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External Stakeholder Management in Megaprojects – a Framework of Strategies and Power in Practice

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EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT IN MEGAPROJECTS – A FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIES AND POWER IN PRACTICE

ABSTRACT

Infrastructure megaprojects, due to their colossal nature, can cause inconvenience to multiple external stakeholders such as stakeholders in lands, existing services and project communities. These stakeholders are difficult to manage as they interact with the project across permeable boundaries, are not accountable to the requirements of a Detailed Project Report (DPR) and cannot be governed with contractual instruments or conformance to standards as in the case of internal stakeholders. Hence the project team resorts to strategies to manage these stakeholders. Even though there are records of the use of different strategies in the literature, a framework to explain how these strategies work to manage external stakeholders is missing. We use the organizational power theories of the dimensions of power framework and the circuits of power theory to understand how strategy and power interact in the process of managing external stakeholders. Using the case study of a metro rail project in India, we highlight persuading, framing and hegemonizing strategies along with the relationship between these strategies. The framework explains that covert power-based framing and hegemonizing strategies dictate the visible overt power-based persuading strategies employed to manage external stakeholders.

KEYWORDS

Infrastructure Megaprojects, External Stakeholders, Strategies, Power.

1. INTRODUCTION

Empirical studies show a strong correlation between the availability of infrastructure and economic growth (Queiroz & Gautam, 1992). Flyvbjerg (2014) claims that the size of infrastructure projects has grown by 1.5 to 2.5 percent annually -equivalent to a doubling in project size two to three times per century – implying that countries around the world are investing in megaprojects to meet their infrastructure needs. Megaprojects are colossal, captivating, costly, controversial, complex and laden with control issues (Frick, 2008). Even as the number and size of these projects increase worldwide, these projects are shrouded in inefficiencies and failures.

One of the reasons for the poor performance in megaprojects is the inability of the project to manage the external stakeholders (Mok et al., 2015). These are stakeholders who may be peripheral to the project such as existing land-owners, utilities and the community surrounding the project site. Multiple studies have demonstrated that complying with the demands of external stakeholders can lead to scope creep (Shapiro & Lorenz, 2000), escalation of commitments (Ross & Staw, 1986) and goal displacement (Ansar, 2018) on the part of the project team – a prime reason for the underperformance of infrastructure megaprojects (Gil, 2015; Mok et al., 2015).

Ignoring the needs and expectations of the external stakeholders in the form of general public or local community can generate social unrest or community resistance through collective action against the project (Liu et al., 2018). Since governance instruments such as contracts and conformance to standards are unavailable to govern these stakeholders, project teams muddle through with short-term tactics that, temporally, cohere into strategies.

Theories of organizational power can be used to understand external stakeholder management strategies in megaprojects. One of the earliest sociological definitions of power was that of Max Weber who defines power as ‘the probability that one actor within a social relationship would be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance’ (Weber, 1947). Based on this definition, this research seeks to explore the strategies employed in carrying out the will of the project team in contrast to the demands of external stakeholders. Research in infrastructure megaprojects is often criticized for excluding topics such as power, politics and conflicting interests, even when they are crucial (Clegg & Kreiner 2013). Thus, I use an organizational power-based approach to understand the dynamics of managing external stakeholders using strategies. Hence, the main objective of this research is to create a framework to explain external stakeholder management strategies in infrastructure megaprojects from an organizational power perspective.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL POWER THEORIES

The use of organizational theories can create multiple perspectives that can hopefully infuse a more insightful and penetrating research agenda (Söderlund, 2011) well applicable for these kinds of projects given the impact, magnitude, frequency, and diversity (Geraldi & Söderlund, 2018). Organizational power and strategies are closely related constructs as they interact with one leading to the other (Clegg & Kornberger, 2015). Specifically, we use the dimensions of power theory (Lukes, 2005) and the circuit of power theory (Clegg, 1989) to explain strategies in practice.

There have been several attempts in the past to map the different forms of power (Lukes, 1974; 2005; Clegg, 1989; Clegg et al., 2006; Fleming and Spicer, 2014). The most common structural distinction is between the overt dimensions of power and those that are more covert. Overt power involves the direct exercise of power easily observable when some agency seeks compliance with its directives on the part of some other agency such as an individual, a team, an organization, or even a material artefact. Covert power, however, cannot be as easily observed as this power tends to be congealed into more enduring institutional structures, practices and taken-for-granted ideas through which the flows of overt power relations ebb and swell as per the circuits of power theory (Clegg, 1989). The dimensions of power framework can help make sense of different strategic actions (Hardy, 1996) and hence afford a holistic understanding of different strategies in use for managing external stakeholders in the megaproject context. The three dimensions of power, adapted from Lukes, (2005) are depicted in Figure 1.

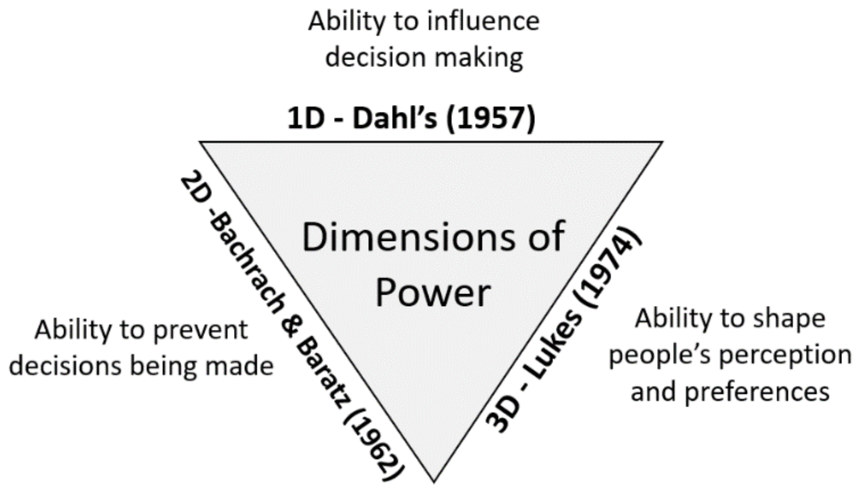

Figure 1: Dimensions of power - adapted from Lukes (2005)

The first dimension of power – overt power – involves the direct mobilization of will, which builds upon Dahl's (1957) concept of power as providing 'one with the ability to make another do something they would not otherwise do.' The execution of this overt form of power relies on the actor's ability to mobilize resources to realize certain goals (Avelino, 2011). It is an instrumental perspective that views power as an actor-specific resource used in pursuit of self-interest (Avelino and Rotmans, 2009). Strategies in the explored in the literature for managing external stakeholders from the first dimension of power includes adaptation, compromise, negotiations, concessions, avoidance, etc (Aaltonen & Sivonen, 2009; Chinyio & Akintoye, 2008). In their study of an infrastructure megaproject, Ninan & Mahalingam (2017) observe visible strategies such as persuasion, deputation, give and take, extra work for stakeholders and flexibility. These strategies are part of the fair process approaches (Kim & Mauborgne, 2003) and are instrumental in handling the relational consequences of interests being vested in megaprojects (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2004).

The second dimension of power is a mix of overt and covert power and thus involves direct and indirect mobilization of power. Commonly known as the power of non-decision making, this construct was developed by Bachrach and Baratz (1962) as they highlighted the role of agenda-setting by elites and their ability to keep topics off the agenda by framing agendas on an exclusionary basis. Scholars argue that in agenda-setting there is no direct exercise of resource-based power; instead, there is an implicit shaping of issues considered important or relevant in relation to their inclusion or exclusion from agendas (Fleming and Spicer, 2007). Being able to set the agenda is referred to as 'real power' by Lukes (2005) because it enables issues to be framed as legitimate and enacted or not and thus limits not only those issues addressed but also the range of possible solutions that a broader set of issues might engender. Strategies that are based on the second dimension of power employed to manage external stakeholders include strategic misrepresentation wherein the benefits of the project are overemphasized while the costs are under played leading to the selection of poor projects (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003) and framing where the 2012 London Olympics as an urban regeneration project (Gil and Lundrigan, 2012).

The third dimension of power is covert, the radical view of power proposed by Lukes (1974), which works by shaping subjects' preferences, attitudes and political outlook. Scholars regard that this is a supreme exercise of power as it shapes preferences such that the subject accepts a situation as an existing order of things to which an alternative is unimaginable (Lukes, 2005). Such a state of order can be cultivated through specific corporate cultures as well as field-wide or societal-wide assumptions (Fleming and Spicer, 2014). It is said that power can be most effective when it is least observable (Lukes, 2005). Strategies that are based on the third dimension of power for managing the external stakeholders includes educating the community of the benefits of the project (Ng & Loosemore, 2007) or as subtle branding strategies (Ninan et al., 2019) or 'corporate diplomacy' (Henisz, 2017) wherein he talks of the ability of an organization to win the hearts and minds of the external stakeholders. These change in hearts and minds of the external stakeholders can draw parallels to the third dimension of power discussed above.

The circuits of power framework (Clegg, 1989) offers an explicit mechanism for tracing the exercise of power as flowing through multiple circuits (Lapsley & Giordano, 2010) similar to electricity. In the framework, power circulates through social relations, working practices and techniques of discipline (see Clegg, 1989, p. 214 for the circuits of power model). The model considers power as flowing through three dependent circuits integrated through Obligatory Passage Points (OPP). Obligatory passage points are yardsticks against which to measure the acceptability, appropriateness and legitimacy of actions (Callon, 1986). The first circuit, the episodic circuit, is based on the first dimension of power (Smith et al., 2010) where different social agents interact. The second circuit, the social integration circuit, focus on the rules of meaning and membership that have an impact on social relations. This circuit provides one with the resources and legitimation to exercise power over another (Backhouse et al., 2006; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). The third circuit, the system integration circuit, relates to innovations in techniques of discipline and production that empower or disempower the agents (Vaara et al., 2005). Thus, as per the circuit of power framework, overt power depends on the existing rules and practices, which are part of the covert circuit. These existing practices are sometimes referred to as 'hidden structures of power' or 'deep structures' (Clegg, 1975; Allen & Kern, 2001) as people tacitly accept and reproduce them. The circuits of power framework thus describes the social fabric in which power relations operate.

Even though records of these strategies according to the dimensions of power exist in the literature we lack a holistic understanding on how these strategies work together and thereby explain the episodic action of the project team. Thus, the research objective is to create a framework to explain external stakeholder management strategies in infrastructure megaprojects. More specifically, we ask the following research questions, (1) what are the strategies used for managing external stakeholders from a dimensions of power perspective? and (2) how do these strategies relate with each other from a circuits of power perspective?

3. RESEARCH SETTING AND METHOD

To address our research objective, we choose to adopt a single in-depth case study of a metro rail megaproject in India. This project has a planned cost of USD 2.2 Billion and it satisfies the quantitative requirement of project cost greater than USD 1 Billion. This project also has all the special characteristic of a megaproject as it is built in an existing city disrupting many services and has a huge pressure to keep on schedule.

The metro rail project was conceived in 2007, as the existing surface transport system was unable to support the growth of population and the massive urban migration to the city. The project also had multiple objectives such as to boost economic growth of the city and reduce pollution. For the successful implementation of the project, a quasi-government organization was set up as a Joint Venture with the Government of India and the Government of the state. Our decision to use this project as a case study is because this project is housed in an existing city and there are significant numbers of stakeholders such as land acquisition, utility shifting and traffic diversions with agencies, project community, etc., who have an interest in the specifics of the project.

Our aim here is to explore and uncover the external stakeholder management strategies that were used in infrastructure megaprojects and to understand the power dynamics surrounding them. To enable this, we adopted a qualitative research methodology. Scholars have suggested that such a method is apt for exploratory research when the aim is to gain familiarity with a problem or to generate new insights for future research (Scott, 1965; Eisenhardt, 1989). Since the dimensions of power included both overt and covert dimensions, we chose to carry out unstructured interviews along with observations of exchanges in news articles and social media.

The interview data was collected through face-to-face unstructured interviews (Spradley, 1979) with project personnel. We asked the informants to talk about the challenges they encountered with external stakeholders in the project. Whenever the project team cited challenges, we asked for personal experience from the project to anchor and triangulate instances with other respondents. We interviewed 30 members of the project team who are from the project organization and from the contractor organizations. The participants were from different levels in their respective organizations. Each interview ranged from a minimum of 1 hour to a maximum of around 3 hours with certain participants. In several cases, we conducted multiple interviews with several of our participants and compared comments made by various people on a given issue, to increase internal consistency and validity of our data (Yin, 1984).

Other than the interview data, we also systematically studied news articles and social media posts of the metro rail organization to understand how they communicate with the external stakeholders and thereby understand the covert strategies employed to manage them. All the news articles relating to the metro rail project from 1st January 2017 to 31st December 2017 were retrieved from ‘Google news’ to avoid bias of selection of just one media outlet. The data retrieved were 168 news articles and their 446 user comments spanning across different news media outlets. We also systematically studied social media posts of the metro rail organization on their official twitter and Facebook pages. A total of 640 tweets from 2012 to 2017 and 435 community’s Facebook comments from April 2017 to August 2017 were retrieved.

We adopt a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to systematically study not only data from semi-structured interviews, but also the naturalistic data such as social media posts and news articles. We first use open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to extract instances of use of strategies aimed at external stakeholders and the effects of the use of these strategies from the interviews, news articles, and social media posts. Doing this enable us to create broad categories relating to strategies and effects. Thus, the categories emerged from our data. Following this, we use axial coding to extract the relationship between the strategies and the effects. Subsequently, we use selective coding to collect more data based on the findings from the earlier codes. Thus, following a systematic process of open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and constant comparison we arrive at a theoretical framework that can explain the external stakeholder management strategies that are in use in the metro rail megaproject.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The strategies anchored in the dimensions of power framework (Lukes, 2005) and the relation between the strategies anchored in the circuits of power theory (Clegg, 1989) observed from the case study of the metro rail project in India is discussed below.

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The strategies for managing external stakeholders were persuading strategies, framing strategies and hegemonizing strategies. These strategies are anchored in the dimensions of power framework (Lukes, 2005) as shown in Figure 2 and are discussed in detail below.

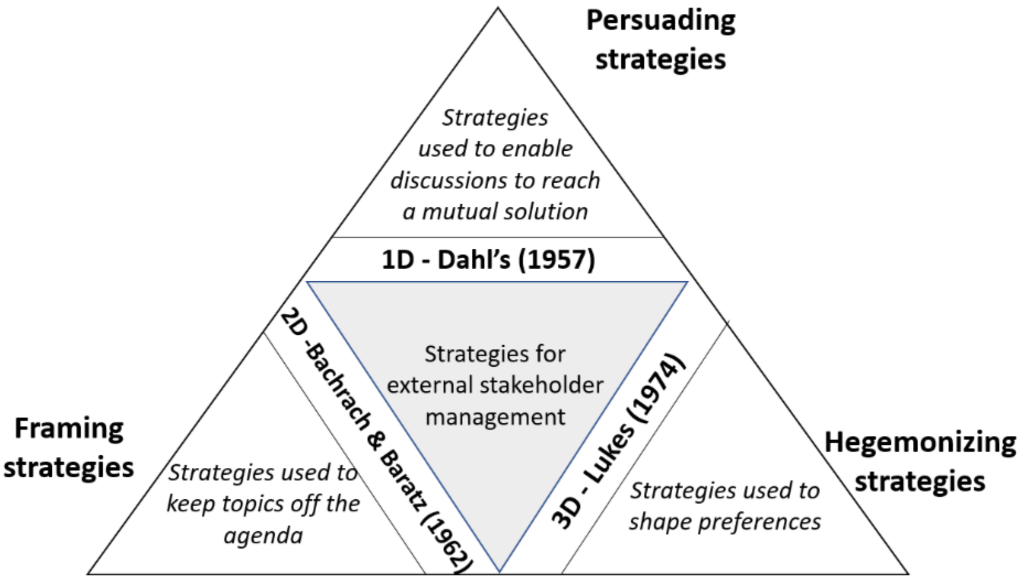

Figure 2: External stakeholder management strategies anchored in dimensions of power framework

First Dimension of Power - Persuading Strategies

Persuading strategies were used for enabling discussions with the affected external stakeholders thereby 'persuading' them to favour the project by improving coordination and speeding the approval process. These strategies led to external stakeholders doing what they would not have done otherwise through an active discussion and mutual agreement.

In the case of the metro rail project, there were visible exchanges to facilitate cooperation with the external stakeholders. The metro rail organization agreed to construct an extra parking facility for the airport authorities in exchange for the permission to build the airport metro rail station in the airport land. During an interview, the design head of the metro rail organization said,

> *"They [airport] also want something from us ... This [parking] is an added facility for them ... these kinds of projects work that way only ... give and take ..."*

In another instance, employees were deputed from government agencies such as the electricity department, water department, telecom department, highway department, etc., to enable coordination during the shifting of utilities.

The dynamics of persuasion observed here constitutes the first (overt) dimension of power, which depends on the actor's ability to mobilize resources to realize certain goals, external stakeholder support in this case, as Avelino (2011) notes. The extra parking facility for the airport authorities described above was possible only because the project team enjoyed fund discretion. The deputation from government agencies was possible because the project team enjoyed political backing thereby permitting government employees to be deputed to the metro rail project. Thus, we posit that

Proposition 1 (P1): The resources available with the project team enable the persuading strategies used for managing external stakeholders in megaprojects

Second Dimension of Power – Framing Strategies

In any power relation there will be some parties for whom issues are legitimated while other parties will seek to delegitimize these or position other issues as more legitimate. Framing strategies were used as a strategic tool by the project team to highlight certain issues while communicating with the external stakeholders and make those issues more legitimate or important than others.

In the case of the metro rail project, the project team restrained itself from talking to the media without a proper agenda. The public relations officer is only permitted to talk or address the media with an agenda approved by the public relations head and managing director of the metro rail project. The public relations officer of the metro rail quoted,

> *"While talking to press, they [PR Head, MD] tell us exactly what to say and we say based on that... generally, the rule here is that no employee is supposed to talk to the press apart from the authorized spoke person"*

By authorizing an official spoke person to talk to the media, the project team was able to highlight certain issues while hiding others. The project team opted to highlight salient features of the project and promoted it as first, innovative, community centric, etc. On the use of solar energy in the project, the project team propagated it in the news articles as the largest on-site solar projects in India, as below.

> *"Once fully operational, the total capacity of rooftops and ground mounted power systems in *** [metro rail organization's] facilities will be six MW [megawatt], which will make it one of the largest on-site solar projects in India".* (Quoted from a news article of 23rd June 2017)

The project team also stressed one of the main goals for the project - interconnectivity between existing infrastructure systems - where ever possible in the news article and would link project's initiatives to this goal as seen with the implementation of common ticketing system highlighted in the news article quote below.

> *"We [metro rail organization] are focussing a lot on implementing the common ticketing system soon. Using this, passengers can use the same card in trains, buses and even ATMs"* (Quoted from a news article of 25th November 2017)

While the project team highlighted certain issues in the news media, it also hid certain issues that were controversial such as reasons for delays or the reason for accidents. Rather than accepting the blame for the accident, the project team would stress that despite taking all the precautions the accidents occurred, as reported in the news article quote below.

> "*The workers did wear their safety gear and other safety precautions were in place. We [metro rail organization] are in the process of finding out how it happened*" (Quoted from a news article of 3rd July 2017)

The strategic use of framing is quite similar to the findings from Kornberger & Clegg (2011), in which the techno-rational discourse of the planner is substituted with the seductive, media-focused language of the strategist, thereby hiding certain issues. These strategies enable the project team to keep topics off the agenda (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962) and not facilitate discussion on certain topics, in contrast with the 'persuading' strategy. It also enables the diversion of attention to an issue which seems more favourable to the project and hides others. Thus, with the use of the framing strategy, there is an implicit shaping of issues which are considered relevant (Fleming and Spicer, 2007). Goffman (1974) claims that framing is the way something is presented to others and it affects the actions and choices individuals make. The dominant frame is an interpretation with the highest probability of being noticed, processed and accepted by most people (Entman, 1993).

These framing strategies create a positive perception of the project. The comments below the news articles showered praises on the metro rail project for being innovative. For instance, the following comment was received in response to the metro rail stations getting a green rating for initiatives such as solar power.

> *"Kudos. That should become trend-setter for other metro rails as well as for IR [Indian Railways] itself"* (Quoted from the comments of a news article of 13th February 2017)

The role of framing strategies in creating a dominant discourse in favour of the organization is supported in the literature. Iyengar & Simon (1993) record that individuals habitually refer to the events as portrayed in the news while diagnosing social and political issues. We therefore posit that,

Proposition 2 (P2): The framing strategies employed with the external stakeholders create a favourable perception of the project.

Third Dimension of Power – Hegemonizing Strategies

Hegemonizing strategies are used to change the behaviour of the community making them subjects of power. There is a great economy to that power which finds it unnecessary to intervene in existing relations because these relations already represent the issues that it seeks to reproduce.

The metro rail project in their social media page appealed to the sentiments of the community. The project celebrated national festivals, hoisted flags during national days, conducted cultural events during regional festivals, and even highlighted the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of the project as demonstrated by the following tweet.

> *Skit on Truth Alone Triumphs Performed: To mark the occasion of Vigilance awareness week ...* (Tweet by official page on 1st November 2014)

The project also targeted sections of the populations such as school children, college students, women, disabled people, etc. and had targeted programs to engage with them. The project took the school children on joy rides in the metro rail and even conducted drawing competitions with the theme 'go green metro' as highlighted in the tweet below.

> *Painting competition at 4pm Today!!! Topic - Go Green Metro -Timing 4pm to 6 pm - Don't forget to bring your colours.* (Tweet by official page on 4 June 2016)

All these events were centred on the metro rail's features and advantages to try and plant them in the minds of young school children. These steps aimed to instil the use of metro rail as a lifestyle choice, acceptance of which implied learning specific disciplines and rituals (Foucault, 1977). For Foucault, identity is shaped by institutions such as schools, self-help groups, work environments and social workers (Foucault, 1991): in view of this data we might add megaprojects to this list of institutions that strive to shape identity. Within megaproject research, Henisz (2016) records that managers should show empathy by understanding and appreciating the local traditions and beliefs of the project community, such as in this case by targeting sections of community according to common sentiments in the form of disabled people, school children and women.

These hegemonizing strategies changed the preferences of the community and changed them into advocates of the project. A Facebook post on recruitment of new staff to the Public Relations team of the metro rail organization that attracted some criticism, such as "this won't bring you more crowd for metro. Reduce the ticket rate", led one of the members of the community to clarify,

> *"This is to have more interaction with the commuters and public to wipe out the inconveniences and to improve the efficiency of the service."* (Quoted from the comments of a Facebook post of 16th September 2017)

This preference of the community resulted in the metro rail getting support from the community. We therefore posit that,

Proposition 3 (P3): The hegemonizing strategies employed by the project team create a set of preferences within the community that favour the project.

Relation between strategies

To understand the relation between strategies we integrated the enablers and effects of the strategies in the previous section along with interview data, news articles data and social media data to see how events are represented in each source. We observed that framing strategies lead to persuading strategies, hegemonizing strategies lead to persuading strategies, persuading strategies lead to framing and hegemonizing strategies, and finally framing and hegemonizing strategies leads to strengthening of resources. Each of these relations are discussed below.

Framing Strategies leads to Persuading Strategies

The metro rail megaproject had to acquire land from multiple stakeholders such as airports, the existing sub-urban rail organization, religious groups and from the general public. With the airport authority, the project team stressed the framing of interconnectivity between services propagated in the news articles. By stressing this frame, they argued that both the airport authority and the metro rail would eventually gain from interconnecting their services. This acted as a precursor for the persuading strategy which finally led to the metro rail constructing an extra parking facility for the airport employees in exchange for permission to construct the metro rail station in the airport land. A similar instance was observed with the sub-urban rail networks too as the metro rail project again stressed the interconnectivity between the existing sub-urban rail network and the under-construction metro rail network. This again enabled the persuading strategy which resulted in the metro rail organization building an extension station for the sub-urban network in exchange for permission to build its own station in the rail land owned by the sub-urban railways.

For acquiring land from the religious groups, the metro rail organization projected that the project is for the people by relying on the framing strategies propagated through news articles. Due to this, when the project team pitched the 'public good' frame and provided adequate compensation, the religious groups agreed to give the land to the project. The public relations officer of the metro rail remarked,

> *"Religious buildings are always a big problem for all projects. We [metro rail organization] tried to make them understand that this was for the people, so ultimately, the trustees understood how things are working out. We compensated them well ... and they were happy with it"*

Similarly, for acquiring land from the general public, the project organization persuaded them to take the market rate compensation and give the land for a public good stressing that the metro rail is ultimately for the community. This is similar to the works of Chong & Wolinsky-Nahmias (2005) who highlight that associating a program with universally supported goals such as 'clean drinking water' can help acquire land.

The 'public good' frame also helped employees of external stakeholder governmental agencies such as utility companies, railways, etc., feel attached to the project and thereby foster better cooperation. These stakeholders considered the project as a 'public good' and supported the earlier completion of the project. From the above instances, we posit that,

Proposition 4 (P4): The perception of the megaproject enabled by the framing strategies along with the resources available with the project team directly impacts the megaproject team's overt strategic action.

This proposition contributes to the earlier discussions on resources available that dictate strategic action. Through this proposition, this research highlights the role of the positive frame in effective management of stakeholders seen in the persuading strategies.

Hegemonizing Strategies leads to Persuading Strategies

Since the metro rail megaproject had a significant number of elevated stretches, they had to create road diversions during construction, leading to disturbances to the road users. These situations are ideal grounds for public protests and user dissentients. To please the project community who are disrupted by these diversions, the project would have to create more efficient and non-disturbing diversions. The project team through its branding and hegemonizing effects were able to reach out to the public and alter their preferences and make them happy with the current diversions without protests. The human resource manager reflected on the community sentiments as follows,

> *"When we [metro rail organization] create traffic diversions for work ... There is no agitation from public ... They [project community] have accepted us."*

Thus, seeing the role of these preferences of the project community in the persuading strategies, we posit that,

Proposition 5 (P5): The preferences of the megaproject community enabled by the hegemonizing strategies along with the resources available with the project team affect the overt strategic action.

This proposition is supported by Henisz (2016), wherein he highlights that megaproject teams should look out for points of similarity, such as affinity of sports, culture, etc., and build initial dialogues around them. In the metro rail megaproject case, the project team used social media to propagate the similarities that the project shares with the external stakeholders by celebrating national and regional festivals. They also shared common sentiments as the project invested in weaker sections of the population and gave free rides to school children. These strategies helped connect the megaproject with the community and this led to a favourable dialogue and even support from the community to the construction activities of the megaproject.

Together both perception of the megaproject and preferences of the stakeholders shape the visible persuading strategies. Supporting this, Mok et al. (2015) highlight that stakeholder perception and behaviours are important considerations of external stakeholder management in these megaprojects. They note that the stakeholders are affected by the values and assumptions that are deeply embedded in the cognitive minds of the stakeholders.

Persuading Strategies leads to Framing and Hegemonizing Strategies

Solar panels were installed in response to the project community raising objections to tapping into the energy source in an electricity deficient city. The project agreed to install the solar panels as an extra work to address the concerns of the project community. The project organization was able to frame the use of solar panels in the metro rail project as the largest such facility in India. Thus, the framing strategy was a result of the persuading strategy. Supporting this, Derakhshan et al. (2019) claims that the community's experiences with the project organization can influence its legitimacy. Thus, we posit that,

Proposition 6 (P6): The use of persuading strategies is highlighted and marketed through framing strategies to create a positive perception of the project.

However, Entman (2004) notes that contested matters are difficult to frame and the frames that are incongruent with dominant schemas are blocked from spreading by a common culture. This can be seen in the work on the Westconnex project by Mangioni (2018) wherein he highlights how the land was acquired for the project and how the impacted property owners were unable to relocate themselves due to lack of support from the project. This led to a negative perception of the project and as the acquisition progressed, the community being aware of the improper relocation did not agree to acquisition by agreement. He notes that the phenomenon of people not voluntarily giving off their land is evidenced by the significant increase in the number of properties the project acquired by compulsion after the events. Thus, the particulars of dissatisfied stakeholders are difficult to frame and if they are framed are blocked from spreading as Entman (2004) notes. A positive public perception of the project is possible only if the stakeholders are dealt with in a satisfactory manner through the persuading strategies and if these strategies are made known to the public through framing strategies.

To acquire land from the church authorities, the project team agreed to renovate parts of the church as part of the persuading strategy. The church would give a small portion of their land for the piers of the metro rail network, in exchange for which the metro rail would do the renovation. The metro rail was able to take credit of this work and framed it as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity. A tweet in the official page of the metro rail organization read,

> *"*** [metro rail organization] repaired and beautified the *** Church at *** [name of place] and was handed over to the church authorities" (Tweet by official page on 18 June 2014)*

In another instance, when an arch sewer was diverted to enable the construction of the metro rail stations, the metro rail tweeted,

*Diversion and Interconnection of Arch Sewer at *** [name of station] Station. An Arch sewer constructed in 1940's... (Tweet by official page on 25 October 2012)*

Thus, the work which was undertaken to manage the utilities as part of the persuading strategies, was framed by not disclosing the full information and the purpose of the diversion. This was propagated in the social media page of the project organization as part of the hegemonizing strategies and thus was effective in creating a positive brand image of the project. Sections of the community opposed the metro rail organization cutting trees to make way for the elevated metro rail viaducts. The organization was accused of reducing the green cover of the city. The metro rail opted to transplant a few trees to newer locations rather than cutting it down to address the concerns of the community. This was tweeted as the project's environmental responsibility.

*Successful Transplantation of Trees by *** [name of metro rail organization] - Tree Transplanting involves relocating or moving a tree safely from ... (Tweet by official page on 17 April 2012)*

When the highway department and the traffic police department allowed construction of the metro rail only during the night hours so as to cause minimum disturbance to the flow of traffic, the project team framed it as 'workers toil as city sleeps' in the social media. Such promoting of the organization creates a brand image of hardworking work culture.

Hence, the adaptations made for the community as part of the persuading strategies were framed and highlighted in the social media as part of the hegemonizing strategies and created a change in the preferences of the project community. Kanji & Agrawal (2016) note that every organization follows a different strategy to implement CSR activities. Here, it is seen that the megaproject framed and promoted the work done as part of the persuading strategy as CSR activity to also create hegemonizing effects that would help the project in the long-term. This appealing to the community through CSR activities resulted in getting support for construction activities, a positive brand image and creating community brand advocates. Thus, we posit that,

Proposition 7 (P7): The effective use of persuading strategies through framing strategies result in hegemonizing strategies.

Framing and Hegemonizing Strategies leads to strengthening of resources

The megaproject was able to get a positive public sentiment by using framing strategies and hegemonizing strategies These strategies created a positive frame and a positive brand image of the project. The political environment in the state that hosts the project is dominated by two parties. During the feasibility stage of the project the party that was in power was supporting this metro rail while the opposition party was supporting the construction of a monorail on the same route. The metro rail project was selected, and construction progressed. As time progressed, the opposition party came into power. The positive perception of the community led the opposition party also to support the project and now they are pushing for the next phase of the project they were initially opposing. This positive public sentiment led the politicians who are interested in vote banks to support the project in the next phase. Other than the state government, the central government also supported the project as quoted by the central minister of India for urban development,

> *"The Central government will do whatever possible for the expansion of the *** metro rail project" (Quoted from a news article of 14th May 2017)*

The positive sentiments from the project community resulted in a prominent funding agency supporting the next phase of the metro rail project. A news media article reported,

> *"Asked whether he was satisfied with the progress of implementation of the first phase of the Metro Rail project, Mr. *** [name of representative from the funding foreign country] termed the project "very important" and replied, "I hope to see early completion of the project ... On that basis, we are ready to look into the project [phase 2 of the metro rail project] in a very serious manner" (Quoted from a news article of 15th July 2017)*

Thus, the successful management of external stakeholders and support from the project community ensured that the resources that the project team possessed in the form of fund discretion from the financiers and government backing from the politicians were all maintained to further enable persuading strategies. Also, since the project enjoyed legitimacy due to the framing strategies, the resource usage of the project was not questioned. Supporting this, Hooge & Dalmasso (2015) note that success of rationale of stakeholders on resource decisions depend on the perceived legitimacy. Hence, we posit that,

Proposition 8 (P8): The perception of the megaproject and the preferences of the project community result in re-fixing the existing resources of the megaproject.

Thus, as seen in the framework in Figure 3, megaprojects start with a political push which helps it to attain resources that enable the persuading strategies as seen in P1. The framing strategies create a perception of the project as seen in P2. The hegemonizing strategies create a change in preferences of the community as seen in P3. The positive perception resulting from the framing strategies and the change in preferences of the community resulting from the hegemonizing strategies are instrumental in enabling the persuading strategies as seen in P4 and P5 respectively. The use of persuading strategies is highlighted and marketed through framing strategies to create a positive perception of the project as seen in P6. Also, the effective use of persuading strategies through framing strategies results in hegemonizing strategies as seen in P7. Finally, the perception of the megaproject and the preferences of the project community result in re-fixing the existing resources of the project as seen in P8. Thus, the framework shows how the overt external stakeholder management affects the perception and preferences of the project and how these in return dictate the episodic overt strategies in subsequent iterations through a circuitry relationship.

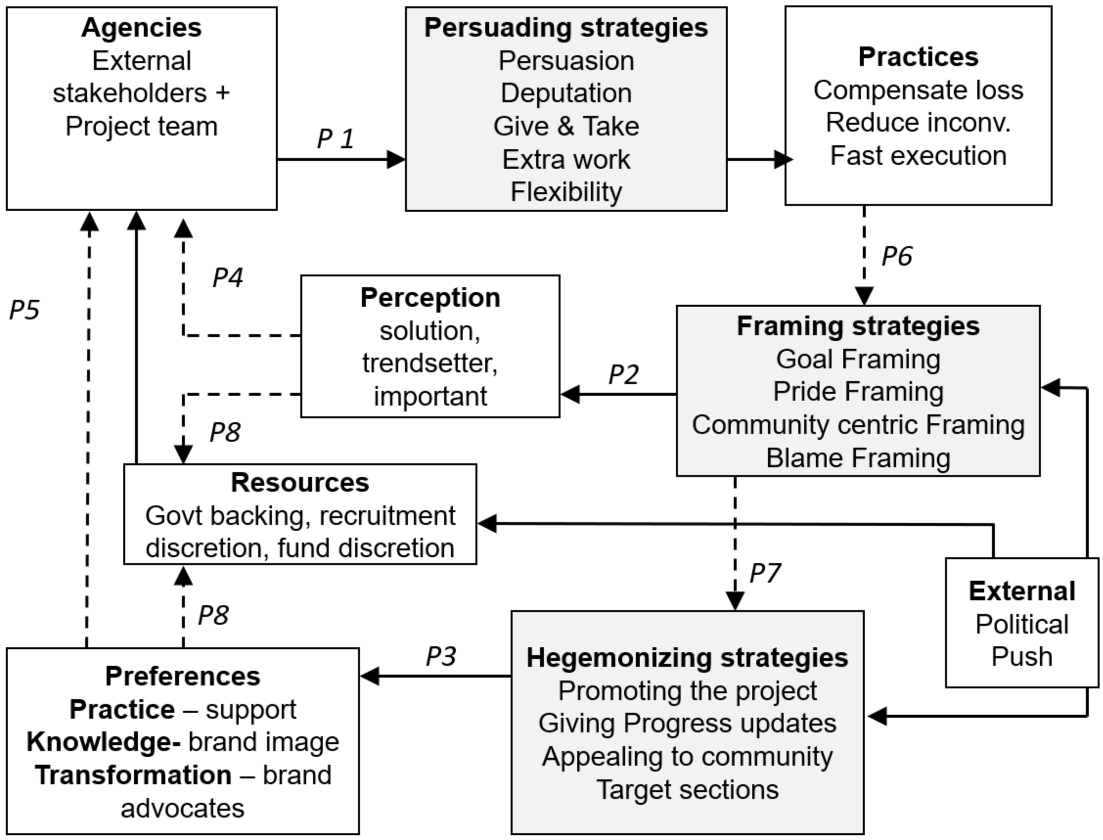

Figure 3: External stakeholder management strategies framework

5. CONCLUSION

From a dimensions of power perspective, we identify three categories of strategies that interact on megaprojects – persuading strategies, framing strategies, and hegemonizing strategies. The persuading strategies resulted in a practice of complying with the needs of the external stakeholder thereby resulting in stakeholder satisfaction. The framing strategies resulted in a perception of the megaproject and the hegemonizing strategies resulted in a change in the preferences of the project community resulting in the support for construction activities and turning the community into brand advocates of the project. We see that practice is dependent on the perceptions and preferences of external stakeholders. Integrating these strategies and effects, we have a framework that explains external stakeholder management in practice. Understanding strategies in the form of this framework will help us plan and deliver infrastructure megaprojects in a complex environment with the multiple conflicting objectives of external stakeholders.

Theoretically, this research was able to classify strategies based on the dimensions of power framework (Lukes, 2005) as persuading, framing and hegemonizing strategies. To organizational power theories, the role of strategy in making power dynamic by creating power, using power and maintaining power is established extending Freedman's (2013) definition of strategy as the art of creating power. It was seen from the findings that while the framing and hegemonizing strategies created power, the persuading strategies used the power created. In subsequent iterations of the circuit, all the strategies were effective in maintaining the power in the circuit. Methodologically, we highlight how naturalistic data such as news media articles and social media posts can be used effectively for studying project organizations and their actions.

To practice, we offer an explanation as to why similar projects with similar resources and personnel perform differently by highlighting the role of external stakeholders' perception and preferences in dictating the overt episodic actions. We also recommend megaprojects to be vocal of their goals, actions and initiatives as they are vital to creating and maintaining the perception of the project and preferences of the external stakeholders.

The work has some limitations. The study focused on only the construction and operation phase of a megaproject and looked at how the project team used persuading, framing and hegemonizing strategies. However, the importance of the shaping phase is stressed in the literature and a similar study can be taken up in that phase too. Also, since this research case study was restricted only to an infrastructure megaproject, it is not able to observe contextual nuances that would arise in other megaprojects such as an Olympic stadium or an Apollo mission. Similar explorations can be made in other megaprojects too. We also acknowledge that resistance to the use of the strategy was not a scope of this work as it looked only at external stakeholder management strategies in practice by the project team. However, these strategies will vary with the resistance from external stakeholders and hence this dynamic of resistance needs to be investigated.

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