



An assessment of the stakeholder engagement practices of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier

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ABSTRACT

Regular and participative engagement between organisations and their stakeholders is central to building and maintaining constructive relationships. In Namibia's electricity supply industry, where decisions directly affect socio-economic performance, pricing, and national development, the need for meaningful engagement is even more pronounced. The study evaluated how effectively Namibia's bulk electricity supplier, NamPower, manages relationships with its primary stakeholders, who influence or are influenced by its mandate, thereby identifying best practices and areas needing strategic improvement.

This was done by using a qualitative case study design, with Namibia's bulk supplier as the case. Data was collected through structured interviews through a purposive known-group sample, of staff who routinely interact with the utility's external stakeholders. Findings indicate that the utility employs various engagement approaches related to the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation framework, particularly the methods of informing, consulting, collaborating and involving stakeholders.

The results further show that while the utility broadly applies the principles of two-way symmetrical communication in its engagement with stakeholders, such as dialogue, listening, and responsiveness, its engagement processes remain largely decentralised and lack coordinated oversight. The absence of a formally constituted stakeholder engagement team and a structured organisation-wide stakeholder engagement strategy and plan limit the coherence and effectiveness of current engagement efforts. The study recommends developing a centralised stakeholder engagement strategy and coordinated structures to strengthen consistency, accountability, and long-term relationship-building.

Keywords:

Stakeholder theory, stakeholder, stakeholder engagement, two-way symmetrical communication

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this study is my own unaided work, being submitted for the first time for academic examination to the Media Department of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Public Relations and Communication Management. I further declare that the necessary authorisation has been obtained to carry out the study.

Name: Tangeni Kambangula

Date: 03 December 2025

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Electricity is central to modern life. It powers households, industries, businesses and public service centres. A reliable and constant supply of electricity is thus crucial for the socio-economic development and prosperity of every society. The fact that electricity supply has a bearing on many sectors of a society, by consequence means the operations and decision-making of electricity suppliers impact diverse stakeholders, all with various interests and concerns (Dupont, 2023). The sector thus has many responsibilities towards their varied stakeholders. Electricity suppliers are obligated to be transparent about their operations and decision-making, especially on issues that have an impact on stakeholders, such as changes in tariffs, status of power supply, new projects and the socio and environmental impacts thereof, and possible service interruptions, among others. Thus, electricity suppliers are under constant pressure to effectively engage and communicate with their stakeholders, who each have their own vested interests (Dupont, 2023). To do so well, they need to identify their stakeholders and understand and address their interests and concerns through proactive stakeholder engagement (Ezeh, Ogbu, Ikevuje, & George, 2024). The nurturing of good relations with stakeholders is crucial for building trust and building good relations.

AccountAbility (2015) describes stakeholder engagement as communication and liaison by organisations with relevant stakeholders, which is intentional and aimed at achieving agreed results. The standard emphasises that such liaisons must be participative, allowing stakeholders to have their voices heard on matters or decisions that impact them. Greenwood (2012, in Kujala, Sachs, Leinonen, Heikkinen & Laude, 2022:1142) defines stakeholder engagement as “the practices that the organisation undertakes to involve stakeholders in a positive manner in organisational activities”.

1.2 Background and Context

Stakeholder engagement concerns the approaches employed by organisations in managing relationships with stakeholders. It is based on active dialogue between an organisation and its stakeholders, through ongoing communication, listening, and collaboration, and through that, allowing stakeholders to be involved in the decision-making process on matters that concern and affect them (Taylor et al., 2003). Thus, the nurturing of stakeholder relations is deemed a strategic imperative that should form part of organisational strategies (Pastoriza, 2025; King V Report; Franklin, 2020). Smith (2017) describes it as a 'C-level activity', implying that it needs to be attended to at the highest level of an organisation. Taylor and Bancilhon (2019) emphasise that corporates need to rethink their management of stakeholder concerns, from regarding them as 'external risks', to regarding them as important and worthy of a strategic engagement.

Poor stakeholder engagement, including the lack thereof, can have serious consequences for organisations, including affecting their reputation and the implementation of their business strategies and thereby ultimately their overall performance (Pastoriza, 2025).

The significance of stakeholder engagement is heightened by its inclusion in key governance laws, making it essential for both the public and private sectors as part of corporate governance, to ensure the effective management of stakeholder relations. Namibia is no exception. The NamCode, the Corporate Governance Code for Namibia, which forms part of the voluntary guidelines that NamPower, the utility under study, subscribes to, is clear on the need for organisations to proactively manage stakeholder relations (NamCode). The NamCode addresses stakeholder engagement through its principles on ethical leadership, governance oversight, risk management and transparent reporting (NamCode). Boards and management are expected to engage key stakeholders in a structured and meaningful manner, while at the same time considering their concerns in decision-making. This point is also emphasised by Franklin (2020), when stating that stakeholder engagement should be included in

corporate communication strategies as part of corporate governance. And therefore, organisations are expected to report on their engagements with stakeholders, including how their concerns have been attended to (Van Zyl, 2013). This, in essence, makes stakeholder engagement an important part of good governance and value creation. Stakeholder engagement is also a key principle in the King Code of Governance for South Africa, to which several businesses and organisations subscribe, including the organisation under study. Principle 13 in the King V Report on Corporate Governance, the section dedicated to stakeholder relationships, upraises stakeholder engagement, with emphasis on proactive engagement and communication with stakeholders, in an inclusive and transparent manner (Institute of Directors South Africa, IODSA). Important to note is that shareholders, regulators and investors, among others, also depend on organisations upholding the requirements of these governance frameworks in relation to the management of stakeholders.

In Namibia, the bulk electricity supplier, NamPower, is at the core of the socio-economic development of the country, given its responsibility to deliver a secure, affordable, and sustainable electricity supply. The utility is mandated with the generation, transmission, distribution, and trading of electricity for the country. It supplies bulk electricity to Regional Electricity Distributors (REDs), Mines, Namwater, Farms and Local Authorities (where REDs are not yet operational) throughout Namibia. The utility supplies electricity through its fleet of generation plants and an established transmission system and network of overhead lines (NamPower Integrated Annual Report, 2023).

The stakeholders of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier (the terms "bulk electricity supplier" and "utility" are used interchangeably), in a perception survey conducted in 2022 with external stakeholders, expressed their dissatisfaction with the level of engagement by the bulk supplier. The bulk supplier commissions stakeholder perception surveys every second year to gauge the opinions of its various external stakeholders on the delivery of its mandate and strategic objectives; assess the level of

customer satisfaction; and assess its reputation among several factors (Business Intelligence Africa (BIA), 2022). The stakeholders engaged in the survey included the shareholders, relevant government ministries, the regulator, customers, independent power producers, funding institutions, opinion leaders, the media, and the public, all with diverse interests in the operations and decisions of the utility.

They expressed the need for regular engagement on issues of interest to them, such as electricity tariffs, which customers described as being too high. To highlight the stakeholder concern about the electricity tariffs, during the 2024 financial year, electricity users expressed their concern about the proposed electricity tariff for the subsequent year, as applied for by the bulk supplier and distributors of electricity to the regulator. The public outcry influenced the government to step in, requesting the regulator to cancel the tariffs that it approved for the bulk electricity supplier and other electricity distributors, and committing to subsidising electricity to consumers for the said financial year. The outcry from the end-users, and the subsequent resolution by the government to stop any tariff increases for the said year, are a testament to the actions and influence of stakeholders, highlighting the importance of relationship building, on which to leverage when needed.

Other concerns expressed by stakeholders include security of electricity supply in the country, as Namibia imports on average between 40 and 50% of its electricity from neighbouring countries (the contribution of imports vary on an annual basis, based on how well the local generation plants perform), through bilateral supply agreements and through the Southern African Power Pool (SAPP) to meet the local demand (NamPower Integrated Annual Report, 2023). Stakeholders further stressed that they want continuous updates on the implementation of newly planned generation projects aimed at increasing local generation capacity, to ensure self-sufficiency and less dependence on imports. They expressed concern about what they term a general lack of in-person engagements, highlighting the need for engagement at a participative level (BIA, 2022).

The need for organisations to engage their stakeholders on issues of common interest cannot be overemphasised enough, as it is crucial for building sound and beneficial relationships between organisations and their stakeholders (Goodijk, 2010; Eskerod, 2020; Ezech et al., 2024). This assertion forms the basis on which this study is premised.

Building relationships with stakeholders through two-way symmetrical communication

Building mutual relationships requires an approach that seeks to benefit both the organisation and its stakeholders. The two-way symmetrical communication model is proposed as ideal for engagement between organisations and their stakeholders, as it allows for dialogue, listening, negotiation, debate, understanding, and, through that, relationship building (Duhe & Wright, in Sriramesh, Zerfass & Kim, 2013). As such, this study, through interviewing key personnel of the power utility, aimed to evaluate the engagement methods of the utility and how they relate to the principles of stakeholder engagement and the two-way symmetrical communication model.

1.3 Problem Statement

Stakeholders of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier have expressed dissatisfaction about the engagement efforts of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier, describing them as insufficient and needing improvement. The bulk supplier is at the core of the socio-economic development of the country by virtue of its mandate and therefore impacts almost every sector of the Namibian society, and consequently several stakeholders. It is thus crucial that it effectively engages with its varied stakeholders to foster sound relations. Good and mutual relationships with stakeholders can be build or improved through adopting good stakeholder engagement practices, through symmetrical communication, especially with primary stakeholders on whom the business is dependent for its operations. Hence, this qualitative study evaluated the engagement practices of Namibia's electricity supplier with its stakeholders, to ascertain how they relate with the principles of stakeholder engagement and two-way symmetrical communication.

1.4 Research Objectives

The assessment of the stakeholder engagement methods of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier contributes new knowledge on the topic of stakeholder engagement for the local electricity supply industry.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are:

- To evaluate the current stakeholder engagement methods of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier.
- To explore the symmetrical communication strategies used in stakeholder engagement by Namibia's bulk electricity supplier.

1.5 Research Question

The situation, as outlined under the problem statement, has raised the following research questions:

- What are the stakeholder engagement methods used by Namibia's bulk electricity supplier?
- What are the symmetrical communication strategies used in stakeholder engagement by the Namibia's bulk electricity supplier?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study will contribute to scholarship in stakeholder engagement, particularly in the electricity supply industry in Namibia. Although many studies have been conducted on the concept worldwide, none were found on Namibia, and specifically on the electricity supply industry. New knowledge from the study can be beneficial as follows:

- The utility under study can use the results to improve their engagement and communication strategies where required, and in so doing, address the needs of their stakeholders on issues that affect them. This can contribute greatly to building trust and improving relations with stakeholders.

- The results can provide valuable insights to role players in the electricity supply sector in the country and so also entrants in the sector, on the type of stakeholder engagement practices employed in the industry, or the lack thereof.
- In addition, new entrants in the sector can use the information in the planning of their projects, which can be advantageous for project success.
- The results can benefit key stakeholders, namely the shareholder, regulator, and financiers, who can use the information in the crafting of their strategies, considering the requirements of stakeholders, and in the process mitigate potential risks.

1.7 Research Design

The research design is presented in brief below. A detailed presentation thereof is provided in Chapter Three.

1.7.1 Qualitative Methodology

The study followed a qualitative approach and entailed collecting primary data through interviews from key personnel of the bulk electricity supplier on which the research is based. Qualitative research allows for probing for in-depth knowledge and understanding of the perceptions of research participants on the topic or aspects under study and for the generation of ideas (Guba & Lincoln, in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The study is interpretive by nature, a major epistemological approach, which allows for deep engagement of participants to better understand their real-life experiences and their views (Creswell, 2009). As Gray (2004) and O'Reilly (2009, in Sol & Heng, 2022: 92) note, "knowledge of the world depends greatly on our interpretation or understanding of human actions, experiences, and environments".

The design is a case study, which is a suitable approach as it accords the researcher the opportunity to obtain specific and contextual knowledge from the participants, who form part of the entity under study. As Lim (2025) explicates, case studies allow for the examination of "key characteristics, meanings, and implications of the case".

1.7.2 Sample

The sample, which is a purposive known-group sample is made up of staff who routinely interact with the utility's external stakeholders, drawn from the larger group of the organisation under study, which constitutes the population. Although participants of the study were interviewed individually, they represent the organisation and its practices. The selected research participants made up a sample size of eight. Ten participants were invited to partake; however, only eight responded.

1.7.3 Research Tool

An interview guide, with open-ended questions was used to conduct one-on-one interviews with participants. The guide featured questions aligned to themes on stakeholder engagement and symmetrical communication, which are central to the study.

1.7.4 Data Collection

A semi-structured interview process was followed to collect data from participants. Interviews, conducted in the personal settings of the participants, lasted on average between 20 and 30 minutes. The interviews allowed the researcher to collect primary data aimed at addressing the research objectives.

1.7.5 Data Analysis - Thematic Analysis

The study used thematic analysis to process the primary text data from the interview transcripts of participants. Thematic analysis involves coding, which entails breaking down data into meaningful and understandable units, classifying it, arranging it orderly, evaluating, and interpreting it (Lim, 2025). After a careful reading of the data, for an overall view and in-depth understanding, common themes were identified, analysed, and the study report compiled accordingly.

1.8 Trustworthiness

Validity in qualitative research entails determining whether the findings of a study are accurate from the researcher's perspective and that of the study participants (Creswell,

2009). Qualitative research depends on trustworthiness to ascertain the reliability of findings. This is done by assessing study findings on “credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability” (Lim, 2025:222), through employing various strategies. The strategies employed to ensure the reliability of this study are outlined in Chapter Three.

1.9 Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought permission from her employer to carry out the study, which was granted. Participants of the study were provided an ‘Individual Consent for Research Participation’ form, seeking their permission to participate in the study by granting interviews. They were required to read and sign the document before participating in the interviews. In upholding ethical principles, participants were not pressurised to partake in the study. Participants were assigned alternative identification (numbers) for anonymity and to protect the information they provided. The data collected for the study is kept in a private folder on a computer and is password-protected.

1.10 Delimitations of the Study

The study focused solely on the national power utility of Namibia by assessing its engagement approaches and the use of two-way symmetrical communication with its stakeholders. The results of the study are thus limited to the national power utility and do not represent the broader electricity supply industry of Namibia. Furthermore, all references to the stakeholder concept in this study are in relation to organisations and no other settings, for example, social programmes. Donaldson and Preston (1995) explicate that although the stakeholder concept is commonly used in various settings, circumstances differ from one setting to another and should thus not be generalised.

1.11 Explanation of Terms

The key concepts and terms guiding this study are explained below.

- **Stakeholder**

Eskerod (2020) describes stakeholders as an individual or group that can be affected by decisions or actions made by an organisation in pursuit of its strategic objectives, and who can equally affect an organisation. In relation to an organisation, stakeholders can be anyone inside or outside the organisation, with a mutual relationship with the organisation and on whom an organisation is dependent, directly or indirectly (Mitchel, Agle & Wood, 1997).

- **Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement relates to an organisation's strategic management of its key stakeholders, involving any deliberate action for dialogue (Gutterman, 2023). The approach dictates that dialogue should be participative and considerate of the views of stakeholders on matters that are of interest to them (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

- **Two-Way Symmetrical Communication**

The two-way symmetrical model is a reciprocal approach of communication and engagement, deemed most ideal for stakeholder engagement, as it seeks to benefit both the organisation and stakeholders through finding a win-win situation (Grunig & Hunt, in Steyn, 2000).

- **Namibia's Bulk Electricity Supplier/Utility**

Namibia's bulk electricity supplier is the entity licensed to generate, transmit, supply, and trade electricity, including the importing and exporting thereof. The utility supplies bulk electricity to all sectors of the economy and the population through Regional Electricity Distributors (REDs), to mines, Namwater (bulk water supplier), and Local Authorities (where REDs have not yet been established) throughout Namibia.

The concepts explained above, in short, are what the study is centred on, namely, the stakeholder and why organisations should take note of them through effectively

engaging them, using methods that are aimed at fostering mutually beneficial relations. These concepts are discussed in detail in the next chapter, in which the theories and concepts are reviewed and outlined.

1.12 Structure of the Study

The study consists of five main chapters, covering the following:

- **Chapter One: Introduction and Background:** As presented above, this chapter gives an overview of the research problem; an outline of the research methods used to study the problem; an explanation of the key concepts on which the study is premised; and the key questions that the study sought to answer.
- **Chapter Two: Literature Review:** This is a summary of a review of the theories and concepts relevant to the study, for context, and how these relate to the issue under study.
- **Chapter Three: Research Methodology:** This chapter outlines the research design and methodology followed to study the problem as presented in the first chapter.
- **Chapter Four: Presentation of results:** The data collected and analysed are presented and discussed in this chapter.
- **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations:** The chapter summarises the results of the study and presents recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature and the theoretical concepts that form the basis of this study, namely stakeholder theory, stakeholder engagement and its approaches, and the two-way symmetrical communication model. It opens with an explanation of the background on stakeholder theory, drawing on the descriptions of various scholars on what constitutes a stakeholder and why organisations need to engage them. The concepts of stakeholder engagement and two-way symmetrical communication, which are advocated as crucial for relationship building, are discussed. The need for organisations to identify, categorise, and prioritise their stakeholders is also discussed in this chapter. These aspects are crucial as they play a major role in aiding organisations to plan appropriately on how to attend to the needs and interests of their stakeholders.

Leaning on the notion that effective stakeholder engagement is dependent on approaches that are rooted in two-way symmetrical communication, the literature further speaks on approaches from an internationally accepted guide, which are deemed key for stakeholder engagement. The approaches are elaborated on, clarifying the usefulness of each one and, with that, how they differ from one another.

2.2 Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder concept, which emerged in the 1950s to 1960s, initially focused on the shareholder only, who was deemed important because of their ownership or investment in an organisation (Argenti, 1997). The discourse about a broader outlook regarding stakeholders, however, gained impetus in the 80s after the launch of Edward Freeman's book, *'Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach'*. In advancing his theory, Freeman (2004) emphasises that the ownership of assets and investments in an organisation cannot be used as a key factor to prioritise those who have made such investments at the expense of constituents who have not. Freeman insists that legitimate stakeholders, despite the lack of monetary investments, contribute to an

organisation's success, albeit differently. Stakeholder theory has since cut across many disciplines and has been adopted in organisations and other settings (Richter & Dow, 2017; Vinten, 2000; Dupont, 2023). Testament to that is the numerous Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder initiatives (international conventions, international standards, business-focused initiatives, multistakeholder dialogues) that have been established because of incidences of labour standards, climate change, and corruption, among others, to address stakeholder needs and concerns on various fronts (Richter & Dow, 2017).

Freeman (2004) defines stakeholders as anyone who can impact or is impacted by an organisation or system in its quest to meet its objectives. Substantiating this definition, Donaldson (in Richter & Dow, 2017) describes stakeholders as people or groups that can benefit from or can be harmed by an organisation's actions. The definitions point to the fact that stakeholders can be anyone inside or outside an organisation, who has a relation with the organisation directly or indirectly (Mitchel et al., 1997). Literature on stakeholder theory advances the notion that an organisation's (successful) performance is dependent on its relations with stakeholders, wherein an organisation considers the interests and well-being of its stakeholders beyond those who have invested in it (Godam, Omega & Ochnonogor, 2019; Phillips, Freeman & Wicks, 2005).

Definitions of stakeholders abound in the literature on stakeholder theory; however, they do not deviate much from Freeman's initial definition. The definitions emphasise the expectation on organisations to balance multiple stakeholder interests (Richter & Dow, 2017), connoting an obligation on the side of the organisation in its operations and conduct towards stakeholders (Phillips et al., 2005).

The stakeholder concept is applied in various ways, which include varied methods and assessment criteria. The uses include the descriptive (empirical), instrumental, and normative approaches (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The descriptive approach describes an organisation, especially in relation to its set-up, how it is managed, and the views about stakeholders as held by those who manage the organisation

(Donaldson & Preston, 1995). On the instrumental front, based on the information from the descriptive approach, the accomplishment of organisational objectives is scrutinised in relation to how stakeholders are managed (Donaldson & Preston, 1995:67). This, in essence, aligns with the notion that organisations that uphold stakeholder principles are likely to be more successful. The normative use of the stakeholder concept is regarded as more crucial than the descriptive and instrumental approaches (although all approaches are recognised as valuable). It impresses on the organisation to recognise those stakeholders with legitimate interests in key aspects of the organisation (the legitimacy of stakeholders is discussed later in this chapter under the heading 'stakeholder identification'). The normative approach further compels organisations to recognise that the interests of the stakeholders are of value, in their respective capacities (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Richter and Dow (2017:428) propose a 'deliberative approach', mainly formed out of Jürgen Habermas' language-pragmatic approach. The approach places strong emphasis on dialogue, participation, and procedural justice, highlighting the inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making in a meaningful way. The deliberative approach proposes the prioritisation of stakeholder legitimacy and deliberative democracy, which Richter and Dow (2017) say has foundational benefits for stakeholder theory.

Considering the definitions of a stakeholder as presented earlier and the key features of the normative approach, two aspects stand out, namely, a wide accountability of organisations towards all parties that they impact and vice versa. The other is the emphasis of a two-way relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders, the key focus of the topic under study. Stakeholder theory defines the organisation intersubjectively (Richter & Dow, 2017), referring to the need for a mutual understanding between the organisation and stakeholders, interacting on issues of common interest. This emphasises discourse through a two-way symmetrical communication.

2.3 Criticism of Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory has received much contention since its advent. Criticism from opponents is based on divergent (mis)interpretations of the theory, including questioning its legitimacy, and comments that it is too normative and lacking in explanation (Argenti, 1997; Mitchel et al., 1997; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Frynas & Yamahaki, in Richter & Dow, 2017). Questions posed about the concept include 'who has a stake in an organisation; how should organisations balance opposing and varied stakeholder interests correctly; and why should organisations conduct themselves ethically in relation to stakeholders' (Richter & Dow, 2017). Adding to the criticism, Donaldson and Preston (1995) opine that the theory, in most literature, is presented implicitly.

Argenti (1997) appraises the approach for its advocacy for a broad accountability of the organisation towards stakeholders, while further commenting that it lacks clear and specific guidelines on how organisations should accommodate and manage stakeholders. Stakeholder theory has been further criticised for being overly concerned about the distribution of financial gains among all stakeholders. Proponents of the theory (among them Freeman, 2004; Richter & Dow, 2017; Phillips et al., 2005), however, explicate that material yields are not the sole focus of the theory, and that factors such as information sharing, engagement, and collaboration, among others, are crucial too. The scholars also emphasised that benefits are or should be distributed on merit.

Despite all the criticism, Richter and Dow (2017) note that no alternative comparable to stakeholder theory has been presented in 'organisational research'. Instead, suggestions have been expressed to improve the theory normatively. There is some kind of concurrence among scholars to use Habermas' concepts and frameworks to normatively extend the theory and address pertinent questions relating to it (Richter & Dow, 2017; Mbinjama-Gamatham, 2014; Mbinjama, 2022). Meanwhile, the theory has been entrenched in the operations of organisations.

This study leans towards the normative approach of stakeholder theory because of its emphasis on the recognition of the legitimacy of the stakeholder, their voice, and interests. These aspects align more with the topic under study.

2.4 Stakeholder Identification

The entrenchment of the stakeholder approach in various sectors of society, including business, has compelled organisations to identify and prioritise their stakeholders. To engage stakeholders effectively, there is a need to identify them and their respective needs, to be able to attend to them appropriately. Stakeholders are classified into two groupings, namely primary stakeholders, which often include employees of an organisation, customers, the communities around the organisation, shareholders, suppliers, and the government or its entities (Goodijk, 2000). The second group is referred to as secondary stakeholders and can include competitors, the media, trade unions, and interest groups (Goodijk, 2000). Stakeholders, however, differ from organisation to organisation. There is also another group called passive stakeholders, who become active only when something important to them occurs. When this constituent becomes more aware or active, they are referred to as publics (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Organisations are compelled to recognise stakeholders who have a stake in their business either through interest, influence, or both (Sedmak, 2021). Organisations must, however, only form relationships with key stakeholders (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

2.5 Stakeholder Salience

Stakeholders are not homogeneous (Andrade, 2022); thus, there is a need to distinguish them. Stakeholder salience is concerned with stakeholder identification based on power, legitimacy and urgency (Tam, 2024). The three attributes are explained as: the 'power' of a stakeholder to influence the organisation; 'legitimacy' in that they believe their action/s is right; and the claim of 'urgency' for their concerns to be attended to by an organisation (Tam, 2024; Mitchel et al., 1997). This typology is concerned with the scale at which organisations should prioritise competing

stakeholder claims, namely, the priority to be given to a stakeholder. Organisations can prioritise stakeholders based on the following: interest (the level of enthusiasm of stakeholders to mobilise themselves on an issue); influence (their skills to garner support on an issue of interest); and salience (the level of consideration by an organisation on an issue) (Mitchel et al., 1997).

From the three attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency, seven stakeholder classes have been identified under the categories of latent, expectant and definitive. The table below reflects the categories, the classes under them and their respective attributes:

Table 2-1 Stakeholder Types

STAKEHOLDER TYPES	
<p>Latent stakeholders Possess only one of the three salience attributes; has no strong influence on an organisation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dormant stakeholders: Have power but no legitimacy and urgency, thus cannot use their power on the organisation. • Discretionary stakeholders: Has legitimacy but no power and urgency to influence the organisation. • Demanding stakeholders: Has urgency (claim) but has no power and legitimacy to grab the attention of an organisation.
<p>Expectant stakeholders Possess three of the two salience attributes; active and require reaction from the organisation on their claims.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominant stakeholders: has power and legitimacy, with views that require attention by an organisation. • Dangerous stakeholders: has power and urgency but not legitimacy; can negatively influence an organisation. • Dependent stakeholders: has urgent claims and legitimate views; can impact an organisation by working with stakeholders with power.
<p>Definitive stakeholders Possess all three categories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because they have all three attributes, they require an organisations full attention.

(Adapted from Mitchel et al., 1997)

Understanding these categories helps organisations with prioritising stakeholders accordingly. Freeman (in Richter & Dow, 2017) notes that the analysis of stakeholders should be broad, as the status of any part of them might change at any given time.

Pointing to the fact that stakeholders are not equal, Campbell (1997) emphasises that the stakeholder model puts the responsibility of clarifying what it intends to deliver to each stakeholder on the board and management of an organisation. This requires thoroughly understanding stakeholder interests, needs, concerns, and the potential impact they may have on an organisation's activities (Freeman in Ezech et al., 2024).

Once an organisation has identified its stakeholders and categorised them accordingly, the next step is to respond to their varied needs through appropriate approaches. Stakeholder engagement, a two-way communication approach, is believed to be the ideal way to go about engaging stakeholders. The approach is discussed next.

2.6 Stakeholder Engagement

The dynamic business and social environments of today require organisations to continuously adjust the ways they conduct business, which includes how they communicate and engage stakeholders. Stakeholders are demanding inclusivity through consultation, and for organisations to be transparent and accountable in their dealings, an exigency that relates to stakeholder engagement (AccountAbility, 2015). Engaging stakeholders to understand their needs is crucial in building relations and for the realisation of business initiatives, especially those that impact or can be impacted by stakeholders. Smith (2017) emphasises that engagement must be focused on key strategic issues and thereby the correct stakeholders, if the desired outcomes based on the organisation's set objectives were to be achieved.

Stakeholder engagement pertains to an organisation's strategic management of its key stakeholders in building relations, and involves any deliberate actions of dialogue, inclusion, collaboration, and empowerment (Gutterman, 2023). Expanding on the concept, Jeffery (2009:8) states that it calls on organisations to give stakeholders "the opportunity to comment and input into the development of decisions that affect them". Gutterman (2023) describes it as more than 'listening' to stakeholders, emphasising that it involves building collaborations and working on realising set goals between

organisations and stakeholders. Ultimately, it is about forging relationships with all parties that are crucial to the sustainability of an organisation.

Stakeholder engagement should, however, not be confused with stakeholder management, an approach which Kujala et al. (2022) describe as one-sided. Jeffery (2009) describes stakeholder management as entailing the qualities of being proactive, anticipative, regular, and defensive, while stakeholder engagement is interactive, encouraging, inclusive, and with the possibility of an organisation to change position, when the need arises.

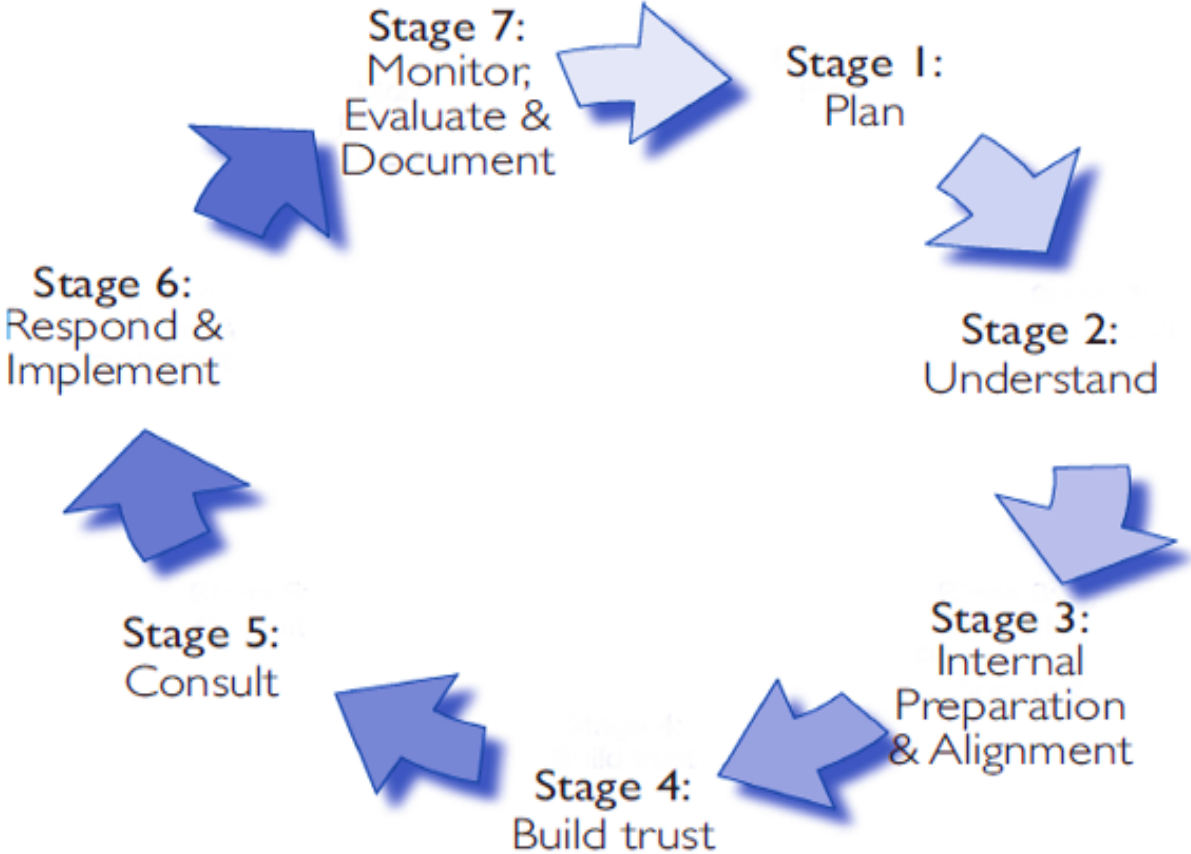
The stakeholder engagement concept dictates that dialogue between organisations and their stakeholders should be participative and consider the views of stakeholders on matters that concern or affect them (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Jeffery (2009:15) emphasises that stakeholder engagement should be managed like all “business projects”, involving “proper analysis, preparation, implementation, reporting, evaluation and follow-up”. Jeffery further adds that the concept requires organisations to be open to amending their plans to accommodate the interests of stakeholders when necessary. A moral obligation on the side of the organisation is prominent in the literature on the stakeholder engagement concept. Given the expectations on the side of the organisation, it might appear as if organisations are expected to compromise on their businesses. Jeffery (2009), however, points out that the approach instead emphasises the advancement of the interests and wants of both parties (Jeffery, 2009).

Smith (2017) emphasises that stakeholder engagement must be addressed at the most senior level of an organisation. Organisations can use engagements with stakeholders to share their strategic plans and vision, keeping stakeholders informed and allowing them to input where necessary. Reynolds and Yuthas (in Bruce-Iri & Shelley, 2010) note that such involvement allows for consensus and interpersonal communication, supporting a shared vision among involved parties. An inclusive engagement approach can stand to benefit the organisation through support when needed, denoting long-term investments. Engagement also grants organisations the

opportunity to learn about issues relevant to their stakeholders, giving them an opportunity to make decisions from an informed point of view (Gutterman, 2023). The approach is, furthermore, crucial to improving transparency and building trust with stakeholders (Lipnack & Stamps, in Bruce-Iri & Shelley, 2010).

Jeffery guides that the process of engaging stakeholders should be logical. Describing the process as iterative, he emphasises that experiences from engaging with stakeholders should inform future planning and engagements. The proposed process is depicted below:

Figure 2-1: Process flow of stakeholder engagement



Source: Jeffery (2009)

Organisations that do not try to consider the opinions of their stakeholders can find themselves affected by challenges that can impact their operations (Gutterman, 2023). In reference to the organisation under study, matters such as security of electricity

supply, electricity tariffs, and planned projects aimed at ensuring self-sufficiency are important to stakeholders. This approach speaks to the call of the stakeholders for regular and participative engagements. Engagement with stakeholders should be aimed at gathering information on issues that concern them and their thoughts on how these can be addressed.

Despite the concept of stakeholder engagement being extensively referenced in the business environment, social settings, and in research as being important, and actively applied in various sectors, Kujala et al. (2022) has criticised it for lacking clear fundamentals. The researcher opines that the concept is mostly addressed in relation to stakeholder theory, noting that until “a settled and comprehensive view of essentials” of the concept is established, it will continue to lack “internal identity and external distinctiveness”, especially in research (Kujala et al., 2022:1138).

For the present study, the concept of stakeholder engagement is considered as commonly recognised, namely, denoting an organisation’s strategic management of its key stakeholders. It is also considered in reference to it being crucial for relationship building and aiding in the successful implementation of organisational objectives. Furthermore, stakeholder engagement is considered from the moral perspective, namely the organisation’s conduct and consideration of its stakeholders, and not the strategic (entailing stakeholders’ readiness to contribute towards value creation for the business) and the pragmatic perspective (concerning action and problem-solving in practical contexts) (Kujala et al., 2022).

Based on the explanation of the stakeholder engagement concept above, pointing out its attributes for building good and mutual relations, it is found to be ideal to reference for investigating the research questions for this study. Furthermore, because the concept is premised on a reciprocal and inclusive approach, it contains principles of the two-way symmetrical model of communication. This concept is important for this study and is thus discussed next.

2.7 The Four Communication Models

Organisations use the four corporate communication models by Grunig and Hunt, also referred to as public relations models, in the execution of their programmes or when communicating to stakeholders (Steyn, 2000). The models and what they stand for are explained below:

- **Press agency:** It is a one-way communication model, used (by organisations) to persuade and manipulate targeted audiences, with the intention to influence them as desired. No research is used to guide the communication being shared.
- **Public Information model:** It is also a one-way communication model, which used various communication techniques such as media releases, to distribute the organisation's information. No research is used to guide the communication being shared.
- **Two-way asymmetrical model:** Considered as two-way communication. Uses persuasion to influence targeted publics as desired by the organisation. Uses formal research, of which feedback is used in the communication with publics.
- **Two-way symmetrical model:** It is a two-way communication model, premised on the principles of respect and due regard of the parties involved, namely the public and organisation. Matters between parties are resolved in a manner that is beneficial for both parties.

(Adapted from Roberts-Crews, 2021).

The first two models, namely, the press agency and public information models, are regarded as basic and one-way communication as they mainly aim to obtain publicity and distribute information about the organisation, respectively. Government institutions, for example, mainly follow the public information model for disseminating information on decisions made, affecting citizens of a country, or campaigns such as for vaccination. The utility under study will, for example, use the same model when communicating information about planned electricity outages or

electricity safety tips. This one-way approach is suitable because the aim is just to share information. However, a combination of approaches can be used, depending on the issue at hand.

The second two models, namely, the two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models, are regarded as more refined (Grunig, Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang & Lyra, 1995). The two-way asymmetrical model involves engaging stakeholders to seek information, which is then used to influence or persuade stakeholders to accept an organisation's view. On the other hand, the two-way symmetrical model is reciprocal. The use of an approach will differ from issue to issue, and so also publics, depending on the message to be communicated.

Based on the explanations above, it is evident that the models of press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetrical are not ideal for engaging with stakeholders if the aim is to consider their voice, include them where necessary and build relations. Because stakeholder engagement is intentional, inclusive and aimed at achieving agreed results (Accountability, 2015), the two-way symmetrical communication model is most suitable for engagement between organisations and their stakeholders. Thus, this study leans on the two-way symmetrical communication model as most suitable for stakeholder engagement. The model is explained below.

2.8 Two-way Symmetrical Communication Model

The two-way symmetrical model of communication is deemed ideal for stakeholder engagement and thus the desired approach to use, as it offers reciprocity and seeks to find a balance in the interests of both the organisation and its stakeholders, resulting in a win-win situation for both (Grunig & Hunt, in Steyn, 2000). Interaction with stakeholders should be geared towards bringing about change and can thus not be one-way (Taylor & Bancilhon, 2019).

Stakeholder engagement and two-way symmetrical communication are suggested as foundations for good and mutual relationship building between organisations and their stakeholders (Taylor et al., 2003; Goodijk, 2010; Eskerod, 2020). Two-way

symmetrical communication allows for organisations and their stakeholders to engage in dialogue, debate their respective viewpoints, and try to advance their interests, while allowing for the balancing of such interests (Duhe & Wright in Sriramesh et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2003).

The above assertions are a clear indication that organisations need to engage stakeholders through ongoing interaction, listening, and collaboration (Taylor et al., 2003), as being invited by the stakeholders of the bulk supplier. According to Goodijk (2000), providing opportunities for dialogue and participation in the running of the business is crucial to both an organisation and its stakeholders, as it contributes to transparency and information sharing, among others.

There are different approaches to engaging with stakeholders. The present study focuses on the following approaches: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering. These approaches, except for 'informing', are characterised by a two-way and mutual style of communication model, which is crucial for engaging stakeholders.

2.9 Engagement Approaches

There are several approaches that organisations can use to engage their stakeholders. The categorisation and understanding of the needs of stakeholders guide decision-making on what approach to use. From the literature review, some key words and phrases emerged, that present as pertinent for effective stakeholder engagement. Similarly, some of these are also found in the literature on two-way symmetrical communication. They include listening, negotiation, dialogue, understanding, ongoing communication, participation, inclusion, win-win, collaboration, and engagement. Engagement approaches used by organisations should thus encompass the essence of these concepts.

This study is focused on the assessment of the engagement and communication methods used by Namibia's bulk electricity supplier with its stakeholders. The IAP2's (International Association of Public Participation) Spectrum of Public Participation

was used as the tool to assess engagement approaches used by the utility (Jaansoo, 2019). The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is widely used to assist with the selection of the level of participation, which defines the public’s role in any public participation process (IAP2). The guide outlines the use of five approaches, namely, inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. These approaches relate to the phrases encompassed in the stakeholder engagement and two-way symmetrical communication concepts, as highlighted previously.

The engagement approaches of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation are depicted in the figure below.

Figure 2-2: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Source: International Association of Public Participation

The approaches are explained in more detail below. As shown in the figure above, their effect becomes more inclusive as they gradually move to the right.

Inform

The approach is a one-way communication, aimed at keeping stakeholders informed or educated, through providing information and updates on issues of interest. It does not require input from stakeholders. Information is shared through various media such as organisational websites, social media platforms, print and electronic media, mail, newsletters, public announcements, and so forth (IAP2; Stuart, 2017, Hardy, 2015).

Consult

This approach is two-way in as far as actively seeking input from stakeholders on the issues at hand. Input from stakeholders can be collected through meetings, discussion forums, public hearings, and surveys. With this approach, it is important for organisations to take note of stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the issue on the table, to engage them more for their wealth of knowledge or input. Stakeholders are informed about how their inputs have been considered (IAP2; Stuart, 2017, Hardy, 2015).

Involve

This approach reaches out to stakeholders for their inputs and views. Engagement is two-way, and stakeholders are drawn in as partners and accorded the opportunity to provide input and to influence outcomes. At this level of engagement, the organisation recognises that the stakeholder has valuable knowledge and experience that can improve the matter under discussion. At this level, building trust, extending mutual respect, and shared responsibility are crucial between the organisation and stakeholders, which can be developed through brainstorming sessions, the generation of ideas, and problem-solving. Stakeholder contributions can be included at the strategic level, for objective-setting and in implementation plans. The channels of communication between the organisation and stakeholders are open in this approach, allowing for a free flow of information. The approach requires feedback mechanisms to keep stakeholders up to date on the impact of their contributions. This nurtures

transparency, expresses value for their contribution, and presents continuous engagement (IAP2; Stuart, 2017, Hardy, 2015).

Collaboration

Collaboration is regarded as the ultimate level of stakeholder engagement and involves stakeholders with keen interest, responsibility, and influence in a project or other. At this level, stakeholders are actively involved in decision-making, and their contributions are considered at the same level as everyone else. Because they are treated as part of a team, they share a sense of ownership. The organisation is obliged to create a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with the stakeholder(s) at this level. To cement the relationship, it is required that stakeholders are kept up to date on any new information regarding the project/matter at hand; included in the drafting of relevant documents; invited to make input at the highest level of the project/matter at hand; assigned responsibilities; provided with resources and support where required, enabling them to contribute better. Channels of communication with stakeholders at this level can include joint planning sessions, stakeholder forums, strategic dialogues, and collaborative platforms (IAP2; Stuart, 2017, Hardy, 2015).

Empower

This approach leaves all the decision-making in the hands of the stakeholders. Hardy (2015) describes it as “delegated authority”. The organisation implements what is decided by the stakeholders. This approach is, for example, ideal in instances of an organisation supporting a community project. The organisation will then provide the resources required, while the stakeholder(s) will implement the project as desired (IAP2; Stuart, 2017, Hardy, 2015).

The framework shows that engagement can take place, albeit at different levels and with diverse approaches of interaction (Hardy, 2015).

The literature, as outlined above, provides good background on the aspects that the study is focused on, namely, stakeholders, their importance to organisations, and the need to engage them and how. The description of these key concepts presents a good basis to evaluate the problem as outlined in the problem statement, by assessing the engagement methods used by the utility under study and how they relate to the principles of stakeholder engagement and two-way symmetrical communication. The study assessed the methods of engagement of the utility against those of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation framework as outlined, using the framework as the primary lens.

The engagement methods of the organisation under study were assessed on whether they are made up of these approaches, which are central to fostering good relationships with stakeholders. Recognising that the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation does not address the element of communication in stakeholder engagement, it is complemented by the two-way symmetrical communication model to represent the nuances of dialogue and mutual understanding, essential for genuine engagement.

An assessment of stakeholders is central to determining the most appropriate engagement approach for every group. It is thus important that an organisation identifies, analyses, and categorises its stakeholders before segmenting them according to their levels of interest, influence, and potential impact on an organisation's plans (Tractivity). The engagement approaches are not necessarily linear or to be followed in a chronological manner as presented above. They can be applied as needed at a given time, as stakeholder needs and interests also change, and so also their level of priority.

The literature review, therefore, provided the researcher with the needed context to carry out the content analysis and interviews as presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

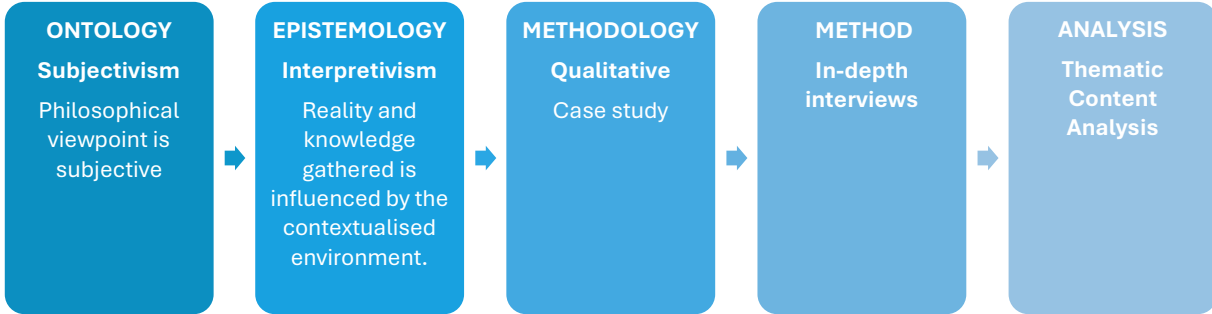
This chapter outlines the research design and methodology that was followed for this study, to answer the research questions:

- a) What are the stakeholder engagement methods used by Namibia’s bulk electricity
- b) What are the symmetrical communication strategies used in stakeholder engagement by the Namibia’s bulk electricity supplier?

The chapter further explains the specific research methods used to analyse and interpret the data collected.

The research framework below depicts the key aspects of the research design and the process flow:

Figure 3-1: Research Framework



Adapted from Gray (2014) and O’Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) in Brown

3.2 Research Philosophy: Interpretivism

The philosophical approach underpinning this study is interpretivism, a form of qualitative methodology grounded in an epistemological approach. According to Brown (n.d.), the research process of collecting and interpreting data is influenced by how a researcher interprets ‘knowledge and truth’, which is what entails epistemology. Interpretivism, a branch within epistemology, seeks to gain in-depth and rich meanings from smaller numbers of research participants (Sol & Heng, 2022). The

approach was deemed ideal for this study due to its ability to engage research participants deeply and understand their world of experience in relation to the topic under study (Guba & Lincoln in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). With interpretivism, the researcher's insights about the topic under study are deemed important for better understanding and interpretation of the participants' experiences (Lim, 2025). Gray (2004) and O'Reilly (2009) (in Sol & Heng, 2022:92) explain that "knowledge of the world depends greatly on our interpretation or understanding of human actions, experiences, and environments". Thus, through the interviews with the participants, their way of thinking of the topic under study is considered and not the understanding of researcher.

3.3 Research Design: Case Study

A research design is the strategy or plan of the researcher to answer the research question through empirical data (Creswell, 2009). The strategy thus entails deciding on the research objectives and approach; whether primary or secondary research will be used; how research participants/samples are chosen; and how data will be collected and analysed. A research design, furthermore, spells out the research method to be applied, whether quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, and the method that will be used to analyse the empirical data that will ultimately answer the research question.

This study adopted a case study research design. Case studies are deemed appropriate for descriptive research, as they allow participants to provide detail and comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon under study. Lim (2025) further elaborates that the case study approach is ideal as it allows for deep exploration and situational analysis without the researcher's active participation in the study. To gain an in-depth understanding of the stakeholder engagement methods used by Namibia's bulk electricity supplier, the utility was selected as the case.

3.4 Methodology

3.4.1 Qualitative Approach: Qualitative

This study followed a qualitative research approach, through a case study, allowing for the comprehensive engagement of participants to understand their worldview in relation to the topic under study (Guba & Lincoln in Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26). Lim (2025) describes qualitative research methods as ideal when you are seeking a deeper understanding of complicated matters. The approach allows for the assessment of attitudes, behaviours, and the experiences of research participants (Dawson, 2002; Islam & Aldaihani, 2022), in contrast to quantitative research, which requires numerical data analysis and translations, which are not apt to describe human and societal experiences (Lim, 2025). The data collected through the interviews was interpreted based on the participants' real-life experiences of engaging stakeholders.

3.4.2 Sample and Choice of Participants

Ahmad, Alias, and Razak (2023) describe the population as the complete group being studied, and a sample as a sub-section thereof. The sub-section is used to represent the population. Highlighting the importance of the two concepts as being key in research, Ahmad et al. (2023) emphasise the need to ensure the careful selection of the sample, as it carries the important role of representing the population.

The population of this study were Windhoek-based employees of the power utility who engage with stakeholders. The study used purposive known-group sampling to select participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Tajik, Golzar and Noor (2024), describe purposive samples as essential and widely used in qualitative research. The participants were selected based on the researcher's knowledge and experience of their roles and thus knowing that they will be able to provide the information sought on the matter under study. Although participants of the study were interviewed individually, they represent the organisation and its practices.

The sample for the study was made up of personnel who engage with external stakeholders in their respective roles, representing the company. They included one

representative from the following key departments and executive roles: the executive team, procurement unit, debtors department, the corporate communication and marketing section, transmission and distribution customers departments, treasury and strategic finance for relationships with financiers and lenders, and the generation capital projects unit.

The participants made up a sample size of eight. In qualitative research, a small number of participants is acceptable as it allows for in-depth gathering of the information that is required (Babbie & Mouton, 2003), providing a window into the behaviour of the larger unit of analysis (Dawson, 2002).

The data collected from the participants was found to be sufficient to complete the research, given the similarities in the information collected, as such, it is believed that data saturation was achieved.

3.4.3 Data Collection methods – semi structured interviews

The study collected data through semi structured interviews to augment the literature review and to answer the research questions. Participants of the study were invited through email, which included a formal letter of invitation, explaining what the research was about and that it was strictly for academic purposes. The invitation also included a copy of the approval letter from the utility.

An interview guide (the interview guide is attached as Appendix A, on page 70) with semi structured questions was used to conduct the one-on-one interviews. The interview guide, which contained open-ended questions around how the utility engages stakeholders, accorded the interviewer the opportunity to engage the participants deeply and probe more where required. The interview guide included the five engagement approaches of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (namely, inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower), as well as questions on two-way symmetrical communication. The same questions were asked to all participants to ensure consistency (Dawson, 2002).

Interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants, their personal setting, which allowed for comfort and ease. The interviews lasted on average between 20 to 30 minutes. The researcher permitted participants to freely share their views and experiences in detail (Struwig & Stead, 2001), allowing for flexibility to collect detailed information where necessary. This conversation approach further allowed for probing participants in instances where their responses were vague or needed elaboration, and through that, garnering in-depth information on the topic of study (Dawson, 2002).

The interviews were recorded and the recordings transcribed, thereby providing data for analysis. Consent was sought to record participants during the one-on-one interviews, which were done with a smartphone.

3.4.4 Data Analysis

3.4.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Qualitative research data can be deep and very detailed, impressing on the researcher to take due care in the process of breaking down the information collected and interpreting it to identify codes and clear themes (Lim, 2025). For this study, thematic content analysis was used to process the primary text data from the interview recordings with participants. Thematic content analysis is described as an instrument for reducing, compressing, and grouping content (Henning et al., 2004). The method dictates that all the data collected be read thoroughly for an overall view and that common themes coming out of it be identified and noted. According to Henning et al. (2004), meaning cannot be found in a single line but rather in sentences or phrases.

Braun and Clarke (2006, in Lim, 2025) describe thematic analysis as following a six-step logical process to analyse data. The six-step approach entails the following steps: the researcher familiarising themselves with the data; generating initial codes; identification of themes; reviewing the themes and thereafter defining and naming them; and finally writing the report based on the themes (Lim, 2025). The process converts the raw data into findings aimed at answering the research question.

3.4.4.2 Familiarisation of Self with Data

The interviews with participants, which were recorded, were transcribed, providing the researcher with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the data beyond the interview process. The researcher further read through the data after transcribing, searching for patterns, in preparation for the process of coding.

3.4.4.3 Generating Initial Codes

The coding process is a crucial step in thematic analysis. The process entails breaking down data into meaningful and understandable units, comparing the different parts of the data to identify commonalities, and categorising and labelling common occurring words or phrases. Henning et al. (2004) point out that coding is not a straightforward exercise, and as such, a researcher is bound to change codes from time to time until they are satisfied that they are descriptive of the units of meaning from the data. Researchers are advised to be open to new categories emerging (Lim, 2025; Naeem, Ozuem, Howell & Ranfagni, 2023). During this process, the researcher highlighted prominent sentences and phrases from the primary data and labelled them for identification purposes.

3.4.4.4 Identifying Themes

Once all the data had been coded, predominant codes were identified and grouped into possible themes. Henning et al. (2004) note that using themes for coding is ideal for highlighting the representation of an idea, and especially one that is related to the research question (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). The grouped sentences and phrases from the transcript were populated in a table in Microsoft Word (Appendix B on page 72). Codes that did not fit in with the key themes and thus were not related to the research question were regarded as 'miscellaneous' (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.4.4.5 Reviewing Themes

In this step, possible themes as identified in the previous step were reviewed to confirm their relation to the coded and overall data. Those that were lacking were then re-examined and amended accordingly and classified correctly. At this stage, new

codes that might have been overlooked were identified, while those found not to relate to the research question were discarded (in the case of this study, placed under the theme 'miscellaneous' (Nowell et al., 2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2006, in Nowell et al., 2017), once all themes have been confirmed, they should align well and tell a story about the data.

3.4.4.6 Development of Themes

The fifth step focused on refining and naming the themes. According to Lim (2025:221), at this stage, it is important to link the themes to the relevant areas of the data and see how they connect to the "story" emerging from the overall data. Every theme is then analysed and reported on in detail, and how they relate to the research question. For this study, the identified themes were reported on in relation to the approaches of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.

3.4.4.7 Report Writing Based on Themes

This final step entailed analysing the data in line with the confirmed themes for the compilation of a comprehensive, concise, and logical report (Lim, 2025:221) and to answer the research question(s). According to Nowell et al. (2017), including quotes and extracts from the data in the report is crucial, as it aids in clarifying points interpreted by the researcher and gives authenticity to the report. Reference to the literature is also deemed essential for validating the findings, as well as sharing the report with research participants as part of member checking.

The results of the analysis of the data are presented and discussed in Chapter Four.

3.5 Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Research

According to Peirce (1995, in Mirza, Bellalem & Mirza, 2023), the aspect of bias, which entails the level at which the researcher's subjectivity can affect data and the findings of a study, cannot be detached from qualitative research. While the reliability and validity of results in quantitative research are ascertained through statistical criteria, qualitative research depends on trustworthiness to ascertain the reliability of findings

(Mirza et al., 2023). For this study, the strategies as outlined below, were employed to ensure the reliability of the results:

The researcher made sure that the information from participants was transcribed as recorded to reflect the experiences and perspectives of the participants on the topic under study. Furthermore, the researcher made sure to interpret the information and experiences of the participants appropriately, ensuring that the participants could relate to the findings of the study.

Member checking, also known as respondent validation, was applied to assess the accuracy of the data and to ensure that the study report carries reliable results. Member checking entails taking the final report or specific descriptions back to research participants for their confirmation on accuracy (Creswell, 2009; Lim, 2025). Member checking was carried out upon completion of the content analysis. The researcher further engaged peers as part of *peer debriefing* during the research process and after compiling the research findings, for an external perspective.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In research, ethics deals with the moral standards and principles that guide the entire process. This includes the conduct towards the research participants, the process of collecting data and the interpretation thereof, and the distribution of findings (Mirza et al., 2023). Lim (2025) emphasises ethical consideration as critical in qualitative research, given the research's often personal and interpretive nature, and the likelihood of researcher bias.

As the study is on the employer (case study) of the researcher, permission was sought to carry out the study (Appendix C on page 86). Also, given the fact that the researcher is familiar with the research participants as they are colleagues, to ensure “seriousness and adaptability” of the study, the researcher emphasised their neutral stance in the study and kept the engagements with the participants formal (Mirza et al., 2023:443). The researcher further committed to constant ‘check-ins’ with self throughout the

process, to ensure that their interpretation of the data is in line with those of the participants and that of the research philosophy (Lim, 2025).

Participants of the study were properly briefed about the purpose of the study, why they were identified to participate, and how they would be engaged. They were provided an 'Individual Consent for Research Participation' (Appendix D on page 87) form, seeking their permission to participate in the study by granting interviews. They were required to read and sign the document before participating in the interviews. In the spirit of upholding ethical principles, participants were not pressurised to partake in the study. They were accorded the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to participate or not and were informed that they could withdraw at any given time. Consent was sought to record participants during the one-on-one interviews, with a guarantee of confidentiality.

Participants are not identified by their real names and were assigned alternative identification (numbers) to guarantee anonymity and protect the information they provided. The data collected for the study is kept in a private folder on a computer and is password-protected.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the findings from the data collected from the research participants, which aimed to answer the research questions on the stakeholder engagement methods used by Namibia's bulk electricity supplier and to ascertain the symmetrical communication strategies the bulk supplier uses in engaging stakeholders. Participants of the study were chosen through purposive known-group sampling, constituting staff who engage with the utility's stakeholders. An interview guide, with open-ended questions, was used to engage the participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the data collected were analysed using thematic content analysis.

Objectives of this study are:

- 1) To evaluate the current stakeholder engagement methods of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier.
- 2) To explore the symmetrical communication strategies used in stakeholder engagement by Namibia's bulk electricity supplier.

Participants are referred to as Participant 1 - Participant 8 to protect their identity and uphold anonymity. In addition, participants are also not referred to as "he" or "her", as it might make identifying them easy.

The results are presented below.

4.2 Reporting on the Data

The study participants interviewed represent various operational areas of the power utility, including executive management, the procurement unit, the debtor's department, corporate communication and marketing, transmission supply business, distribution and rural electrification, treasury and strategic finance (managing relationships with financiers/lenders and investors), and the generation capital

projects unit. They engage with varied stakeholders, namely the shareholders, government ministries and agencies, the regulator, customers, financiers and investors, the public, the media, suppliers (services and goods), communities, Independent Power Producers (IPPs), and contractors. The stakeholders represent diverse interests across Namibia's social and economic landscape.

The open-ended questions posed to participants aimed to obtain data to address the research objectives. The questions covered stakeholder identification, the topics they engage stakeholders on, the engagement approaches they use, and whether those approaches are one-way or two-way. The participants were also asked whether they are satisfied with their engagement and communication efforts, and what media they offer their stakeholders to connect with them.

4.3 Approaches used to Engage with Stakeholders

Since the study aimed to determine the engagement approaches and the symmetrical communication strategies used by the bulk electricity supplier with its stakeholders, the assessments were informed by the theoretical concepts of stakeholder engagement and its approaches (for this study, the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is referenced) and by two-way symmetrical communication model. Stakeholder engagement is considered because it encourages recognition of the stakeholder voice on matters that concern and can affect them, and because of its attributes of inclusiveness and participatory engagement between stakeholders and the organisation (Hon & Grunig, 1999). The two-way symmetrical communication of Grunig and Hunt (in Steyn, 2000) is considered for its attributes of conversation and reciprocity between the organisation and stakeholders. Consequently, the approaches employed by the power utility were assessed on the attributes of the two theories, which are described as ideal for building and nurturing mutually beneficial relations between organisations and their stakeholders.

Engagement between organisations and their stakeholders takes on various forms. As outlined in Chapter Two, organisations use various communication and engagement approaches with their stakeholders. Participants confirmed the use of the varied

methods, which include one-way and two-way approaches. The approaches used for engagement also align with those of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, which are acceptable to assess the level of stakeholder engagement. The approaches are applied at different levels and paces, dependent on the reason or basis for communicating and engaging and vary from stakeholder to stakeholder. They are explained below, in relation to the research objectives.

4.4 Research Objective 1: To evaluate the current stakeholder engagement methods of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier.

4.4.1 IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation framework approaches - Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower

Inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower are part of the engaging approaches of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, all with varying levels. The approaches, apart from 'inform', are accommodating of the stakeholder, given their engaging characteristics. Because of their characteristics as outlined in the literature review, the approaches provide mutuality between an organisation and stakeholders (Grunig & Hunt, in Steyn, 2000).

According to the participants, the engagement methods they use with stakeholders include meetings, visits, participation in relevant forums, media briefings, and activations. These approaches allow for interaction between the utility and its stakeholders. Participant 1 shared that there is a stakeholder engagement plan in place, which guides the key issues to be addressed with respective stakeholders and the approaches to be used. The participants who engage with the shareholder and the regulator, for example, shared that in addition to communicating through letters and reports (reported as one-way communication later in the chapter), they also have meetings with these primary stakeholders.

Consult

The *consult* approach involves stakeholders by seeking their input on subject matters that are of interest or relevant to them. This is done through various engaging platforms. *Consult* is a step above informing and allows stakeholders to share their views on matters on the table for consideration, while granting the organisation the opportunity to tap into the knowledge of stakeholders (Tractivity; International Association for Public Participation). Participants of the study describe below how their engagement methods with stakeholders relate to this approach.

Participant 1 explained that, in addition to letters and reports as mentioned (elaborated on under one-way communication later in the chapter), the line ministries and regulator are also engaged through meetings, at which pertinent information is exchanged and matters of common interest are discussed. This shows that the one-way communication methods used for these stakeholders, as stated under the 'inform' approach, are followed up with two-way communication. It is important for the utility to engage the shareholder and the regulator in a consultative manner, because of their crucial roles in providing guidance, supervision and governance. The utility, as a public enterprise, operates under the oversight of relevant line ministries that are representing the shareholder, more so the Ministry of Industries, Mines and Energy (MIME). The MIME holds the authority to establish policy in the country's electricity supply industry. The regulator on the other hand, controls the electricity supply industry within which the utility operates. Consulting with these entities is thus indispensable.

Participant 4, who also engages with the shareholder and with financiers, shared that their approach with these stakeholders is mainly in-person and consultative. Engagements with the shareholder involve among others updates on the utility's financial performance and on funding plans for planned capital projects. As the shareholder, through the MIME, makes determinations on generation projects to be implemented by the utility and Independent Power Producers, they must be kept up to date on the progress of implementation of the projects. With funders, engagements

focus on projects updates, funding proposals and capital investment plans, among others. Apart from meetings, Participant 4 shared that financiers are also engaged at investor conferences, platforms which are frequented by prospective funders and investors, as they cover a wider but targeted audience.

Participant 3, who liaises with customers on electricity supply, shared that their engagement initiatives form part of their annual activity plan; thus, meetings with stakeholders, for example, are diarised on the calendar annually. This deliberate effort not only points to due consideration of the stakeholder, but also to an intention to nurture relations with them. Engagements are sometimes held virtually when meeting in person is not possible. The Participant explains how they go about it: *"We normally take a cocktail of expertise with us on these engagements...the customers have the opportunity to update us on their operations."* The participant further expounded on the consultative nature of their engagements. *"Say for instance, a customer is going through a difficult period, and they want to go onto care and maintenance, and they need to reduce their electricity and thus amend their power supply agreement, we will then guide them."* The approachability of the utility to guide the customers through their challenges, and the willingness to accommodate them suitably speaks to a commitment to cement relations.

On the contrary, Participant 2, working with community-based customers, indicated that although they considered it necessary to engage the group through meetings, they were later forced to relinquish the meetings they held with the stakeholder group, as it became challenging to manage due to the large numbers. *"We used to arrange community meetings, which is a big platform in terms of numbers, and so it was never easy, as everyone has something to say and sometimes on top of each other."* As a result, meetings for this category of stakeholders are now held with representatives of the respective communities to manage the process better. Although the intention to accommodate these big stakeholder groups was well meant, it is not always feasible to do so and thus requires the consideration of alternative options.

Expounding on the engagement methods for procurement processes, Participant 7 shared that for all bids, prospective bidders are invited to pre-bid meetings, at which details about the bids and the processes are explained. *“That is done face-to-face, and it is two-way because we present, and the bidders can ask questions for clarity.”* They explained that interaction continues after bids are submitted and evaluated, as bidders can seek clarifications on the outcome of the bids. The participant further elaborated on the engagements that exist between their office and that of relevant government agencies, describing them as interactive. *“...They always engage, and sometimes they will come up with a platform where everyone comes together to give their contributions. So there, the engagements are good.”*

Participant 7 also alluded to the existence of stakeholder engagement sessions between their office and those of relevant government agencies. As a public enterprise, the utility is required to adhere to the public procurement regulations as prescribed, which includes, among others, interaction with bidders.

The engagement methods and activities as outlined above by the participants, denote the *consult* approach, which is an active engagement approach that involves stakeholders by providing updates and seeking their input through feedback and suggestions. It is however important to note that the approach is not applied the same across all stakeholders. The level of application varies from stakeholder to stakeholder and is dependent on the subject matter at hand.

Involve and Collaborate

The *involve* approach allows stakeholders to be part of the decision-making process, by drawing them in as partners and granting them an opportunity to provide input and to influence the outcomes of matters on the table. At this level, strengthening trust, extending mutual respect, and shared responsibility are crucial between an organisation and its stakeholders. *Collaborate* on the other hand is defined as the apex level of stakeholder engagement and involves stakeholders with a keen interest and influence in projects or other. In this approach, stakeholders are part of decision-

making, with their contributions considered equally with that of everyone. Participants described how they apply these approaches as part of their engagement.

Participant 2, who forms part of rural electrification, shares that the implementation of projects under the programme entails an inclusive (involve) and collaborative approach. The rural electrification programme, which entails extending electricity infrastructure to remote rural areas, is crucial for improving the socio-economic well-being of affected communities. Accordingly, the utility works with all relevant stakeholders, namely, the shareholder represented by the line ministry, regional councils, and communities through their representatives, to identify areas to be electrified (NamPower, 2022). The collaboration also involves grant sponsors. The stakeholders are partners in the programme and are thus fully involved at the levels at which they should be, and so, project realisation is a shared responsibility. Participant 2 emphasised that stakeholder inputs are crucial and are valued. *"We discuss as partners and with equal power."* Open and honest communication is important in this approach (Tractivity). Stakeholders involved at the collaborative level, as in the case of the rural electrification programme, have "high levels of interest, commitment and influence" in a project (Tractivity). Liaison involves joint planning sessions, strategic dialogue, and collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

Engaging with communities as it pertains to the development of new projects also takes on a direct approach. Participant 5, who is involved with projects, shared that where projects are planned, meetings are held with communities who are in the locality. The participant elaborated: *"Sometimes we need to get some approvals for land usage, and sometimes because of statutory requirements from the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism"*. The meetings are used to share information and to accord communities an opportunity to ask questions and give input where necessary. Ezeh et al. (2024) emphasise that engaging stakeholders through platforms where they can not only ask questions but also provide input can help address concerns and enhance transparency. The meetings with the communities and relevant authorities, where projects are planned are crucial for the success of such projects. Describing the

approaches they use as involving and collaborative, Participant 5 further described how these are applied when working with contractors: “...*engagement with contractors, for example, during pre-bid meetings...these are collaborative. During early market engagements, we ask for their inputs, which, after reviewing, we incorporate into the bidding documents*”. This approach speaks to actively involving stakeholders with the intention of considering their expert opinions.

The approaches of consult, involve and collaborate as expounded on above are crucial for building and maintaining sound stakeholder relations. In instances of projects, for example, where stakeholders have different levels of influence, if they are not engaged as necessary, programmes like rural electrification or even newly planned projects can be affected. Again, it is important to note that the approaches are not applied the same across all stakeholders. The degree at which they are applied differs from stakeholder to stakeholder and is dependent on the matter at hand and the interest of the stakeholder.

Empower

The empower approach is enabling of the stakeholder, in that, the organisation implements what the stakeholder identifies. In the instance of the utility, this approach is observed in the funding and support extended to eligible initiatives through its foundation. Communities for example, identify initiatives they want to implement or areas they need support in, and request for assistance accordingly. The utility, through its foundation, considers the requests in line with its social investment policies and implement the initiatives that are approved.

These approaches, which speak to efficient stakeholder engagement, not only assist in building relationships with communities but also contribute to fostering trust and garnering support for projects. Communities, especially in an area earmarked for project development, have a level of power, i.e., legitimacy to influence and impact the success of a project. The need for them to be consulted and engaged can thus not be emphasised enough (Freeman, 2004).

The approaches employed by the participants, as outlined above, align with the 'consult', 'involve', 'collaborate' and to a limited extent 'empower' of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. This indicates that the participants employ inclusive approaches in their engagement with stakeholders. It is also evident that different approaches are used for the different stakeholder groups, depending on the issue being addressed.

4.5 Research Objective 1: To explore the symmetrical communication strategies used in stakeholder engagement by Namibia's bulk electricity supplier.

4.5.1 Communication models:

Inform

Communicating with stakeholders is crucial for business operations and the achievement of strategic objectives. It is not stakeholder engagement, but it is essential for the implementation of stakeholder engagement initiatives. The *inform* approach entails keeping stakeholders up to date on what they need to know, mostly as defined by the organisation. It signifies a one-way relationship, in which relevant stakeholders are kept informed through requesting information (passive) or the organisation doing so out of their own (active) (Kivits & Sawang, 2021). The one-way communication approach is used across stakeholders. Although the method lacks instant, in-person interaction with recipients of information, it is essential in organisational communication and relevant across different situations and stakeholders (Soni, n.d.).

Participants confirmed the use of multiple mediums and approaches of communication, as Participant 6 stated: "*...we use several communication methods depending on the message we want to communicate*". The one-way communication mediums used by the utility include letters, emails, website, telephone calls, surveys, quarterly reports, information trailers, social media, and advertorials. Information aimed at all, or at least the bulk, of stakeholders is shared through platforms such as

the website, appropriate social media, and print and electronic media. This includes information and material such as the annual procurement plan, which is targeted at suppliers and is shared on the website; tariff adjustment announcements, which are important to customers and are shared through the print media, on the website, relevant social media platforms and send by mail together with account statements; power outage notices relevant to customers, which are shared on social media platforms and also on radio at times; bursary adverts aimed at prospective students, shared through various mediums; and public campaigns, alerts, and vacancy adverts aimed at the public and job applicants and also shared through the various mediums as outlined above.

Others include communication with the media, especially through media releases and responses to queries, which are shared via email (except when media briefings are held). Accentuating the use of media releases and advertorials, Soni (n.d.) notes that they are necessary because they grant organisations control over the message they want to communicate, ensuring clarity and avoiding ambiguity. Participant 6 clarified, however, that the media is free to send follow-up questions for clarity, proof that one-way communication mediums are not always devoid of reversion. It is only that communication is delayed.

Information on matters such as project updates, regulatory issues, customer statements, and invoices, is communicated through official letters, which are emailed, sent through postal mail, or hand-delivered where necessary. Participant 3, who engages customers as a relationship official, explained that it is important to communicate crucial information, such as tariff adjustments or regulatory issues, through letters with relevant stakeholders. *"We will then use official letters, issued from the Managing Director's office, and we will email those letters to the customers"*. The issuing of letters from the highest office of the organisation signifies the importance of the communication. Although communication through letters is not a direct approach, the recipients of the information are free to revert with requests for more information or to provide inputs if they so wish, through the same means.

Similarly, Participant 8, who works with customer accounts, pointed out that there is not necessarily direct engagement with customers, other than sending their statements and invoices through email and postal mail. Any other information that is of interest to the customer is many a time also included in the mail or on the customer portal online. This one-way communication points to a relationship that is mainly transactional and is thus managed accordingly. Explaining that a customer is also a stakeholder, Smith (2017:44) emphasises that there is a difference between activities led by “customer relationship management staff and stakeholder engagement staff”. Stakeholder engagement staff are not involved with sales of products and services, he reminds but instead engage with stakeholders seeking support or an opinion on an aspect of interest to the customer. The power utility however has relationships beyond just transactions. These will be elaborated on under the two-way communication approaches later in this chapter.

Participant 7 from the procurement department shared that current relations with suppliers and prospective bidders are more one-way, and mostly through emails and on the website. Referencing the administration of the annual procurement plan for the utility, for example, they indicated that it is currently placed on the website, without any engagement. They opined that in-person engagements would be great and explained the benefit. “... *I would not only want to explain what we are going to procure in that given year, but also to explain the challenges of the procurement process*”. This, the participant noted, will, among others, help with deterring non-qualifying bidders from registering for pre-bid meetings when they do not meet the requirements.

The above findings from the participants on their use of the ‘inform’ approach, which is largely one-way communication, demonstrate that the utility mainly uses the approach to keep stakeholders informed. Although the approach does not contribute much towards fostering meaningful relationships (Grunig & Hunt, in Steyn, 2000), because it lacks interaction, it is essential for the purpose that it is intended for in the

respective instances. It is thus indispensable in the communication strategies of organisations (Soni, n.d.).

One-way communication has several advantages, which include the reach of large audiences at once and speedily, when a situation dictates. In the instance of the power utility, it is beneficial when communicating on matters that are aimed at a larger stakeholder group, such as on power outages and campaigns. One-way communication also saves time as it cuts out back-and-forth interaction between the organisation and the recipients of the message, when such is required. Another benefit is that of control over a message that needs to be communicated without being adjusted by third parties (Soni, n.d.).

4.5.2 Two-way Symmetrical Communication

Stakeholder theory emphasises the need for a mutual understanding between the organisation and stakeholders, interacting on issues of common interest. This emphasises discourse through a two-way symmetrical communication.

Two-way symmetrical communication is considered ideal for engaging stakeholders effectively, because of its attributes of inclusive conversation, dialogue and reciprocity between an organisation and its stakeholders. It is central to ongoing communication with stakeholders and so also the implementation of stakeholder engagement initiatives.

As reported earlier under the 'consult', 'involve', 'collaborate' and 'empower' approaches of the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation, participants confirmed the use of various approaches to engage with stakeholders. These include meetings, visits, in-person meetings, participating in various forums, consultative platforms, and media briefings among others. These platforms allow for conversation, dialogue, listening and collaboration among others, denoting interaction with stakeholders, and thus align with the principles of two-way symmetrical communication. It is also indicative of interaction taking place between the organisation and its stakeholders, which is reciprocal. Furthermore, Participant 1 shared that there is a stakeholder

engagement plan in place, which outlines communication methods, such as annual planned engagements. This points to engagements that allow for two-way communication with stakeholders.

4.6 Scope for Improving Engagement with Stakeholders

While the participants overall expressed satisfaction with the approaches they employ for engagement and their relationships with their respective stakeholders, a common consensus was observed among the participants to improve on current engagement efforts. This need for continuous improvement aligns with the sentiments of Jeffery (2009:8), who explains that the stakeholder engagement process is “iterative”, impressing on organisations to learn from their experiences, and for these to inform future planning and engagement initiatives.

Speaking on the need for improvement, Participant 1 underscored that the continued improvement of engagement efforts was non-negotiable, cautioning that complacency can affect relations: *“If we can implement our stakeholder engagement plan to the fullest, then we will be able to do a proper assessment of whether we have done enough or not”*. They however emphasised the need for increased resources, both human capital and financial, to support the implementation of the stakeholder engagement plan to the fullest and to proactively improve engagement efforts with stakeholders. Participant 3, who works with customers, shared the same view while cautioning against stagnancy: *“I am looking forward to other ways of communicating as well...we are open to advice on new ways of communicating and collaborating or how we can tweak what we currently have.”*

Participant 2 echoed the same sentiments about improving current engagement efforts and the need for additional resources to support such: *“I would like a budget to improve my human resources, to allow us to increase our engagements. I would like my people to go out at least once a year to our customers”*. They further shared that the topic of electricity tariffs especially, remains prominent among customers, who describe the tariffs as high. The participants pointed that their continued efforts to unbundle the tariff structure and to explain it simply, including explaining that the tariff is regulated and

applied as pronounced by the regulator, have not appeased customers. They remain adamant in their views: *“Their biggest complaint is always about the tariff and the money they believe we are making. This is, however, not the case. We go by the tariffs as granted by the Regulator.”*

The persistent criticism of tariffs could point to a lack of understanding of the tariff methodology or to a general lack of acceptance of tariffs as they are deemed high. The electricity supply industry is highly technical and complex. It is thus expected that some stakeholders will have difficulty understanding highly technical aspects of electricity generation, transmission, tariffs, system constraints and regulatory decisions, among other things. Nevertheless, it highlights the need to raise awareness of the tariff and other issues through straightforward, ongoing educational campaigns. This requires appropriately differentiating stakeholders and simplifying technical concepts for non-technical stakeholders to enable targeted dissemination of the information.

While expressing their contentment with the level of engagement with their stakeholders, Participant 4 also emphasised the need for the betterment of engagement efforts: *“I’m thinking, for example, when our financials are done and ready for release, it would be nice if we could invite our stakeholders to a function where we can present the results.”* This sentiment points to a desire to present the financials in person to relevant stakeholders, rather than simply uploading them to the website as part of the integrated annual report. This is particularly important for investors and lenders, as it will not only allow them to present on the organisation’s financial performance in person but also to network, discuss the financials, and, through that, forge and strengthen relations with this group of stakeholders.

Participant 6 expanded on more issues they feel require attention to improve stakeholder engagement efforts. They highlighted what they termed the need for “buy-in” from executive management, explaining that: *“Although we do implement the engagement initiatives that we are responsible for, buy-in and support from management (will)*

just puts on a validity stamp on the engagements". The view from Participant 6 is supported by Smith (2017), who describes stakeholder engagement as a "C-level activity" that must be managed at the most senior level of an organisation if it wishes to secure stakeholder support for key issues or objectives. Thus, the management thereof cannot be left solely in the hands of those assigned to carrying out the function.

Another issue Participant 6 raised is what they believe is a poor understanding of or ignorance about who is responsible for stakeholder engagement: *"We, with my colleagues, have noticed that sometimes when colleagues hear the word stakeholder, they think communications department. That is totally wrong. As long as you work with people, whether internally or externally, those are your stakeholders, and you are responsible for them."* Although stakeholder engagement is not the responsibility of any one person or department, not every staff member in the organisation is responsible for it. Organisations identify staff to carry out stakeholder engagement activities on their behalf and properly empower and equip them to execute their engagement plans. Based on Participant 6's remarks, there may be a need to educate key staff and departments on the concept of stakeholder engagement, who should be concerned with it, and how.

Participant 6 further emphasised the need for the implementation of initiatives in the stakeholder engagement plan to be executed as planned and according to set timelines. *"Although we do have a stakeholder engagement plan, we attend to it on an ad-hoc basis or when a need arises, which makes it more reactive"*. Grayson and Hodges (in Jeffery, 2009:15) emphasise that "stakeholder engagement should be managed as one would manage any other business function". They caution that poor management of engagement initiatives can undermine stakeholder relations, foster mistrust, and create unnecessary strain, affecting future relations with stakeholders.

Participant 7 added to the sentiments of the other participants, emphasising that engagements with suppliers can also be improved, pointing to the need for supplier education: *"For it to be effective, there needs to be face-to-face meetings with the prospective*

bidders where we will explain...these are the lists of things that we are going to procure for this financial year, so that they better understand what we have on the list and for them to have an opportunity to ask what we mean...". They were, however, fast to recognise that this approach might have major resource and logistical implications. In the absence of these face-to-face engagements, prospective bidders use emails and call the relevant department for inquiries. Feedback is, however, shared only with those who make inquiries, not with the broader stakeholder group, a factor Participant 7 is not happy with.

The remarks of Participant 6 summarise the analysis of the data collected aptly, when they opine that because stakeholders distinctly differ, they require different engagement approaches and communication mediums, dependent on the objectives to be met. Referring to the stakeholders of the utility overall, Participant 6 expressed the following: *"We have identified our stakeholders, we know exactly who they are, we know the role that they play within or in line with our industry, so we are clear on how to take care of them"*. Expressing confidence in the utility's engagement efforts, Participant 6 noted that there is also awareness of the technologies their stakeholders are using, that they are tapping into those mediums, and that they are keeping up with the times to better serve them. What is required, however, is to increase current engagement efforts at all levels and to allocate additional resources in tandem.

Most participants noted capacity constraints, such as limited human resources and time constraints, which they said force them to prioritise operational matters over stakeholder engagement. A utility environment, particularly on the technical side of its operations, is typically characterised by operational demands such as maintenance schedules, responding to power outages, load management, and meeting project deadlines, to name a few. These urgent operational requirements are bound to push stakeholder engagement in the background, even when the staff have the capabilities. This points to the need to review the practice of every department engaging stakeholders independently, a practice that lacks cohesion. A coordinated approach to

stakeholder management, with a formal team to implement the utility's stakeholder engagement plan, would be ideal.

The analysis presented above illustrates the various efforts participants make to engage the power utility's stakeholders. It is evident that different approaches are used across stakeholders and that they change over time, depending on the situation. The approaches used, especially in two-way communication and engagement, align with the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. This indicates that engagement with stakeholders is conducted in line with the principles of the stakeholder engagement concept.

This chapter sought to answer the research questions “what engagement methods does the bulk electricity supplier employ with its stakeholders?” and “how do the engagement methods used relate to the principles of stakeholder engagement, including two-way symmetrical communication?” Data were sourced through interviews with participants. Findings from the interviews indicate that participants use various methods to communicate with and engage stakeholders on behalf of the utility. The methods include one-way communication approaches, primarily aimed at informing the varied stakeholders of the power utility about issues relevant to them. The two-way communication approaches used embody the essence of stakeholder engagement. Overall, the participants, while confirming that they are happy with the engagement approaches they currently use and their relations with stakeholders, all spoke to the need for greater efforts to engage stakeholders.

4.7 Synthesis of Findings and Literature

The findings reveal a multi-layered and partly fragmented engagement environment within the utility. While a variety of one-way and two-way communication approaches are in use, their application differs significantly across departments, resulting in inconsistent engagement experiences for stakeholders. This pattern aligns with the literature suggesting that organisations may value stakeholder engagement

conceptually but lack integrated systems to operationalise it consistently (Jeffery, 2009; Kujala et al., 2022).

A dominant theme emerging across the interviews is the strong reliance on the “inform” and “consult” approaches. These approaches enable the utility to disseminate operational information and gather input where necessary, aligning with the lower to mid-levels of the IAP2 Spectrum. However, the more participatory approaches (involve and collaborate) are applied selectively and largely confined to technical or strategic stakeholder groups, such as Independent Power Producers (IPPs), lenders, and large customers. This indicates that two-way symmetrical engagement is present but not yet embedded as a systemic organisational practice.

Another key finding is that engagement activities are largely decentralised, with each business unit managing its own relationships and deciding independently when and how to engage. This decentralisation contributes to uneven engagement patterns, missed learning opportunities across the organisation, and the perception among some stakeholders that engagement is irregular or insufficient, concerns also echoed in previous stakeholder perception surveys.

Although the organisation demonstrates many attributes associated with two-way symmetrical communication: dialogue, listening, opportunities for feedback, and joint problem-solving, the absence of a coordinated, organisation-wide approach limits the effectiveness of these efforts. Literature emphasises that stakeholder engagement is most successful when supported by formal structures, strategic direction, and senior-level commitment (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Smith, 2017).

Overall, the findings indicate that the utility has a strong foundation in place, applies recognised engagement approaches, and fosters positive interactions with several stakeholder groups. However, to fully realise the benefits of stakeholder engagement and strengthen relationships, a more integrated, strategic, and coordinated approach is required.

In Chapter Five, a summary of the findings, recommendations, and the conclusion is presented.

CHAPTER 5: CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key findings of the study, presents recommendations to strengthen stakeholder engagement at Namibia's bulk electricity supplier, and outlines the limitations of the study together with suggestions for future research. No new analysis or interpretation is introduced. Instead, this chapter consolidates the insights derived from the research findings presented as discussed in Chapter 4 and provides a concluding reflection on the study's contributions.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

This qualitative study examined the engagement methods used by Namibia's bulk electricity supplier. The findings reveal that, while the utility applies several recognised engagement approaches, the effectiveness and consistency of these practices vary across stakeholder groups and departments. The key findings are summarised under the following themes:

5.2.1 Use of Multiple Engagement Approaches

The study found that the utility employs a variety of engagement approaches consistent with the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation. These approaches include:

- Informing, largely through letters, notices, the website, media releases, reports, and social media platforms;
- Consulting, through meetings, feedback channels, and written communication; and
- Involving, particularly in technical or project-based engagements.

Limited evidence of collaboration was observed, mainly with strategic stakeholders such as financiers and Independent Power Producers (IPPs). The use of the empower

approach was minimal, as expected, given the regulatory and operational environment in which the utility operates.

Overall, these approaches demonstrate that the organisation uses both one-way and two-way communication methods depending on the nature of the engagement and the stakeholder group involved.

5.2.2 Understanding and Planning for Stakeholder Engagement

Participants in the study demonstrated a sound understanding of stakeholder engagement and its importance in fostering constructive and mutually beneficial relationships. The findings also indicate that stakeholder engagement activities are planned annually and that the utility has a stakeholder engagement plan in place. This planning framework provides some structure for engagement activities; however, it does not fully address the inconsistencies in implementation observed across departments.

5.2.3 One-way and Two-Way Communication Practices

The findings show that the utility makes extensive use of one-way communication, particularly the inform approach, which is used to communicate operational updates, tariff changes, project developments, and other essential information. Although one-way communication does not facilitate participation or mutual dialogue, it remains an important organisational communication function.

Two-way communication practices reflecting the consult, involve, and collaborate approaches are used to varying degrees. These practices allow stakeholders to participate more actively in discussions and contribute meaningfully to decisions that affect them. Participants noted that two-way approaches are more commonly used with stakeholders who have greater influence or interest in the organisation's operations.

5.2.4 Alignment with the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

The utility's engagement methods align most closely with the first three levels of the IAP2 Spectrum: inform, consult, and involve. While the organisation makes efforts to solicit stakeholder input and ensure participation in selected areas, deeper participatory approaches such as collaborate and empower are not consistently applied across the stakeholder spectrum.

The organisation's partial alignment with the upper levels of the IAP2 Spectrum suggests the need for greater emphasis on participatory engagement and structured mechanisms for ongoing stakeholder involvement.

5.2.5 Decentralised Engagement Practices

One of the central findings of the study is that engagement activities are largely decentralised. Individual departments initiate and manage their own engagements, leading to variations in frequency, method, and follow-through. This decentralised model creates inconsistencies in stakeholder experiences and limits opportunities for cross-departmental learning and alignment.

Some participants indicated that, although a stakeholder engagement plan exists, it is not consistently applied or understood across the organisation. Others were not aware of a formal plan, suggesting gaps in internal communication and coordination.

5.2.6 Stakeholder Expectations and Identified Gaps

Data from the interviews and previous stakeholder perception surveys indicate that stakeholders expect more structured, frequent, and transparent engagement. Stakeholders expressed the need for:

- more consistent and predictable engagement;
- greater transparency on key issues, particularly tariffs and security of supply;
- more in-person engagement opportunities; and
- more opportunities for participation in discussions affecting their interests.

The findings reveal a gap between the utility's current practices and stakeholder expectations, highlighting the need for strengthened engagement strategies.

5.2.7 Absence of a Formal Stakeholder Engagement Framework

Participants highlighted the absence of a coordinated, organisation-wide stakeholder engagement framework. Key gaps include:

- the absence of a formally designated stakeholder engagement team;
- the lack of standardised engagement processes and documentation tools;
- limited formal mechanisms for feedback management; and
- inconsistent implementation of engagement strategies across departments.

These gaps limit the organisation's ability to implement long-term, strategic, and relationship-based engagement with stakeholders.

5.3 Recommendations

In response to the key findings summarised above, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen stakeholder engagement at the utility.

5.3.1 Establish a Centralised Stakeholder Engagement Structure

The utility should establish a formally designated stakeholder engagement unit or cross-functional team, headed by a senior staff member. This team would coordinate engagement activities across departments, provide strategic oversight, and standardise tools and processes to ensure coherence and consistency.

5.3.2 Develop an Organisation-Wide Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

A comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy should be developed, outlining:

- stakeholder mapping and prioritisation;
- engagement objectives for key stakeholder categories;

- preferred engagement approaches and frequencies;
- internal roles and responsibilities; and
- clear mechanisms for capturing, tracking, and responding to stakeholder feedback.

This strategy would guide a consistent, coordinated, and purposeful approach to engagement.

5.3.3 Strengthen Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Practices

To enhance participatory engagement, the organisation should:

- host annual stakeholder forums, dialogues, or roundtables;
- increase in-person and hybrid engagement opportunities;
- strengthen mechanisms for demonstrating how stakeholder input informs decisions.

These efforts would support trust, transparency, and collaboration between the utility and its stakeholders.

5.3.4 Improve Documentation, Knowledge Sharing, and Feedback Loops

The organisation should implement standardised tools for recording engagement activities, tracking stakeholder issues, and monitoring trends. A centralised database or reporting system would enhance organisational memory and support evidence-based decision-making.

5.3.5 Build Internal Capacity for Stakeholder Engagement

Training should be provided for staff who interact with stakeholders on:

- effective communication and active listening;
- negotiation and conflict management;
- engagement planning and implementation;
- understanding the stakeholder map and engagement strategy.

Strengthened capacity will help ensure consistent engagement across stakeholder groups.

5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on the engagement practices of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier and drew on the perspectives of personnel responsible for carrying out stakeholder engagement. As such, the findings reflect internal perspectives only. Engaging external stakeholders (such as regulators, customers, financiers, and IPPs) in future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of engagement effectiveness.

The sample size consisted of eight participants. Although sufficient for qualitative research, a larger sample may yield broader insights. Future studies may also consider:

- comparative research with other utilities or redistributors in Namibia;
- regional studies exploring engagement practices across the Southern African energy sector;
- the role of digital platforms in modern stakeholder engagement.

5.5 Conclusion

This study set out to assess the engagement practices of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier and examine how these methods align with the principles of stakeholder engagement. The findings show that, while the utility employs multiple recognised engagement approaches, these practices are applied inconsistently due to decentralisation, limited coordination, and the absence of an organisation-wide engagement framework.

The study contributes valuable insights into stakeholder engagement within Namibia's electricity supply industry, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. The recommendations provided aim to support the organisation in developing a more strategic, coordinated, and participatory approach to stakeholder

engagement; one that promotes mutual understanding, strengthens relationships, and enhances organisational credibility.

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for building trust, supporting informed decision-making, and ensuring sustainable organisational performance. For stakeholder engagement to be successful, it must be treated as a strategic organisational priority, championed by leadership, and supported through coordinated processes that facilitate meaningful participation and ongoing dialogue.

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APPENDIX A

Research topic:

An assessment of the stakeholder engagement practices of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier

Discussion Guide

Introduction:

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to partake in this study. Your making time for the interview is appreciated.

I am a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in South Africa, pursuing a Master's Degree in Public Relations and Communication Management. To complete the degree, I'm required to submit a mini-dissertation on any relevant topic. I have chosen to "assess the stakeholder engagement approaches of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier" for building and maintaining relationships. The request to interview you is because you engage with stakeholders of the utility.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers. My aim is to understand your perspective and opinion.

Also, please note that the interview is confidential; thus, your identity will be kept anonymous.

Do you mind if I record the interview for my own analysis later?

Opening questions:

- Which stakeholder group/s do you engage with on behalf of the utility?
- Do you have an indication of the number of stakeholders you engage with?

Questions based on the stakeholder engagement approaches

(Inform; Consult; Involve; Collaborate; Empower)

1. How do you engage with your stakeholders? What communication channels do you use (for example email, social media, newsletters, the website, media releases/media briefings, in-person meetings? Other?
2. What do you communicate about?
3. How would you describe your current communication or engagement efforts with the stakeholders? Are they informative; consultative; involving; collaborative? Please elaborate.
4. How do you view communication with stakeholders - is it a one-way or two-way process? Please provide examples.
5. Are you happy with your current communication or engagement efforts? Please elaborate.

6. Are there platforms/forums through which your stakeholders engage with you/where they can voice their views?
7. How would you describe your/your department's current relationship with your stakeholders?

Thank you.

APPENDIX B

CODING

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>1. How do you engage with your stakeholders? What communication channels do you use (for example email, social media, newsletters, the website, media releases/media briefings, in-person meetings? Other?</p> <p>Participant 1 I or rather we engage with them through written responses that are compiled from within our business unit. There are some instances, although few, where one must answer telephonically. Otherwise, we also engage the public through awareness campaigns. The Regulator we engage through meetings at which we exchange information, or at which we clarify to each other on matters on matters on the table. On the Customers side is more to do with customer complaints, or customer feedback...turnaround times on applications. We have meetings with them too. The Shareholder we engage through the AGM. And the line ministry as an external stakeholder we engage through meetings and reports on updates to specific activities.</p> <p>Participant 2 Distribution customers: We visit them after every second or third year. We make appointments, we engage them... For the farmers and factories we group them. We also communicate through email and through their statements. Community: We arrange for community meetings, which is a big platform in terms of numbers and so it is never easy as everyone has something to say and sometimes on top of each other. So we rather prefer to work with their representatives, for example a councillor. Some communities have WhatsApp groups on which we are represented through our regional personnel and communicate on there on various matters, including power outages.</p> <p>Participant 3 We have different ways of engaging and it depends on the reason for communicating. Another would be regulatory information... We will then use official letters, issued from the Managing Director’s office and we will email those letters to the customer. Another mode of communicating to the customer is</p>	<p>Varied mediums of communication and engagement used for the different customers</p>

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>when we have courtesy engagements. It will either be a physical engagement where we go to the customer... and they also enhance on our communication that we have send out by email, to give that clarification... what do you call it? To foster the relationship and to explain to the customer and address any of their questions if they have anything related to that formal one-way communication. We will then share any other information with the customer. Say for instance if we are looking at introducing pre-payment metering system, and we accord the customer to then ask questions. We normally take a cocktail of expertise with us on these engagements. And in these engagements, the customer also has the opportunity to update us on any of their operations and often we can guide them through the process if it relates to electricity or to their contract. Or also when there is a change in ownership, we will guide them. Now that very same physical engagement sometimes is also virtual. We will then schedule a Teams Meeting. We also</p> <p>where there is a need from the customer, they engage with us via email. Say for instance they want to upgrade or they have a new project which they want to bring online, they will then come to us enquiring about certain information which we will share electronically. We will also schedule an inception meeting where the customer then share with us their requirements or where they want to go with their project etc. So its exchange of information and clarifying. Telephone conversations are another medium...we often get customers that phones looking for information or following up on something. The Transmission Customer Survey which we conduct every year is also another communication channel which we use to engage with our stakeholders.</p> <p>Participant 4</p> <p>With the government it is more face-to-face engagements where we would present them with our funding plans - with government I am referring the Ministry of Industries, Mines and Energy and then Ministry of Finance. With the line Ministry it is more on the investments whereas with MoF it is the funding aspects. We also use a combination of communication channels, for example through emails, letters, the website in addition to the in-person approach.</p> <p>Participant 5</p>	

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>With the ministries it is mostly formal communication so it is letters and meetings. With our line ministry there is reporting, so we have quarterly reports. With the communities we must engage them in person, so we have community meetings where a project is identified, sometimes to get some approvals for land usage and sometimes because of statutory requirements from the ministry of environment, forestry and tourism. Other engagements are also when the projects are in execution stage... the efforts we are making now like having ground-breaking ceremonies for the projects, information trailers where there is a new project, and communication on the social platforms. All this is to keep the Namibian public informed, some of this we do through the media. We also have media briefings on the projects and project updates in various publications.</p> <p>Participant 6</p> <p>We use several communication methods depending on the message we want to communicate about. With the public for example we mostly use the social media platforms to engage, print, we electronic media (television and radio), trailers, activations; information brochures, posters, billboards. For beneficiaries, we communicate to them in person, over the phone, through email and also through letters. When we engage in person it is mostly when we are handing over the material that we are sponsoring. In terms of players in the ESI, meetings, corporate events and through letters. With suppliers it is mostly through email and meetings – meetings especially when we have to brief them on something specific for events or products.</p> <p>Participant 7</p> <p>Let's start with the suppliers. Because the engagement that we do with them is mostly paper based. It's like for example we will start with our annual procurement plan, we will put it on our website, we will put it on the Procurement Policy Unit website and that is where it ends. But in terms of the procurement processes, apart from now explaining especially what we are planning to do, once we start a procurement process, again although it is document-based, for every bid we invite the prospective bidders to pre-bid meetings where we explain what the specific procurement is all about and what is required. That is done face-to-face and it is two-way because we present and the bidders can ask</p>	

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>questions for clarity. Ministry of Finance (for all procurement units): How we engage with them is through letters and in person interactions. In terms of reporting, we report on a quarterly basis to the Procurement Unit on what procurement we have done, how many and how did we do it.</p> <p>Participant 8</p> <p>We do not really have direct engagements with customers. We communicate by sending out customer statements and invoices through email and through the post. When a customer is in arrears, we will on their statement indicate that and include a message prompting them to bring their accounts up to date. This is so because what we communicate, namely the statements, is confidential and it is not something that we can communicate on for example social media platforms or the traditional media. Every month we send letters, they are referred to as demand letters, to the customers that are in arrears. We also have customer engagement meetings with those who are in arrears. These engagements are arranged or managed by the relevant business units who serve the customers and they would then invite us when they go out to see their customers.</p>	
<p>2. What do you communicate about?</p> <p>Participant 1</p> <p>On the Customers side is more to do with customer complaints, or customer feedback...turnaround times on applications. For businesses, local and international is mostly advisory or rather information sharing. With the media it is of course to maintain the relations, by keeping them informed and to also attend to any questions they have and provide clarifications. When we empower the media, they assist us with informing the broader public... .. sometimes they ask questions from where they sit, but the responses must be such that it informs and creates an informative basis for them to convey the message. For example, from my office it is on rural electrification and distribution, on rural electrification we provide updates on progress made in the implementation of projects and we assist the ministry with access to electricity.</p> <p>Participant 2</p>	<p>Information sharing, project updates, and customer service</p>

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>We make appointments, we engage them, we inform them if there have been any changes on our end internally that they need to know about; we ask them if they have any issues they would like to discuss. The community meetings are not set. We mostly go out to them when there is a problem or when we have a budget to extend electricity supply. So we communicate before the tariffs are approved, indicating that we have applied for a tariff increase and that when it is approved it will be applied in July. We also communicate when we connect new customers as we have to put off the power in order to connect the new customer. It's called planned outages. On Rural electrification, we will communicate to the relevant stakeholders once our budget for rural electrification is approved. We communicate on the approved budget amount and ask for a list of the areas that they need to be electrified. We then go out to assess the identified areas, look at the cost each will need vs the budget we have and we prioritise accordingly.</p> <p>Participant 3</p> <p>One way is when we provide the customer with information, for instance if we have a revised tariff from the Regulator, so it would be tariff notifications.</p> <p>Participant 4</p> <p>Our engagements are focused on seeking funding support in the form of guarantees, whereas with the line ministry we would seek approval of projects, through the approved Namibia Integrated Resource Plan. With the ministry of Finance, we would discuss the company's capital budget, the funding plan as well as the long-term financial viability of the company.</p> <p>Participant 6</p> <p>With the public, we engage and communicate with them on concerns that relate to them with regards to our industry. We for example communicate to them on energy saving, energy safety and power outages as these are issues that concern them. With the ESI, we communicate on issues of common interest, for example the issue of safety and then the games that we hold annually as the industry. With the sponsorship beneficiaries we communicate by responding to their requests, indicating whether the response has been granted or not, and when granted, we will communicate about the handing over.</p>	

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>Participant 7</p> <p>For the suppliers, it is to inform them about our procurement plan for the year. With the Ministry of Finance, particularly the procurement units, for example, if we have an issue that we need clarity on or we want to ask for an exemption then we arrange for face-to-face meetings. Also, when they are revising the law, the regulations, they always engage and sometimes they will come up with a platform where everyone comes together to give their contributions. After the submission of bids and after we have evaluated, we immediately inform them on the outcome, for example to whom the bid was awarded, why other bidders were not successful. That also involves interaction as bidders can ask for clarifications and so on. So, in essence, this covers for the lack of engagement on the procurement plan.</p> <p>Participant 8</p> <p>We discuss the outstanding accounts. They then enter into repayment arrangements sometimes.</p>	
<p>3. How would you describe your current communication or engagement efforts with the stakeholders? Are they informative; consultative; involving; collaborative? Please elaborate.</p> <p>Participant 1</p> <p>The engagements are sometimes positive, informative, consultative and sometimes they also have an element of tension because of the expectation at the beginning of a meeting until you find common ground towards the closure of the meeting. Especially when they relate to customer complaints or customer feedback then there might be a bit of a different view but then you have to move towards a common ground towards the end of the meeting.</p> <p>Participant 2</p> <p>On Rural electrification, I would say our engagements are going well. They are collaborative because we work together with the respective stakeholders to implement the rural electrification projects. For Rural electrification we have engagements where we discuss with equal power. We discuss as partners and we advise where necessary. The stakeholder inputs play a major role and so they are valued. But on the distribution side, although we are engaging, there is a need for us to improve on our current efforts. With the Distribution customers our engagements can be more informative. We also need to</p>	<p>Stakeholder communication and engagement</p>

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>look into ways to entice our Distribution customers to attend the meetings that we arrange. We need innovative ideas on how to do that.</p> <p>Participant 3</p> <p>I can tick-off all them. Our engagements are informative, it is consultative, we involve the customer, its collaborative, we elaborate on issues, we really listen to the customers and we provide them with the information they need. We also have the facet of empowerment. For instance, where they can increase or decrease their notified maximum demand based on their operations. That has an impact on their monthly bill. The same with the pre-payment metering system where they can opt to go onto the system if they so wish. This helps to put the cashflow management into their hands.</p> <p>Participant 4</p> <p>Our engagements are two-fold. For government, it is to inform them out our plans and number two, to see where we can collaborate, for instance where they can support us for projects. With the private sector, it is also two-fold. We inform them about the planned projects including the financial needs and if there is any appetite from them then the question from us is what are the conditions. The same with private investors also, though public private partnerships, we also aim to collaborate.</p> <p>Participant 5</p> <p>For the ministries it is informative. They are happy with the regular progress reports that we give. With the public I would say we have not been doing well previously but we improved since this year, communicating on the status of the projects, the progress we have made and so forth. The engagement with the communities, the turnout is low sometimes, maybe we have to relook how we invite them and how we should follow up once we have sent out the invitations. For some projects, like for example our biomass project, our engagements are involving and collaborative. So also with our contractors for example during pre-bid meetings these are collaborative. During early market engagements we ask for their inputs which after reviewing we incorporate in the bidding documents.</p> <p>Participant 6</p>	

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>With the public, depending on the medium that we are using, it is mostly informative because we want to create awareness around those issues that I indicated previously. The ESI is more consultative and collaborative because in most cases we share ideas on our experiences and what is happening on the ground so that we can discuss and provide each other with solutions. With sponsorship is more involving because...we don't necessarily expect the beneficiaries to do anything apart from providing the required or necessary information and there after we liaise in terms of when and how to hand over the sponsored items. With suppliers, it is involving and consultative because of the aspect of making sure that we give them the correct specifications of what we need. In some instances, it also consultative because we reach out to them as they are experts in their fields.</p> <p>Participant 7</p> <p>With the ministry I will say engagement is good, our engagements are interactive. In addition, for complex bids, we have what we call stakeholder engagement sessions.</p> <p>Participant 8</p> <p>They are mostly informative, through the letters; consultative the meetings and involving when we reach out to government and the regulator. We send the shareholder and regulator letters every month now to inform them about the status of the accounts.</p>	
<p>4. How do you view communication with stakeholders - is it a one-way or two-way process? Please provide examples.</p> <p>Participant 1</p> <p>I touched on this under question one and would just like to add that as much as we have good relations with both the Regulator and Shareholder, we don't have the frequency that creates the sort of, how can I put it... So that whenever they are uncertain about something, before they pronounce themselves to check with us or vice versa, which is something we can improve upon so that there is that proactivity element must come in, in the whole process.</p> <p>Participant 2</p>	<p>Engaging stakeholders through one and two-way communication approaches</p>

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>Electrification and Distribution customers, the communication is two-way.</p> <p>Participant 4 It's a two-way process in the sense that financiers for example wants a return on their investments as such they will engage and wants to be updated on future projects. On the other hand, NamPower needs financing and have to engage and understand the needs of the financiers.</p> <p>Participant 5 It is mostly two-way communication with most of the stakeholders.</p> <p>Participant 6 It is a bit of both depending on the stakeholder, like for example with the public, we do more one-way communication because of the type of mediums that we use and the fact that what we communicate is to drive information. However, if the public wants to engage, there are also platforms that they can use. Our engagements are continues because the concerns that we have for example safety, is not something that just starts and ends, it is always there. So even if communication is not at the same frequency, it is continues. With some of the stakeholders, for example ESI and suppliers, we are consultative and which is a two-way approach that allows us and the stakeholders to liaise. These engagements are seasonal because they happen around the time that we plan for the annual games and stakeholder forums. With suppliers we deal with signage companies, brand agencies, printing companies, events management companies, just to mention some and to give an idea on why I say the engagements are consultative. We engage with suppliers as and when the need arises.</p> <p>Participant 7 As explained previously, it is dependent on the matter at hand and on the stakeholder.</p> <p>Participant 8 Mostly one-way.</p>	
<p>5. Are you happy with your current communication or engagement efforts? Please elaborate.</p> <p>Participant 1</p>	<p>Openness and consideration to</p>

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>I would say I am satisfied with what we are doing currently, but I know there is still a lot more that we can do. If we can implement our Stakeholder Engagement Plan to the fullest then we will be able to do an assessment of whether we have done enough or not. At this stage, we are not doing nothing, we are doing something. Also, our visibility might not come through but we are doing a lot as a company. But we must not be complacent...maybe in some areas maybe we are doing well and others might be a bit wanting. There is a lot that we can do, a lot of proactivity that we can introduce into our communication with objectives of what we need to do. I mean that is why the company has a Stakeholder Engagement Plan and if we can put some effort and resources into it to be able to ensure that we can complete and sort of look at the outputs of those engagements, I'm sure we will be able to get a lot of mileage by proactively engaging with our stakeholders.</p> <p>Participant 2</p> <p>They are easy to visit and work with because they are a number of customers but they have representatives so you are working with a few people at a time, unlike when you go to the small towns where you provide electricity directly to the communities. Sometimes they also invite us to their farmers unions meetings. The engagements are there, however there is room for improvement. I would like a budget to improve my human resources to allow us to increase our engagements. I would like my people to go out at least once a year to our customers.</p> <p>Participant 3</p> <p>We look at a minimum of one engagement per annum with our customers, but it doesn't stay with one. That is the customer engagement from the Supply Business side where we touch base. But there are always more engagements. It depends on the needs of the customer as well as the needs of NamPower. The current ways of engagement serves a purpose to share information and so hear from the customer and to build relations. But we should not get stagnant, we need to evolve. I am looking forward to other ways of communicating as well and so we are open to advice on new ways of communicating and collaborating or how we can tweak what we currently have. Like there is a need for a digitalised system,</p>	<p>improving current communication and engagement efforts</p>

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>specifically where customers can apply for power supply. With that information flow or availability of information... whereas now you need to follow up where an application is, whether it is internal or whether it is with the customer.</p> <p>Participant 4</p> <p>Yes, quite happy because of the continuous engagements with all the relevant stakeholders which removes second guessing that could result in wrong perceptions. We engage the government mostly once a year and as the need arises. But with lenders its quarterly. However, there is always room for improvement. I'm thinking for example, when our financials are done and ready for release, it would be nice if we can invite our stakeholders to a function where we can present the results.</p> <p>Participant 5</p> <p>Yes. But like I have explained, we can improve on our engagements with the public.</p> <p>Participant 6</p> <p>Overall, we are happy with our engagements. Of course, we do have an understanding that different stakeholders require different ways or modes of communication and what to communicate. So, I think all in all we have mastered that. We have identified our stakeholders, we know exactly who they are, we know they role that they play within or in line with our industry, so we are clear on how to take care of them. I really feel so far we are doing well. Also, we are aware of what technologies people are into now and we are tapping into those mediums and keeping up with the times on how better to serve our stakeholders. I have however noted some areas of improvement... One is buy-in from top management for us in trying to execute the stakeholder engagement plan. Although we do implement the engagement initiatives that we are responsible for, buy-in and support from management just puts on a validity stamp on the engagements. I also see the need for all departments internally to prioritise stakeholder engagement. I have realised that sometimes when colleagues hear the word stakeholder, they think communications department. That is totally wrong. As long as you work with people, whether internally or externally, those are your stakeholders and you are responsible for them. Also, although we do have a stakeholder engagement plan, we attend to it on an ad-hoc basis or when a need</p>	

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>arises which make is more reactive. We need to relook our plan and execute the initiatives we have on it according to time lines.</p> <p>Participant 7</p> <p>I must admit that in terms of engagement, it is very low. Out of ten for example I can easily give us under five. Why? Because the engagement that we do with them is mostly paper based. It's like for example we will start with our annual procurement plan, we will put it on our website, we will put it on the Procurement Policy Unit website and that is where it ends. So that is why I say it is low. Also, we need to ask ourselves whether it is practical because it involves costs in terms of resources and travelling, especially for the annual procurement plan. For it to be effective, there needs to be face to face meetings with the bidders where we will explain these are the list of things that we are going to procure for this financial year. So that they better understand what we have on the list and for them to have an opportunity to ask what do we mean by this and that. In the absence of the face-to-face engagements, they can however contact us via email or over the phone. However, you are then giving feedback only to the person that inquired and not everyone. If we could have a platform to engage with all the prospective suppliers, that will be the best. But like I said it involves funds and resources. Also, suppliers are all over the country and not in one place. There is always room for improvement, especially in terms of the suppliers. We can call that suppliers education because in that, I would not only want to explain what we are going to procure in that given year but also to explain the challenges of the procurement process. Because then some of them will not register to come for the pre-bid meeting when they know they do not meet the requirements based on the Procurement Act.</p> <p>Participant 8</p> <p>The statements and invoices go out every month.</p>	
<p>6. Are there platforms/forums through which your stakeholders engage with you/where they can voice their views?</p> <p>Participant 1</p>	<p>Availability of varied avenues through which</p>

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>These include emails, telephone calls and sometimes some will come in person, although that is rare. Another platform is that of the External Stakeholder Perception Survey through which we get to know what the customers feel and experience about how we are serving them. The survey covers different areas of the business.</p> <p>Participants 2 Distribution customers communicate to us through email; they call; they go to our regional offices countrywide.</p> <p>Participant 4 Yes, we also take advantage of platforms such Investor Conferences where most of our relevant stakeholders also attend and through that we cover a wider audience. That has really worked well. We have done this in Cape Town through Cerus Capital and now it is annual in Swakopmund.</p> <p>Participant 5 Yes, like I explained, our stakeholders are open to email or call us. Also, in the information we have on the website, we have for example a grievance form that stakeholders can complete and send back if they have any problems.</p> <p>Participant 6 We have social media through which the stakeholders can reach out to us, we have a web-based inquiry platform that the public can go onto to enquire about anything they wish to know about; they can call us, we are really accessible. Obviously some of them can come to our offices.</p> <p>Participant 7 Mostly emails and then the mediums I explained previously. Mostly emails and then the mediums I explained previously.</p> <p>Participant 8</p>	<p>stakeholders can communicate</p>

UNITS OF MEANING (FROM DATA)	CODE
<p>We have a call centre to where customers can call so our customers can call. They can also use the customer portal on the website through which they can also make payments.</p>	
<p>7. How would you describe your/your department's current relationship with your stakeholders?</p> <p>Participant 2 Overall, I would say the relationships are good. We are always available to listen to our stakeholders and to attend to them the best we can. We always reach out and have interaction. Nothing is perfect and we are always open to improve ourselves.</p> <p>Participant 4 The relationships are healthy. For example I know that the lenders are happy. They are happy with the company's financial performance so it is a company that they would want to lend to.</p> <p>Participant 6 I am happy with the relationship between my section and the stakeholders that I manage. I've always believed in creating mutual relations with all stakeholders. I think it just improves your working relationships with all of them. But there is always room for improvement and we are open to listening and to consider adjusting our approaches where necessary.</p>	<p>Assessment of relationships status with stakeholders</p>

APPENDIX C

Namibia Power Corporation (Pty) Ltd
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Ms Tangeni Kambangula
Cape Peninsula University Of Technology
Student No. 206166753

Enquiries : M. M. Situmbeko
Telephone : 061 – 205 2595
Date : 09 April 2024

Dear Ms. Tangeni

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH STUDY AT NAMPOWER

We acknowledge receipt of your application dated 09 April 2024, to conduct your intended research study titled **"An assessment of the stakeholder engagement practices of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier."**


NamPower hereby grants permission for you to carry out research and data collection. Kindly take note that you are allowed to contact NamPower employees to participate in your study.

Further take note that information from any NamPower document. Should only be used for the study mentioned above and will under no circumstances be used for other purposes without prior written consent from NamPower.

Should the researcher be published, the source of data i.e., NamPower should be acknowledged in the research report. Upon completion of the research, NamPower requires that a copy of the study should be submitted to the Records Management Section for future research and record keeping.

For further enquiries, kindly feel free to contact Human Capital Division.

Recommended by


PP. **Mercy M. Situmbeko**
Manager: Education Training & Development

10/04/2024
Date

Approved / Not Approved


.....
Kahenge S Haulofu
Managing Director

10/4/2024
Date

APPENDIX D



FACULTY OF INFORMATICS AND DESIGN

Individual Consent for Research Participation

Title of the study: An assessment of the stakeholder engagement practices of Namibia's bulk electricity supplier

Name of researcher: Ms Tangeni Kambangula

Contact details: Email: tangeni.kambangula@nampower.com.na or 206166753@mycput.ac.za

Phone: 00 264 61 205 2335 or 00 264 (0) 812880447

Name of supervisor: Dr Adelina Mbinjama

Contact details: Email: MBINJAMAA@cput.ac.za

Phone: 00 27 (0) 21 469 1136

Purpose of the Study:

The study aims to assess how Namibia's bulk electricity supplier engages with its stakeholders.

Participation: The student will carry out the study, which will include interviewing participants/interviewees.

Confidentiality & Anonymity:

I have received assurance from the researcher/student that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the mini thesis in the fulfilment of the Master of Public Relations and Communication Management. My confidentiality will be protected as I will not be identified by my real name but will be assigned a pseudonym name (alternative name) to protect my identity and the information I will provide.

Conservation of data: The data collected will be kept in a secure manner, in a private folder on a personal computer and will be password protected.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate in the study. If I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Additional consent: I make the following stipulations (please tick as appropriate):

	In thesis	In research publications	Both	Neither
My image may be used:				
My name may be used:				
My exact words may be used:				
Any other (stipulate):				

Acceptance:

I, (print name) _____ agree to participate in the above research study conducted by **Ms Tangeni Kambangula** of the Faculty of Informatics and Design, Media Department at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, which research is under the supervision of **Dr Adelina Mbinjama**.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or the supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the secretary of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at 021 469 1012, or email naidoo@cput.ac.za.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____