of their project without failing to meet the expectations of relevant project stakeholders.

## Knowledge of stakeholder engagement

In response to the question that focused on assessing research participants' understanding of the concept of stakeholder engagement, key themes that emerged are meeting needs, communication, involvement and managing expectations, as shown in figure 4. Research participants' knowledge of the concept suggests they understand their role in ensuring that business needs are met by proactively considering the influence and impacts of identified relevant project stakeholders.



**Figure 3:** Elements of stakeholder engagement.

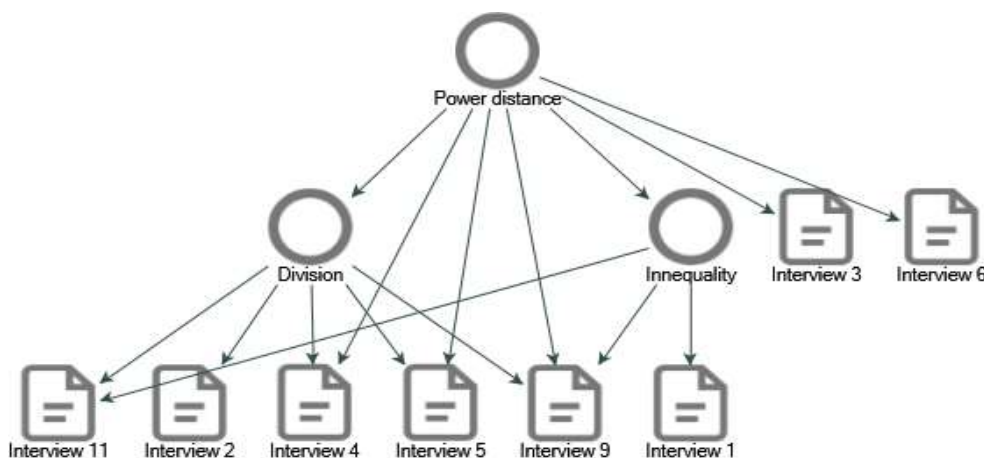
Most research participants described stakeholder engagement as entailing effective communication and managing the expectations of people whose interests could impact a project's success. In contrast, others viewed the concept from the perspective of involvement and meeting needs, as presented in table 3.

**Table 4:** Excerpts in support of stakeholder engagement definition.

<b>Meeting needs</b>	
The process of assessment of the pain points of stakeholder (s) and measures taken to ensure that such needs are met.	Int/Part 1
Allow them to ask questions and align with you, because two cannot work together except they agree.	Int/Part 2
<b>Communication</b>	
Ensuring that the key stakeholders are kept abreast of the ongoing within the project specific to their own areas of interest.	Int/Part 12
Stakeholder engagement is letting them know what you are doing, letting them know how it impacts them, letting them know how they can support you.	Int/Part 2
<b>Involvement</b>	
It is the process of meeting with people or coming together of people who have something in common.	Int/Part 11
Stakeholder engagement simply means carrying people along.	Int/Part 4
<b>Managing expectations</b>	
Stakeholder engagement is basically how best we manage the expectation and the needs of the identified parties in this case identified stakeholders, to enable us to achieve our sets goals and objectives.	Int/Part 5
It is the active management of each of your stakeholders to ensure the best outcome for your project.	Int/Part 8

### Impacts of Power distance

Research participants were asked how they engage with the various sub-stakeholders within the community stakeholder group during project implementation to understand how power distance which focuses on the relationship between higher-ranking and lower-ranking individuals within a community impact stakeholder engagement. Figure 4 depicts participants' views and opinions.



**Figure 4:** Impact of power distance on stakeholder engagement

The data gathered suggest that power distance often creates the need for project practitioners to ensure healthy execution of communication, interactions and relations with relevant stakeholders

while harnessing the differences among the community stakeholder group. The following excerpts in table 5 support this finding.

**Table 5:** Excerpts in support of the impact of power distance.

The question before developing society is how to harness the varying individual differences inherent in the society be gender, race, culture, etc and develop it for a better society.	Int/Part 3
A lot of times affect the expectations of different stakeholders, and so I think that's a good project manager will always find that balance.	Int/Part 4
You need to profile your stakeholders right, you need to know who it is you engaging with or you need to engage with.	Int/Part 6
It's important to ensure, you know that those power differences are very well understood and the impact of those differences and channels of engagements, you know, to ensure that everyone is properly brought to the table needs to be very well understood and considered.	Int/Part 9

While it is clear that research participants are knowledgeable about the impacts and contributions of power distance, the data gathered further revealed that the gap in social strata among the community stakeholder group will often result in division and inequality among the different sub-community stakeholder groups.

**Table 6:** Excerpts in support of resultant effects of power distance.

There are certain things that appeal to a certain group, and that may not necessarily appeal to the other.	Int/Part 4
Is either you are really up there powerful and rich, or you are down there as part of the masses.	Int/Part 9

According to the participants, a proper understanding of the effects of power distance will foster successful stakeholder engagement. It largely contributes significantly to the different community stakeholder trust in project practitioners, influencing how to begin engagement and determining its effectiveness.

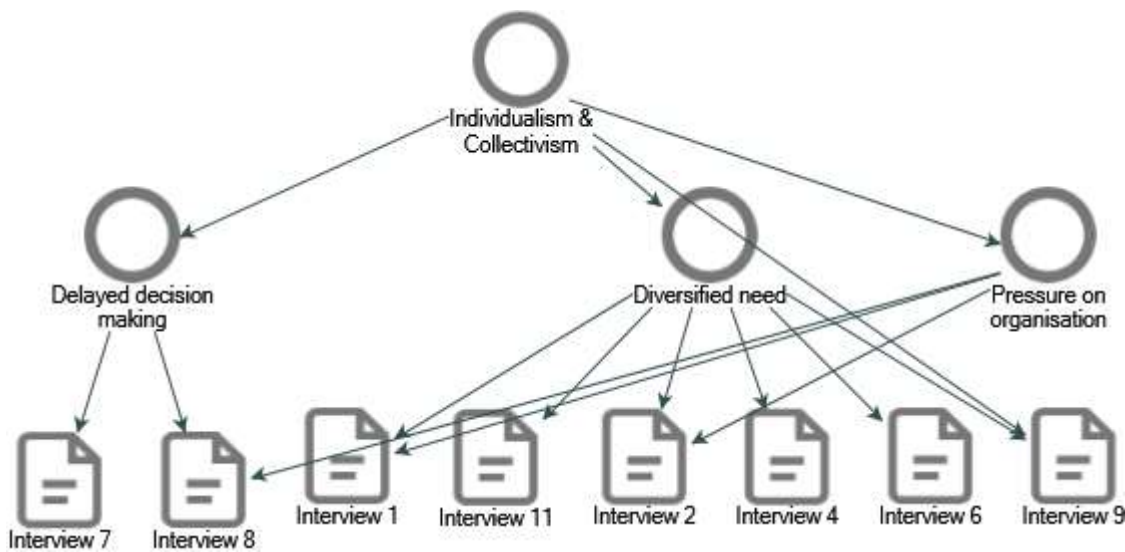
**Table 7:** Excerpts in support of power distance importance.

It is important to segregate the stakeholders and look at the areas of interest to them that would help you in engaging them, winning them over.	Int/Part 2
It's important to ensure, you know that those power differences are very well understood and the impact of those differences and channels of engagements, you know, to ensure that everyone is properly brought to the table needs to be very well understood and considered.	Int/Part 9

These views and opinions further emphasise how an appropriate understanding of the power distance cultural dimension could aid project practitioners in ensuring the commitment and support of the different community stakeholder groups.

### Influence of Individualism–collectivism

The study further explored how organisations' pursuit of cohesion among the community stakeholder group impacts stakeholder engagement during project implementation. Figure 5 depicts participants' views and opinions.



**Figure 5:** Impact of individualism-collectivism on stakeholder engagement.

The data gathered revealed that the prominence of individual orientation instead of group orientation among the community stakeholder group will result in delayed decision-making, diversified needs and pressure on the organisation, as shown in the excerpts in table 8.

**Table 8:** Excerpts in support of individualism-collectivism impacts.

<b>Delayed decision making</b>	
Extended engagement and negotiations would likely be needed to come to any clear resolutions.	Int/Part 8
<b>Diversified needs</b>	
Disparity among community stakeholders bring about diversified stakeholder needs.	Int/Part 1
Tend to complicate the management and engagement of community stakeholders because what works for one sub-group of the community may not work for the other	Int/Part 8
<b>Pressure on organisation</b>	
This further places pressure on corporations in trying to tie diverse demands arising from such disparities with community stakeholders.	Int/Part 1

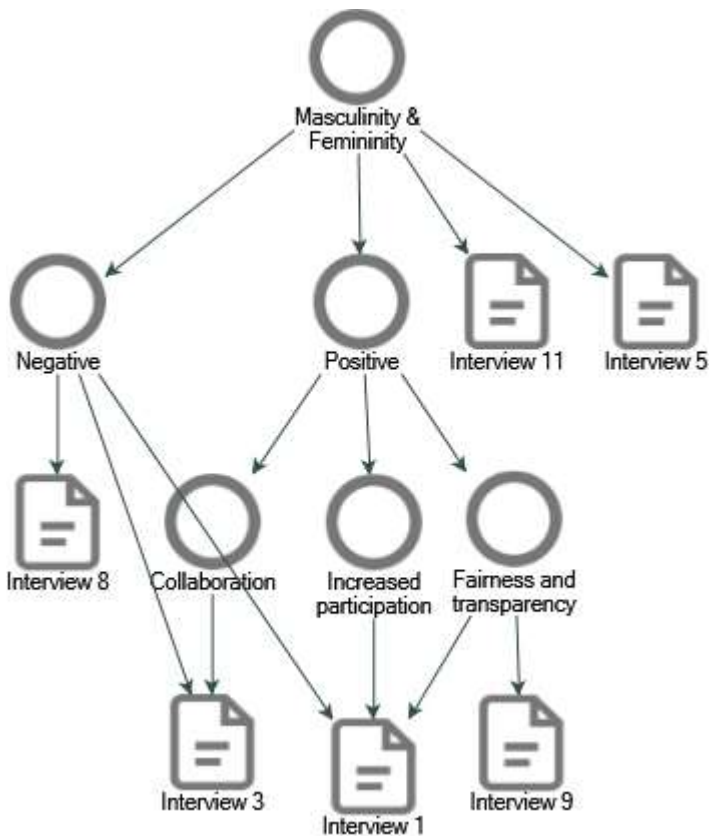
However, some of the research participants concluded that understanding the individualism-collectivism cultural dimension allows project practitioners to identify stakeholder drivers, create bonds among a set of stakeholder groups and ensure appropriate trade-offs. These views further suggest that individualism and collectivism can coexist and influence decision-making when engaging community stakeholder groups. The following excerpts in table 9 support this finding.

**Table 9:** Excerpts in support of individualism-collectivism importance.

Would help build a bond with these people as long as you understand their needs.	Int/Part 4
Usually there is always a middle point where both parties trade off something.	Int/Part 5
Also help you to properly address or understand the drivers for the different stakeholders.	Int/Part 9

### **Masculinity-femininity**

Masculinity-femininity as a concept depicts characteristics or traits associated with being male or female. Masculinity and femininity are perceived as opposite ends of a single dimension in that masculinity is at one extreme and femininity is at the other. Thus, research participants were asked how this concept impacts their ability to effectively engage the community stakeholder group. The findings suggest that an understanding of these concepts avails project practitioners an orientation of what community stakeholders deem appropriate behaviour and expected of a man and for a woman. Figure 6 depicts participants' views and opinions.



**Figure 6:** Impact of masculinity-femininity on stakeholder engagement

The research participants' views and opinions in response to the impact of the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension on stakeholder engagement were initially viewed broadly from negative and positive perspectives. Excerpts supporting the negative perspective are shown in table 10.

**Table 10:** Excerpts in support of masculinity-femininity negative impacts.

The down side of this is that it can become a tight rope for organisations to walk as competing parties try to outwit eah other in the process thus it becomes more difficult to satisfy competing community stakeholders.	Int/Part 1
Could affect the stakeholder engagement negatively if not properly identified or managed. For example, in patriarchal societies, where the majority may not be used to females in positions of authority, engagement across stakeholders with gender and age differences could be inadvertently wrongly managed.	Int/Part 8

On the other hand, the data gathered revealed that positive views and opinions foster collaboration, increased participation, and fairness and transparency, as shown in Table 11. This further

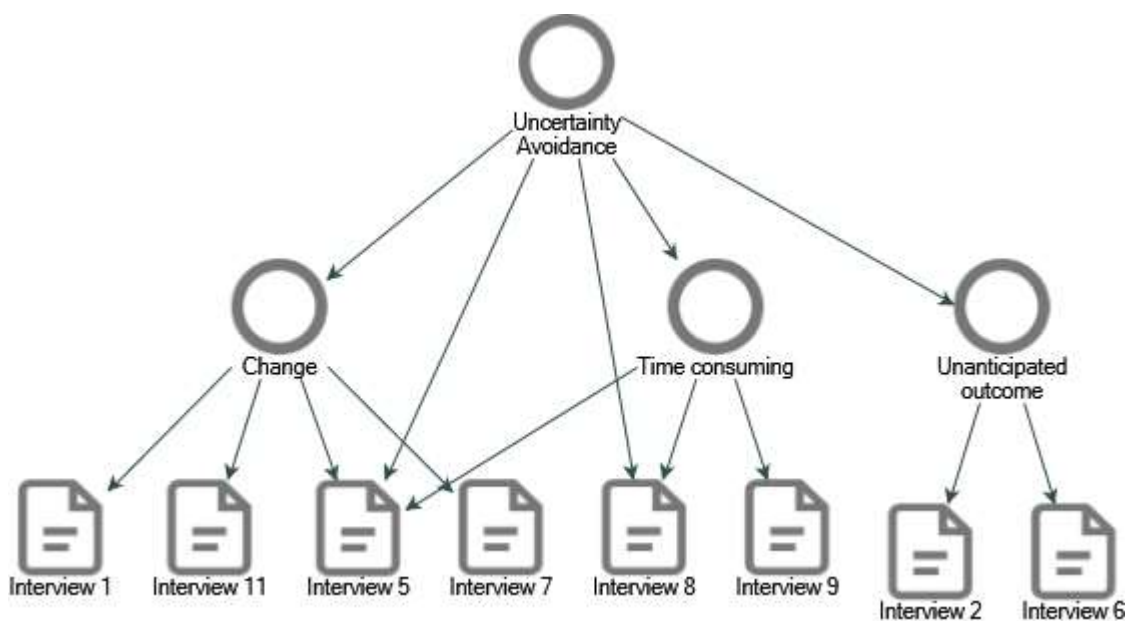
demonstrates that the understanding of project practitioners of the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension will influence how they engage with different community stakeholders.

**Table 11:** Excerpts in support of masculinity-femininity positive impacts.

Collaboration and respect for one another thrives, the cohesion of the various stakeholder can be a true source of development and growth.	Int/Part 3
Brings about greater participation in the process of stakeholder engagement.	Int/Part 1
Create an atmosphere of fairness and transparency such that whenever things are being done for the communities or whenever our projects are being progressed within communities, it's clear what the mission is, what the thinking of the companies and anybody that evaluates dispassionately will come to the same conclusion as to what is the agreement.	Int/Part 9

### Contribution of Uncertainty avoidance

Exploring research participants' views and opinions was important to know how the community stakeholder group responded to the fact that the future can never be known during an engagement. Responses to the question help ascertain research participants' understanding of how stakeholder engagement is impacted by the degree to which different community stakeholder groups are comfortable with the unknown and their tolerance for unpredictability. Figure 7 depicts participants' views and opinions.





**Figure 7:** Impact of uncertainty avoidance on stakeholder engagement

The data gathered revealed that uncertainties during engagement give rise to unanticipated outcomes, necessitate project changes, and are often time-consuming, which informs business practices, social norms and human behaviour as shown in the excerpts in table 12.

**Table 12:** Excerpts in support of uncertainty avoidance impacts.

This can necessitate change in communication channels whilst interacting with project stakeholders.	Int/Part 1
Time and effort would be required to achieve understanding, alignment and obtain support from such stakeholders.	Int/Part 8
While engaging, you should be willing to manage surprises because you are dealing with human beings.	Int/Part 2

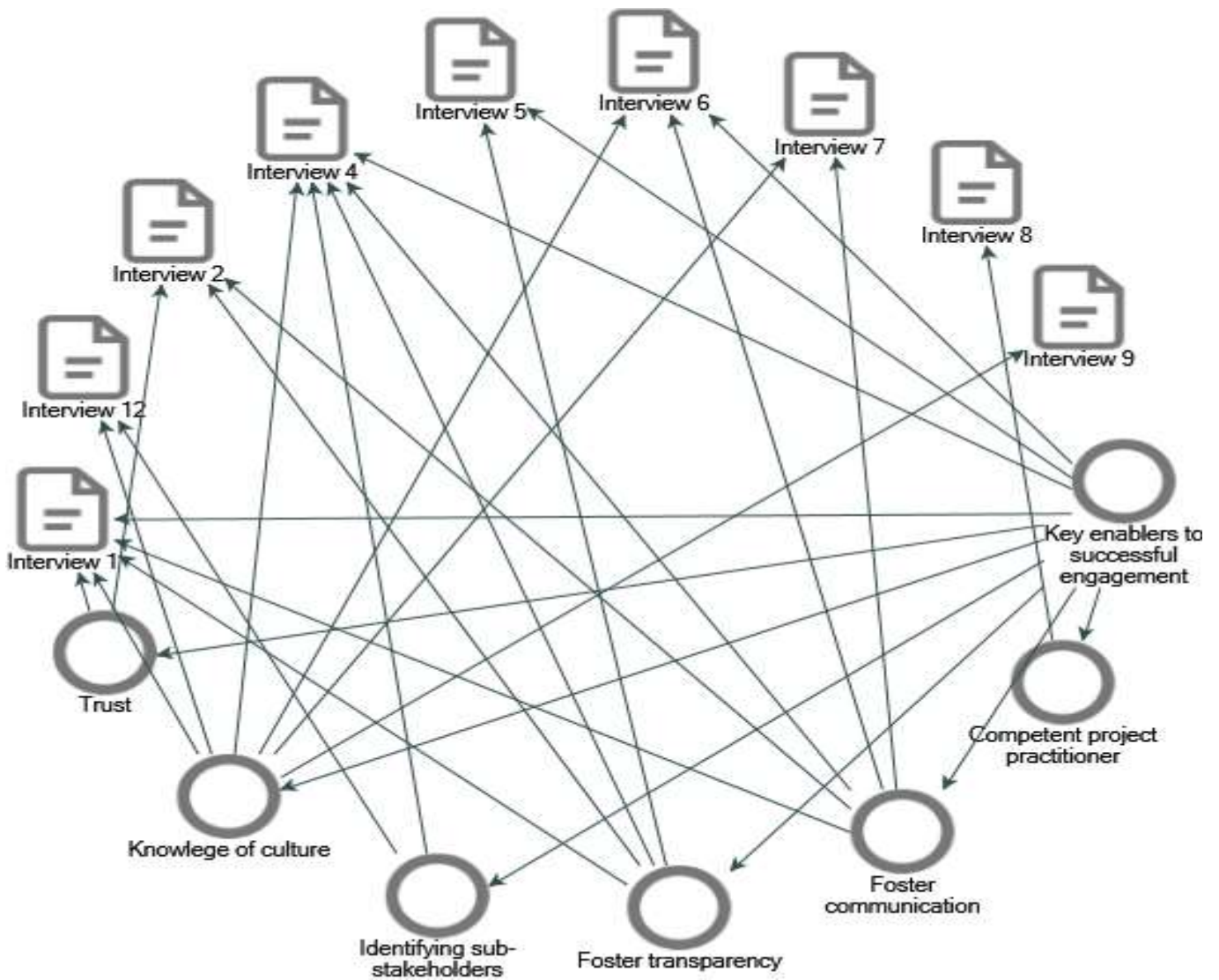
However, some participants conclude that continued engagement and open communication will help minimise the level of uncertainty and unpredictability during engagement as shown in table 13.

**Table 13:** Excerpts in support of the role of engagement and communication in uncertainty avoidance.

Continuous engagement which is like a sister to early engagement is important.	Int/Part 5
Open and regular communication is required as the uncertain situation evolves. It is important to be open and transparent to stakeholders on what the company or project knows for certain, what are the known unknowns, and be clear that there could still be unknown unknowns yet to be identified.	Int/Part 8

**Enablers for a successful engagement**

During the data analysis, it emerged that key factors influence successful stakeholder engagement in a multicultural setting, as shown in figure 8. The presents of these factors do not guarantee success. However, their absence during engagement could negatively impact the stakeholder engagement process.



**Figure 8:** Enablers for a successful engagement

Research participants emphasised the competence of project practitioners, effective communication, transparency, awareness of sub-stakeholders, knowledge of culture and trust as the key enablers for a successful stakeholder engagement, as shown in the excerpts in table 14.

**Table 14:** Key enablers for successful stakeholder engagement.

<b>Competent project practitioner</b>	
Engagements and negotiations have to be skillfully managed to ensure that the diverse voices are heard and everyone feels a sense of belonging.	Int/Part 8
<b>Communication</b>	
The key enabler in engagement is that they must see value in the discussion they're going to have with you.	Int/Part 2



To engage a new community, it is important to call for a town hall meeting yeah because this is the first time you're coming to this place.	Int/Part 4
<b>Foster transparency</b>	
So for me, what has worked is being transparent. Tell them what you can do and do it. Although they are going to present a lot of demands to you as you see to it.	Int/Part 2
You need to be transparent with the community by ensuring what was planned and agreed is what was implemented.	Int/Part 5
<b>Identifying sub-stakeholders</b>	
Identifying who the major gatekeepers are and then working with those gatekeepers.	Int/Part 4
These will guide the way they are engaged and impact the project deliverables. Because, essentially, how well you know those things are delivered becomes a critical success factor for your project, you know.	Int/Part 12
<b>Knowledge of culture</b>	
Ignorance of a stakeholders culture or disrespect of a stakeholders culture will make stakeholder engagement a bit more difficult, maybe a bit if not significantly more difficult.	Int/Part 6
It is very very important in order to do business successfully with the community. You have to know their culture essential, otherwise you know you could really go off tangent.	Int/Part 12
<b>Trust</b>	
This is to foster trust with stakeholders, which is an important element if stakeholders are to carry along whilst exploring grey areas for which both parties have never walked.	Int/Part 1
Building trust with the community is essential.	Int/Part 2

## Discussion

This study reveals important findings about how culture impacts stakeholder engagement. Research participants' knowledge and understanding of culture as a concept align with scholars' assertion that culture entails the beliefs, norms and customs learnt and shared by a group of people with a common interest (Assael, 1987; Schneider, 1989; Hofstede, 2001). Likewise, the findings from the definition of stakeholder are consistent with scholars' views and opinions on a stakeholder as any individual or group of individuals or institution who have an interest or can influence or is affected by the achievement of an organisation's objectives and vice visa (Freeman, 1984; Savage et al., 1991). In addition, the definition and focus of stakeholder engagement derived from the study findings are consistent with scholars' view of the concept of providing organisations with a two-way dialogue process in obtaining information that could impact its activities, help achieve its objectives and build a relationship aligns with the study findings (Gao & Zhang, 2001; Sharma, 2005; Katsoulakos & Katsoulacos, 2007; International Standard Organisation, 2010).

Regarding the impact of power distance on stakeholder engagement, it was revealed that an imbalanced distribution of power would often result in information restriction, division and inequality among the community stakeholder group during stakeholder engagement. This is consistent with Gray's (1988) argument that an imbalanced power distance will decrease information disclosure. Similarly, Gallego-Álvarez and Ortas (2017) assert that power distance often results in inequality and decreases the dialogue. How power is distributed and the extent to which the less powerful accept that power is distributed unequally may not be appealing. An appropriate understanding of the stakeholder group creates a win-win situation for an organisation and the stakeholder (Plaza-Úbeda et al., 2009). During engagement, it becomes imperative for project practitioners to create an open forum that will facilitate equal interaction and participation for all while obtaining project feedback.

Furthermore, the study revealed that an imbalanced Individualism–collectivism dimension impact on engagement will delay decision-making, divided needs and pressure on organisations. This is because the different sub-stakeholder groups tend to work loosely as they focus on achieving personal interests. This is consistent with Ho et al. (2012) assertion that individualistic communities create room for independence and freedom, which usually prioritise personal interests over common interests. Fostering an environment where collaboration is encouraged while focusing less on pursuing personal goals becomes imperative. These findings align with previous research studies that argued that effective stakeholder engagement allows organisations to build positive relationships (Wayne Gould, 2012; Gallego-Álvarez & Ortas, 2017). Appropriate stakeholder engagement will result in dialogue and sharing of resources for an organisation and its stakeholders. Hence, organisations in an individualistic environment must create an avenue and opportunities that foster a common goal and objective among stakeholders.

The empirical findings provided insight into the extent to which the impact of emphasis on the achievement or nurture of stakeholder engagement could result in a negative or positive outcome. Of emphasis is on the collaboration, fairness and transparency, and increased participation that could emerge from project practitioners having a proper understanding of the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension during an engagement. This aligns with scholars' assertion that a culture that treats females and males equally has a greater stakeholder orientation, as working in cooperation and harmony is valued (Gray, 1988; Van der Laan Smith et al., 2005; Orij, 2010). Furthermore, evidence revealed that change, time-consuming, and unanticipated outcomes are the major outcome expressed when the members of the community stakeholder group feel uncomfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty. Suggesting that organisations should be more sensitive to the interests of their stakeholders. Consistent with Hofstede (1984), the author argued that high uncertainty avoidance demands consensus and written rules, while low uncertainty avoidance is less concerned with written rules and is more risk-tolerant. As a result, how project practitioners deal with the fact that every project is filled with uncertainties remains a concern. Engaging stakeholders effectively will require continuous interactions and providing sufficient information about the project to aid them in making the appropriate decision.

Overcoming cultural challenges such as inequality and the imbalanced distribution of power, lack of collaboration, fairness, and transparency among the community stakeholder is important in fostering open innovation, which creates a holistic approach to exploring and encouraging a wide range of external and internal opportunities (West and Gallagher, 2006; Yun et al., 2020).

## **Conclusion**

This study has aimed to examine how culture influences stakeholder engagement in a multicultural international setting. It has applied the Hofstede cultural dimensions, a cross-cultural framework that provides an understanding and knowledge of a society's culture. Data was collected from different

project practitioners in different multinational companies implementing projects in multicultural settings. The results suggest that culture significantly influences stakeholder engagement during project implementation. Cultural diversity is bound to exist in projects implemented in a multicultural setting. Understanding and appropriately managing cultural differences will positively influence the project outcome.

From a managerial point of view, the findings emphasise the need for MNCs to embed equitable and inclusive stakeholders in their strategy formulation and decision-making process. MNCs should establish a culture of open innovation and rethink how they can add value to their dynamic and complex project environment. This is important as the culture of the environment in which they operate influences the nature of the relationship(s) they can develop. This can be a determinant for open innovation implementation strategy via which new values are developed and integrated into the organisation's business models.

Likewise, the study demonstrates that project practitioners' competence, effective communication, transparency, awareness of sub-stakeholders, knowledge of culture and trust are key enablers for successful stakeholder engagement when implementing a project in a multicultural environment. This provides some insights for project practitioners to manage cultural diversity during project stakeholder engagement right from the point of identifying potential project stakeholders. In addition, during an engagement, it becomes imperative for project practitioners to create an open forum that will facilitate equal interaction and participation for all while obtaining project feedback. Hence, organisations must create an avenue and opportunities that foster a common goal and objective among stakeholders.

From a theoretical point of view, the study contributed to a better understanding of the linkage between cultural dimensions and stakeholder engagement. It sheds light on the factors that could foster a better understanding of stakeholder engagement theory in multicultural settings. The data

analysed in the study is obtained through interviews. Further studies could look into the relationship between the factors identified in the study and stakeholder engagement using a quantitative approach to provide a deeper understanding of the interaction. Also, future studies should investigate the effect of key enablers for successful stakeholder engagement on project success.

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