

## **Interface Management between Internal and External Project Managers in Public Works Procurement: Fundamental Competencies Required**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Relationship management in project management has generally been studied in the context of the managers and their teams' stakeholder management, leaving the interactions between and among the managers' themselves as a gap to be filled. This paper explored fundamental competencies required of internal and external project managers for managing their interfaces in public construction projects. A qualitative research approach was adopted to study perceptions from two Ghanaian institutions – one Public Institution and one Private Construction Firm which together offered the phenomenon studied. The Public Institution represents the Internal Project Managers (IPM) perspective while the Private Construction Firm represents the External Project Managers (EPM) perspective. Data were collected through in-depth interviews which were recorded and analysed using open, axial and selective coding. Three competency themes were studied - knowledge, skills and management styles. It was found that, Internal and External project managers need experiential knowledge about the overriding influences of public sector policies and generic tension between investment and profit interests. Skills required include leadership, communication, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence and managing in political environment. Management style elements also include collaborative, win-win and non-combatant posture approaches. The managers are also to be aware of the basic causes/sources of conflicts including; poor project scoping, frequent request for review, breach of contract provisions and variation orders. A conceptual interface management model embodying characteristics, management essentials and action steps also emerged, indicating that, the IPM-EPM interface management has theoretical and conceptual foundations which could be modelled, practiced and studied as a knowledge area in Project Management. The study provides project management literature with empirical practice-focused knowledge on project managers' operational interfaces management in public construction projects and a call for public-private Organisational learning platforms to educate their project managers on public project related policies and processes for effective project performance to benefit society.

**Keywords:** *Internal and external project managers, public works procurement, public construction project, interface management, investment and profit interests*

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

There has been a tremendous use of the Project Management (PM) tool to undertake most public activities at both national and institutional levels (Wheatley, 2010; Sato & Gnanaratnam, 2014). Like in other project environments and contexts, public projects are fundamentally problem-ridden with administrative bottlenecks, contractual issues, poor quality deliverables, cost and time overruns and abandonment (Ameyaw et al., 2012; Ofori, 2006; Venter, 2005). These assume complex natures, particularly in numbers and interface issues when other entities, systems and individuals are involved (Pritesh and Konnur (2019), namely; private contractors, consultants, other public institutions, stakeholders and project managers as the lead-executors of projects (Project Management Institute, 2017). This study focused on operational interface management among project managers in public projects, specifically to explore fundamental competency elements respecting knowledge, skills and management styles which make the phenomenon effective and in turn mitigate public project problems. Such basic and specific competencies are less known in the extant literatures.

The Public Sector is characterized by interface between policy and implementation and as a result, its projects are executed in conformity to set standards and procedures in public procurement laws, institutional policies and process manuals (Sturgess, 2018). This makes it imperative for internal and external project managers to possess *appropriate knowledge* and understanding about how things work in public projects as part of their competency packages for these engagements. Again, whilst the public institutions strictly protect their investment objectives, the private entities concern themselves with making profits (Grobler & Steyn, 2006). The primary interfaced goals in public projects are therefore at odds with each other (Yamoah, 2014; Ding et al., 2017) and this calls for deployment of *appropriate skills* in the managers' interface management towards achieving the projects' deliverables (Hwang & Ng, 2013). Both readings from literature and learnings from practical experiences further establish the fact that public projects are of different types and require different processes and characteristics which ensure existence of appropriate maturity (Grobler & Steyn, 2006). For example, outsourced projects require procurement process maturity (Macmillan, 2010). Accordingly, the differing operational nature of public project context demands *suitable management styles*. This resonates with Sato and Gnanaratnam (2014) who observed that, different management styles are used in internal and external projects. These literatures and experience-based narratives then underscore Knowledge, Skills and Management styles as fundamental areas of competency required of the project managers in their interface management in public construction projects.

Based on the above background, the study was set in three main contexts: (1) the phenomenon being investigated is the operational interface management between public institutions' project managers, referred to as 'Internal Project Managers' (IPMs) and private construction firms' project managers, also referred to as 'External Project Managers' (EPMs), (2) The Ghanaian public sector is the project environment and the focused projects are those funded from individual public organisations' internally generated and sourced funds, and (3) the project type is public construction project comprising of building and road works. These projects are initiated and planned by public sector institutions but are mostly executed by private construction firms.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study employed organizational theory, relational theory, behavioural theory, system theory and contingency theory to understand and underscore the significance of interface management in public works procurement. Organizational theory focuses on the best way to manage in organizations of which structure and operational processes are fundamental (Draft et al., 2010). This provides a framework for understanding the differing organizational backgrounds in public construction project executions. Relational theory concerns inter-organisational relationships (Huang et al. (2022) and this resonates with the interface management between the organisations in public project management. Behavioural Theory also suggest people study in determining the best way to manage in organisations (Lussier, 2012) and this makes skills for studying counterpart's imperative for the project managers. Systems theory focuses on viewing the organisation as a whole and as the inter-relationship of its parts (Harney, 2024) while the Contingency theory concerns the best management approach for a given situation (Lussier (2012). Both are fundamental to the interface management phenomenon from within and inter-organizational perspectives in public construction project management.

## 2.2 Conceptual Exposition

Research works like Khamaksorn (2016) have considered project managers' interface with environments, systems and people as key functional phenomena in their investigations into the managers' competencies, behavioural traits and roles. According to Meng and Boyd (2017), interface management largely underscores relationship management which has been considered as the chief focus of the next generation of project management, predominantly in the construction industry. Several studies like Ahadzie et al. (2013) have also recognized the substantial interest towards delimiting project managers' competency in various industries including the construction sector. However, despite the highlights on importance of people and working relationship, and delineating project managers' project-domain competencies in extant literatures, little is known about their specifics in interface between IPMs and EPMs themselves, functioning on the same projects and this reveals gaps in literature. This study looked at the aspect of the required competencies in the management of the interface between these managers in public construction projects, respecting elements of knowledge, skills and management styles. The following are its pivotal concepts:

### 2.2.1 Interface Management in Projects

The concept of interface has been looked at in different fields but its core elements include interaction, communication, integration or connection between two objects, individuals, entities or phenomena (Parslov & Mortensen (2015). Wren (1967) described it as the contact point between reasonably independent entities which are interacting to achieve a bigger system objective whilst Pritesh and Konnur (2019) observed this phenomenon in project management as links between different aspects of project deliverables, stakeholders and other elements in its life cycle.

These interface descriptions fit the interface between the IPMs and EPMs in public construction projects who lead their respective organizations (Collins et al., 2010). Its management demands appropriate competencies and conscious efforts to avoid tensions in the quest for achieving project goals/objectives from the public and private entities perspectives – *investment* and *profit* interests respectively. This calls for project goal congruent actions to ensure agreement of individual performance goals (Bradley et al., 2006) with the organizations' two-fold goals (Yamoah, 2014; Atkinson et al., 2012; Ding et al., 2017). This means, a goal congruent management construct will direct the individual actors in an interfaced phenomenon towards achieving overall or common goals/objectives (Borys & Jemison, 2018; Yamoah, 2014), with each party's interest reasonably satisfied through win-win approaches.

Given the public organisations' focus on their investments and the private construction firms also concerning themselves with profit making (Grobler & Steyn, 2006), a goal congruent management construct or model on knowledge, skills and management style competencies will become an important guide in the IPM and EPM interface management with potential for addressing the fundamental sources of conflicts. According to Polyvyanyy et al. (2008), the concept of 'model' is generally an abstracted way of structuring a process which in the IPM-EPM interface connotes patterns of interaction, behaviour and actions towards meeting project goals (Parslov & Mortensen (2015).

### 2.2.2 Competencies of Project Managers

Project Managers' competencies have been extensively studied, described and conceptualized (Brière et al., 2014; Muller & Turner, 2007). The theoretical foundations orientate from varying conceptual domains such as theories of contingency in leadership, organisational psychology, job competency assessment, contextual performance and task-contextual competency (Ahadzie et al., 2013, Skitmore & Lei, 2004). These studies have culminated in various project manager-competency areas including tall standing themes like knowledge, skills and management styles (El-Sabaa, 2001; Newton, 2009).

Khamaksorn (2016) observed that, a competent project manager is key to project success and for that matter must have the required characteristics, knowledge and skills. Hwang and Ng (2013) corroborate this with the assertion that, a project manager needs to possess the required knowledge and skills in order to manage project professionally and successfully. These are further supported by Sato and Gnanaratnam's (2014) indication that, different management styles are used on internal and external projects. As Grobler and Steyn (2006) also observed, different types of project require different processes and operational characteristics to ensure the existence of

appropriate maturity, as in the cases of outsourced projects (Macmillan, 2010). All these claims make the study's competency areas worth investigating in the interface between the IPMs and EPMS who play the leading roles in public construction projects which are generally typical of external projects.

According to Newton (2009), a project manager must have strong communication skills, a personality style to suit the project type, creativity and a good decision-maker skills among others. These reflects Katz's (1974) three-fold skills of administrative, human and conceptual but they lack emphasis on specific areas of application in project management. Muller and Turner (2007) recognized this with the assertion that, none of the skills alone makes the project manager effective as some skills are more suitable than others in different projects, segments and phenomenon. This supports the current study's objective to explore specific knowledge, skills and management styles for managing the IPM-EPMS interface in public construction projects.

### **2.2.3 Typologies of Projects and Project Managers**

Project Managers lead Projects either as an Internal Project Manager or External Project Manager. This classification results from the conceptual identities of Internal Project (IP) and External Projects (EP) (Hauschildt et al., 2000; Sato & Gnanaratnam, 2014). 'Internal' means where an organisation does everything herself from initiation to closer and 'External' refers to where an organisation executes a project decided, planned and owned by another (Grobler & Steyn, 2006; Sato & Gnanaratnam, 2014; Rad, 2003). These distinctions brought to fore the need for knowledge on differing characteristics, functional skills and knowledge for the IPM and EPM and thereby making research in the area very imperative. Sato and Gnanaratnam (2014) have consequently initiated such studies and observed differing skills and basic project management styles of the IPM and EPM as individuals. They undertook the research to fill a gap in literature about lack of clarification to determine the suitability of projects for particular project manager-type. According to them, a manager in a leading IT company claimed that, Internal Project Managers were not assigned External Projects and vice versa due to the different skills required. These claims on different characteristics, skills and management styles of the IPM and EPM reveal a knowledge gap in literature, respecting the specific competencies required to manage the interface between the two project managers on one project as happens in external projects where clients have internal project practitioners as in most public organisations.

### **2.2.4 Public Sector, Works Procurement and Construction Projects**

The public sector comprises of organisations, agencies and enterprises with central government at the centre (The Institute of Internal Auditors, 2011) and public procurement is a means of achieving policy goals governed by legislature (Nijboer et al., 2017). Public construction projects, which constitute the study's domain are core activities of public works procurement which is the process of arranging, contracting and managing any form of physical structural works in line with the tenets of Public Procurement laws (Rees et al., 2014). This is one of the four (4) procurement activity-areas in the Ghanaian Public Procurement Law, namely; Goods, Works, Services and Consultancy (The Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, 2003a, b; The Ghana Public Procurement Authority, 2018).

The building and road works (construction projects) are governed by Contract Agreement between a public organisation and a private construction firm. Such contracts are awarded through procurement tendering processes where tender documents describe the deliverables, primary instructions and conditions of particular applications (COPA), all forming critical components of the Contract Agreement which becomes the standard operating document and central to the interface between the IPMs and EPMS towards achieving their two-fold interest of investment and profit respectively. This brings to fore Grobler and Steyn's (2006) call for conscious management of multiple goals in external projects, which can also be buttressed up by Meyers et al. (2001) assertion that; multiple interests that are not coordinated become contentious and are noted for intensifying challenges in the public sector. According to Pritesh and Konnur (2019), mismanagement of project interfaces affects cost, time and quality with eventual failures. These make the study's pursuit of required competencies and a goal congruent construct for effective management of interface between the IPMs and EPMS in public construction projects relevant towards contributing to project management knowledge.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study begun with a review of relevant literature for theoretical, conceptual and empirical insight into its underlying knowledge contexts and practice domain (Saunders et al., 2007). It adopted case study method of qualitative research approach to explore perceptions from project practitioners’ general working experiences with counterparts and institutional-context project experiences, documented or otherwise (Trochim, 2016; Creswell & Plano, 2011; Yin, 2003).

The Case involves one Public Institution and one Private Construction Firm which together offered the phenomenon studied. The Public Institution represents the Internal Project Managers (IPM) perspective while the Private Construction Firm represents the External Project Managers (EPM) perspective. The institutions’ identities are withheld on data collection permissions and ethical grounds. Both are well-known and adept in public construction projects. The public entity mostly contracts firms to execute her projects and the private organisation also executes projects for public sector clients, including the surveyed public institution. The public institution is an old and large Banking entity which undertakes small, medium and large scale projects strictly on the tenets of the public procurement law of Ghana. The private construction firm is also a well-known and experienced entity in construction projects in Ghana. Both institutions have experienced built-environment professionals who function as project managers. They were considered fit for the purpose of this research given their good academic, professional practice and experiential backgrounds (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). The minimum academic qualification is a Master’s degree. Table 1 below outlines the details:

**Table 1.** List of interviewees’ background

Academic Qualification	Professional Qualification/ Membership	Working Experience
<p><u>First Degrees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bsc. Building Technology</li> <li>- Bsc. Civil Engineering</li> <li>- Bsc. Architecture</li> <li>- Bsc. Land Economy</li> </ul> <p><u>Second Degrees</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Msc. Construction Project Management</li> <li>- MSc. Engineering Project Management</li> <li>- Mphil. Construction Management</li> <li>- Msc. Development Finance.</li> <li>- Msc. Telecommunication Engineering</li> <li>- Msc. Financial Economics</li> <li>- Msc. International Banking &amp; Finance</li> <li>- Msc. Law &amp; Corporate Administration</li> <li>- PhD. Management (Sustainability – Green Building) – <i>In progress</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ghana Institution of surveyors –</li> <li>*Quantity Surveying Division</li> <li>*Valuation and Estate Surveyors Division</li> <li>- Ghana Institute of Architects</li> <li>- Ghana Institution of Engineers</li> <li>- International Project Management Institute</li> <li>*PMP Certified</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have been involved in Projects with size of above USD 5million</li> <li>- Have worked with organizations of employee size ranging between 50 and 500+.</li> <li>- Have worked in the construction industry for between 13years and 25years.</li> <li>- Have played various roles including:</li> <li>*Quantity Surveyor</li> <li>*Project Manager</li> <li>*Project Director</li> <li>*Project Coordinator</li> <li>*Contract Tendering Manager</li> <li>*Project Stakeholder Manager</li> </ul>

#### 3.1 Data Collection and Analysis

The study’s data was collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews with three and two lead-practitioners in the selected public and private institutions respectively based on data collection permissions, corporate experiential data-base and perceived saturation (Trochim, 2016; Creswell & Plano, 2011). They were recorded and thematically analysed through coding; open, axial and selective where the open stage identified concepts/themes and labelled them whilst the axial developed categories from the initial labels/codes and the selective also formulated core themes from the categories through data scanning (Neuman, 2014).

## 4.0 RESULTS

The findings are categorized under the three competency themes of Knowledge, Skills and Management Style. They end with the practitioners ideas on an ideal conceptual model as a guide for managing the interface. The report has been presented to make readers feel as if they were active participants in the research. This is to put them in a position to determine whether or not the study’s findings could be applied to their own situations (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

### 4.1 Knowledge Competencies

Table 2 below summarizes elements of knowledge competencies required:

**Table 2.** Details of Knowledge Competencies encoded  
Source: Author’s own creation

Knowledge Competency	Elements
Knowledge of fundamental experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overriding influences of public sector policies and procedures- Authoritative stands.</li> <li>• Limitations of the project managers – Technical and institutional knowledge.</li> <li>• EPMS’ lack knowledge about the IPMS internal systems.</li> <li>• IPMS’ inadequate capacity to take critical decisions.</li> </ul>
Knowledge of key organisational and project management issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generic tension between <i>Investment</i> and <i>Profit</i> interests – public and private respectively.</li> <li>• High influence of Organisational culture.</li> <li>• Communication and stakeholder management.</li> </ul>
Knowledge of key Operational Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational background respecting litigation and others.</li> <li>• Counterparts’ experiences and competencies.</li> <li>• General, specific and contemporary PM knowledge.</li> <li>• Frequent poor project scoping - public institutions.</li> </ul>
Knowledge of information Security management issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidentiality clauses in Contract Agreement.</li> <li>• A watch statement: <i>‘If they don’t need to know, don’t tell them’</i>.</li> <li>• A breach can create personal and Organisational problems.</li> </ul>

#### 4.1.1 Knowledge of Fundamental Experiences in Public Sector Projects

The practitioners shared experiences which are worth knowing before getting into the interface management. As an EPM stated: “I see a lot of challenges with most of the public institutions we work with” (EPM). According to the interviewees, these experiences are fundamental and having prior knowledge about them carries weight in one’s competence.

The prominent among them was said to be the overriding influences of public sector policies and procedures which mostly results in misunderstandings and conflicts. They occur mostly in handling errors in payment certificates, interests on delayed payments, variation orders, approval processes and when no provisions are made for contingency fund to easily and timely fund cost-occurrences. In all these, the IPMS expect the EPMS to comply with their internal policies, procedures and processes as they ensure strict adherence. They asserted as follows:

“The EPMS don’t understand why you cannot abide by certain contractual principles and also going by the organisation’s regulations and others.” (IPM).

“Mostly, the EPMS come on board with their perceived way of achieving results, but then, because of the internal policies of the Public Sector, at times those procedures are in conflict, and we have to find a way of going around it and that causes a lot of conflicts.” (IPM).

There are also limitations on each side of the project managers which were mentioned as experience worth knowing. Whilst the EPMS lack knowledge about the IPMS internal systems, the IPMS also do not have adequate

capacity to take critical decisions and these result in infractions relating to variations, payments, scoping, etc. as claimed below:

“Most of the EPMs do not have adequate knowledge for working with their public sector colleagues in their internal systems and this at times leads to certain infractions normally termed as construction disputes.” (*EPM*).

An EPM also said:

“So, the problem I have with them is their indecision-making. You come for a meeting where something needs to be done, and they will say let me go and consult and come. They don’t have the capacity for a final determination on issues. So those are the challenges.” (*EMP*).

#### **4.1.2 Knowledge of Key Organisational and Project Management Issues**

The practitioners mentioned varying organisational and project management issues which impact on the foundations of their interface. It was emphasized that, coming into the interface with this knowledge constitute a valuable competence.

There is a generic tension between the public organizations’ investment interest and the private construction firm’s profit interest: “In fact, all the time the EPMs focus on profit, and we are also looking at not going over budget” (*IPM*). It was indicated that, the thoughts, actions and reactions from both the IPMs and EPMs orientate from these primary interests as evidenced in this statement: “You know, the EPM mostly comes on board to make profit, that is the general aim of any EPM. So right from the start, they look for ways and means to maximise their profits, either revising the success criteria or the objectives and even the deliverables” (*IPM*).

The High influence of the organisations’ culture which comprises of internal politics, code of ethics, policies, procedures and information security regulations were also mentioned as key issues worth knowing. An IPM stated: “Well, first on the list is the organisational culture, mostly, the EPM is coming from a different background and as in the public sector also, we have our own internal culture. So mostly, there are conflicts” (*IPM*).

Other key issues worth knowing are on communication and stakeholder management. The practitioners mentioned that, clear lines of communication and feedback involving all stakeholders are frequently lacking and must be ensured to avoid side-stepping, breaches and inconsistencies:

“One key thing is how communication flows in either direction. If communication is not actually made in a very clear concise manner between both parties, that is where it turns to generate, contractual disputes. So communication and proper feedback system is very key in this relationship” (*IPM*).

“So therefore, stakeholder management also becomes critical element within this interface. On each side, how stakeholders are managed and brought into the interface is also very critical” (*IPM*).

#### **4.1.3 Knowledge of Key Operational Issues**

The interviewees mentioned a number of key operational issues worth knowing as interface management competencies. The project managers must know each other’s Organisational background such as project delivery and litigation history which offer risk indicators:

“You must also have knowledge about the organisation’s project delivery history. Sometimes you are working with a Company which is known to be litigant. If you have this knowledge, it helps you to know how to deal with them, because, most of the time they want to go to court, they want to drag issues, and so if you have such knowledge about them, it helps you to ensure the progress of the project” (*IPM*).

“It was further mentioned that, the managers must equally have knowledge about their counterparts’ experiences and competencies: ‘If you spend time to search on the EPMs, for me being an IPM, then I know their track records, what they are highly good at and their shortfalls, strengths and weaknesses” (*IPM*).

The next knowledge competency element is the general, specific and contemporary project management knowledge. Likewise, knowledge about project types, governance laws and statutory provisions. The practitioners considered as very fundamental and important for the IPMs and EPMs to acquire knowledge about the construction industry, its conventions and national laws affecting the built environment:

“Both parties will have to make sure that they are abreast with what is required in the area of the work. You can draw on the experience from other projects, or you can draw from the research that you have done in relation to how that project should be done” (*EPM*).

“Where there is an imbalance in the level of knowledge of each party within this interface, much more so about the subject or the projects in question, then it becomes an avenue for conflict” (*IPM*).

Not the least operational issue mentioned is the frequent poor project scoping which the EPMs claimed comes from the client and consultants, resulting in variation orders, misunderstandings, and cost and time overruns. An EMP stressed on this issue with a strong facial expression:

“A lot of time you realize issues like, from the start of the project, the scope is not always well defined between both the consultants and the clients. So on the projects there are usually a lot of variation issues on cost, time and others. Because of the scope issue, usually time and cost are affected and it leads to project delays and cost overruns. That is usually the biggest challenge we have with them” (*EMP*).

However, an IPM’s response appeared to counter the sole blame on the client and consultants as follows:

“Now when the EPMs come on board, because they are coming from a different firm and have to take our initial scoping and also business cases, at times they find it very difficult understanding the real intent of the public sector. So, they turn to either call for a review of the business cases or even the success criteria which at times bring about conflicts right from the start” (*IPM*).

#### **4.1.4 Knowledge of Information Security management issues**

Information security management issues were mentioned as key for all to be mindful of and that, it can create both personal and organisational problems in the interface. These include disclosures of all kinds and there is always a confidentiality clause in the Contract Agreement to strictly adhere to. An IPM stated this as a watch statement in his institution: “If they don’t need to know, don’t tell them” (*IPM*). An EPM also commented as follows to support the sensitivity of information security issues and the criticality of its knowledge competency.

“...So we try to scrape off any kind of discussions that bring shortfalls, cost and other implications to be discussed when all the stakeholders who should be part of the job are there to appreciate the issues. What they tell you is that, don’t worry about that, we will deal with it on the project. So, we will sweep all the issues under the carpet and that meeting just becomes a tea meeting and we all walk away” (*EPM*).

## 4.2 Skill Competencies

Table 3 below summarizes elements of skill competencies required.

**Table 3.** Details of Skill Competencies encoded.  
Source: Author’s own creation

Skills Competency	Elements
Basic Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication – lines, language and clarity.</li> <li>• Leadership – servant, leader-member exchange, etc.</li> <li>• Conflict Resolution – effective combination of formal and informal approaches.</li> <li>• Negotiation</li> <li>• Inter-personal /People study</li> <li>• Cordial relationship</li> <li>• Technical Area</li> </ul>
Ethical principles, values management and emotional intelligence skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temperament</li> <li>• Professionalism</li> <li>• Cost management</li> </ul>
Skills for managing in political environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to manage political nuances.</li> <li>• Self-control against disclosures.</li> <li>• Self-discipline in managing political orientations.</li> </ul>

### 4.2.1 Basic Skills

The practitioners generally mentioned a number of basic skills required of the IPM and EPM such as; communication, leadership, conflict resolution, negotiation, inter-personal or people study, technical and cordial relationship. They stated that, these are critical for addressing behavioural and operational conflicts as well as misunderstandings, such that, it may not be necessary to escalate issues to high levels which may also cause delays and the like. The statements include the following:

“Number one (1) on the list is communication skills, how to clearly outline your interest to be clearly understood by the EPM. I think also your leadership skills in terms of how you carry yourself about on the project and how you take decisions. One of the most important things you need is having the ability to be cordial. Conflict resolution and negotiation skills can actually eliminate some of the challenges we have talked about” (IPM).

How one understands the other party’s language and cultural values they bring onto the project environment was also variously mentioned as in these statements: “You should be someone who should be able to study people’s mannerism and culture. How you relate and talk to each other. That is your inter-personal relationship skills” (EPM).

On technical skills, it was said, “Their technical ability is also very important, for instance to be able to review payment. So that comes back to having know-how about what you are doing” (IPM).

### 4.2.2 Skills in ethical principles, values management and emotional intelligence

Ethical principles, values management and emotional intelligence skills were said to be helping to deal with professional ethics in issues like cost management and also people of different temperament. The statements include the following:

“The last one I will add is being disciplined. You know, governing the whole idea about project management also bothers on issues of ethics and sticking to your ethical values regarding the projects. I will just put all together as being disciplined. When you remain disciplined to the tenets of the industry that you find yourselves in, then at the interface level, both of us know what we are talking

about and the rule that govern the whole game. Once we remain disciplined, we can collaborate better” (*IPM*).

“The next is emotional intelligence because you are going to meet with so many personalities where each individual has his or her own temperament. So, your ability to deal with situations of conflict is also key” (*IPM*).

**4.2.3 Skills for managing in political environment**

Not the least skills mentioned are one’s abilities to manage political nuances and information security. Self-control and self-discipline were mentioned as key. Sometimes an *IPM* or *EPM* have to let go some critical points or observations at meetings because of their political implications: One such indication is:

“You see, it is like some of them are quite political, so only a few people along the line know the details of the project. It is like, do not try to disclose too much when you come to such meetings. For example, there are some meetings you attend and they tell you that, you do not know the history about how these people got this job, so don’t talk too much. So, it is more like just keeping quiet and managing the job” (*EPM*).

**4.3 Management Style Competencies**

Table 4 below summarizes elements of management style competencies required:

**Table 4.** Details of Management Style Competencies encoded  
Source: Author’s own creation

Management Styles	Elements
Cordial Relationship Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Formal-informal</li> <li>• Win-win</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Teamwork</li> <li>• Non-combatant postures</li> </ul>

**4.3.1 Cordial Relationship Approaches**

It was mentioned that the *IPMs* and *EPMs* must have various management styles with potential for good influence in the interface. These include approaches such as discussion, collaborative, formal-informal, win-win, transparency and teamwork. They claimed that these facilitate cordial relationship and are fundamental to preventing and resolving conflicts and misunderstandings as observed in the statements below:

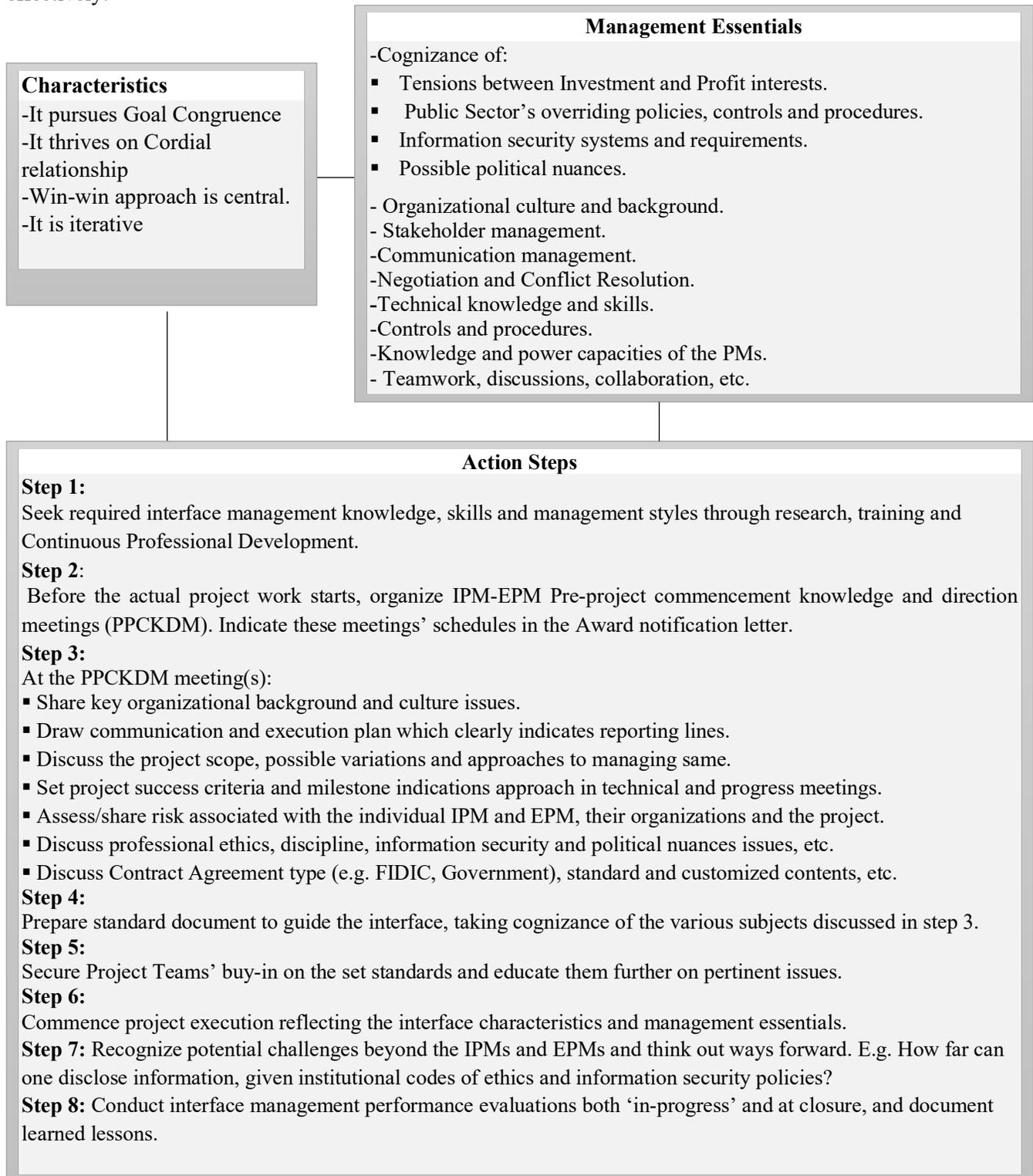
“My style is more of discussion. This is the scope of work, or this is what we have to do. I want us to communicate more, let’s talk about it, before letters are written or issued. At our level, let us talk and find solutions to problems and when we realize it is beyond us, then we escalate it to the next level but not to always write letters” (*IPM*).

“So, it should be such that, everybody will learn, everybody will contribute, everybody will support the effort. So, I use team building approach” (*EPM*).

“I think that, I try to use a win-win approach in dealing with stakeholders. So, in as much as we are all there to make sure that, it is successful, there shouldn’t be dictatorial stance. There should be a teamwork approach which should be mutually beneficial to all the people that are involved” (*EPM*).

#### 4.4 Conceptual Model For IPM-EPM Interface Management

Based on the data collected, Figure 1 below presents a conceptual model for managing the IPM-EPM interface effectively:



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model for IPM-EPM Interface Management

Source: Author’s own creation

The interviewees expressed various ideas about an ideal management model for the IPM-EPM interface in public construction projects. The elements of action step elicited include: pre-project commencement knowledge and direction meeting(s), documentation of standards to guide the interface, preparation of communication and execution plans, risk assessment on organizations, education of project teams and securing their buy-in for the set standards, being agile to speed up processes, recognition for potential challenges in information sharing due to institutional policies on information security, IPMs and EPMs embracement of cordial relationship and win-win mentality, evaluation of performance both 'in-progress' and at closure for future learned lessons and benefits. The following are examples of the ideas expressed:

“Our first meeting will be progress meeting, so if we have a model that put all the parties in a room just discussing the project before the start, that can bring a lot of things to bear on the project. And also, will deepen every body’s understanding of the project’s concept” (*EPM*).

“There must be a standard and stated procedures on how the relationship will be managed. Those procedures must be well documented and well understood by the parties” (*IPM*).

“So, in an ideal world, right from the planning stage of the implementation, let there be coordination, let’s sit down, let’s plan the work together” (*IPM*).

## **5.0 DISCUSSIONS**

### **5.1 Consistency with literature**

There is a general consistency with existing literature on theoretical and conceptual foundations. These include organisational, relational, behavioural, systems and contingency theories (Draft et. al, 2010, Huang et.al, 2022, Lussier, 2012 Harney, 2024.), the concept of interface and their intents in project management as in Parslov and Mortensen (2015) and Wren (1967), the knowledge competency areas also in Sturgess (2018), Grobler and Steyn (2006) and Khamaksorn (2016), the skills competencies in Project Management Institute (2017), El-Sabaa (2001), Brière et al. (2014), Skitmore and Lei (2004), Hwang and Ng (2013) and Newton (2009) and finally the management style competencies as reflected in Sato and Gnanaratnam (2014).

Again, the fact that the results constitute specific competencies for specific project management types and phenomenon is also theoretically grounded in Grobler and Steyn (2006), and Muller and Turner (2007). The findings therefore provide basis for concluding that, the IPM-EPM interface management has theoretical and conceptual foundations, and could be modelled, practiced and studied as a knowledge area in Project Management.

### **5.2 Contribution to Knowledge**

Generally, the findings indicate corroboration from both manager-type in all the thematic areas and this strengthens a call to seriously apply the knowledge contributed to the project management theory and practice. In the same vein, the few areas where the IPMs and EPMs appeared to differ or apportion blames do further buttress the importance of the study.

The core findings further provide IPMs and EPMs with sources of conflicts, effects and possible ways out in public construction projects (Ullah, 2023), as assembled in Table 5 below:

**Table 5.** Assembled encoded sources of conflicts, effects and possible ways out  
Source: Author’s own creation

Sources of conflicts in the IPM-EPM Interface	Effects	Possible ways out
i. Investment and profit interests’ orientations of the IPM and EPMs respectively. ii. Overriding influences of Public Institutions’ internal policies, procedures, etc. iii. Poor project scoping and frequent request for review. iv. Breach of contract provisions. v. Variations orders. vi. Limitation of the IPMs in decision making capacity. vii. The inadequate knowledge of the EPMs about the public sector procurement policies and procedures.	i. Delays in achieving in-progress and finished deliverables. ii. Increasing variation orders. iii. Delays in payments. iv. Cost and time overruns. v. Protracted stalemates. vi. Potential for termination and project abandonment. vii. Poor quality delivery. viii. Inter-corporate litigations after projects (severed relationship).	i. Adequate knowledge and decision about related public sector policies, procedures, etc. ii. Cordial relationship and Win-win Mentality iii. Clear description of project scope, objective and success criteria. iv. Provision for <i>Contingency Fund</i> for variation, interest in delayed payments, etc. v. Negotiations and conflict resolutions skills. vi. Adequate knowledge about each other’s organizational background. vii. Adequate decision-making power, particularly for the IPMs.

The interviewees’ ideas on an ideal construct for managing the interface together with the competency areas reflect three components namely; *characteristics* which the project managers must internalized, *management essentials* which they must become adept in, and the *action steps* which they must deploy, as shown in figure I above. This emerged conceptual model is theoretically and conceptually supported as an abstracted way of structuring a process (Polyvyanyy et al., 2008) and also premised on goal congruence to ensure agreement of the individual IPMs and EPMs performance goals (Bradley et al., 2006) with the organisations’ two-fold goals (investment and profit interests) (Yamoah, 2014).

**5.3 Implications for Practice**

There are varied implications of the findings for IPMs and EPMs practices in public construction project management. Notably, EPMs must accept that, public construction projects are mediums for implementing public policy and the two are inseparable and statutorily underscored. Therefore, consciously seeking knowledge and understanding about these policies must be their primary concern.

Among others, the strong emphasis on competencies such as cordial relationship and win-win mentality implies a call to project managers in external projects to shun away from the usual combatant stance.

**6.0 CONCLUSION**

This study explored perceptions of practitioners to identify knowledge, skills and management style competencies required of IPMs and EPMs to manage the interface between them in public construction projects through qualitative research approach. These managers must be knowledgeable in fundamental experiences, organisational and project management issues, and operational issues. Basic skills such as leadership, communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, inter-personal or people study and the technical area are required whilst competencies in management style such discussion, collaborative, win-win, formal-informal and teamwork approaches must be adopted. A conceptual model has also emerged to guide the management of the interface with key structured elements of characteristics, management essentials and action steps. Future research may adopt quantitative methods to test the results for statistical validation and generalization.

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