

# Employer Toxic Leadership and Implications for Managing Risk and Stakeholder Management: a Road Improvement Project in Nepal

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Received: August 11, 2022 Accepted: September 5, 2022 Published: September 16, 2022

doi: 10.5296/erm.v7i1.20274 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/erm.v7i1.20274>

## Abstract

This is a research paper that is focused on assessing the impacts of Employer Toxic Leadership in terms of Risk and Stakeholders Management of an 81Km road construction project in Nepal. An interpretive methodology was utilised in order to help understand implicitly the management leadership's impact on the project. The scope for this research was the on-site supervisory team. The targeted population of interest was made up of 15 engineers located at on-site offices in the early construction phase of a road construction project. The research outcomes consisted of six (6) main themes with corresponding nineteen (19) sub-themes.

The paper addresses raised issues of toxic leadership impacts within risk and stakeholder management and establishes outcomes and implications for the continuing project construction management. The paper also indicates that the Employer conducts inadequate risk management especially in relation to a variety of stakeholders and thus faces serious project performance issues leading to project failure.

The Employer road construction management is considered to be a very weak risk management environment due to institutional toxic leadership style, orientation and lack of professional engagement of project management with stakeholders. The Employer (government department - DoR) has purposely and negatively altered the project quality and delivery expectations resulting in serious questions over its operational governance stance and financial efficacy.

**Keywords:** Risk management, Stakeholders, Toxic Leadership, Employer, Road Construction Project, Nepal

## 1. Introduction

Many complex projects show severe management difficulties associated with risk management (Chapman and Ward, 2003), stakeholder management (Ndlela, 2018) and toxic leadership (James, 2022). Project success criteria traditionally follows the contractual criteria of cost, time and quality (Pinkerton 2003). Project success appears to be a two-edged sword - project success and project management success (Cook-Davies, 2002). However, contemporary notions of project success factors for the project management appear to revolve around project practices, project management capability/performance and assessed project performance outcomes (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). Subsequently, project success further appears to be linked to corporate strategy and softer derived personnel practices - certified, trained and knowledgeable (Kerzner, 2013). Project success is also built on Stakeholder project objectives (de Wit, 1988), with the implementation of appropriate project management practices (Munns and Bjeirmi, 1996), and the development of more effective measures for project success (Atkinson, 1999). However, complex project success remains tenuous and difficult (Kerzner and Belack, 2010).

### *1.1 Risk Management*

Complex project risk assessment has been used as an effective project management tool (Moshood, et al., 2020) and is seen as important integral part of project management (Han, et al., 2008). High levels of risk - whether recognised or not - is a significant impediment for project success (Zwikael and Sadeh, 2007) especially when no planning is conducted. The outcomes of time-based risk assessment provides the project management with decisions that have to be made, at a variety of planned milestones, throughout the project life-cycle (Tserng, et al., 2009). Proper risk evaluation and risk control measures are therefore necessary to ensure a complex project success (Lewis, 2008). Communications and collaborative decision explanations become the norm between the project management stakeholders (Marle and Vidal, 2016; Aven and Zio, 2013) which include risk assessment decisions (Harvey, Rattray & Van Hemert, 2021).

Risk assessment/management and risk decision-making (Hansson and Aven, 2014) underpinned by the development of rigorous risk assessment (Aven, 2011) have not been researched adequately in connection with toxic leadership. Ignoring risk represents risk mismanagement (Marle and Vidal, 2016). Complex projects subsequently require managerial risk treatments to help manage the constraints on the project and raises issues about how this should be achieved (Vidal and Marle, 2008). This introduces the notion of managing uncertainty (Flage, et al., 2014) where the management of risk indicates more effective control of the project outcomes (Chapman and Ward, 2000). Risk management, as an academic pursuit, has advanced the understanding and impact of complexity in projects (Geraldi, Maylor and Williams, 2011) and enabled a transactional-cost appreciation of management behaviour internally within a project (Brown, Potoski and Slyke, 2016). Without appropriate levels of project risk knowledge (Thieme, Song and Shin, 2003) and the use of risk management mitigation measures (PMI, 2021), it is almost impossible to manage a complex project effectively (Wysocki, 2019; Ward, 2018; Kerzner, 2013). Therefore, the need

to apply consistent risk management practices through-out the project life-cycle is a pertinent project success requirement (Moshood, et al., 2020). Project supervision development indicates that project effectiveness is reinforced through collaborative contract management (SNC, 2020). Risk management serves to help project managers manage project risks by identifying and planning for risk engagement (PMI, 2021). Where risk management is conducted in projects, it is conducted as part of an integrated management scheme (Chap 11, PMI, 2021).

A major role of project management in complex projects is to lead others (Remington and Pollack, 2007) especially at the beginning of a project (Brockmann, 2021). In complex projects, weak project management or ineffective care by the Employer or other major stakeholders, will damage the project management outcomes (Tan, 2004), often resulting from stakeholder hidden intentions (Jäger, 2008). This will also increase costs and extend the planned project time, leading to challenging contractual issues that the major stakeholders may not want to tackle (PMI, 2021) and increase project uncertainty (Cleden, 2009). Subsequently, leading a large interconnected, complex project, has implications for managing people and resource management (Cavaleri and Reed, 2008) as well the coherent governance management of the project (Pica, 2015).

### *1.2 Stakeholder Management*

Stakeholders have a critical and important responsibility to engage with other project stakeholders so that the project aims, and objectives are met, whilst ensuring their views, impacts and concerns are addressed (Bourne and Walker, 2008). Thus, stakeholders engage in different types of behaviour, that can be perceived by the project management as being constructive or destructive (Bourne and Walker, 2006) depending on the observer position. Complex, high-cost projects are often attract political, socio-economic, political and public attention (Turner and Zolin, 2012). The lack of understanding by the project management in dealing with these stakeholders leads to significant project risk (Winch and Bonke, 2002) where the project schedule, cost and quality could be impacted negatively. Complex project management have poorly performed in relation to any benefits to the local area and large estimates of government monetary wastage (Bruzelius, Flyvbjerg and Rothengatter, 2002).

Choosing the correct path through the myriad stakeholder positions can create huge issues and problems for the project. Thus, the project Engineer and the Employer need to have higher levels of communication in order to manage these different situations and positions (Sutterfield, Friday-Stroud and Shivers-Blackwell, 2006) and ensure an approved Works schedule operates and is consistently monitored (PMI, 2021). However, contractual requirements will always take precedence over political issues raised by any less than direct stakeholders. Subsequently, knowing the key stakeholder requirements (aims and strategies) will help to ensure that any detrimental issues can be discussed before final decisions are made and before entrenched views are created to minimise the detrimental impacts some stakeholders may have. For project success, stakeholders often demand project metrics that help shape their understanding of the projects value generation gains. This focuses project managers on dealing with real issues that become the project management problems (Kerzner,

2013). However, where a donor is involved, this is also an important requirement to measure through value-driven metric dashboards (Kerzner, 2013) - especially those metrics associated with technical/economic performance and lately those reflecting social engagement impacts and performance outcomes. This requires changes to a collaborative leadership style for the integrated complex project (Galvin, Tywoniak and Sutherland, 2021) as more data and decisions need to be shared due to the complex project's integration and the subsequent impact of the risk management posture (Loch, DeMeyer and Pich, 2011). Further, stakeholder mapping will help the project managers understand the respective classifications and needs (Mabrouk, Sperandio and Girard, 2014) and lead to the consideration of risk management strategies. Subsequently, stakeholder management training is often conducted to ensure that rigorous project operational leadership differences are made openly clear and managed (Pizzolitto, Verna and Venditti, 2022) as stakeholder processes are actively illuminated, engaged with and challenged, if necessary, (Kerzner and Belack, 2010) in order to provide the expected project deliverables.

This research will focus on project performance and benefits improvement (Laursen and Svejvig, 2016) and draws on research through stakeholder theory (Sutterfield, Friday-Stroud and Shivers-Blackwell, 2006) will help expose the level of project stakeholder interactions and the subsequent impact of toxic leadership.

### *1.3 Toxic Leadership*

Toxic leaders invoke destructive behaviour in projects towards any person or persons within an organisation who performs indifferently (often professionally) to their misdirected requirements (Einersen, Aasland, and Skogland, 2007). When toxic leadership is recognised at institutional level, the project is often run in an authoritarian way designed to “damage” the project (Reed, 2004). This hampers and prevents proper project progress due to ineffective decision-making, through the application of a selfishness (Tiwari and Jha, 2022), narcissistic abuse of power (Maccoby, 1999) and through the lack of personal integrity (Blair, Hoffman and Helland, 2008). This is reinforced every time they are able to operate within the same organisational environment without being challenged or made aware of their toxic operating disposition (Goldman, 2009) through defensive and protective collusion measures (Locatelli, et al., 2017). This toxic culture is legitimised by the overt and deliberate abuse of coherent project interests of the organisation (Higgs, 2009) and where the toxic leader inflicts harm on individuals who do not support the toxic culture (Tepper, et al., 2004). The toxic leader is reported to employ bullying and intimidation practices (Hogan, Hogan and Kaiser, 2003) coupled with overt abusiveness (Tavanti, 2011) as a coercive scheme for ensuring “authoritative acceptance” (Higgs, 2009).

Toxic leaders are reported to oppose good technical project practices that are often transparent in operation and utilise different “operational objectives” (Gallus, et al., 2013) that are deliberately inconsistent with expected project outcomes. This toxicity is unhealthy, as the toxic leader is seen as underperforming and failing the project (Lipman-Blumen, 2006), and radically affects the good operation of a project by causing significant damage to operational norms resulting in inadequate project performance outcomes. These outcomes can

result in large project delays (Ansah and Sorooshian, 2018), increased costs (Reed, 2004), forced personnel turnover (Bhandarker, and Rai, 2019), huge data/information loss and substantial performance reduction (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999; Rafferty and Restubog, 2011). These aspects reduce project performance through the lack of project planning and controls and/or project governance (Müller, et al., 2016). These are initially promulgated by the lack of project agency at the start of the project (Mullaly, 2016) and are exacerbated when the Engineer decision-makers are frightened of the toxic leader behaviour of the Employer (Einarsen, Aasland and Skogstad, 2007). This can lead to specific and incoherent management decisions linked to collusion (Lipman-Blumen, 2006), that may result in negative changes to the Engineers contractual level of independency (Kerzner, 2017).

Further, effective research has not been conducted on the nature of toxic leadership impacts (Toor and Ogunlana, 2009) associated with ineffective leaders (Kellerman, 2004), toxic leaders (Rumsey, 2013), destructive leaders (Harris, Kacmar and Zivnuska, 2007) or despotic leaders (Naseer et al., 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to explore these issues in the development of informed complex project management outcomes (PMI, 2021).

This creates the context for the research question, In what ways do Employer Toxic Leadership affect Risk and Stakeholder Management, in terms of performance outcomes of an 81Km Road rehabilitation Project in Nepal?

## **2. Methodology**

Exploring the impacts of risk management, stakeholder management and Employer toxic leadership in a “live” road infrastructure project in Nepal, that affects project staff personally, requires a qualitative inquiry to explore explicitly the destructive issues raised (Walsh, White and Young, 2008). The research orientation targets relevant engineering personnel judgements and opinions as authoritative “knowledge agents” (Benn et al., 2008) arising from individual site Works experiences. This research utilises these opinions as direct experiences associated with the project context (Cassell and Symon, 2004) and closely related to their perceptions of the project impact of the Employer’s and stakeholder’s managerial practices.

The research method employed a qualitative document review (Cassell, Cunliffe and Grandy, 2018) and a robust semi-structured interview process (James and James, 2011), which was further reinforced through the utilisation of an “inductive/theory building” approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Due to the dearth of published research in the area of civil engineering complex projects and also reflecting the sensitivity and impact of the toxic leadership environment on the project, this approach is designed to raise appropriate contextual data to develop rich content and theory development (Cayla and Eckhardt, 2007). The research process focused on a closed population of fifteen (15) - the “population of interest” (Carman, 1990) - ensuring empirical adequacy (Spanos, 1990). The informants were all constrained within an appropriate research frame (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) with rationally defined boundaries. In order to support the main interview process, a pilot study was carried out with two (2) informants from the defined population and excluded from the main interview process (following Maxwell, 2013). The outcome permitted changes to language and the logic of the question routine questions given to informants (Kim, 2011). These were made up

of “approved” engineers (those that had been certified by the Employer and ADB for supervision of the Works) who had continuous and direct project related experiences.

Interviews were conducted in English (Works Contract language) and took approximately one hour each, and were recorded with permission (Duranti, 2007). An identical set of questions was used to structure the interviews using questioning processes indicated by Gray and Wilcox (1995) and (James, 2022), which was reinforced with interview-based probing questions (Balshem, 1991; Punch, 2014). The verbatim transcription from each interview was returned to each informant via e-mail (Harris and Brown, 2010) - for comment, correction, addition and/or deletion and return. The data was further interrogated using qualitative software (after Bailey, 2008) and analysed through a procedure, where each interview was initially manually and independently coded (Flick, 2018) leading to thematic analysis outcomes (Humble and Radina, 2019). This was added to, by constructing visual-discourse outcomes (Walsh, White and Young, 2008). No portion of any interview dialogue was left uncoded and the overall outcome represented the informant’s views through a progressive open-coding development (Buston, 1999). The resultant themes and subthemes were fine-tuned and developed out of the data interrogation (Adu, 2019; Harwood and Garry, 2003), where validity was improved by using document triangulation processes (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007) uniting documentary evidence that informed and sustained the analysis process.

The developed narrative was based on substituting “credibility” (Johnson, 1997) and “dependability” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) for “reliability” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The observations and documentary data from the studied population reflected the project experiences of the application of risk/stakeholder management and Employer toxic leader(s) and the negative impact of their practices (Lambsdorff, 1998). These were designed to help build an analysis in the “*interests of the public good*” and utilising a “*...good-faith effort to report wrongdoing...*” (Sinzdak, 2008) - in an open and clear manner due to unethical managerial behaviour (Knoll, Schyns and Petersen, 2017).



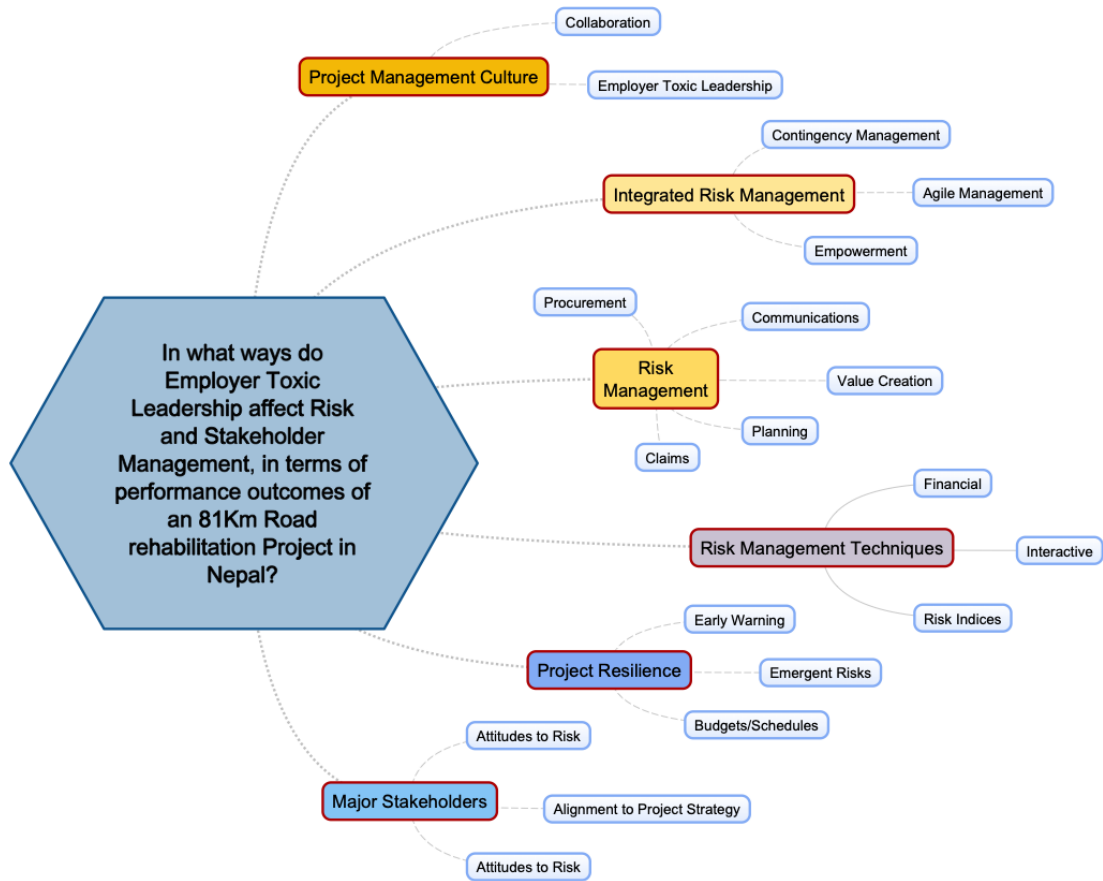


Figure 1. Research Outcomes

**Illustration of Research Outcomes**

The research themes raised for this analysis are shown in Figure 1, above. These outcomes are further extended numerically in Table 1 below to include the number of informant responses for each independent sub-theme discussion target. This consists of six (6) main themes - Risk Management, Risk Management Techniques, Project Management Culture, Integrated Risk Management, Project Resilience and Major Stakeholders, and Nineteen (19) sub-themes with 280 discussion targets.

Table 1. Research question, themes, and discussion targets

Research Question		
In what ways do Employer Toxic Leadership affect Risk and Stakeholder Management, in terms of performance outcomes of an 81Km Road rehabilitation Project in Nepal?		
Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Discussion Targets
Risk Management	Procurement	11
	Planning	15
	Value Creation	18
	Claims	17
	Communication	22
Risk Management Techniques	Financial	10
	Interactive	16
	Risk Indices	12
Project Management Culture	Collaboration	17
	Employer Toxic Leadership	24
Integrated Risk Management	Contingency Management	11
	Agile management	8
	Empowerment	14
Project Resilience	Emergent risks	12
	Budgets/Schedules	14
	Early Warning	9
Major Stakeholders	Alignment to Project Strategy	14
	Attitudes to Risk	16
	Stakeholder Influences/Adjustments	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>

Table 1 above indicates the minimum responses for each identified sub-theme.

Brief Project Notes and Impacts\*: This research focus is towards a major 81Km road rehabilitation construction project in Nepal costing initially of US\$256Mn, partially funded by the ADB - \$49Mn (major external stakeholder) using the FIDIC 2010 - Pink Book contract. The “Engineer” is managed by an internationally experienced JV Lead Partner with two national companies. The project consists of 2 independent Works road rehabilitation packages. Both packages have underperformed considerably since the Employer issued the



project “commencement” outside of the Engineer contract conditions – (Package 1 - 0.8% physical progress - with delays of 329 days; Package 2 - 0.0% progress - with delays of 121 days) - where the Employer had so far singularly executed the project management for 80% of this time. The last 20% of the past year, was after the Engineer was selected (which appears to be an afterthought) and where the Engineer has not been able to get control of the project, under the Contract, due to the toxic leadership of the Employer. Commencement letters were issued to the Contractors, but not according to the Contract and before the appointment of the Engineer. There has been little scope planning, definition or validation conducted. Some key Engineer staff at site, appear to be Employer proxies, with no decision-making capability that is directly enforced by the Employer PD. The Employer project management staff presents as a group with little vision, lacking project management competency, drive and ambition. These issues remain a fundamental problem underpinning the lack of project progress, possibility of financial fraud and continuing harassment of Engineer staff. In this way, the Employer exacerbates the delays to the project by ignoring their responsibilities under the contract. (All stated data is correct at time of publication).

The use of any specific references for the above facts could affect the project visibility and informant confidentiality (Kaiser, 2009; Helgesson, 2015) as well as deductive disclosure (Tolich, 2004) and lead to breaches of confidentiality. Subsequently, the data presented above is appropriate, focused, applicable and clear - without revealing such references - and follows appropriate qualitative research methodology in doing so (Baez, 2002).

\*This note is presented to create a contextual basis for the application of the qualitative research methodology in which a note is used to provide a brief description of the source of contextual data that is considered important to the research (Alpi and Evans, 2019).

### **3. Results**

The results (analysed outcomes) are presented below, where the discussion focuses on the main-theme elements directed by the subsequent sub-themes: using topical extracted evidence following Gonzalez, (2008). The informant’s voice is revealed through verbatim statements, where the reporting format is persuaded by (Aerts, Doooms and Haezendonck, 2017; Gonzalez (2008); and Daniels, et al. (2007).

#### *3.1 Main Theme – Risk Management*

In terms of Procurement, this is typified by one informant (3) who suggested that, ...They (\*Employer) don’t invest in employing a risk manager... Another informant (8) denoted that, ...There is no project progress because the risk issues have not been addressed - just money given away. They [Employer] seem to think that there is no risk to them and transfer all risk to the contractor’s insurance company... (\*Employer DoR - Department of Roads)

In terms of Planning, this is typified by one informant (11) who suggested that, ...the Employer has no risk management strategy, uses no risk profiling or RMIS for any project that it manages. It is very sad, but these government employees don’t really have a clue about risk management and cannot appreciate any risk solutions offered by the Engineer...

In terms of Value Creation, this is typified by one informant (7) who suggested that, ...The requirement for loss reduction means that the Employer should conduct risk management. But doesn't... Another informant (4) denoted that, ...there is no risk mission statement and that the costs associated any risk assessment are fully ignored by the Employer...

In terms of Claims, this is typified by one informant (2) who suggested that, ...The Employer does not help the project as it does little to mitigate risk through proper risk management and just says NO to every claim - whether valid or not...

In terms of Communication, this is typified by one informant (1) who suggested that, ...The Employer does not manage risk or communicate effectively on the project but appears to wait for an incident and then spends so much time arguing (without any data) who should be paid or at fault... Another informant (6) denoted that, ...No, they don't communicate anything about risk management or strategies or conduct any training at all in risk management. I don't think they know anything about that...

### *3.2 Main Theme – Risk Management Techniques*

In terms of Financial, this is typified by one informant (9) who suggested that, ...They [Employer] do not use any financial metrics except simple arithmetic. None are used for risk management... Another informant (5) denoted that, ...they are considerably weak at project management, and especially risk management. The problems just mount up, they not document and are significantly impaired by lack of recorded data - this is a project run by verbal decisions only and no responsibility...

In terms of Interactive, this is typified by one informant (4) who suggested that, ...It is a little disconcerting when issues arise, that have been experienced previously, and where no risk mapping is conducted, and nothing recorded. It is as if each new risk failure is seen again for the first time...

In terms of Risk Indices, this is typified by one informant (5) who suggested that, ...The Employer does not use any risk indices or quantitative/qualitative metrics. This means they are blind to problems that often they create on the project... Another informant (11) denoted that, ...there is no risk register, no risk assessment, no risk data developed or subsequent risk analysis and the ADB does nothing. Is this how a well-managed project is conducted?...

### *3.3 Main Theme – Project Management Culture*

In terms of Collaboration, this is typified by one informant (2) who suggested that, ...As is usual for them [Employer] they do not want to collaborate. They just command, even when they know nothing. They are really unprofessional...

In terms of Employer Toxic Leadership, this is typified by one informant (7) who suggested that, ...Decisions are made and imposed without discussion - just retribution if we do not comply. It is very uncomfortable in meetings as they will not discuss or accept any other views other than their own - which are often wrong or biased. It is threatening to be in any meeting with them personally. Very dangerous... Another informant (3) denoted that, ...they [Employer] got rid of our strong team leader because he was a threat to them. The project

continues to suffer badly with old internationals who do not know what to do...

### *3.4 Main Theme – Integrated Risk Management*

In terms of Contingency Management, this is typified by one informant (7) who suggested that, ...We can only have contingency planning if there is risk management conducted. Since there isn't, we have no contingency plans. It sucks. There is no learning...

In terms of Agile management, this is typified by one informant (2) who suggested that, ...The DoR [Employer] does not know anything about agile management and even less about risk management. What do these guys do for a living. The designs they put forward are rubbish, they waste our time and the Employer blames us [Engineer] for any delays caused by their incompetence...

In terms of Empowerment, this is typified by one informant (9) who suggested that, ...There is no transparency, so all decisions are made in secret without discussion. We don't feel empowered here, because we are blind to what is coming. They [Employer] don't help anybody...

### *3.5 Main Theme – Project Resilience*

In terms of Emergent risks, this is typified by one informant (13) who suggested that, ...Surely we should be using past experiences. The Employer just cannot provide any indication of emergent risks especially in relation to their exceptionally poor designs and they don't listen to anyone either... Another informant (6) denoted that, ...it seems that the Employer does not anything about risks, because if they did they would get rid of them all from the project management - so what are they hiding?...

In terms of Budgets/schedules, this is typified by one informant (7) who suggested that, ...It is very well understood that the project is so far behind schedule and are over budget. But this is because the Employer does not manage any risks and does not know what to do. When the Engineer directs the Contractor correctly, this is countered by the Employer who often gets angry because of it...

In terms of Early warning, this is typified by one informant (10) who suggested that, ...I asked about this, but the Employer does not provide any risk identification for this project - because after a year there are an extraordinary number of incidents which have not been risk assessed. Just ignored...

### *3.6 Main Theme – Major Stakeholders*

In terms of Alignment to project strategy, this is typified by one informant (4) who suggested that, ...There is no process of risk management. Subsequently, the project orientation is very short-term and where the Employer just says NO to any changes to deal with them...

In terms of Attitude to risk, this is typified by one informant (8) who suggested that, ...Sadly, I can see why they have failed so many times, they just don't care about any risk. This is ridiculous and unprofessional. It will cost the project lots. Maybe that is what they [Employer] want...

In terms of Stakeholder influences/adjustments, this is typified by one informant (12) who suggested that, ...The Employer is really scared of being made to work. They sit there and direct without having any idea about the consequences of managing risk. They really need to look at themselves as they are failing the project... Another informant (9) denoted that, ...just accepting demands from politicians will have a negative influence on the project - especially due to unusual demands for money. They are all doing it...

#### **4. Discussion**

This discussion represents the status of risk management and toxic leadership and lack of professional project management legitimacy exhibited by the Employer (DoR) management and is a measured, reasonable and accurate assessment. The outline discussion of the research implications for this study follows the main themes and is considered further below:

##### *4.1 Main Theme – Risk Management*

Substantial risks do not appear to have been addressed, and the informants illustrate the Employers lack of risk interest and its management. One example was stated where it would appear that the Employer design outcomes such as alignment and designed levels could not be verified by the contractor or the Engineer, as the benchmarks were either destroyed (99%) or when available were unusable. When appraised of the situation, the Employer refused to conduct another survey. This manifest risk has created huge problems for the Contractor and Engineer. Subsequently, the Employer has not accepted its role according to contractual requirements (FIDIC, 2010) and neither has the Employer accepted their mandate to apply appropriate levels of coordination and governance nor apply proper project management expertise (PMI, 2021).

The Employer does not appear to have conducted any risk planning or assessments where the present project status shows major delays for nearly a year. The Employer appears to collectively consider that by “contractually” transferring risks to the Contractor through the Contract, that this solves all of the risk issues on the project for the Employer. This also completely ignores the social/other major stakeholder risk issues raised to date. These practices were “designed” to ensure that the project did not progress (James, 2022) and shows a lack of stakeholder engagement (Jeffery, 2009). The lack of risk responsibility, risk data, pertinent risk analysis, and subsequent monitoring of risk outcomes, means that the Employer’s project management decisions remain uninformed and illustrate in good part, but importantly, why the project is failing.

Due to the Employers established risk management incapability, value creation is greatly hampered by ignoring risk management requirements in a complex project with no integrated risk management system (Rodney, et al., 2015). Additional contractual costs arise from delays caused by other major stakeholders and Employer resistance associated with the reluctance to engage appropriately to help plan and schedule the Works. This also underpins the toxic leadership when the Employer threatened the Engineer during a meeting (13<sup>th</sup> Apr 2022) with instant contract dismissal and the Engineer was forced to issue a withdrawal letter - despite being correct under the Contract. The Employers stance is therefore considered inappropriate,

illogical and unprofessional. Subsequently, the Employer appears to be reactionary when communicating and does it in an arrogant way by making demands (verbal means or demands via WhatsApp) that underpin its toxic leadership stance. Very little is planned, and the decisions made, reflect little data or written analysis resulting in indifferently biased project outcomes and decisions that are invariably incorrect.

#### *4.2 Main Theme – Risk Management Techniques*

The financial aspects of the project are reported on a monthly basis, with simple BOQ arithmetic and accumulations that the Employer often returns for errors that don't exist or a change in format. However, no contractual financial KPIs are being met due primarily to lack of progress and where little data is written down to verify their inclusion in the financial reporting outcome. There is no risk register and monitoring conducted by the Employer - despite the Engineer introducing such a register where the Employer has robustly censured the register use for raising issues “of no interest” to the Employer.

The Employer does not appear to understand the need to interact with major stakeholders especially for project risk mapping impacts (Ndlela, 2018). Documentation and learning actions associated with managing risk is **not** seen as part of the Employer management orientation. It appears that this is a deliberate action by the Employer which is reinforced by a lack of project risk awareness. It was also raised and of concern, that no other major stakeholder is aware of the project risk impacts and where socio-politics uncontrollably affects the project operations.

Of further concern is that the Employer has never used or intends to use any risk indices or track these developments within the project operation; or manage operating risks throughout the life-cycle of the project to reduce/mitigate risk impacts and providing better economic outcomes (PMI, 2021).

#### *4.3 Main Theme – Management Culture*

From the reported data, the Employer has demonstrated that making autocratic decisions creates improper project decision-outcomes - hence delays in the project progress. Subsequently, it is reported that there is a scarcity of orchestrated collaboration throughout the project operation. The Employer appears to perceive collaboration as a weakness, and just makes inconsistent demands that are unsupported by the project operational data (Yang, Wang and Jin, 2014). This continuing toxic leadership attitude to resist solving issues collaboratively (Matos, O'Neill, and Lei, 2018), shows a consistent lack of project management capability, where progress is resisted throughout the Employer's project administration.

The embedded toxic culture of the Employer exacerbates many problems and issues at site, and when the research data is scrutinised, it is perceived by the informants that the Employer is structurally destructive in terms of measured project performance outcomes (Harris, Kacmar and Zivnuska, 2007). Thus, the toxic leadership culture can be thoughtfully explained as using distrustful, irrational, hostile behaviour (Tepper, Moss, and Duffy, 2011) in order to employ power dominance (Case and Maner, 2014) over the Engineer, as a way to



recklessly direct the project. Thus, individuals, especially those employed by the Engineer, have been vilified for doing their jobs correctly (Sankowski, 1995), and abused and openly discredited (Ashforth, 1994). This labels the Employer as an arrogant bully (Vugt et al., 2003; Wyatt and Hare, 1997). Further, the collusive toxic culture implemented by the Employer has damaged the project progress and interfered with its proper management. The toxic leadership culture therefore appears endemic, wide-scale, threatening and aggressive (Bowling and Beehr, 2006) throughout the Employer's staff and continues to negatively disrupt the project progress.

#### *4.4 Main Theme – Integrated Risk Management*

The data indicates that there is no risk planning, or risk register and therefore no contingency planning as required in a complex project (PMI, 2021). Many issues raised by the informants could be mitigated or at least identified and assessed to determine possible impacts on the project operation. However, the Employer appears to prefer to deal with problems raised on an ad-hoc basis - indicating a clear refusal to deal with contingency management requirements (Ortiz, Pellicer, and Molenaar, 2019). Subsequently, there is a lack of diversification of project risk knowledge and no demonstrated project portfolio management. Risk and exposure is seen as the same by the Employer, creating major issues in the application of the Contract, as the Employer views risks as being completely taken over by the contractor - in order to “blame” the contractor for problems that arise. Unfortunately, construction project systemic risks cannot always be treated in this way (Cox, 2021) or ignored (Cox and Townsend, 1998). This poses a significant risk of whole project failure. Further, most major stakeholders do not appear to conduct any risk assessments or share any risk outcomes with any other stakeholder on the project. This gives rise to a lack of ongoing communication between the major stakeholders (Davis and Love, 2011), reflecting a lack of trust between these major project partners and the ongoing problems associated with the project operations.

Contingency management plays a vital role in the development of continuous improvement strategies of complex construction projects (Russell, et al., 2012). The Employer lacks foresight as depicted by non-acceptance of the contractor's contract contingency plans that include such factors as imposed scope changes, specifications, lack of design quality, site access, or delays in addressing problems (Smith and Bohn, 1999). It is disconcerting that an informant indicated that the Employer had no knowledge of Agile project management. This is not surprising, as agile project management is adaptive, and helps project managers move quickly - but this is not part of the Employer management modus operandi, as the Employer operates in a very slow, backward-looking environment. This makes the project decision process extremely deficient and slow, affecting the project progress. A major failing is that the Employer has not conducted a stakeholder analysis (PMI, 2021) and has thereby not developed an effective communication plan for each of them separately - which should have been done at the project initiation phase. However, lean project management using continuous improvement measures - cannot work in an environment where details are not recorded (PMI, 2021), as is the case with the Employer's conscious toxic leadership style and project mandate.



From the data, the Employer does not provide an empowerment platform. There is no nurturing element of the Employer's operations on the project. This is significant, as the Employer appears to avoid project governance through lack of project data generation and recording; and the lack of recognition of one of the prime requirements of the contract - knowledge transfer (Aerts, Doods and Haezendonck, 2017). The Employer appears not to want to learn about enhancing project performance (Mahura and Birollo, 2021), as the Employer staff conduct themselves in a way to ensure the project ineffectiveness. This means that the Employer can use the excuse of false project progress as a way to ensure its failure (Baccarini, 1999).

#### *4.5 Main Theme – Project Resilience*

Since the Employer has no risk register or risk planning capability or Integrated Risk Management system, this denotes the Employer's reluctance to properly manage the complex project. This is considered an extremely poor management stance. Project resilience refers to the project capability to respond to, prepare for and mitigate the impact of interruptions to project operations. Effectively this means the ability of project management to ensure project operational continuance in order to cope with known and unknown uncertainties (Park, Seager and Rao, 2011). Emergent risks appear from the data to be absent from the Employer project management repertoire. There does not appear to be any mechanism to deal with such risks nor even an understanding of any planning mechanism to help make such risks visible early (Hillson, 2014) as required in a complex construction project (PMI, 2021). For this project, the consistent delays created by the Employer, continuously produce differentiated emergent risks (Naderpajouh and Hastak, 2014) that become very difficult for the Contractor to deal with. Other emergent risks - especially external stakeholders (Joshi and Lambert, 2011) - appear to have had serious consequences for the project, where the clear disruptive impact on the project progress remain completely misunderstood/ignored by the Employer.

Due to the lack of risk management applied to the project and the lack of understanding and recognition of emergent risks, the Employer is exposed so much that it can easily be considered that it borders on financial project recklessness (Collier and Berry, 2002). For each construction package the construction programme/schedules/budgets remain unapproved by the Employer (after submission and approval by the Engineer) after nearly a year of project operation. This signifies a lack of transparency in the project process/budgeting assessment of the Employer (Nijhof, Graafland and Kuijer, 2007) and lack of proper engagement with ADB programme budgeting requirements contained in the ADB Project Cycle (ADB, 2022).

#### *4.6 Main Theme – Stakeholders*

There is a distinct Employer determination that anything the project requires to be performed against project objectives just doesn't isn't possible or plausible. The Employer's disposition affects the strategic intent of the project (Kermanshachi, et al., 2016) by preventing good project management process outcomes meet the project objectives developed at the start. Thus, early internal stakeholder alignment to project strategy is a must (Winch, 2010) arising primarily from the project legitimacy of the Engineer. The Employer has missed the

opportunity to do this, and appears also to misunderstand the notion and role of the major stakeholders (Olander and Landin, 2005), and the impact of the complexity of the project. Given the project situation, the data suggests that the Employer has deliberately misaligned the Employer responses to project issues raised and subsequent decisions made. This effectively means that such a misaligned stance makes it extremely difficult for the contractor to fulfil its duties and responsibilities under the contract.

The focus of the Employer is therefore to ignore ALL the risks brought to their attention and to apply the “ostrich effect” (Karlsson, Loewenstein and Seppi, 2009), when issues were raised in regards to such risk exposure that is perceived as threatening to their project management capability (Caplin, 2003). Thus, the Employer has failed to diversify the risks, acknowledge that such risks are attributed to them and self-manipulate the project decision process to not even consider the non-diversifiable risks that directly affect them that are imposed externally. This is clearly shown through the Employer’s risk practices that ignores loss aversion leading to extreme risk capitulation. This means that the Employer’s position on loss aversion indicates neither risk-seeking in the domain of gains or risk averse in the domain of losses (Herweg and Schmidt, 2015). This is because of their entrenched, backward disposition.

Further, the Employer has not instituted a project stakeholder management strategy (PMI, 2021). Therefore, this lack of planning has severely undermined the project viability even before the project construction could get started (Kerzner, 2017b). This also affects the Engineer’s role as it becomes more difficult to estimate and control project deliverables and increase project risk factors by ensuring that the Engineer supervision becomes difficult or impossible. Thus, the Employer has used measures through toxic leadership to ensure the project failure. It is reported that complaints were made directly to the ADB on numerous matters associated with the Employer behaviour, such as the Engineer TL being removed without notice, but the ADB has not responded appropriately as required under their operating mandate to deal with such complaints.

## **5. Conclusion**

The lack of appropriate risk management combined with the Employer (DoR) toxic leadership (Tepper, Moss, and Duffy, 2011), indicates a clear danger to the project development, progress (Tiwari and Jha, 2022) and its success. The Employer’s failure to conduct risk assessments and impose unrelated project decisions on the project operation and the lack of any risk control measures, puts the project at severe risk of failure. This has not resolved any “real” uncertainties associated with the project operation through lack of shared understanding (Senge 1990). Regular risk management monitoring and reviews would mitigate such issues being developed and project funds being misappropriated (Aven, 2016) - and making such major stakeholders accountable for the project delays.

The Employer has been found to be actively engaged in denigrative and coercive management practices (Maccoby, 1999) where the project has lurched from one crisis to another. This has also led to significant issues with other major stakeholders through the Employer’s mismanagement (Tan, 2004). The lack of engagement and utilisation of

appropriate risk management strategies and processes/tools indicates a managerially failing project (Lipman-Blumen, 2006).

The project toxic leadership environment shows that the Employer is not serious about managing complex projects, and displays little respect for the Engineer, by using intimidation and threat tactics to reduce the progress of the project by resisting contractual obligations and requirements (Bowling and Beehr, 2006).

There are fundamental Employer (DoR) project management failures due to systemic managerial risk inadequacy and demonstrated institutional toxic leadership (Mackey, et al., 2021). These together, further show failures to meet responsible project management standards (PMI, 2021). This research statement may seem to be a watershed opportunity, as the ADB as a major stakeholder, must also question its governance stance and the way it conducts that governance of such road projects, when demonstrably the Employers toxic leadership is clearly linked to a failing project (Jäger, 2008). As a major stakeholder, following its procedural requirements, the ADB should visibly support measures to address and eradicate toxic leadership behaviour shown in the Employer (DoR) at the earliest, and explicitly assist those individuals who raise such issues for their attention and resolution (Kerzner and Belack, 2010).

A major issue corresponds to fear-based decision-making, rather than professional knowledge-based decision-making. This has done significant harm to the project. From the data, the Employer has imposed unsubstantiated decisions that affect the efficacy of managerial arrangements for the complex project (Kerzner, 2013). Further, not accepting the authority of the Engineer and the Engineer's independence on decision-making under the Contract, has created numerous issues associated with who was in charge of the project governance. This suggests the lack of deference by the Employer to the Engineer in areas that were clearly contractually separated from the Employer. This is further representative of a continuing systemic toxic environment employed by the Employer (DoR) management (O'Connor and Quinn, 2010).

The ADB appears to show a lack of transparency in assessing the reduced project performance, and ignore obvious and important negative impacts associated with the Employer project management. The ADB cannot continue to allow such management practices to be conducted, as they breach their own ADB operating governance principles (ADB, 2015).

The Employer did not apply any risk instruments to assess the project exposure nor provide any measure or analyse the performance outcomes to determine the level of anticipated risk variability (Lalonde and Boiral, 2012). Since the Employer does not conduct any risk assessments, then this also has an impact on the ADB donor requirements, and raises serious questions about the ADB oversight and the lack of appropriate governance over the entire project life-cycle performance (ADB, 2022). This is through the ineffectiveness of the Employer management and personnel and collusive, deliberate and destructive actions designed to create consistent project failures. This may also underpin the lack of project governance associated with ADB country managers and the need to improve their project

governance (ADB, 2014). This is especially of concern as claims from stakeholders to the ADB appear to be systematically ignored.

The “normal” strategies for risk management in developing Employer risk attitudes, clearly relate to the provision of necessary information for enhancing risk management performance in complex road projects (Moshood, et al., 2020). Subsequently, a recommendation to develop/utilise adequate risk management processes, techniques and tools (PMI, 2021) is appropriate and necessary. Subsequently, the above reported negative organisational outcomes, are the product of a growing inertia of dysfunctional toxic leader behaviours, susceptible followers and a contributing environment, where there is no discernible oversight (Padilla, Hogan and Kaiser, 2007). Consequently, there would appear to be a governance failure (Finkelstein, 2005) by the Employer and ADB to ascertain the wider impact of toxic leadership behaviour on the project performance as a whole (Hoel and Salin, 2003).

The use of such toxic actions by the Employer is a serious interference with the application of the principle of “justice” for all stakeholders (Bingham, 2011) as unsupported punitive and contradictory decisions are deliberately made by the government entity Employer (DoR), with the project funded by public money (Kharas and Ghosh, 2012). Justice demands transparency in the use of official power (Rawls, 1999) which is not provided, utilised and is even concealed by the Employer (Campbell, 2007). For example, it was reported that the Engineer Team Leader was physically prevented to conduct works activities at site, is one such arbitrary, unethical and punitive decision affecting the project orientation and professional standing.

It was reported that there were consistent failures of the Employer to attend important meetings at site, leaving the Engineer to present to some stakeholders - and where Engineer project decisions were renounced without discussion or notice. This reinforces a consistent cycle of continuous crisis mismanagement (Ndlela, 2018). The result is the extremely poor project performance exclusively attributed to the Employer (DoR) project management failings.

Thus, toxic leadership is seen as an important operational aspect to eradicate from the project in order to ensure the project success (Müller, et al., 2016). Strong project leadership is required to counter the negative toxic culture installed and reinforced by the Employer that has created a failed road construction project (de Carvalho and Junior, 2015). Subsequently, this failing project cannot be delivered on time, with the Contractually expected quality nor according to the designed schedule or standards (PMI, 2021).

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