

Effect of Communication Process and Mission on Project Implementation in County Governments in Kenya, Study of Trans-Nzoia County

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to provide research based information that will improve project implementation in County Governments in Kenya. The data was collected through questionnaires, interviews and documents analysis. The target population was the County Executive Committee Members, the County Representatives and the County Public Service employees. The findings from the analysis show that communication is pillar of projects implementation among the county government. The study therefore recommends that the County Governments should work towards achieving their goals by sharing information with its stakeholders and having clear project mission to promote goals achievement in the projects being undertaken.

Keywords: Communication, Participation, development communication, Projects, Mission, Goals.

1. BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Communication refers to the exchange of information and ideas. It is the transfer of information among the major players in the project implementation process, the channels of communication and the appropriate network that must be open to transmit necessary data concerning the project to each stakeholder. Community is a group of people living together and has religious, cultural, ethnic or other characteristics that the project will try to change their way of life. It is also the involvement of people in decision making, implementation and monitoring. The community must be involved in planning, execution, monitoring, running and use of the project.

All over the world projects are undertaken in all construction endeavors, aerospace-that is, construction of aero planes, ship building, software industries, insurance, banking and education. Projects are the building blocks in the design and execution of strategies for any organization and it provides an organizational focus for conceptualizing, designing and creating new or improved products, services and organizational processes (Cleland, 2004).

According to Bagaka (2008) a look at the implementation n of CDF projects in recent years reveals a mismatch between the nature of capital expenditure decisions and financing for the operations and maintenance of such projects with local benefits. It was noted that, CDF projects were launched politically and more often new projects undertaken while existing ones are left to deteriorate or are inadequately funded (Tanzi & Davoodi, 1998), the above scenario applies to most projects in the country.

Yabs, (2010) informs us that a mission can be seen as a synonym for the objectives, goals, aims, end results and targets. All these terms are used to describe the end towards which all management efforts are directed. They describe the destination of all company activities that are aimed at achieving. The mission is the unique purpose that sets a company apart from others of its type and identifies the scope of its operations in product, market and technology (Pearce and Robinson, 2011).

According to Kibet (2014), the study established that communication is a basic tool for motivation, which can improve morale of the employees in an organization. Inappropriate or faulty communication among employees or between manager and his subordinates is the major cause of conflict and low morale at during strategy implementation. Manager has the responsibility to clarify to employees about what is to be done, how well they are doing and what can be done for better performance to improve their motivation. The managers can prepare a written statement, clearly outlining the relationship between company objectives and personal objectives and integrating different interest during strategy implementation. Effective communication of information and decision is an essential component for management-employee relations during strategy implementation. The manager cannot get the work done from employees unless they are communicated effectively of what he wants to be done. The manager should also be sure of some basic facts such as how to communicate and what results can be expected from that communication. Most of management problems in strategy implementation arise because of lack of effective communication. Chances of misunderstanding and misrepresentation can be minimized with proper communication system, this paper sought to establish how the communication process affect project implementation in County Governments in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem:

Cleland, (2004) observes that projects fail because of inadequate senior management, ineffective planning, inappropriate organizational design, lack of well defined and delegated authority and responsibility, an inefficient system of monitoring, evaluation and controlling, misuse of resources on the projects, ineffective contingency planning, limited team participation in the execution of project decisions, Unrealistic cost estimates and schedules, lack of customer commitment to projects, limited customer supervision and inadequate management information systems. SID (2004) notes that, 80% of projects are completed late and therefore lead to budget overruns. Similarly, Cleland (2004) states that the reasons leading to project failure are inadequate senior management involvement, ineffective planning, inappropriate organizational design, lack of clear mission, lack of well defined goals and delegated authority, limited team participation in project decisions and lack of customer supervision. Bolles (2002) points out that project implementation appears to be the most difficult aspect of a manager's job therefore the need for more research in this area. Further evidence of the problem in Kenya is exhibited by Kirungu (2011) in a study on factors influencing implementation of Donor Funded Projects. She observes that the Financial and Legal Sector Technical Assistance Project (FLSTAP) under the Ministry of Finance (The National Treasury) has faced challenges to do with implementation and therefore not able to achieve its goals within the stipulated timeframes. She further cites a World Bank Report (2009) which indicated that the current average project funds absorption rate was less than 10% per annum which was attributed to a constrained procurement process. On his part, Omanga (2010) found out that 21% of CDF Projects in Lari Constituency had either stalled or abandoned altogether. This statistic closely tallies with the findings on CDF Projects in Kanduyi Constituency which recorded a 25% project implementation failure during the Financial Year 2007/08, Mutunga (2010), the above past research on projects implementation has shown that projects failure rate are high. Despite above studies done there is limited study on communication and project mission being one of these causes of project success or failure and thus this was the gap of this paper which sought to answer the questions, how does the communication process and skills affect project implementation in County Governments in Kenya?

Study Objectives:

This study sought to answer following research questions;

- a) To examine the effect of communication process on project implementation in County Governments in Kenya.
- b) To determine the effect of the project mission on project implementation in County Governments in Kenya

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Process and Project Implementation:

A possible strategy in achieving sustainability and development places the people of the community in the centre of the communication process. This technique is also known as the participatory approach. Where interpersonal communication is exercised through community media, the members of the culture are agents of change as opposed to the outsiders who may provide any necessary tools. Technology then becomes implemented by people in their social and economic contexts and results in a major shaping process. The participatory approach can be combined with three other types of communicative methods to effectively invoke social change. These include: Behavior change communication, mass communication and advocacy communication (Wikipedia, 2013).

Projects are key in development in the country and CDF is one of the key pillar in funding projects which has shown both success and failures in various countries. Comparatively little is known about CDFs given the absence of research on their long term impact in countries like Pakistan, the Philippines and India which have well established CDF schemes. Other countries that have CDF schemes around the world are Bhutan, Solomon Islands, Jamaica and Malaysia. Around Africa, they will be found in the Sudan, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda among others. In all, at least 23 countries around the world including the ones already mentioned have adopted or are considering adopting CDFs (Van Zyl, 2010). This paper sought to know how communication influences these projects.

Awareness of the different purposes and functions of various types of communication is the first step toward a better understanding of the field of development communication and an effective way to enhance necessary quality standards. Being familiar with the origin of this particular discipline and the major theoretical frameworks underpinning it can help achieve a much better understanding. The field of development communication can also be referred to as “communication for development,” “development support communication,” and more recently, “communication for social change.” (Rogers 2008).

According to Smit and Cronje, (1993:354) organizational communication is the act of providing information to all management functions, namely controlling, leading, organizing and planning. Managers should therefore improve upwards, downwards and lateral communication to ensure that everybody at all organizational levels understand their responsibilities and are aligned around a central purpose, Mission and vision (Bass and Avulio, 1999:147). Communication of the strategy and project information should be well defined and be as complete as possible. It should omit words, phrases or concepts that will cause misunderstanding at lower levels. Therefore communication should be timely. Ineffective communication also erodes trust. Kottler, (1990), therefore states that three communication pitfalls should be avoided: under communication, ineffective communication and inconsistent communication.

Under communication leads to ineffective project implementation, it occurs when elaborate change efforts are communicated to members of an organization or project team through a single memo or meeting, with the result that few people grasp the essence of the information. Ineffective communication is characterized by an inability to communicate a message despite intentions to do so. Without clarity and understanding, the leadership of an organization will find it difficult to communicate meaningful information to the project team. In the absence of shared meaning and interpretation of reality, coordinated action will be difficult to facilitate. Inconsistent communication occurs when the day to day action of leaders are inconsistent with their messages. Communication has four major functions within organizations, namely control, motivation, emotional expressions and information. For an organization to enhance performance the managers need to maintain some form of control over their employees, stimulate employees to perform, provide means for emotional expression and make the information flow effectively. Effective communication fosters enthusiasm, buy in and creative execution of tasks (Alkhafaji, 2003).

According to Kotler and Keller, (2012) the key competitors achievements, products and, plans, action and performance should be apparent to all organizational members. Major external opportunities and threats should be precise and employees and managers concerns should be attended to. Top down flow of communication is essential for developing bottom up support (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

Organizational communications also plays an important role in training, knowledge dissemination and learning during the process of project implementation. Through communication process, organizational context and implementation objectives are directed despite the merits and quality aspects of a project, if the business team do not understand and accept it, performance will suffer. This will cause delay or cause the project to fail. Indeed it has been found out that communication is mentioned more frequently than any other single item in promotion and success of projects or Strategy implementation. The content of such communication usually includes clearly explaining what new responsibilities, tasks and duties need to be performed by the respective employees. The study to be undertaken concurs that communication is an important and crucial determinant of project implementation and investigates this concept.

Communication is greatly linked to the concept of sustainable development which can be defined as the improvement of a community using information and technology and the communities' ability to maintain the created real estate without compromising its environment and resources. Development communications is envisaged as a response to particular historical, social, and economic factors that characteristics freedom of access to information and citizen participation. This

includes socio-economic problems such as high levels of poverty and unemployment, low standards of living, poor access to basic services, remote of information, poor health services, lack of education and skills and lack of infrastructure. Communication is essential for projects implementation and the figure 1 shows communication process in projects.

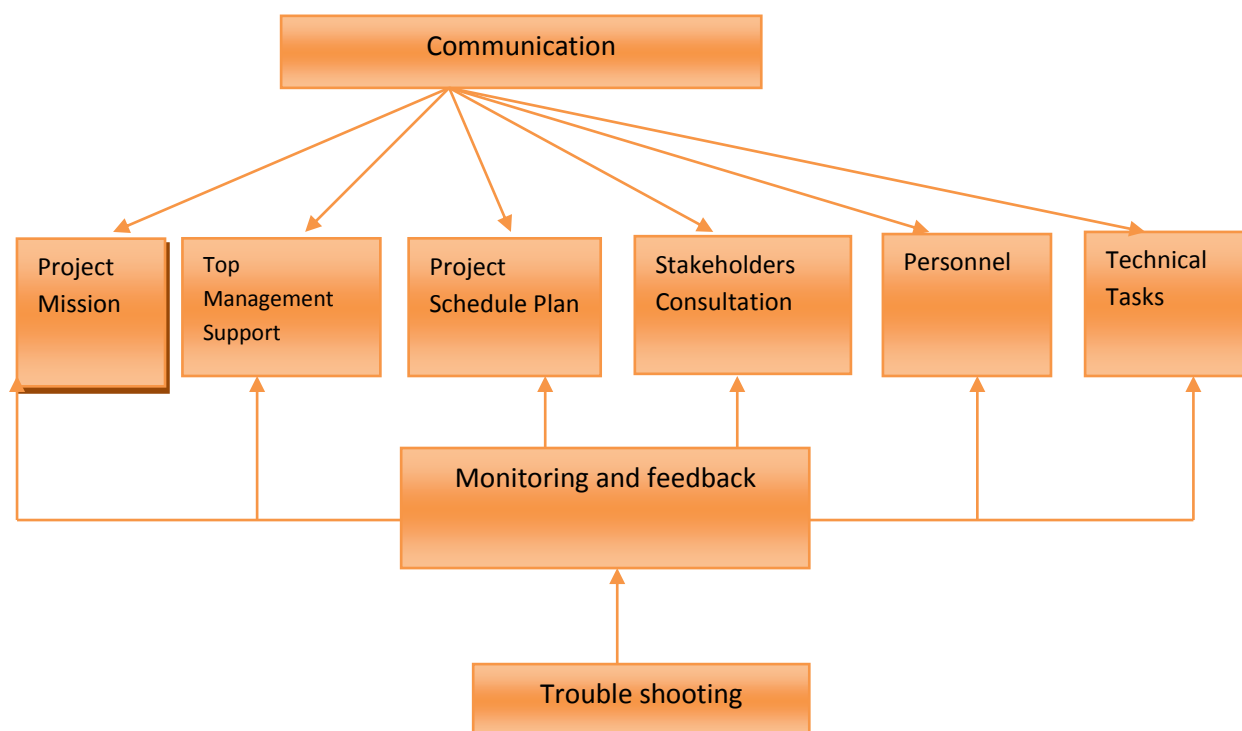


Figure 1: Communication Process as per Wouter Baars (2006)

Project Mission:

Bart, (1992) asserts the commercial mission statement of an organization consist of 3 essential components 1) Key Markets: who is target client/ customer? 2) Contribution: what product or service do you provide to that client? 3) Distinction: what makes your product or service unique? The three definition shows that a mission statement must state the main purpose of the organization – the product, the target market and the uniqueness of the product.

Project implementation also seeks to satisfy the purpose of the organization. It aims at ensuring that, the mission as stated is undertaken to the satisfaction of the beneficiaries of the project. Therefore no project can be undertaken without a well and clear mission. The mission of any project is to deliver a product or service that will change the life of the beneficiaries – this can be a completed road, classroom, a clinic or a school bus.

Table.1: Project Life Cycle

Definition	Planning	Executing	Closing
1) Goals	1. Schedule	1. Status Reports	1. Train Customers
2) Specification	2. Budget	2. Changes	2. Transfer Docs
3) Tasks	3. Resources	3. Quality	3. Release Resources
4) Responsibilities	4. Risks	4. Forecasts	4. Evaluation
5) Targets	5. Staffing	5) Events	5. Lessons Learned

Source: - (Business Analysis ACCA of Study Text, 2011)

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study of project implementation was guided by the systems theory of organizations developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in the early 1950's. Systems theory emerged as part of intellectual thinking following the World War II. Systems theory takes into account the inter relationships of the several parts of a phenomena that must interact. This theory is different from the classical and content theories that consider organizations as closed social units that are independent of external environmental forces (Oso and Owen, 2009). County Governments as organizations exist as social units in the larger environment. It is therefore important that they must be managed like systems where their operations and programmes continually interact with the outside environment in terms of its inputs and thereafter its output in form of service delivery and projects.

Systems theory provides that organizations such as County Governments are like other open systems which of necessity engage in various modes of exchange with the environment (Katz and Kahn, 1966). Systems theory emphasizes the considerations of the relationships between organizations and its environment as well as what goes on within organizations. The systems theory is mainly concerned with the problems of relationships of structures and the constant attributes of objects (Katz & Kahn, 1966). The fundamental idea in the central systems theory is the concept of interactions (Oso and Owen, 2009).

In this study, the systems theory holds that, the mission of the project, the personnel engaged on a project, the communications process among all the stakeholders involved in a project and the participation of the community influences the implementation of projects. However, systems theory adopted in this study has its shortcomings. The interrelationships among parts of a system have to be recognized and understood by all people involved (Oso and Owen, 2009). This theory also requires a shared vision that all stakeholders must have an idea of what they are trying to accomplish. This means that, there must be coherent effort from all the stakeholders, a task that is not easy to achieve especially where stakeholders are varied and have different interests as in County Governments.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted through a descriptive survey research design approach. The descriptive survey describes and explains the events as they are in the real life context in which they occurred. This research design was suitable for this study because it was able to appropriately answer the research questions. It was able to provide the required data more quickly and it enabled the gathering and analysis of the relevant information. The study was done at the County Government of Nzoia, Trans Nzoia County. The variables under study were project implementation and the factors influencing it. The data was collected from employees and management of the County Government of Trans-Nzoia. The study covered a total population of 2650 employees and 39 County Representatives with a sample of 71 selected for the study. This enabled the researcher to derive from it a detailed data at an affordable cost, time, finance and human resource. Questionnaires were used as the instrument of data collection. They were designed to collect data addressing the research questions. County Government documents and other official government documents were used for data collection. The closed and open ended questions were employed. Descriptive statistics were used in the presentation of information in this study. Descriptive statistics give ways and means of interpreting data, condensing the information and giving numerical and graphical techniques of collecting, analyzing, organizing and presenting data. The mean and standard deviation were used in the analysis. Data was also presented in pie-charts, tables and even graphs

5. FINDINGS

Communication and Project Implementation:

According to Gilley, McMillan, and Gilley, (2009) motivation, communication, and team building skills are interrelated and complementary that's why leadership needs to development in these areas, so as a result, for effective change development of interpersonal skills such as communication, motivation, and team building is required to fully engage employees and to cultivate success. Communication is prerequisite for existence of organization not only in projects implementation but in all areas and this is why this study sought to find out how communication influences projects implementation in the County Government of Trans-Nzoia and results are presented in this section as one of the study objectives. Analysis also indicates that agreement between employees that; communication help them respond quickly to

customers requests (mean 4.4) ; they believe that having contacts is important in project implementation (mean 4.3) ; they have also gained knowledge through working in the organization (mean 4.0) ; they also agreed that someone else can handle what they are doing in cases when they are away (mean 3.8) ; they also understand what they consider very important in their job (mean 3.6) ; they understand the five most immediate needs in their work program (mean 3.5) ; through the project implementation they have gained new ways of looking at people or process (mean 3.2) and it was also revealed that most of them agree that they know someone to contact in cases of problem (mean 3.0) .

However some of the respondents were in disagreement when asked if; they know actions to take to transfer knowledge gained from organization (mean 2.8) ; they understand ten most important things needed to complete their job (mean 2.8) ; they know their current responsibilities like with pending work, action steps, next steps and contacts (mean 2.7) ; the tasks are not documented in a way that someone new can understand perform them based on documentation without help (mean 2.6) and information is not documented in a way that others could easily locate and make use of it (mean 2.6) .

Table 2: Information Possessed by Employees

Informed Employees	Mean	Std. Deviation
Respond quickly to customer requests	4.4	.9
Are the following contacts important (phone number, email address, mailing address)	4.3	.5
You have gained skills and knowledge from the organization	4.0	.4
Is anyone else able to perform what you are doing	3.8	.8
Do you know the what you consider the ten most important tasks of your job	3.6	1
Do you understand the 5 most immediate needs in your work or program	3.5	1
You have gained new insights or ways of looking at people or processes	3.2	1
You know someone to contact for assistance most frequently in order to do your job	3.0	1
You know actions to take to transfer knowledge gained from the organization	2.8	1
Do you understand the ten most important things you need to know in order to do your job	2.8	.9
Do you know your current responsibilities (with pending work, action steps, next steps and contacts)	2.7	1
Are these tasks documented in a way that someone not familiar with them could perform them based on the documentation	2.6	1
Is this information documented in a way that others could locate and make use of it	2.6	1

Through communication the employees can; quickly respond to customer requests, have contacts to use, gain skills and knowledge, train people to undertake their tasks, understand five most immediate needs in their work, gain insights on ways of looking at people, have someone to contact in case they needs assistance. But despite their knowledge of the process the employees feel that; they do not understand ten important things needed to complete their job, their tasks are not documented in a way that someone can do them using the documented procedures; neither is the information stored in a way that others can locate and make use of it.

Types of Information and Communication Technology tools used:

The study also revealed that the types of communication used were mainly; search engines (mean 3.8); email (mean 3.6) ; computer based learning (mean 3.2) . Very few were in agreement that County Government uses; intranet (mean 2.7) ; conference tools like chat and whiteboard (mean 2.4) ; database (mean 2.3) ; visualization tools (mean 2.2) ; electronic catalogues (mean 2.2) and document management or archiving (mean 1.9). Wenbin (2008) supports that for communicating with external environment in writing, electronic mail, internet web sites, letters, proposals, telegrams, faxes, postcards, contracts, advertisements, brochures, and news releases are used. From interviews respondents also supported that non-verbal communication methods were used in project implementation which according to McConnell, (2003), nonverbal communication is behavior, other than spoken or written communication, that creates or represents meaning. In other words, it includes facial expressions, body movements, and gestures.

The results indicates that the County Government during project implementation mostly uses tools such as; search engines, email and computer based learning systems but they rarely use; intranet, conference tools like chat and

whiteboard; database; visualization tools; electronic catalogues and document management or archiving which could mean that the County Government is not effectively sharing information during implementation process.

Organizational tools used to support Project knowledge Transfer:

The study further sought to understand organization structure tools used by the County Government in sharing of its information and from findings most of the respondents were in agreement that they use; role definition (mean 3.5) ; use of benchmarking tools (mean 3.5) ; human resource tools such as job rotation (mean 3.1) and skills profiles (mean 3.0) . However the respondents feel that organization does not use; organization structures tools like teamwork (mean 2.7) ; reward system (mean 2.6) ; objectives definition and monitoring (mean 2.3) and communication tools (mean 2.1) ; as shown in table 2. Studies suggest that abilities to communicate, and build teams will increase success with change (Gilley, McMillan, and Gilley, 2009), so effective communication is ability to build and manage team and bring positive change in an organization. Team leaders need to be able to and clearly; (a) communicate team goals, decision, responsibilities and roles, and so on, (b) inspire and bring confidence in leadership resources and direction, and (c) to motivate team members to resolve different issues and to deliver results, So to become effective team building leader one must have the other two skills such as abilities to motivate, communicate.

Table 3: Organizational Tools used to Support Project Knowledge Transfer

Organizational Tools	Mean	Std Deviation
Role definitions	3.5	1
Benchmarking tools (best practice)	3.5	1
Human resource tools (job rotation)	3.1	1
Skill profiles	3.0	1
Organization structure tools (e.g. team work)	2.7	1
Reward systems	2.6	1
Objectives definition and monitoring	2.3	.7
Communication tools	2.1	.9

The County Government also uses organization structure related tools to pass information in the project implementation such as; role definition; use of benchmarking tools; human resource tools such as job rotation and skills profiles. But the respondents feel that organization does not use; organization structures tools like teamwork; reward system; objectives definition and monitoring and communication tools.

Project Mission and Project Implementation:

The respondents were asked if the project mission is put into consideration during the project implementation and from the study results it was shown that 61.8% of them believe that it is considered with 38.2% agreeing that the project mission is not considered as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Mission Consideration in Project Implementation

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mission Considered	43	61.8
Mission Not Considered	28	38.2
Total	71	100

This implies that although 61.8% of the respondents feel that the organization takes into consideration project mission in implementation process there is a number of this who refutes this and thus it could mean that the project mission is not given much weight during its implementation by the management. This findings is in agreement with Gray and Larson (2003) who argued that effective project management begins with selecting and prioritizing projects that support the firm mission and strategy, but successful implementation requires mastering both the technical and social cultural dimensions of the process.

Methods of ensuring project mission adherence:

When asked how the County Government ensures that project mission is adhered to during implementation; 61.8% agree that it through following the laid down plan, 58.8% through involving the stakeholders in implementation process, 52.9% by being transparent on their daily activities of the project, 50% through acceptance of mistakes and correcting them, 41.2% having clear leading of activities and 30.9% through constant project evaluation as shown in figure 2.

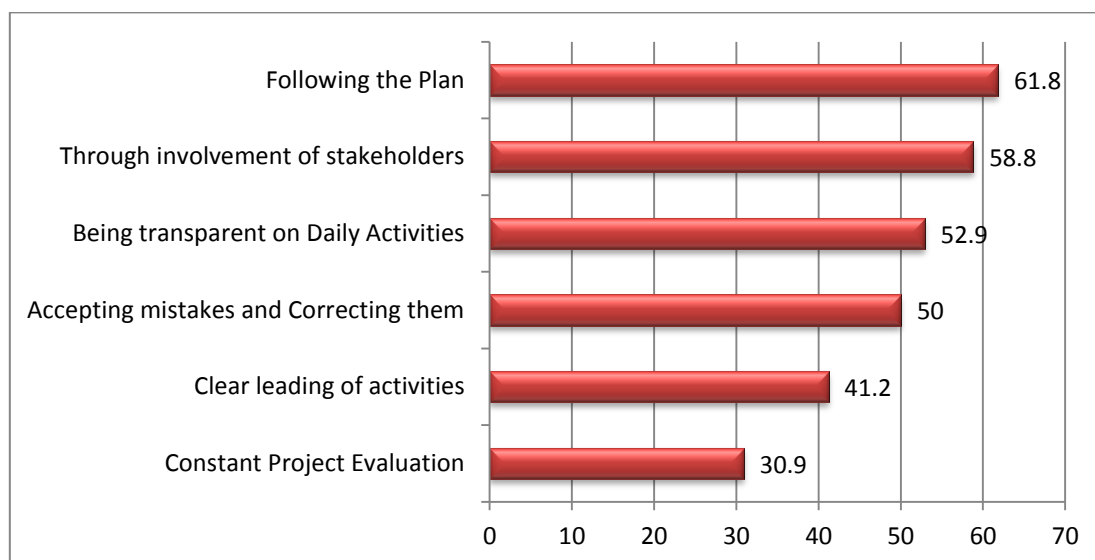


Figure 2: Methods of Ensuring Project Mission Adherence

Attainment of Project Mission:

From the study results it was revealed that according to 76.5% of the respondents at the end of the projects the CG achieves its project mission.

Table 5: Attainment of Project Mission

Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mission Achieved	54	76.5
Mission Not Achieved	17	23.5
Total	71	100

Although majority of the respondents believe that CG achieves its projects mission there is also a number of projects undertaken by the CG which do not achieve its mission as supported by 23.55 of the CG employees. The above is supported by SID (2004) study results which showed that more than 80% of projects run late and in effect overrun their budgets. Most projects undertaken by the government, CG overrun their budgets and time and thus meaning that their goals were not attained.

Challenges hindering Project Goal Achievement:

According to the study results; 91.2% of respondents agree that poor management of funds, 86.8% poor communication, 79.4% corruption, non-participation of the local communities and 55.9% of the respondents faces unrealistic project missions which was the main challenges facing achievement of project implementation goals in the County Government of Trans-Nzoia as shown in figure 3. The above study findings is supported by Cleland (2004) who found out that projects fail for the following reasons: inadequate senior management, ineffective planning, inappropriate organizational design, lack of well defined and delegated authority and responsibility, an inefficient system of monitoring, evaluation and controlling the use of resources on the projects, ineffective contingency, planning, limited team participation in the execution project decisions, Unrealistic cost and schedule objects, lack of customer commitment to projects, limited customer supervision and inadequate management information systems.

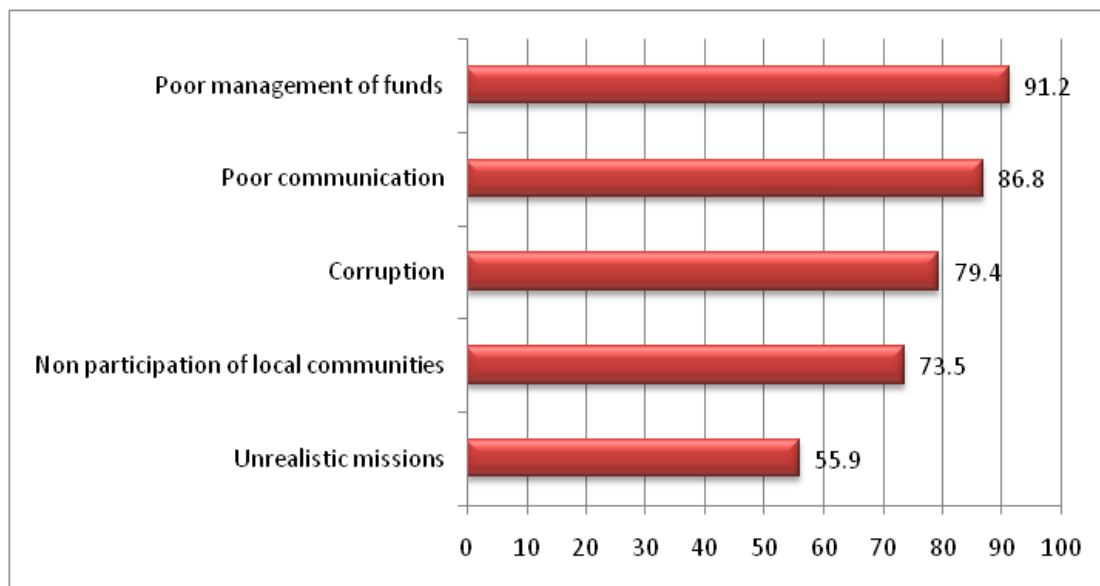


Figure 3: Challenges hindering Project Goal Achievement

6. CONCLUSION

On communication in project implementation the study showed that there is quick customer response, gaining of knowledge, understanding of the employees needs, gaining insight into needs of customers, having information for contacting in cases of need for assistance. The County Government mainly uses communication tools such as; search engines, email and computer based systems but rarely use; intranet, conference tools like chat and whiteboard; database; visualization tools; electronic catalogues and document management or archiving which could mean that the County Government is not effectively sharing information during implementation process. Apart from utilizing above mentioned tools the County Government also utilizes structural tools like; role definition; use of benchmarking tools; human resource tools such as job rotation and skills profiles. However it does not use organization structures tools like; teamwork, reward system; objectives definition and monitoring and communication tools.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication came up as an important factor in project implementation. A person engaged on a project must communicate to each other during the planning stage, implementation and conclusion of the project. Therefore the communication process is very crucial for the successful implementation of any project. Finally community participation which involves self mobilization, functional participation, interactive participation is very important in project implementation and ownership. Community participation ensures that the beneficiaries understand the project, they contribute positively towards the project, they own and support it and they will not reject it or vandalize the project. It is therefore important that the community should be fully involved in all the stages of the project implementation.

The project mission should be well identified, defined and explained to all stakeholders for the project to be implemented successfully. In this connection the project mission should be well defined at the planning stage to ensure that stakeholders clearly understand what the project is to deliver after its conclusions and the benefits to be derived from the project are well documented and understood by all parties involved in the project implementation process and ownership.

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