



Stakeholders' Perception of Organization: An Attribution and Fairness Perspective

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1 Stakeholders' Perception of Organization: An Attribution and 2 3 4 1 5 6 7 2 8 9 10 11 3 12 13 14 4 **Abstract** 15 16 17 18 5 We draw on the normative stance of stakeholder theory to highlight the benefits of a more 19 6 holistic and inclusive organizational approach to stakeholders. In this conceptual paper, we 20 7 underscore the importance of human perception in engaging stakeholders and argue how often 21 8 marginalized local communities involved in projects interpret an organization's behavior at the 22 9 corporate, project, and individual levels. The conceptual framework we propose is elucidated 23 10 through the lens of attribution theory. By doing so, we emphasize that communication serves 24 11 as the source of stakeholders' attributional processes and influences their perception of fairness. 25 12 Focusing on construction and infrastructure projects, we suggest that early, transparent, and 26 13 informative communication with local community stakeholders facilitates their perception of 27 14 fairness in terms of both the process of decision-making (procedural) and the outcome of 28 15 decisions (distributive), as well as the way they are treated (interactional). Such proactive 29 16 communications help mitigate biased attributions by reducing the influence of personal beliefs, 30 17 fostering a conscious and unbiased attribution process. Organizations that adopt this approach 31 18 in their projects will ultimately gain the benefits of broader stakeholder support. 32 33 34 35 19 36 37 38 20 **Keywords** 39 40 41 42 21 Stakeholder, normative, fairness, attribution theory, local community, marginalized 43 44 22 stakeholders 45 46 47 48 23 49 50 51 24 52 53 54 55 25 56 57 58 26 59 60

4 **Abstract**

5 We draw on the normative stance of stakeholder theory to highlight the benefits of a more
6 holistic and inclusive organizational approach to stakeholders. In this conceptual paper, we
7 underscore the importance of human perception in engaging stakeholders and argue how often
8 marginalized local communities involved in projects interpret an organization's behavior at the
9 corporate, project, and individual levels. The conceptual framework we propose is elucidated
10 through the lens of attribution theory. By doing so, we emphasize that communication serves
11 as the source of stakeholders' attributional processes and influences their perception of fairness.
12 Focusing on construction and infrastructure projects, we suggest that early, transparent, and
13 informative communication with local community stakeholders facilitates their perception of
14 fairness in terms of both the process of decision-making (procedural) and the outcome of
15 decisions (distributive), as well as the way they are treated (interactional). Such proactive
16 communications help mitigate biased attributions by reducing the influence of personal beliefs,
17 fostering a conscious and unbiased attribution process. Organizations that adopt this approach
18 in their projects will ultimately gain the benefits of broader stakeholder support.

20 **Keywords**

21 Stakeholder, normative, fairness, attribution theory, local community, marginalized
22 stakeholders

1. Introduction

Stakeholder research within the realm of business and management studies has frequently embraced an organization-centric approach. In this prevailing perspective, the central organization is chosen as the primary point of focus for gathering data on stakeholders and their attributes (e.g., Bondy & Charles, 2018; Miles, 2017). Through an extensive systematic review examining 885 stakeholder theory definitions, Miles (2017) provided compelling evidence that the majority of high-quality publications pertaining to stakeholders in the fields of business and management predominantly adopt a management/strategic standpoint, rather than a stakeholder-centric view.

Conforming to the mainstream approach of stakeholder research, studies in project management do not diverge from the prevalent organization-centric outlook. In this framework, project-based organizations have typically not treated stakeholders as an end in themselves, but rather, they have instrumentally aimed to make them conform to project requirements through mechanisms of prioritization and anticipation (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2019b; Eskerod & Larsen, 2018). In this context, organizational behavior is not primarily guided by the value an organization can provide to its diverse stakeholder base, but rather by the benefits it can extract from them. It can be argued that this theoretical approach has led to an imbalanced portrayal of the discourse, with an undue emphasis on representing the perspective of the organization. The practical ramifications of this approach include a detachment from the rationalization of stakeholder demands and concerns, and sometimes even their alignment with the organization's objectives (Aaltonen et al., 2015; Liedtka, 1996).

One could argue that the implications of this approach become even more pronounced when applied to instrumental stakeholder perspectives (e.g., as seen in works by Bourne and Walker, 2005; Johnson et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 1997). In instrumental stances, where the often-

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3 51 competing resources within projects lead 'primary' stakeholders to bolster and amplify their
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5 52 influential role within the stakeholder network through their formal contractual ties to, or direct
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8 53 legal authority over, the organization (e.g., clients, sponsors, suppliers, and employees).
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11 54 This organization-centric approach has at times led to the marginalization of certain 'secondary'
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13 55 and external stakeholder groups, such as community groups, labor unions, consumer advocates,
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15 56 special interest groups, and other non-governmental organizations, as noted by Aaltonen et al.,
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17 57 (2008). In the decision-making process, the voices of these stakeholders may easily go unheard
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19 58 or not receive adequate priority. Since these stakeholders cannot be effectively governed
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21 59 through contracts, rules, and regulations, these secondary actors are external to such formal
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23 60 mechanisms, making it more challenging to incorporate their perspectives (Derry, 2012;
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25 61 Nguyen et al., 2019).
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31 62 Moreover, the normative perspective in stakeholder literature (Eskerod & Huemann, 2013;
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33 63 Freeman, 1984; Jensen & Sandstrom, 2013) has long emphasized the importance of adopting
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35 64 a more inclusive approach when dealing with all stakeholders. In contrast to an exclusively
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37 65 economic viewpoint, the normative stance within stakeholder theory acknowledges that
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39 66 business inherently possesses a moral dimension, and therefore, the focal organization should
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41 67 seek input from all parties affected by its actions (Jensen & Sandstrom, 2013).
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46 68 From both economic and social performance perspectives, organizations managing projects,
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48 69 especially in the context of large-scale construction and infrastructure projects, are particularly
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50 70 vulnerable to poor project delivery and inadequate stakeholder engagement (Denicol et al.,
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52 71 2020; Eskerod et al., 2015). In such undertakings, legitimate stakeholders, such as local
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54 72 communities, are disproportionately impacted due to their close proximity to the project
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56 73 development. Consequently, projects are often perceived as failures by local stakeholders when
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74 they are excluded from decision-making processes that influence their daily lives (as
75 highlighted by Derakhshan, 2020; van den Ende & van Marrewijk, 2019).

76 In response to these challenges, there has been notable progress in the field of construction
77 project management and beyond, with a focus on stressing the importance of greater inclusivity
78 and giving voice to secondary stakeholders who may have been previously disregarded (e.g.,
79 Cuganesan & Floris, 2020; Di Maddaloni & Davis, 2017; Lehtinen & Aaltonen, 2020; Teo and
80 Loosemore, 2017). Consequently, there is a growing interest in understanding how local
81 communities are treated and prioritized, recognizing these stakeholders as risk-bearers who can
82 suffer directly due to their proximity to construction projects (Olander, 2007).

83 Likewise, many countries have enacted legislation mandating extensive communication with
84 secondary stakeholders before granting approval for major projects, aiming to better integrate
85 them into the decision-making process (as seen in examples like the Statutory Planning Act in
86 the UK or the Community Empowerment Act in Scotland). However, there is a lingering
87 question about whether this communication truly enhances the decision-making process or if
88 it is merely a mandatory checkbox exercise to secure project approval (Di Maddaloni & Davis,
89 2018). Skepticism arises when we observe stakeholders exhibiting oppositional behavior in the
90 context of large and intricate projects across various countries and industries, raising doubts
91 about the organization's genuine commitment to stakeholder engagement practices.

92 The construction industry, in particular, provides a valuable learning platform and a fertile
93 ground for investigating how project organizations can enhance their stakeholder engagement
94 practices, fostering an unbiased perception of fairness and garnering support from a wider
95 range of stakeholders. Over the past 25 years, numerous instances illustrate the consequences
96 of projects that disregarded the social and political context, sparking local resistance due to
97 their perceived unsustainability. These include the lengthy protests in Susa Valley against the

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3 98 High-Speed Rail connecting Italy to France (Turin to Lyon) (Hooper, 2012), the riots during
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5 99 the World Cup in Brazil (Watts, 2014), the violent protests in Turkey over the construction of
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8 100 a shopping center in 2013 (Letsch, 2013), the national campaign against HS2 in England
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10 101 (Pearse, 2020), and the obstacles faced by the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) (CEE Bankwatch
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12 102 Network, 2018).

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15 103 Empirical studies have sought to understand the impact of secondary stakeholders on large-
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17 104 scale construction and infrastructure projects as they endeavor to legitimize such developments
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19 105 within their surroundings. Notable examples include the North-South metro line in Amsterdam
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21 106 (van den Ende & van Marrewijk, 2019) and the prolonged protests in Australia against a major
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23 107 housing project (Teo & Loosemore, 2014). As these studies allude, in these cases, often
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25 108 marginalized stakeholders perceived the organization's initiatives as unfair, prompting them to
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27 109 engage in collective actions against the proposed developments.

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32 110 In disciplines beyond construction project management, such as supply chain, operations and
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34 111 marketing stakeholder research has shown that stakeholders' actions against projects represent
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36 112 the final stage in a sequence of processes. This sequence commences with stakeholders
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38 113 attempting to comprehend their surroundings, interpreting an organization's actions, appraising
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40 114 the fairness of the terms set by the project, and then forming emotional responses (Coombs &
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42 115 Holladay, 2005; McDonald et al., 2010; Tee et al., 2013). Consistent with the views presented
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44 116 by Garry and Pearsall (2015) and Phillips et al. (2003), we maintain that stakeholders'
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46 117 assessments of the fairness of project outcomes serve as dependable indicators of their ensuing
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48 118 emotions towards the organization. As such, these perceptions are inherently integral to
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50 119 stakeholder engagement. In this context, the paramount importance of acting with fairness and
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52 120 ethical integrity becomes evident. This is particularly crucial for project organizations that
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54 121 aspire to adopt a strategic and systematic approach in their pursuit of organizational objectives
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56 122 and goals, which involves actively involving and aligning the interests of all stakeholders.

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3 123 Nonetheless, it can be contended that the organization-centric approach prevalent in
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5 124 stakeholder literature has restricted our comprehension of the processes undertaken by
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7 125 stakeholders. While organizational justice, with its three dimensions of fairness (distributive,
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9 126 procedural, and interactional) as outlined by Greenberg (1987), has long been acknowledged
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11 127 as a significant factor in motivating individuals to support an organization and enhance project
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13 128 performance (e.g., Aibinu et al., 2011; Ng et al., 2007), the underlying processes involved in
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15 129 shaping stakeholders' perceptions of fairness at the corporate, project, and individual levels
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17 130 have received only peripheral attention in project studies (Lim & Loosemore, 2017;
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19 131 Unterhitzenberger & Bryde, 2019; Unterhitzenberger & Moeller, 2023; Shafi et al; 2021).

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25 132 Given this context and with the aim of advancing current knowledge within the realm of project
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27 133 studies, this conceptual article seeks to address the following question: *How do stakeholders*
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29 134 *endeavor to interpret an organization's behavior, and what strategies can organizations*
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31 135 *employ to foster unbiased perceptions of fairness?*

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35 136 In order to address this research question, we draw upon attribution theory to elucidate the
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37 137 process underlying the development of stakeholders' perceptions of fairness. We employ
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39 138 attribution theory as the framework through which we can comprehend how individuals
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41 139 attempt to interpret an organization's behavior, particularly focusing on secondary stakeholder
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43 140 engagement, such as the local community. Our conceptualization serves a dual purpose: it
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45 141 outlines a framework that highlights communication as the mediator in shaping human
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47 142 perceptions and offers a process model that can guide project organizations and practitioners
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49 143 in embracing a more inclusive approach toward often-overlooked stakeholders. This approach
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51 144 aims to enhance these stakeholders' perceptions of fairness at the corporate, project, and
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53 145 individual levels. We underscore the significance of organizations providing clear and
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55 146 transparent communication to a wider range of stakeholders, including those who have had
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3 147 limited involvement in the decision-making process (often-dismissed voices). By fostering
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5 148 collaboration rather than manipulation, project organizations can encourage stakeholders to
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7 149 develop unbiased perceptions of fairness, both in terms of the process and the outcomes of the
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10 150 project.

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13 151 In the development of our conceptual framework, we will commence by scrutinizing the issue
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15 152 at hand and delving into the theoretical underpinnings within the realm of project stakeholder
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17 153 studies. Subsequently, we will elucidate our proposed approach for addressing the theoretical
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19 154 gap, integrating elements from Weiner's attribution theory (1986). This integration will help us
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21 155 construct a conceptualization of how stakeholders interpret an organization's behavior, a
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23 156 pivotal aspect that serves to make a practical and theoretical contribution to the normative
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25 157 evolution of stakeholder theory. We will conclude our presentation by suggesting how this
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27 158 conceptualization can facilitate the convergence and reconciliation of insights from various
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29 159 perspectives on attribution theory and stakeholder engagement within the context of project
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31 160 studies. We will also discuss the implications of our work for both research and practical
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33 161 applications.

34 35 36 37 38 39 40 162 **2. A Critique: Project Stakeholder Management**

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43 163 Widely embraced and applied in the realm of mainstream business and management
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45 164 studies, stakeholder theory serves as a valuable tool for comprehending the behaviors of
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47 165 organizations and their interactions within the social systems where they carry out projects.
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49 166 However, research in stakeholder theory grapples with two intrinsic limitations that hinder the
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51 167 realization of its full potential. These limitations are rooted in the ontology of the theory itself
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53 168 and in the approaches embraced by both scholars and practitioners. As we will illustrate in this
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55 169 section, these limitations have given rise to a significant imbalance in the treatment of various
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57 170 stakeholders, both in theoretical discussions and practical applications. This imbalance not only
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3 171 obstructs stakeholder research from offering a comprehensive and holistic view of the debate
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5 172 but also adversely impacts the daily lives of secondary stakeholders, who frequently bear the
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7 173 brunt of negative consequences resulting from project activities.
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11 174 The first limitation emerges from the process of stakeholder identification and the efforts to
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13 175 answer questions like "Who are the stakeholders?" and "What roles and rights do they have?"
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15 176 We align with Eskerod and Larsen (2018), who articulate that stakeholders are primarily
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17 177 recognized and categorized based on their designated roles (e.g., suppliers, end users, local
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19 178 community). This tendency is particularly pronounced in instrumental management approaches
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21 179 to stakeholders, where the concept of 'power' forms the foundation for their prioritization and
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23 180 significance (e.g., as seen in works by Bourne & Walker, 2005; Johnson et al., 2005; Mitchell
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25 181 et al., 1997). This approach has, unfortunately, led to the marginalization of secondary
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27 182 stakeholders in numerous projects (as noted by Derry, 2012; Teo & Loosemore, 2017). It also
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29 183 fosters a situation where decision-making becomes detached from those stakeholders who are
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31 184 directly impacted by the decisions, as eloquently stated by McVea and Freeman (2005, p.60).
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38 185 The second limitation arises from the methodological and practical approaches employed to
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40 186 derive insights from the demands, concerns, and beliefs of stakeholders, prompting the
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42 187 question, "How should the roles and rights of stakeholders be identified?". In the prevailing
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44 188 theoretical paradigms, the priorities and demands of stakeholders are often chiefly framed from
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46 189 the organization's perspective (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2019b; Friedman & Miles, 2002). This
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48 190 organization-centric approach results in a dyadic, relatively detached relationship with
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50 191 stakeholders (Eskerod & Larsen, 2018; Eskerod et al., 2015; Frooman, 1999). It also leads to
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52 192 an "unbalanced perspective in which the stakeholder voice is underrepresented, remaining a
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54 193 limitation of stakeholder theory" (Miles, 2017, p.448). The experiences and interests of many
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56 194 stakeholder groups are often only superficially considered, without a deeper exploration of how
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3 195 these stakeholders themselves perceive their rights and entitlements within the context of the
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5 196 project (Bondy & Charles, 2018). These two limitations may not primarily impact stakeholders
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8 197 who possess the power to assert their voices within the organization. However, they can
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10 198 significantly disadvantage marginalized stakeholders, including local communities, by further
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12 199 weakening their positions within the stakeholder network (Derry, 2012). This impact becomes
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14 200 particularly pronounced in institutional systems characterized by various layers of complexity,
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16 201 such as large construction and infrastructure projects (Qiu et al., 2019), where the imperative
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18 202 for simplification often leads to extensive marginalization (Derry, 2012). Given that power is
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20 203 the primary determinant of stakeholder salience (Parent & Deephouse, 2007), the instrumental
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22 204 approach is more likely to result in the marginalization of secondary stakeholders located at a
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24 205 distance from the core of the project, including local communities directly affected (Di
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26 206 Maddaloni & Sabini, 2022).

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31 207 Similarly, in practical terms, it is crucial to acknowledge that many construction and
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33 208 infrastructure projects have historically been driven by the interests of the project-based
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35 209 organization. This history makes communication with secondary stakeholders a challenging
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37 210 endeavor. This challenge is not unique to developed regions; it is a recurring issue observed in
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39 211 developing countries as well, as exemplified by various projects documented in the works of
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41 212 Xue et al. (2015) in China, Jordus-Lier (2015) in South Africa, Strauch et al. (2014) in Peru,
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43 213 and Nguyen et al. (2009) in Vietnam, among others.

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48 214 Therefore, in this article, we advocate for the normative perspective of stakeholder theory and
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50 215 channel our focus toward secondary stakeholders in complex social contexts, especially within
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52 216 the sphere of large-scale construction projects.

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57 218 **3. A Way Forward: Investigating Stakeholders' Perceptions**

219 In recent years, governments and project promoters worldwide have taken significant
220 strides toward adopting a more stakeholder-inclusive approach. A consortium of private,
221 public, and research institutes conducted a study, as reported by NETLIPSE (2016), which
222 examined 15 infrastructure projects with a combined investment exceeding €50 billion. The
223 research empirically demonstrated the positive outcomes associated with extensive stakeholder
224 involvement in numerous large-scale projects, such as the Øresund Crossing in Denmark, the
225 West Coast Main Line in the UK, the Bratislava Ring Road, and the Lisboa-Porto High-Speed
226 Line.

227 This trend toward greater stakeholder inclusion was further underscored by the World
228 Economic Forum in 2020, with a gathering focused on the theme "Stakeholders for a Cohesive
229 and Sustainable World." In the forum's manifesto, Executive Chairman Klaus Schwab
230 articulated, "The purpose of a company is to engage all its stakeholders in shared and sustained
231 value creation. In creating such value, a company serves not only its shareholders but all its
232 stakeholders – employees, customers, suppliers, local communities, and society at large."

233 While examples of stakeholder-oriented approaches are gaining traction in practical
234 applications, they still remain somewhat limited in the realm of stakeholder research
235 (Derakhshan et al., 2019b; Miles, 2017). Proposing a path forward, Jensen and Sandström
236 (2013) argue that exploring communication with stakeholders from a bottom-up perspective
237 (Burton & Dunn, 1996) and investigating the promotion of stakeholders' unbiased perceptions
238 of fairness through such an approach (Phillips, 1997; Phillips et al., 2003) could pave the way
239 for reimagining stakeholder engagement and inclusion through inclusive governance processes
240 (Gil & Fu, 2022; Müller, 2017; Unterhitzberger & Moeller, 2023).

241 While organizations must move beyond simply sharing the outcomes of their decisions with
242 stakeholders and should actively encourage an unbiased perception of fairness in both process

243 and outcome (Phillips et al., 2003), researchers should similarly expand the traditional
244 boundaries of stakeholder studies to present a more comprehensive view of the discourse. In
245 doing so, a promising avenue (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; Stingl & Geraldi, 2017; Weiss et
246 al., 1999; Wong et al., 2008) involves placing stakeholders' perceptions and emotions at the
247 center of research endeavors.

248 Against this backdrop, and as part of the growing awareness of the importance of stakeholder
249 engagement, our central argument revolves around the adoption of a more inclusive approach,
250 coupled with a stakeholder perspective. Embracing this approach necessitates reinforcing the
251 significance of stakeholders' perceptions of fairness in order to achieve more compelling and
252 effective stakeholder inclusion (as noted by Weiss et al., 1999) and to enhance project
253 performance (as indicated by Lim & Loosemore, 2017; Unterhitzberger & Bryde, 2019). In
254 this section, we begin by discussing the various dimensions of stakeholders' perceptions of
255 fairness and then explain how stakeholders endeavor to comprehend organizational behavior
256 by perceiving fairness at the corporate, project, and individual levels.

257 *3.1. Dimensions of Fairness: Distributive, Procedural and Interactional*

258 Since Rawls's seminal work in 1956 on justice as fairness, the concept of fairness has
259 been widely utilized as a cognitive tool through which individuals make sense of their
260 surroundings (Barsky et al., 2011; Leventhal, 1980). Over time, this concept found its way into
261 organizational studies literature, where it serves to interpret how individuals use fairness as a
262 crucial aspect in assessing the conditions established by organizations and the extent to which
263 they perceive fair treatment (Greenberg, 2003). Fairness theory, represented in works like
264 Ambrose and Schminke (2009) and Colquitt and Rodell (2011), distinguishes between three
265 types of perceived fairness: distributive, procedural, and interactional.

266 *Distributive fairness* pertains to the allocation of benefits and burdens, rewards and costs, and
267 other factors that influence the well-being of individual members within a group or community.
268 It encompasses whether outcomes relevant to an individual (e.g., a salary, a promotion, job
269 security) or outcomes linked to a group (e.g., a community development program) are regarded
270 as fair (as highlighted by Luo, 2007). The fundamental principles of distributive fairness are
271 those that support effective cooperation to enhance the well-being of each member in
272 economic, social, psychological, and physiological dimensions (Luo, 2007). Decision-makers
273 can employ distributive fairness to foster cooperation by establishing standards and norms for
274 expected behavior (Prasad et al., 2011). In the context of construction and infrastructure
275 projects, distributive fairness can be viewed as the extent to which, at the organizational level,
276 i) the organization embodies a 'moral nature' and ii) the distribution of rewards resulting from
277 cooperation is considered fair in light of each party's contribution, commitment, and
278 assumption of responsibility.

279 *Procedural fairness* revolves around individuals' perceptions of the formal procedures that
280 govern decisions affecting their treatment and benefits. The fundamental premise is that the
281 perception of fair treatment significantly influences how individuals react to decisions,
282 making it a central determinant of their behavior (Lind & Tyler, 1988).

283 Procedural fairness encompasses the perception of whether the procedures (or processes)
284 underlying distributive outcomes are fair (Horvath and Andrews in 2007). It involves
285 evaluating whether decisions and their execution are characterized by transparency and
286 correctability. It also hinges on whether these processes are free from bias, representative of all
287 parties, and devoid of discrimination, while also aligning with contractual specifications (Luo,
288 2007). In the context of construction and infrastructure projects, procedural fairness can be
289 defined as the extent to which the decision-making process and procedures that affect the gains

290 and interests of each party are perceived as impartial, fair, and inclusive by a broad spectrum
291 of stakeholders.

292 *Interactional fairness* represents a third dimension of fairness that extends the concepts of
293 distributive and procedural fairness. It offers a more refined distinction between individual and
294 organizational levels of fairness. Interactional fairness focuses on the quality of treatment and
295 communication provided to individuals by project personnel (Colquitt et al., 2001). From this
296 perspective, it underscores the quality of dialogue and how effectively project managers can
297 communicate and interact with their stakeholders in a respectful and equitable manner (Kujala
298 & Sachs in 2019). Interactional fairness encompasses the explanations given to convey the
299 rationale behind organizational processes and outcomes. It also centers on individuals'
300 perceptions of the quality of the interpersonal treatment they receive during the execution of
301 organizational procedures (Jawahar, 2002).

302 This dimension involves interactions between individuals within an organization and those
303 outside it, including stakeholders, as they engage with one another (Ambrose et al., 2002).
304 Farrar et al. in 2019 emphasize that interactional fairness encompasses the quality of
305 interpersonal treatment, including elements such as politeness, dignity, and respect, as well as
306 the adequacy of information provided to individuals. It pertains to the quality of interaction
307 between project stakeholders and project authorities, such as project managers or
308 communication managers, and to what extent stakeholders receive equitable interpersonal
309 treatment and sufficient information throughout the engagement process.

310 Procedural and distributive fairness are theoretically distinct (Colquitt et al., 2001), yet they
311 both hold significant importance. An individual's assessment of their experiences with project
312 and organizational practices is a unique judgment that takes into account both the outcome and
313 the process (Greenberg, 2003). The evaluation of fair treatment signals a positive intention on

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3 314 the part of the organization (Hewett et al., 2019). While the first two dimensions of fairness
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5 315 primarily address the formal aspects of the exchange process, interactional fairness shines a
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7 316 spotlight on the social dimension of the process (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).
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11 317 These three dimensions of fairness have been explored by several researchers in the field of
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13 318 project studies and construction project management. Kodefors (2005) delves into fairness in
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15 319 contractual and procurement arrangements in two projects in Sweden. Similarly, Zhang et al.
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17 320 (2016) investigate the perception of fairness based on the perceived effects of risk allocation
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19 321 on contractors' cooperative behavior in construction projects in China. Ng et al. (2007)
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21 322 incorporate the concepts of distributive and procedural fairness to develop a dynamic conflict
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23 323 project management system for dispute resolution. Aibinu et al. (2011) find that construction
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25 324 projects in Singapore are positively impacted by the perceived fairness of distributive
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27 325 outcomes, leading to a reduction in conflicts and disputes. In a recent empirical study by
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29 326 Unterhitzenberger & Bryde (2019), it is demonstrated that project performance improves when
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31 327 procedures are in place for the fair treatment of project team members, fair allocation of
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33 328 resources, and interactions characterized by respect, propriety, and dignity. Similar results have
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35 329 been recently reinforced in the project context by Unterhitzenberger and Moeller (2023) and
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37 330 Shafi et al. (2021).
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44 331 Highlighting the significance of inter-organizational justice, Loosemore and Lim (2015)
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46 332 initially focus on the three dimensions and the level of fairness across different construction
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48 333 project types. Later, in 2017, they find that these three dimensions can be correlated, and that
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50 334 managerial practices must actively influence all three aspects of fairness to be effective (Lim
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52 335 and Loosemore, 2017).
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56 336 It can be argued that organizations have traditionally emphasized the fairness of their outcomes,
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58 337 ensuring the equitable distribution of dividends to stakeholders. This focus is evident in
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3 338 contracts, codes of ethics, and mission statements that are established to guide an organization's
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5 339 strategic direction. However, the perception of procedural fairness, which pertains to the
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7 340 fairness of the processes leading to outcomes, has often been overlooked. Stakeholders are
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9 341 frequently excluded from having a say in how decisions are made, as indicated by Phillips et
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11 342 al. (2003) when they refer to stakeholders not having a role in "how the pie is baked" (p. 487).

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15 343 Regarding the perceived fairness of policies and norms established at the corporate level to
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17 344 make decisions (distributional fairness), organizations often consider themselves autonomous
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19 345 decision-makers and do not involve a broader range of stakeholders in the processes that lead
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21 346 to the final outcomes (procedural fairness). Consequently, certain stakeholders, like local
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23 347 communities, are often disregarded in comparison to primary actors such as shareholders. They
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25 348 are not fully informed about their proportional contributions in any cooperative endeavor, and
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27 349 the processes behind decision-making are not adequately explained, nor is the quality of
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29 350 information provided. This lack of organizational communication prevents stakeholders from
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31 351 perceiving fair treatment in the organization's behavior (interactional fairness).

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37 352 As discussed in this section, a comprehensive normative stakeholder approach encompasses
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39 353 fairness not only in the outcomes shared with stakeholders (distributive) but also involves
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41 354 stakeholders in the decision-making processes that affect them the most (procedural). This
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43 355 approach also places importance on the quality of communication with stakeholders, which
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45 356 includes elements such as politeness, dignity, and respect (interactional). In the next section,
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47 357 we will delve into how stakeholders perceive an organization's outcomes, processes, and
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49 358 interactions, offering project organizations a deeper understanding of how their strategic and
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51 359 tactical decisions are perceived as fair by a broader range of project stakeholders, particularly
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53 360 secondary actors.

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362 4. The Process of Perceiving Fairness

363 The cognitive process through which stakeholders appraise the fairness of an
364 organization's actions comprises two key elements. First, individuals observe and evaluate the
365 changes implemented by the project, essentially assessing the organization's behavior based on
366 the extent to which these efforts improve the lives of the intended beneficiaries and society as
367 a whole (Bhattacharya et al., 2009). Existing studies in the field of organizational behavior
368 have demonstrated that this evaluation process involves a comparative aspect, leading to the
369 perception of fairness or unfairness in some form (Martinko et al., 2002).

370 The subsequent stage of this cognitive process involves an analysis of the causes that have led
371 to the perceived fairness or unfairness among stakeholders (Hewett et al., 2019). Previous
372 research indicates that stakeholders react to an organization's activities based on the causal
373 factors they attribute to the organization's involvement in these initiatives (Phillips et al., 2003).
374 It is widely acknowledged that these perceived causal factors significantly influence how
375 stakeholders perceive the fairness of the situation (e.g., Greenberg, 2003; Hewett et al., 2019;
376 Martinko et al., 2002).

377 While various theories have been employed to describe the processes and reasons behind
378 stakeholders' causal reasoning (Martinko et al., 2002), we contend that attribution theory offers
379 the most comprehensive and integrated explanation of how stakeholders perceive the causes
380 behind organizational behavior. Our argument regarding the central role of attribution is based
381 on two primary models within attribution theory. The first model, developed by Kelly (1973),
382 focuses on how individuals use information to form attributions. The second model, introduced
383 by Weiner (1986), explains what information individuals employ in their attributional
384 processes. In the following section, we will provide detailed explanations of both these models
385 before applying them to the realm of project studies.

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3 386 Human beings, often described as "naïve psychologists" in Heider's (1985) words, possess an
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5 387 innate inclination to attribute events to specific causes. Attribution theories offer valuable
6
7 388 frameworks for analyzing how individuals ascribe causality when interpreting events in their
8
9 389 environment (Gardner et al., 2019; Martinko & Mackey, 2019). Despite their significant
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11 390 potential for explaining a wide range of workplace behaviors, attribution processes have been
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13 391 underutilized in organizational literature (Martinko et al., 2011; Weiner, 2019) and, to the best
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15 392 of our knowledge, have not been applied in the field of project studies. This is somewhat
16
17 393 surprising given that attributions serve as reliable predictors of human behavior (e.g., Martinko
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19 394 et al., 2007), and we believe they are essential for understanding stakeholders' perceptions and
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21 395 their subsequent emotions and responses when supporting or opposing a project or program.
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27 396 In this paper, we introduce attribution theory to the field of project stakeholder management as
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29 397 a theoretical framework for explaining how secondary stakeholders attempt to make sense of
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31 398 organizational behaviors by attributing causes to their initiatives. We will begin by elucidating
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33 399 how individuals make attributions and the type of information they rely on. Subsequently, we
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35 400 will apply these theoretical constructs to the subject of our study.
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39 401 *4.1. The Attribution Theory Explained*

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43 402 In organizational studies, the term 'attribution' encompasses two primary meanings. The
44
45 403 first involves individuals attempting to answer the 'why' question, seeking explanations for
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47 404 behavior, while the second is concerned with inferring traits from behaviors and assigning
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49 405 blame (Shaver, 2012). As Malle explains, the common element in both definitions is that "in
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51 406 attribution as explanation, a behavior is assigned to its cause; in attribution as inference, a
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53 407 quality or attribute is assigned to the agent based on an observed behavior" (2011, p.72).
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57 408 In explaining how individuals attribute causality, Weiner (1986) identified three dimensions of
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59 409 cause that people use to judge situations. The first dimension is the locus of the cause, which

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3 410 can be either internal or external. Internal loci are rooted in the traits or intentionality behind
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5 411 acts and behaviors, while external loci are due to reasons outside of the agents and are therefore
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7 412 less controllable by the perceiver. The second dimension is the stability of the cause, assessed
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9 413 by considering whether the cause changes over time. The third dimension pertains to the
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11 414 controllability of the cause, addressing the level at which the cause could be controlled.
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14 415 According to the theory, these attributions can lead to the emergence of feelings on the part of
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16 416 stakeholders. Therefore, to effectively manage stakeholder emotions regarding the project
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18 417 organization, it is crucial to understand the attributional process they undertake.
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22 418 Expanding on Kelley's seminal work (1973), several researchers have theorized that there are
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24 419 three main sources of information that individuals use to make attributions about others'
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26 420 behavior: information about the stimulus, beliefs based on prior experiences, and motivation
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28 421 to make attributions (Harvey et al., 2014; Hewett et al., 2019; Martinko et al., 2002). According
29
30 422 to Kelley and Michela (1980), these three factors work together to shape attributions and are
31
32 423 not consciously distinct when used by humans. Any piece of information acquired by an
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34 424 individual has the potential to trigger an appraisal of the situation (Hewett et al., 2019; Martinko
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36 425 et al., 2002). This information can be obtained from an individual's observations or experiences
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38 426 (Martinko et al., 2007) but must be significant enough to motivate the individual to initiate
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40 427 attributional processes.
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46 428 Stakeholders' attributions are similarly based on deep stimulus, beliefs, and motivations drawn
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48 429 from their prior experiences. This concept aligns with Heider's work (1958), which explains
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50 430 that individuals' causal attributions of others' behavior are influenced by their general
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52 431 perception of those parties. In the context of organizational studies, this second source of
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54 432 information is defined as legitimacy (Derakhshan et al., 2019a) or an organization's cynicism
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56 433 (Hewett et al., 2019), reflecting an individual's attitude toward the organization as a whole,
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58 434 including its policies, procedures, and management. Furthermore, the study by Munyon et al.
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3 435 (2019) explores how attribution theory sheds new light on the firm-level, indicating that
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6 436 consumer judgments can have costly firm-level consequences in the form of reputational
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8 437 damage, diminished purchase intentions, and increased legal consequences.
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11 438 The cognitive process of making attributions is undertaken by individuals only when they
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13 439 perceive that the information they receive is important to them (Weiner, 1986). This highlights
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15 440 the significance of perceived relevance of the practice, which can be defined as the extent to
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17 441 which individuals are interested in and dependent on changes in their environment (Sivacek &
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19 442 Crano, 1982; Gardner et al., 2019). Perceived relevance serves as a motivation for individuals
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21 443 to process information about their experiences and observations in order to uncover underlying
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23 444 causes.
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28 445 Given that the human brain has limited capacity, processing vast amounts of data to discern the
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30 446 reasons behind behaviors is facilitated by organizing and storing information through
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32 447 categorization, such as assigning traits to others (Lord & Smith, 1983; Lind, 2001; Srull &
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34 448 Wyer, 1980). Categorization, based on previous experiences or beliefs, is considered a
35
36 449 fundamental aspect of attribution-making. Feldman (1981) introduced two types of
37
38 450 attributional processes: automatic and non-biased. The human brain can consciously engage in
39
40 451 the non-biased attribution process, where the perceiver has full control over the data being
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42 452 processed by the brain to develop attributions. This controlled attribution process can be
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44 453 explained through three main steps. First, it involves the conscious observation of others'
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46 454 behavior and the impulse to initiate attribution. Second, it encompasses the analysis of this
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48 455 behavior based on observed or experienced information to identify the cause that led to its
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50 456 occurrence. Finally, it entails the selection of one primary cause that explains the behavior's
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52 457 occurrence, including an assessment of whether this cause reflects a specific trait of the agent.
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3 458 When individuals decide to assign a specific category or trait to an agent based on their
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6 459 observations, all subsequent judgments about that agent are automatically interpreted through
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8 460 the lens of that assigned trait. This process, known as automatic categorization, significantly
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10 461 reduces the amount of data processing that humans need to undertake to attribute a cause to a
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12 462 behavior. However, it's also the primary reason for individuals' attributional biases
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14 463 (Derakhshan et al., 2019a; Hewett et al., 2019).

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17 464 As Taylor and Fiske (1978) explained, people tend to stop searching for the causes of behaviors
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19 465 once they find the first satisfactory and salient cause. Feldman (1981) and later researchers like
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21 466 Martinko et al. (2007) and Hewett et al. (2019) expanded on Taylor and Fiske's work,
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23 467 suggesting that when there are different explanations for a behavior, the first salient explanation
24
25 468 is often selected as the cause. These salient sources are typically either distinctive qualities of
26
27 469 the agent or a specific cause stored in the observer's memory (a trait previously assigned to the
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29 470 agent). For humans, these traits are considered salient in determining causality, and thus,
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31 471 knowing an agent from the past or considering a particular trait associated with them influences
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33 472 the interpretation of their behavior in the present.

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36 473 Furthermore, categorization isn't solely used to reduce the amount of data processing. During
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38 474 attributional processes, categorization is also relied upon as a foundation for making
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40 475 assumptions in situations where specific information is unavailable (Wyer & Srull, 2014).
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42 476 Therefore, causes identified through automatic attribution processes are likely to be inaccurate
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44 477 and, in some cases, incorrect (Feldman, 1981). As will be explained below, these automatic
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46 478 processes are associated with several biases that have long been studied by attribution scholars
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48 479 (Billet & Qian, 2008; Doukas & Petmezas, 2007).

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51 480 In situations where information is lacking, individuals tend to invoke internal causes
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53 481 (attributing behavior to an organization's traits) more frequently than external causes
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3 482 (attributing behavior to reasons outside the organization's control) (Carson, 2019; Weiner,
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5 483 1986). Internal causes are more often considered the primary reason behind a given behavior,
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7 484 especially in cases with severe and negative consequences, while external causes are more
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9 485 likely to be ascribed to behaviors with trivial or positive outcomes.
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13 486 When a behavior leads to severe negative consequences, individuals tend to attribute it to the
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15 487 intentionality of the organization responsible for the action. Conversely, when the outcomes
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17 488 are positive, the cause is typically attributed to factors outside the organization's control
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19 489 (Feldman, 1981; Martinko et al., 2007). It appears that individuals are more inclined to attribute
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21 490 internal causes to the "good" behaviors of organizations they like and the "bad" behaviors of
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23 491 organizations they dislike. In other words, the positive actions of liked organizations are more
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25 492 often attributed to their traits, while negative actions are considered to be due to external causes.
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27 493 Conversely, the positive actions of disliked organizations are more likely to be perceived as
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29 494 accidental or unintentional, while their negative actions are attributed to their traits, implying
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31 495 intentionality.
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37 496 *4.2. The Attribution Theory Mobilized*

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40 497 Understanding how stakeholders perceive an organization's actions at the individual
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42 498 level is crucial for organizations striving for normative behavior. Such organizations are
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44 499 motivated to share their decision outcomes and processes with stakeholders to enhance their
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46 500 perception of fairness. They make efforts to reach decisions that are considered fair by
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48 501 stakeholders. According to Phillips (1997), for a decision to be fair, it should take into account
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50 502 the risks, costs, and contributions of all network stakeholders. The decision outcome may
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52 503 involve benefits or costs imposed on secondary stakeholders, like local communities. For
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54 504 example, this could include the environmental degradation resulting from specific project
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56 505 activities or infrastructure development as part of a community development program agreed
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3 506 upon with the local government. However, individuals within the local community will form
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5 507 their own perceptions based on available information, considering whether the project
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7 508 organization had control over the causes of the outcome or if the outcome was a result of
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9 509 external conditions (Weiner, 1986; Weiner et al., 1988). This attributional process will lead to
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11 510 judgments about the fairness of the organization's decisions and subsequent actions either in
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13 511 support or opposition to the organization.
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18 512 In the stakeholder's initial interactions with the organization, their attribution processes are
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20 513 conscious and non-biased. This means that when individuals perceive changes in their
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22 514 environment that are relevant to them, they consciously seek information to attribute causes to
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24 515 these changes. However, when information is lacking, attribution biases come into play,
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26 516 leading individuals to consider the organization's intentionality behind negative outcomes and
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28 517 attributing positive outcomes to external causes beyond the organization's control.
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33 518 Over time, these attributions combine and form the individual's beliefs about the organization
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35 519 or its traits. After numerous such observations, attributions solidify into an individual's
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37 520 perception. Given that fairness is perceived from the outcome (distributive), process
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39 521 (procedural), and communication among individuals (interactional), stakeholders use these
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41 522 three dimensions to evaluate whether the organization is fair in decisions that affect them. As
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43 523 Malle (1999) emphasizes, an organization's past behavior is considered the cause behind its
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45 524 present behavior. In organizations where often disregarded stakeholders lack sufficient
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47 525 information to attribute the real cause behind organizational behavior, stakeholders attempt to
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49 526 guess the underlying processes that led to the emergence of a particular outcome (Wyer &
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51 527 Srull, 2014).
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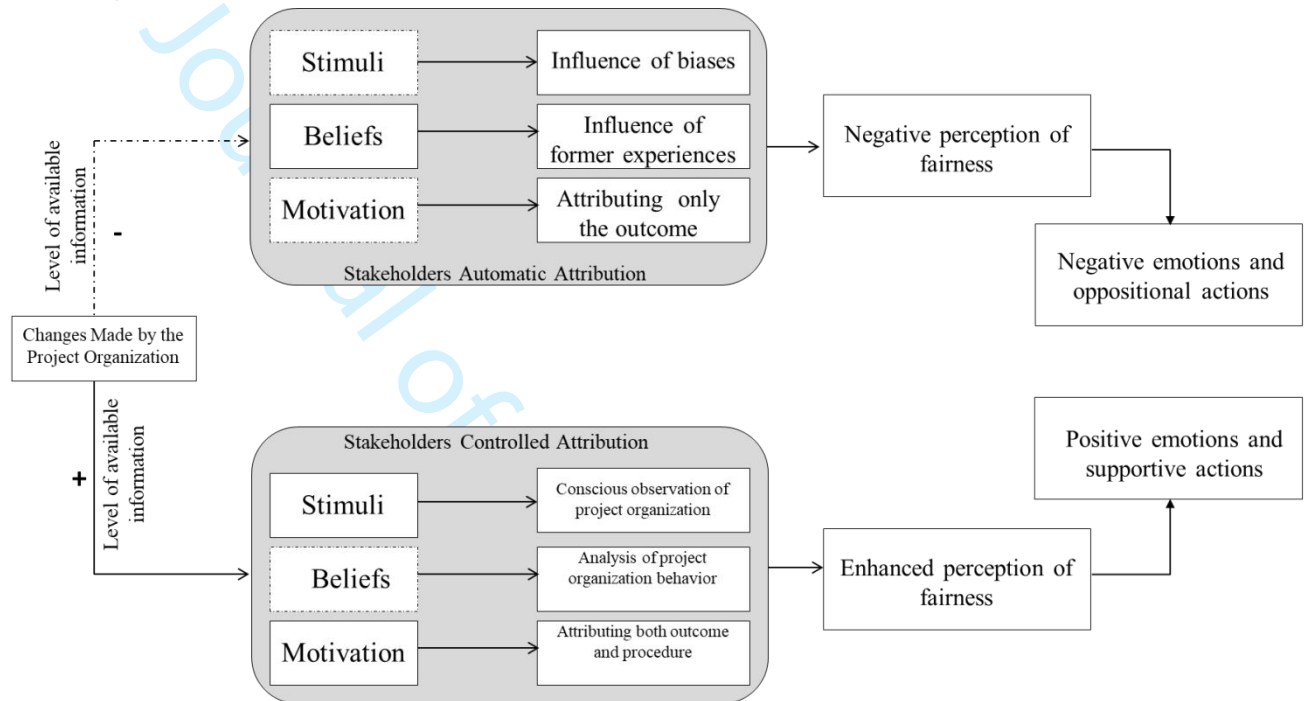
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56 528 In an organization that excludes secondary stakeholders from the decision-making process,
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58 529 these disregarded stakeholders tend to perceive the organization as cynical. They automatically
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3 530 attribute negative behaviors to the organization's traits and assign beneficial acts to external
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5 531 causes. From the individual's standpoint, further considerations of the causality of negative
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7 532 impacts are automatically rejected because they have found what they consider a satisfactory
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9 533 reason (Ross, 1977). As suggested by Feldman (1981) and Malle (1999), in such circumstances,
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11 534 if an accident that is out of the organization's control has a negative impact, the individual is
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13 535 likely to automatically blame the project organization for that accident. Thus, despite not being
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15 536 factually accurate, the perception of the project organization's "untrustworthiness" becomes the
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17 537 most salient explanation for this unfortunate event, leading stakeholders to develop negative
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19 538 emotions toward the organization and eventually engage in collective actions against the
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21 539 project.

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27 540 However, automatic attribution can be replaced by a more conscious process. A conscious
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29 541 categorization process, which is less biased, is triggered when incoming information deviates
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31 542 significantly from a stakeholder's pre-assumed traits or expectations. In such cases, individuals
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33 543 become motivated to make attributions about the causality of the emergent information.
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35 544 Because the new pieces of information do not align with the previously established traits of the
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37 545 project organization, individuals seek other reasons behind the organization's recent behavior.

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41 546 Lord and Smith (1983) explain that the level of information processing plays a significant role
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43 547 in reducing biases in the attribution process. The rule of thumb is that when a high level of
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45 548 information is available, a conscious and non-biased attribution is made, and the frequency of
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47 549 attribution biases diminishes during the process. Research by Jeong (2009) on post-crisis
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49 550 communication following an oil spill, for instance, confirms that stakeholders made higher
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51 551 internal attributions and lower external attributions about the oil spill accident when a high
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53 552 level of information was provided to them by the project organization, compared to when low
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55 553 levels of information or no information were provided.
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554 Drawing from attribution theory, this section has outlined the process through which
 555 stakeholders attempt to make sense of an organization's behavior by evaluating the changes in
 556 their surrounding environment due to project activities. In light of the above discussion, the
 557 conceptual framework for the study is shown in Figure 1.



558

559 **Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework - Stakeholders' attributional processes towards the project
 560 organization

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563 **5. Contributions to Theory and Implications in Practice**

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565 In this article, the aim was to understand how secondary stakeholders, who are often
 566 disregarded and marginalized, make sense of an organization's behavior and how the
 567 organization can promote a non-biased perception of fairness among these stakeholders. This
 568 question is crucial for project organizations seeking support from a broader range of
 569 stakeholders, including local communities affected by large construction and infrastructure
 projects. Attribution theory was used to explain the process that stakeholders go through in

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3 570 perceiving fairness. The study emphasizes the significance of human perceptions in project
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5 571 stakeholder management, and the theoretical and practical implications of the research are
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8 572 presented below.
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14 574 *5.1. Theoretical Implications*

17 575 The conceptualization developed in this study aligns with the normative stance of
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19 576 stakeholder theory, which places significant importance on fair treatment among a broad range
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21 577 of project stakeholders (e.g., Phillips et al., 2003; Unterhitzemberger & Lawrence, 2023). This
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23 578 research is grounded in the moral aspiration that project organizations should aim to meet and
24
25 579 exceed stakeholder expectations by understanding how stakeholders perceive the changes
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27 580 brought to their environment (Freeman et al., 2010). It underscores the ethical responsibility of
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29 581 decision-makers to consider the demands, concerns, and interests of various stakeholders,
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31 582 including those like local communities who lack formal contractual relationships or direct legal
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33 583 authority over the organization (Di Maddaloni & Sabini, 2022).
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38 584 As highlighted in this study, even organizations with the intention of fairness may
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40 585 unintentionally exclude stakeholders from the decision-making processes that most affect
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42 586 them, leading to perceptions of unfairness. From this perspective, the concept of "legitimacy"
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44 587 becomes a central element for engaging and including secondary stakeholders in the decision-
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46 588 making process, as opposed to the "power" and resource-exchange view often emphasized in
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48 589 instrumental formulations of stakeholders (Derakhshan et al., 2019a).
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53 590 While an organizational justice approach has been claimed through a more stakeholder focused
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55 591 form of governance (e.g., Gil & Fu, 2022; Müller, 2017; Unterhitzemberger & Moeller, 2023);
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57 592 This study contributes to the evolving literature on organizational management practices,
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3 593 shifting from an organization-centric approach to a stakeholder-centric approach, recognizing
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5 594 the often-overlooked aspect of the stakeholder debate. It builds on the work of scholars who
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7 595 have explored stakeholder management practices from the perspective of the organization, and
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10 596 it advances the understanding of how project organizations can promote fairness and
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12 597 inclusiveness among secondary stakeholders in decision-making processes (Derhakshan 2020;
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14 598 Malle, 2011).

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18 599 This research represents a pioneering effort in project management studies by departing from
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20 600 the conventional definition of stakeholders as entities with specific roles and rights (e.g.,
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22 601 Friedman & Miles, 2002). Instead, it delves into the stakeholder attribution process, exploring
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24 602 how stakeholders' perceptions of fairness are shaped, which can subsequently lead to project
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26 603 opposition or support. The study contributes to the limited body of work within stakeholder
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28 604 theory that underscores the significance of stakeholders' perceptions and emotions as valuable
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30 605 sources of knowledge for organizations to support decision-making.

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35 606 In contrast to studies that examine projects from the perspective of fairness or justice theories
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37 607 (e.g., Unterhitzemberger & Briyde, 2019; Unterhitzemberger & Lawrence, 2023 Shafi et al.,
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39 608 2021), our findings emphasize that the perception of fairness is influenced by stakeholders'
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41 609 experiences and observations at three distinct levels: first, the outcome shared with them,
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43 610 initiated by the organization at the corporate level (distributive fairness); second, the decision-
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45 611 making process discussed with them at the project level (procedural fairness); and third, the
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47 612 overall quality of treatment provided by project authority figures (interactional fairness).

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52 613 By applying this tripartite framework, our research underscores that for managerial practices
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54 614 to be effective, they must actively influence all three dimensions of fairness. This provides a
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56 615 nuanced perspective on stakeholder management, recognizing that fairness is not solely
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58 616 dependent on the outcomes but also on the processes and interpersonal interactions that shape

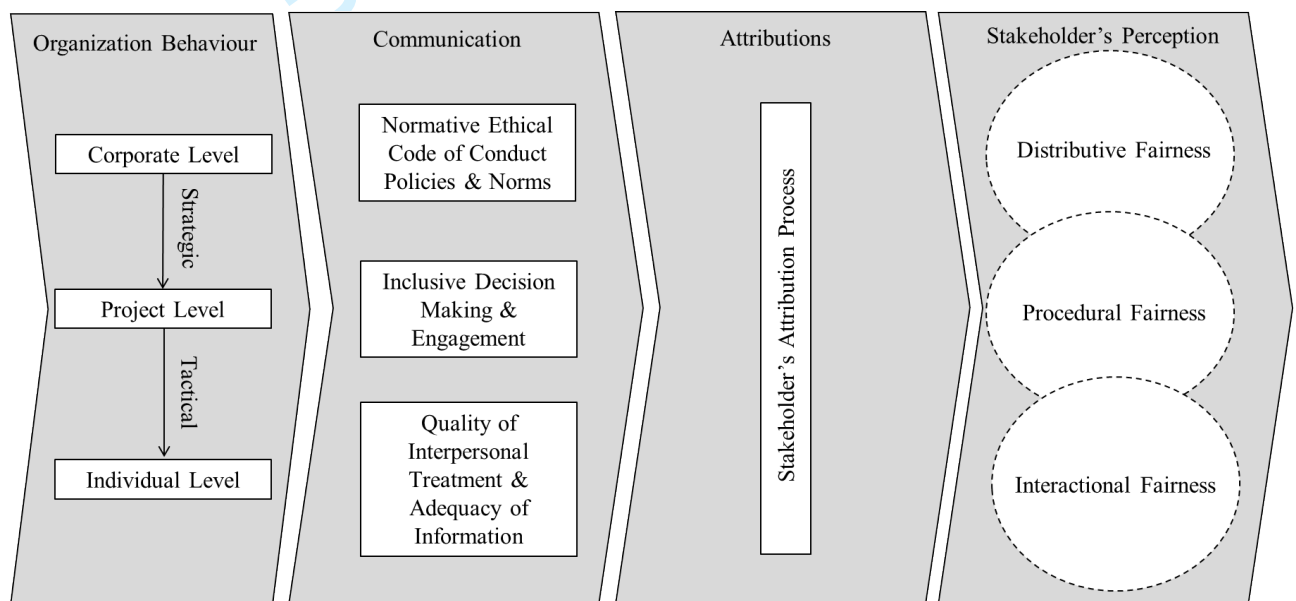
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3 617 stakeholder perceptions. While the dimensions of fairness, including distributive, procedural,
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5 618 and interactional fairness, are all crucial for achieving stakeholder satisfaction, stakeholder
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7 619 management practices have historically placed a stronger emphasis on the final outcome of the
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9 620 project (distributive fairness). However, a normative interpretation of stakeholder theory
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11 621 emphasizes that decisions about these outcomes should involve active communication with
12
13 622 stakeholders and should not be confined to the organization, shareholders, and other primary
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15 623 influential stakeholders as the sole decision-makers.

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20 624 This study underscores the necessity of involving stakeholders in the decision-making
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22 625 processes behind an organization's initiatives (procedural fairness). It also highlights the
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24 626 importance of providing stakeholders with high-quality engagement and adequate information
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26 627 (interactional fairness) to ensure that stakeholders perceive fairness not only in the outcomes
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28 628 but also in the processes and interactions that shape their experiences. In doing so,
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30 629 organizations can strive to enhance stakeholder satisfaction and achieve a more comprehensive
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32 630 and equitable approach to stakeholder management.

33 34 35 36 37 631 *5.2. Managerial Implications*

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41 632 In terms of practical implications, this study advocates a paradigm shift towards
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43 633 adopting a stakeholder perspective, with a particular emphasis on actively engaging and
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45 634 communicating with secondary stakeholders right from the inception of complex systems like
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47 635 large construction and infrastructure projects. While existing stakeholder communication
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49 636 literature has long emphasized that involving secondary stakeholders in the decision-making
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51 637 process enables an organization to better understand their demands, shared risks, and interests
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53 638 (e.g., Eskerod & Larsen, 2018), this study takes it a step further by suggesting that effective
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55 639 communication significantly impacts how stakeholders perceive the fairness of project
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57 640 conditions across three distinct levels: corporate, project, and individual.

641 By embracing a normative commitment and providing disempowered stakeholders with an
 642 adequate level of information, these attributional processes become more conscious, ultimately
 643 reducing the influence of biases. The study proposes a process model to guide practitioners in
 644 adopting an inclusive and normative approach aimed at enhancing stakeholders' perception of
 645 fairness across corporate, project, and individual levels, as illustrated in Figure 2. This model
 646 serves as a practical tool for organizations to actively engage with their stakeholders and
 647 improve fairness in project-related decisions and actions.



648
 649 **Figure 2:** Process model towards stakeholders' perception of fairness in projects

650 Figure 2 illustrates that at the corporate level, project organizations should engage in
 651 transparent and ethical communication regarding their commitment to meeting and surpassing
 652 stakeholder needs and expectations (e.g., Freeman et al., 2007). Decisions related to value
 653 distribution among a wider spectrum of stakeholders should be formulated at the corporate and
 654 strategic levels, guided by a normative ethical code of conduct, policies, and norms. This
 655 ensures that stakeholders perceive the distribution of benefits and harms fairly, which impacts
 656 the well-being of individual group members and the community.

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3 657 To achieve this, a clear top-down message should be conveyed from the corporate level to the
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5 658 interface where project communicators and project managers engage with secondary
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7 659 stakeholders. This message should stress the importance of effective collaboration in the
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9 660 decision-making process, not only guaranteeing fair treatment but also fostering perceptions of
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11 661 fair procedures among stakeholders. Policymakers and project promoters have already made
12
13 662 substantial progress in this direction. For example, the use of balanced scorecards (Kaplan &
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15 663 Norton, 2001) in large construction and infrastructure projects can help compare the impact on
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17 664 stakeholders, balancing it with the project's goals. Legislation like the 'Statutory Planning Act'
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19 665 or the 'Community Empowerment Act' has been beneficial in promoting consultation and
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21 666 participatory planning. However, it's important for project organizations to be mindful that
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23 667 stakeholders may view these initiatives as merely box-checking exercises for project approval
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25 668 (e.g., Di Maddaloni & Davis, 2018). Therefore, project organizations should be diligent in their
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27 669 stakeholder communication to ensure that their genuine commitment to fairness is well-
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29 670 perceived.
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36 671 At the project level, organizations should aspire to create an inclusive decision-making
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38 672 process that is transparent, correctable, and representative of the often-overlooked voices of
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40 673 stakeholders. By viewing stakeholders as an end in themselves, project managers should
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42 674 apply the ethical stance and core values of the organization at the project level. Stakeholder
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44 675 satisfaction should be the goal of an organization transitioning to an inclusive decision-
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46 676 making process and embracing bottom-up collaborative forms of engagement. The project
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48 677 organization should consider the impact and benefits delivered to a diverse and cohesive
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50 678 array of stakeholders, such as local communities, by actively listening to and incorporating
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52 679 their perspectives for mutual benefit.
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3 680 We define communication as a tool for providing information to motivate and support
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5 681 stakeholders' attributional processes. While it's beyond the scope of this article to provide an
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7 682 exhaustive list of communication approaches, we suggest that, in line with this definition,
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9 683 project managers should choose and employ diverse means and methods for sharing the
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11 684 decision-making processes and engagement with a broad range of stakeholders. Depending on
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13 685 the project context and the stakeholders involved, these methods may include meetings with
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15 686 representatives (Yalegama et al., 2016), public hearings (Kivilä et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2017),
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17 687 or continuous updates through social media (Lobo & Abid, 2019; Ninan et al., 2019).
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23 688 Communication can range from simple, one-on-one discussions between managers and
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25 689 individual stakeholders to more complex interactions when multiple stakeholder interests are
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27 690 involved (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003). Regardless of the approach, the purpose of this
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29 691 communication is to inform and engage stakeholders in a way that supports their attributional
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31 692 processes. It is essential to ensure transparency and the flow of adequate information. Project
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33 693 practitioners should also recognize that communication with stakeholders is incomplete if it
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35 694 doesn't extend to individuals within the project organization who have authority, such as project
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37 695 managers, at the individual level.
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42 696 When information is lacking, stakeholders' perceptions of fairness become biased and
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44 697 distorted. This is especially significant for disregarded or marginalized stakeholders, such as
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46 698 local communities, who are often not included in communication efforts required by many
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48 699 regulations. Their perceptions of the project may only become apparent when they directly
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50 700 experience or observe tangible outcomes.
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55 701 One of the fiduciary obligations of the project organization is to maintain constant
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57 702 communication with stakeholders throughout the decision-making process. This
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59 703 communication not only encourages stakeholders to engage in positive attributional processes
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3 704 but also fosters the perception of fairness as a fundamental aspect of decision-making. It also
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5 705 helps reduce biases in the attributional processes of stakeholders, as highlighted by Lord and
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8 706 Smith (1983). It's in situations with insufficient information that the impact of these biases
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10 707 becomes significant. Therefore, providing stakeholders with adequate information is essential
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12 708 for them to correctly attribute the locus of cause, and project organizations should work toward
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15 709 achieving this goal.

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21 711 **6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research**

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25 712 This paper commenced by questioning the underlying assumptions of stakeholder
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27 713 theory and uncovered certain underappreciated aspects of stakeholder management studies. It
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29 714 explored the three dimensions of perceiving fairness through the framework of attribution
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31 715 theory to provide insight into how stakeholders' perceptions of organizational behavior are
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34 716 shaped through cognitive processes carried out by stakeholders. This attribution theory
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36 717 perspective laid the foundation for a deeper understanding of the importance of stakeholder
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38 718 perception in garnering stakeholder support and satisfaction. The study revealed that the
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41 719 perception of fairness operates at various levels and that decisions regarding value-sharing with
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43 720 stakeholders should be formulated at the corporate level and implemented at the project level.
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45 721 Furthermore, the actual perception of fairness is constructed at the individual level.

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49 722 The main objective of this research was to offer guidance on how organizations can foster a
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51 723 non-biased perception of fairness among secondary stakeholders, who are often overlooked in
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53 724 the decision-making process. The study focused primarily on the role of communication as a
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55 725 mediator between an organization's behavior and stakeholders' attributional processes, leading
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58 726 to their subsequent perceptions of fairness. Given that the purpose of organizational
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3 727 communication is to inform stakeholders and stimulate their attributional processes, the
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5 728 transparency and provision of sufficient information are of utmost importance. This approach
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7 729 ensures that stakeholders develop a conscious and non-biased perception of an organization's
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9 730 actions and behaviors.
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13 731 The study acknowledges its limitations, which primarily arise from its conceptual nature and
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15 732 scope. This research paves the way for future empirical studies in the field of stakeholder
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17 733 engagement. Given the novelty of the concept under investigation, this study adopted a
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19 734 conceptual approach. Empirical research within the realm of project studies is required to
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21 735 validate and build upon the findings of this research. It's important to note that this article
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23 736 primarily examines stakeholders' perceptions of fairness, and it does not delve into the study
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25 737 of stakeholders' emotions or actions. These later stages may also be influenced by various
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27 738 contextual factors, such as the characteristics of the stakeholders themselves or their networks
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29 739 within the societal or project environment. This study focuses on the initial step of analyzing
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31 740 perceptions, leaving the examination of stakeholders' emotions and consequent actions for
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33 741 future research. Future research could explore how these perceptions evolve into stakeholders'
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35 742 emotions and subsequent actions.
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42 743 Furthermore, attribution theory, as a theoretical framework with significant unexplored
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44 744 potential, provides a strong basis for further empirical investigations into stakeholders'
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46 745 perceptions and cognitive processes. While this research utilized the attribution theory
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48 746 framework to initiate a discussion on how project stakeholders attribute organizational
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50 747 behavior, it's important to recognize that the individual attributions explored in this study do
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52 748 not directly translate into collective attributions by stakeholder groups. Nevertheless, consistent
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54 749 with previous research, it is recognized that group attributions by stakeholders can significantly
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56 750 influence the attributions made by individuals within that group. Future empirical research
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751 could investigate the mechanisms by which individual attributions are transferred to the group
752 level and under what conditions individual perceptions prevail and become the final judgment
753 of stakeholder groups regarding an organization's behavior.

754 While our conceptualization is specifically situated within the context of the construction and
755 infrastructure industries, we believe that the reasoning and principles discussed can be applied
756 to a wide range of projects that have a significant impact on various secondary stakeholders.
757 This includes projects in industries like extractive resources and major development projects.
758 We encourage future scholars in the field of project management to further build upon this
759 study, complement the research presented here, and expand our understanding of how project-
760 based organizations can effectively engage secondary stakeholders. Such research can
761 contribute to the long-term success and sustainability of projects in various sectors.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29	Authors' responses	Page in the manuscript
<p>Comments of Reviewers</p> <p>do have appreciation for your research paper, which aims at discovering how the often disregarded 'secondary' stakeholders attempt to make sense of an organization's behavior, and how this perception can be promoted by the organization to achieve non-biased stakeholder's perception of fairness. The study emphasizes that demands and concerns of stakeholders particularly of local community need to be considered in empirical studies as well as practical aspects. By applying attribution theory, it highlights the importance of stakeholder-approach to ensure long benefits of organizations and projects. It also underscores that project organizations need to provide clear and transparent communication to a broader range of stakeholders, such as those that have had little to say in the decision-making process (the often-disregarded voices).</p> <p>The paper, however, has issues that require revisions and/or further re-work as presented section- by-section.</p>	<p>Reviewer 1</p> <p>We are grateful for the reviewer's valuable advice on the entire manuscript. Having addressed each point made, we feel that the quality of the work has been truly improved, and we sincerely hope that the reviewers agree. We appreciate the reviewer's comments and have incorporated them in this new revision of the article. In doing so, we have more clearly emphasized the contribution of this conceptual paper and explained the need for this research effort. We believe that the updated manuscript has improved considerably and hope that it will match the standard expected by the reviewer and the journal.</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>Abstract section:</p> <p>at the corporate, project, and individual level. Here, use 'levels' in place of level.</p> <p>...from both the process of decision-making (distributive) and the outcome of decisions (procedural), as well as the way in which they are treated (interactional).</p> <p>Please check for the usage of appropriate terminology. For example, the process of decision-making needs to be termed as</p>	<p>Thank you for your careful attention. We went through all article and provided a thorough English editing in all sections. All the points mentioned by you are also carefully considered.</p>	<p>Page 1.</p>

<p>'procedural instead of 'distributive'. Similarly, distributive fairness relates to the outcome of decisions.</p> <p>1 The sentence is complex. 2 3 4 Such communications lead to less biased attributions as they 5 reduce the influence of personal beliefs in achieving a conscious 6 and non-biased attribution mode. 7 8 Attribution is redundant in this sentence.</p>		
<p>9 10 Introduction 11 12 On page 2, paragraph 1, Line 9: replace 'has not' by hasn't 13 14 The following sentence on page 5 is too long and very complex to 15 understand. 16 17 Stakeholder literature in other disciplines outside the construction 18 project management field has elucidated that stakeholders' actions 19 against projects are the last step in a series of processes that begin 20 with stakeholders trying to make sense of their environment, 21 perceiving an organization's behavior, evaluating the fairness of 22 the conditions made by the project, and developing emotions in 23 response (Coombs & Holladay, 2005; McDonald et al., 2010; Tee et 24 al., 2013). 25 26 27 28 29 30 Concerning the following sentence on page 5: 31 32 33 However, it could be argued that the organization-centric approach 34 recorded in stakeholder literature has limited our understanding of 35 the aforementioned processes undertaken by stakeholders. 36 37 38 But, the processes undertaken by stakeholders were not well 39 introduced in the previous sections. 40 41</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. We changed the English writing so that all your comments about tone and grammar are addressed. Also complicated sentences are divided to become simpler and better understandable.</p> <p>About the last point in this section, we meant attribution processes taken by stakeholders. We changed the sentence to make it clearer: "Nonetheless, it can be contended that the organization-centric approach prevalent in stakeholder literature has restricted our comprehension of the processes undertaken by stakeholders."</p>	Page 2.
<p>42 The Attribution Theory Mobilized 43 by understanding how stakeholders make sense of the 44</p>	<p>Thanks for this observation. We have provided much better clarity in our writing and the mentioned point has been addressed in text.</p>	Page 21.

<p>Page 41 of 50 organization actions at the individual level, organizations with an inclination to normative behavior tend to be better motivated to share the outcomes and process of their decisions with stakeholders enhancing their perception of fairness.</p> <p>In the above text, the usage of 'their' is confusing! The first 'their' represents organizations but, the second 'their' represents stakeholders.</p>	<p>International Journal of Managing Projects in Business</p>	
<p>Under 5.1. Theoretical Implications, Page 25, paragraph 3:</p> <p>In contrast to works that examine projects from a fairness or justice theory perspective (e.g., Kadefors, 2005; Loosemore & Lim, 2015; Unterhitzberger & Bryde, 2019; Zhang et al., 2017), our findings suggest that the perception of fairness is shaped by stakeholders' experiences and observations from three different levels: 1) the outcome shared with them and initiated by the organization with an intention of fairness at the corporate level (distributive fairness); 2) the process of decision-making discussed with them at the project level (procedural fairness); and finally 3) the overall quality of treatment provided to individuals from the project's authority figures (interactional fairness). Through the application of this dichotomy, we reinforce the point that for managerial practices to be effective they need to actively influence three aspects of fairness (Lim & Loosemore, 2017).</p> <p>Though the author (s) claimed that above findings, the paper has no section for findings. One of the most serious problems of this paper is that its conclusion is not based on data and evidences.</p>	<p>Thank you so much for your point. Our paper is a conceptual paper and so rather than drawing on or testing empirical evidence, it is based on theoretical discussions embedded in extant literature. In such type of articles, it is not common or value-adding to have a findings section, since the discussions are built over the paper through logical arguments.</p> <p>This means that our purpose is primarily "to bridge existing theories in interesting ways, link works across disciplines, provide multi-level insights, and broaden the scope of our thinking" (Gilson and Goldberg, 2015). According to Jaakkola (2020), conceptual papers do not lack empirical insights, as these are constructed upon theories and concepts that have been formulated and validated through literature.</p>	<p>Page 24, Page 25.</p>
<p>Page 30, paragraph 2 under section: '6. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research', the author (s) indicated that the role of communication as a mediator between an organization's behavior and stakeholders' attributional processes and subsequent perceptions of fairness.</p> <p>But, acceptable methodology was not followed to reach into such conclusion. Besides, the claim was not supported by evidences.</p>	<p>For the same reason mentioned above, the paper does not have a methodology section as well.</p> <p>Specifically, conceptual papers typically do not have methodology section. A few examples among many others from both project management and mainstream management literature include: Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Crane and Ruebottom, 2012; Cropanzano, 2009; Driscoll and Statik, 2004; Dunham et al.,</p>	<p>Page 31.</p>

2006; Eskerod et al., 2015; Flyvbjerg et al., 2009; Frooman, 1999; Hart and Sharma, 2004; McVea and Freeman, 2005; Rowley, 1997; Sanderson, 2011; Soderlund, 2004; Sutton and Staw, 1995).

“In general, conceptual and theoretical manuscripts do not have methodology sections. There is no argument being made that the broad scope of a body of literature has been explored and new findings are emerging from an analysis” (Callan, 2010, p.302).

In this conceptual paper we tried to use theory and concepts to construct our arguments on how we have arrived at this problem. We have selectively chosen key pieces of literature (including seminal works) that support a particular perspective that we are putting forth for consideration.

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18 References

19 I would like to forward my appreciation that the author(s) applied a
20 standard referencing style. Most sources, however, are too old that
21 do not properly capture state-of-the-art in the project stakeholder
22 management studies. Besides, some sources in the reference
23 section are presented in a different style. Some of these are:

24
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26
27 Letsch, C. 2013. Turkey protest spread after violence in Istanbul
28 over park demolition. The Guardian, 31st May 2013.

29 Rosemore, M., Lim, B.T.H., 2015. Inter-organisational unfairness in
30 the construction industry. Construction Management and
31 Economics. 33 (4), 310–326.

32
33 Ng, H.S., Pena-Mora, F., Tamaki, T., 2007. Dynamic conflict
34 management in large-scale design and construction projects.
35 Journal of Management Engineering, 23 (2), 52–66.

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37 Rawls, J., 1958. Justice as fairness. Philosophy Review, 67 (2), 64–
38 94.

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45 though flexible and innovative methods in research are

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Thanks for this observation. Like any conceptual paper, our work aims to build upon seminal works and core principles of the theory, which is why some references may be dated. Our approach involves progressing from these foundational elements to the latest thinking in the investigated domains. New and most up to date reference have been added.

In this instance, we respectfully disagree with the reviewer, as our paper adheres strictly to mainstream management approaches for developing and presenting conceptual work. This, of course, contrasts with an empirical study in terms of how results and findings are collected, analyzed, and presented.

With that said, we express our gratitude once again to the anonymous reviewer for dedicating time and effort to provide guidance for improving this article. Your insights have been invaluable in achieving the expected quality required by IJMPB, and we sincerely hope that the reviewers concur.

Page 6,
Page 9,
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Page 26.

encouraged, we should not compromise standard procedures and acceptable methods in a given field of study. In this regard, the present study has no clear research design. Overall, the result section is a mere literature review which does not qualify for result/findings section.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

1. Though the paper attempts to address the local community's perception of fairness regarding decision-making in a project context- which gets a marginal attention in project management literature-, it lacks to provide new and significant information.
 2. The paper contains relevant literature. But, the author (s) ignored the following significant works in the field:
 - MGille ller, R. (2017). Organizational Project Governance. In: Müller, R. ed. Governance and Governmentality for Projects: Enables, Practices and Consequences. New York, NY: Routledge, pp.11-24.
 - Unterhitzenberger, C., & Moeller, D. (2021). Fair project governance: An organisational justice approach to project governance. International Journal of Project Management, 39(6), 683-696.
 - Unterhitzenberger, C., & Lawrence, K. (2023). Fairness matters: organisational justice in project contexts. Production Planning & Control, 1-16.
- In terms of concept wise, the author (s) failed to link fairness with the construct of organizational governance, which can provide the required rigour and theoretical underpinning to generate relevant insights (Unterhitzenberger & Moeller, 2021).

1. Thank you for your valuable feedback. We have endeavoured to enhance the clarity of the paper's discussion and contributions to emphasize the novelty of our article.
2. We have incorporated the most recent relevant works, as suggested. We appreciate your guidance. While fairness is intricately linked with governance, our focus in this article is solely on stakeholders' perceptions. Future research could delve into how attribution processes are connected to project governance.
- 3, 4, 5. We appreciate your suggestions. This paper takes a conceptual approach as the concepts of stakeholder attribution and perceptions of fairness are relatively novel in project management studies. The discussions in this paper lay the groundwork for future empirical studies.
6. We sincerely thank you for your patience in reviewing the earlier version of the paper. The manuscript has undergone professional English editing, and we believe all English-related issues have been addressed in this revised version.

Page 24,
Page 25,
Page 27.

Page 6,
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Page 11,
Page 14,
Page 25,
Page 26.

3. The paper has no clear research design except that a conceptual approach was followed. A mere conceptual design is not acceptable for the study topics or issues where there is adequate theoretical and empirical literature. This true for fairness in project or project governance and project stakeholder management-the central ideas of the paper.

Overall, the author (s) did not follow appropriate and standard methodology to undertake the study. Though flexible and innovative methods in research are encouraged, we should not compromise standard procedures and acceptable methods in a given study. In this regard, the present study has no clear research design. The best option could be (1) to do a systematic review or (2) to apply 'Meta-Analysis Design'

4. Overall, the result section is a mere literature review which does not qualify for result/findings section. One of the most serious problems of the paper is that its conclusion is not based on data and evidences

5. The paper attempts to address the existing limitations in the conventional project stakeholder management which presumes organizational-centric approach. It highlights the importance of local community (secondary stakeholder) participation and involvement in project decision-making. The paper, however, has no data and clear findings that justify the stated implications.

6. Concerning quality of communication, the flow of ideas and the sentence structure are fine. But, the paper further requires proofreading to improve its readability.

<p>1 2 found the paper insightful and interesting to read; thank you. 3 4 5 6</p>	<p>We thank again the reviewer for the time spent reviewing this manuscript. We appreciate the reviewer's comments and have taken them seriously in this version of the manuscript. We believe that the updated article has improved and hope that it will match the standard expected by the reviewer.</p>	n/a
<p>7 8 While stakeholders' literature is relatively rich, the paper does 9 contain new and significant information by establishing the 10 conceptual framework for the existing literature and practices that 11 conceptualize the process through which stakeholders attempt to 12 conceptualize the process through which stakeholders attempt to 13 make sense of an organization's behavior. 14 15 16 In addition, a process model was developed to lead practitioners 17 towards an inclusive and normative approach aimed at enhancing 18 stakeholders' perception of fairness at the corporate, project, and 19 individual levels. 20 21 22</p>	<p>Thank you. We really appreciate this comment.</p>	n/a
<p>23 24 The paper presents an adequate understanding of the relevant 25 literature. However, the literature review does not include 26 anything between 2021-2023. The authors are recommended to 27 elaborate on any relevant recent literature. 28 29 30 While the authors mentioned some real project examples, they 31 were not detailed enough to establish relevancy to the topic. The 32 authors are advised to elaborate further on relevant international 33 project examples. 34 35 36 It would have been good to discuss the competencies of the 37 project manager/ stakeholder engagement manager and how this 38 impacts the engagement outcome. Even in organizations that 39 foster early stakeholders' engagement, the executors' 40 competencies might also affect the real application. 41 42 43 44 45 46</p>	<p>Thank you for your feedback on the citations. In response to your comments and those of the other reviewer, we have included additional citations that are not only more recent but also more relevant to the paper.</p> <p>Regarding your suggestion about empirical examples, it's important to note that this paper is conceptual in nature. While empirical examples could enhance the understanding of the paper, the nature of a conceptual paper limits the expansion of such cases. Our primary goal aligns with the idea of "bridging existing theories in interesting ways, linking works across disciplines, providing multi-level insights, and broadening the scope of our thinking" (Gilson and Goldberg, 2015). As Jaakkola (2020) points out, conceptual papers are not devoid of empirical insights; instead, they are constructed upon theories and concepts validated through existing literature.</p> <p>While we acknowledge the significance of project manager competencies in shaping stakeholder attribution, addressing this aspect would necessitate a shift in the article's direction and potentially involve the use of other theories.</p>	Page 6, Page 9, Page 10, Page 11, Page 14, Page 25, Page 26.

1 2 3	Therefore, we have chosen not to explore this dimension in the current article. However, we believe and suggest that future research could delve into this important and intriguing subject.	
4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21	<p>Thank you so much for your point. As mentioned above, our paper is a conceptual paper and so rather than drawing on or testing empirical evidences, it is based on theoretical discussions embedded in extant literature. In such type of articles, it is not common or value-adding to have a methodology and findings section, since the discussions are built over the paper through logical arguments.</p> <p>As Callan (2010, p.302) states: "In general, conceptual and theoretical manuscripts do not have methodology sections. There is no argument being made that the broad scope of a body of literature has been explored and new findings are emerging from an analysis".</p>	Page 24.
22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	<p>The results and discussion are clearly analyzed and presented. I found both the conceptual framework in Figure 1 and the process model in Figure 2 interesting and well-presented.</p> <p>The recommendations for future researchers can be more specific about the industrial context and the project nature to be investigated.</p>	Page 24.
31 32 33 34 35 36	<p>Yes, the paper does present implications for practice and research. The authors discussed the limitations of the study and findings and how this may impact the outcome of the investigation as well as its implications. I believe that industry practitioners will find the research findings practical and helpful.</p>	Page 25. Page 27.
37 38 39	<p>The paper is clear; proofreading is advised for the revised manuscript.</p>	n/a
Reviewer 3		
41 42 43 44 45 46	<p>The title of the article sparked my interest in reviewing it. There is no doubt that you are addressing a very important issue in construction project management. However, I feel that your</p>	n/a

<p>Page 47 of 50 manuscript has some serious weaknesses. Assuming the role of a reviewer, I will now focus on these "negative" aspects.</p>	<p>International Journal of Managing Projects in Business reviewer's comments seriously and substantially rewritten and refocused the manuscript to improve its quality. We believe that the updated manuscript has been improved considerably and hope that the reviewer will agree.</p>	
<p>1 2 3 In the Introduction, on page 3, paragraph starting from line 20 4 sounds moral stance of stakeholder literature rather than 5 normative? Please read the literature focused on moral 6 annotation to stakeholder engagement! 7 and benefits should be considered and how their model can 8 contribute to better quantify such costs and benefits.</p>	<p>Normative stance of stakeholder theory is indeed the moral stance of how an entity ought to behave with its stakeholders. Based on your comments and comments of other reviewers, we have revised the entire manuscript to provide more clarity on the key constructs this paper takes forward for analysis.</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>11 12 On page 5, line 13, there is lack of clarity in the sentence 13 stakeholder literature in other disciplines...”, please clarify which 14 disciplines? 15 Overall, the Introduction section is too long (5 pages), and the aim 16 of the study is not clear. Furthermore, the research question is not 17 completely aligned with the title of the article! For instance, the 18 title directs towards stakeholder engagement literature, but 19 research question directs towards organizational behavior!! The 20 Introduction has problem formulation issues, there is indication 21 towards multiple research gaps and related theoretical concepts 22 but none of them is focused upon.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. We have revised the English writing to address all your concerns regarding tone and grammar. Additionally, we have broken down complex sentences to make them simpler and more easily understandable.</p> <p>The title of the manuscript has been modified to align it with the research question. In response to your suggestion, we have also focused the introduction more on the research question.</p>	<p>Page 5,</p>
<p>27 28 It is important to write the Introduction in a form of a logical 29 funnel, where more general aspects are told first and sentence-by- 30 sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, then the text should proceed 31 onto narrower details. The aim or purpose of the article is 32 expressed last by describing the research problem and posing the 33 related research questions. Subsequently, it should also briefly 34 describe the research methodology adopted to answer the 35 research questions.</p>	<p>We made introduction more focused on research question as you suggested.</p>	<p>Page 2.</p>
<p>38 39 A serious shortcoming of both the Abstract and Introduction 40 sections is that they lack information concerning the research 41 approach and methodology adopted for this study. Furthermore, 42 there is no Methodology section in the entire article. Additionally, 43 the author(s) did not adhere to the structural abstract requirement</p>	<p>Thank you so much for your point. Our paper is a conceptual paper and so rather than drawing on or testing empirical evidence, it is based on theoretical discussions embedded in extant literature. In such type of articles, it is not common or value-adding to have a methodology and findings section, since the discussions are built over the paper through logical arguments.</p>	<p>Page 1, Page 2.</p>

of IJMPB.

There are many writing guides available that provide advice on the structure of proposed articles. One example is the commonly known IMRAD (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion) structure. Please follow this structure and rewrite the entire article accordingly.

Our primary goal aligns with the idea of "bridging existing theories in interesting ways, linking works across disciplines, providing multi-level insights, and broadening the scope of our thinking" (Gilson and Goldberg, 2015). As Jaakkola (2020) points out, conceptual papers are not devoid of empirical insights; instead, they are constructed upon theories and concepts validated through existing literature.

Specifically, conceptual papers typically do not have methodology section. A few examples among many others from both project management and mainstream management literature include: Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Crane and Ruebottom, 2012; Cropanzano, 2009; Driscoll and Statik, 2004; Dunham et al., 2006; Eskerod et al., 2015; Flyvbjerg et al., 2009; Frooman, 1999; Hart and Sharma, 2004; McVea and Freeman, 2005; Rowley, 1997; Sanderson, 2011; Soderlund, 2004; Sutton and Staw, 1995).

"In general, conceptual and theoretical manuscripts do not have methodology sections. There is no argument being made that the broad scope of a body of literature has been explored and new findings are emerging from an analysis" (Callan, 2010, p.302).

In this conceptual paper we tried to use theory and concepts to construct our arguments on how we have arrived at this problem. We have selectively chosen key pieces of literature (including seminal works) that support a particular perspective that we are putting forth for consideration.

In this instance, we respectfully disagree with the reviewer, as our paper adheres strictly to IJMPB and mainstream management approaches for developing and presenting conceptual work. This, of course, contrasts with an empirical study in terms of how results and findings are collected, analyzed, and presented.

<p>1</p> <p>2 I would rather stop my review here and ask you to consider the</p> <p>3 above comments, as these will/should probably result in more or</p> <p>4 less updating the remaining sections!</p> <p>5 I hope that these, quite critical (sorry!), remarks are of help to you</p> <p>6 when revising your manuscript for potential publication in this</p> <p>7 journal.</p> <p>8</p> <p>9</p> <p>10</p>	<p>We are grateful for these concluding comments about the entire manuscript. Having revised the paper extensively, we hope that many points that might have confused the reviewer have been clarified. We also hope that a meticulous review process has made our intended contribution clear and has improved the quality of the manuscript.</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>11 ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:</p> <p>12</p> <p>13</p> <p>14</p> <p>15 1. Although, the topic of human perceptions in engaging</p> <p>16 stakeholders is an interesting issue but as the article</p> <p>17 currently stands, it is hard to see a substantive original</p> <p>18 contribution due to not following a scientific writing</p> <p>19 structure.</p> <p>20</p> <p>21</p> <p>22</p> <p>23 2. The paper lacks the review of the stakeholder engagement</p> <p>24 literature that is directly related to the research</p> <p>25 phenomenon.</p> <p>26</p> <p>27</p> <p>28 3. Not really, there is no Methodology section in the entire</p> <p>29 article.</p> <p>30</p> <p>31</p> <p>32 4. There is no specific Results Section in the article.</p> <p>33</p> <p>34</p> <p>35 5. Yes, the paper does present implications for practice, but I</p> <p>36 am unsure about the reliability of this Section due to the</p> <p>37 other serious weaknesses – described below – in the paper.</p> <p>38</p> <p>39</p> <p>40 6. The quality of communication is weak because of not</p> <p>41 following a standard scientific structure of academic</p> <p>42 writing.</p> <p>43</p>	<p>1. Thank you for your valuable feedback. We have endeavoured to enhance the clarity of the paper's discussion and contributions to emphasize the novelty of our article.</p> <p>2. We have incorporated the most recent relevant works, as suggested. We appreciate your guidance. Our work clearly highlights how both fairness and attribution processes are inherently integral to stakeholder engagement. However, the primary focus and contribution of this paper lie in understanding stakeholders' perceptions.</p> <p>3. 4, 5. We appreciate your suggestions. This paper takes a conceptual approach as the concepts of stakeholder attribution and perceptions of fairness are relatively novel in project management studies. The discussions in this paper lay the groundwork for future empirical studies.</p> <p>6. We sincerely thank you for your patience in reviewing the earlier version of the paper. The manuscript has undergone professional English editing, and we believe all English-related issues have been addressed in this revised version.</p>	<p>Page 24,</p> <p>Page 25,</p> <p>Page 27.</p> <p>Page 6,</p> <p>Page 9,</p> <p>Page 10</p> <p>Page 11,</p> <p>Page 14,</p> <p>Page 25,</p> <p>Page 26.</p>

Dear Prof. Nathalie Drouin
Editor, International Journal of Managing Projects in Business (IJMPB).

Thank you for the opportunity to revise and resubmit our manuscript. My co-author and I are pleased to learn that Reviewer 2 recommended only minor changes. We acknowledge the reservations expressed by Reviewer 1 and Reviewer 3, particularly their concerns about the absence of a methodology chapter and engagement with the most updated literature.

In response to the reviewers' feedback, we have worked hard to address their concerns, making revisions that we believe directly add value to our conceptual paper. Taking their comments seriously, we hope they will recognize the improvements we have made. The effort exerted in this new revision aims to enhance the manuscript's ability to bridge existing theories in interesting ways, link works across disciplines, provide multi-level insights, and broaden the scope of our thinking regarding stakeholders' perception of the organization through an attribution and fairness perspective.

In this revised version, we have thoroughly addressed all comments made by the reviewers, with specific focus on:

- Better clarification of the novelty of our thinking and its distinction from existing studies on stakeholder perception of fairness. We aim to contribute a different, mainly understudied perspective in the field of project management.
- Building upon seminal works and core principles of the theory, acknowledging that some references may be dated. However, our approach involves progressing from these foundational elements to the latest thinking in the investigated domains, with the addition of new and more up-to-date references.
- Clarification in our response on why a methodological chapter in conceptual papers is not deemed necessary, reinforcing that conceptual papers do not lack empirical insights. Instead, they are constructed upon theories and concepts that have been formulated and validated through literature.
- Enhanced clarity in both the theoretical and practical implication sections, providing a better explanation of the paper's contribution and proposing a conceptual framework aimed at reducing the level of abstractness in stakeholders' attributional processes toward the project organization.

We sincerely believe that we have satisfactorily addressed all concerns raised by Reviewer 1 and Reviewer 3, and we respectfully rebut their comments about the methodology. Thank you again for this opportunity to revise, improve, and resubmit our manuscript.

Sincerely,

Francesco Di Maddaloni
University College London (UCL), London (UK)

Roya Derakhshan
Bocconi School of Management, Milan (Italy)