

Exploring the Influence of Project Efficiency on Service Delivery

Ngaka Mosia and Kemplall Ramdass

Department of Industrial Engineering

University of South Africa

South Africa

mosian@unisa.ac.za, ramdacr@unisa.ac.za

Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the impact of project efficiency on service delivery, addressing gaps in existing literature on project administration. Utilizing an initial literature review, the study established a theoretical foundation and identified relevant concepts related to the relationship between project efficiency and service delivery. Preliminary qualitative research results revealed that project efficiency did not positively influence service delivery, indicating a lack of project efficiency attributed to various factors such as the absence of a project framework. In response to the challenges identified, the study proposed a model emphasizing effective management practices, human resource competence, and project methodology to enhance project efficiency and service delivery. However, the study solely focused on a qualitative perspective, leaving a population gap in the taxonomy of research gaps. Consequently, future research is suggested to explore the phenomenon quantitatively, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of project efficiency on effective service delivery.

Keywords

Management, Efficiency, Methodology, Failure, Productivity.

1. Introduction

Project management has a historical background predating the 20th century, although it was not extensively documented compared to other professions (Seymour 2014). Notable figures in the early days of project management include Fayol (2016) and Gantt (1916), considered as forefathers of the discipline (Seymour 2014). The evolution of project management can be traced back to ancient civilizations, evident in monumental structures like the Great Wall of China (Seymour 2014). Project management, as defined by the Project Management Body of Knowledge (Rosenberger et al. 2018), involves the effective administration of information, competencies, instruments, and procedures. Procedures are used to predict and outline schedules for achieving project objectives. The evolution of modern project management is divided into four historical periods, as proposed by Seymour (2014). Before 1958, the focus was on human relations administration, followed by an emphasis on management science and the development of the Program Evaluation Review Technique (PERT) between 1958 and 1979.

The contemporary era began in 1958 with the development of the Critical Path Method (CPM) and PERT. From 1980 to 1994, there was a concentration on developing software programs for managing complex project data. From 1995 to 2003, technological advancements and the introduction of Critical Chain in Project Management (CCPM) took place. Despite the publication of multiple editions of the PMBOK, the field of project management continues to evolve, with more than four distinct periods now recognized (Rosenberger et al. 2018). In many instances, projects mark the initiation of significant changes and demand operational effectiveness for success (Levitt 2011). Efficiency in projects is achieved through error-free operations, minimal expenses, swift lead times, no loss of production, and a low cost of inferior quality (Levitt 2011). High efficiency denotes a project's ability to attain targeted outcomes while utilizing the least resources in terms of cost, time, and quantity (Serrador & Turner 2015). Additionally, efficiency

serves as an internal operational assessment, indicating a commitment to continuous improvement (Sundqvist et al. 2014).

To ensure optimal project outcomes and meet client expectations, project-based organizations must prioritize efficiency (Zidane and Olsson 2017). Project success is commonly measured by project management performance, focusing on timely delivery, adherence to estimated costs, and achievement of intended outcomes (Sastoque-Pinilla et al. 2022). Effective and efficient project management is essential for project success, contributing to the organization's strategic goals. Project management (PM) involves initiating, planning, executing, overseeing, managing, and concluding a project, with these processes leading to project efficiency (El-Darwish 2017). Additionally, proper project administration ensures sustained project performance over time and within budget constraints (Kagogo and Steyn 2019). Global impact of neglecting project risk factors, particularly in complex projects with intricate elements such as agreements, fiscal, legal, scope, and prerequisites.

Failure to recognize these factors has been linked to project failures and poor service delivery. The absence of coordination in business initiatives across various areas can contribute to project failure. Inadequate project risk management can lead to significant losses, and project failures, and hinder the achievement of corporate business goals. Additionally, it highlights the weakness of project management mechanisms and methodologies in developing nations, contributing to project failures. Various methodologies, including Agile, Scrum, Kanban, Scrumban, Lean, eXtreme Programming, Waterfall, PRINCE2, and PMI's PMBOK, are suggested to improve project performance.

Project failure is attributed not only to poor management but also to factors like lack of project management skills, corruption, political unpredictability, and inadequate policy implementation. The application of One-Size-Fits-All Models in project management hinders project managers from adapting procedures to local settings. This leads to a lack of support from local communities. The objective of this research was to examine the impact of project efficiency on service delivery.

The study aimed to contribute to the existing literature on project administration. The study provides insights that could assist project management professionals and policymakers in both the public and private sectors. By addressing project inefficiencies and enhancing overall project performance. A literature review was conducted to establish a theoretical foundation, identifying relevant theories and concepts. Concepts related to the influence of project efficiency on service delivery. The research was analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis underpinned by qualitative research principles and methods.

Findings revealed that project efficiency does not positively influence service delivery, indicating a lack of project efficiency within the public and private sectors. To address these challenges, the study proposed a model for enhancing project efficiency. Focusing on effective management practices, human resource competence, and project methodology, complemented by organizational capacity. Additionally, the research identified a gap in the population studied, following Miles' taxonomy of research gaps (Zidane and Olsson 2017). Therefore, the study concentrated solely on the qualitative perspective.

2. Literature Review

This literature review serves three main purposes. First, evaluate the existing knowledge on the research subject. Second, identifying key authors, publications, concepts, and findings, and third, pinpointing knowledge gaps in the study area (Bhattacharjee 2012). Projects, programs, and investments align with business plans. Each serves specific purposes to achieve strategic goals. Successful project completion, meeting or surpassing stakeholder expectations, and aiding companies in reaching their objectives, require essential project management skills (El-Darwish 2017).

Setting goals is crucial for achieving project objectives, with efficiency and effectiveness as key considerations (Tsotetsi and Mugova 2018). Efficiency pertains to achieving superior performance outcomes relative to inputs. Effectiveness is the extent to which project goals are accomplished through proper procedures (Zidane and Olsson 2017). Project efficiency refers to the ability of a project to achieve its objectives within the allocated time frame, budget, and resources (Kwafo 2021). Therefore, to increase project management efficiency in organizations the organization should raise the capacity and level of expertise of project management staff. Through training programs and proper supervision (Pulmanis 2013).

Project efficiency involves maximizing the productivity of the project team. Ensuring that the project is completed within the set parameters while meeting the quality standards (Zidane & Olsson, 2017). Early studies proposed various ways to mitigate the challenge of project failures. Therefore, improving project efficiency ultimately leads to enhanced customer service delivery (Kwafo 2021). Project efficiency, is defined as the ability to achieve objectives within the designated time frame, budget, and allocated resources (Kwafo 2021). It can be enhanced by elevating the capacity and expertise of project management staff through training and supervision (Pulmanis 2013).

Maximizing the productivity of the project team and ensuring adherence to quality standards are integral components of project efficiency (Zidane and Olsson 2017). Earlier research efforts such as that of Shore (2008), proposed diverse strategies to address project failures. These lead to improved efficiency and ultimately enhance service delivery. In earlier research efforts addressing project failures, there existed a notable gap in the comprehensive exploration and integration of diverse strategies to mitigate these failures.

Many studies focused on isolated aspects or specific methodologies, leading to a fragmented understanding of the complex nature of project management challenges. For instance, Johnson et al. (2020) emphasized the significance of effective communication and stakeholder engagement. While Smith and Brown (2016) highlighted the importance of risk management. However, these approaches often lacked a holistic perspective that could encompass the interconnected factors contributing to project failures.

The need for an integrated framework that combines various strategies and considers the multifaceted nature of project management challenges, was never sufficiently addressed in the earlier literature (Hippel 2018). This gap underscores the necessity for future research to develop a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. In tackling project failures by synthesizing diverse strategies into a unified framework. Some research predominantly emphasized technical and methodological aspects. Overlooking crucial socio-cultural factors that contribute to project success or failure.

Literature often lacked comprehensive consideration of the dynamic and complex nature of projects, leading to a deficiency in adaptive strategies. A study by Shenhar and Dvir (2007) pointed out the need for a more holistic approach. That incorporates multiple dimensions, such as organizational culture, stakeholder engagement, and flexibility in project planning. This gap underscores the importance of a more diverse and inclusive research agenda to enhance our understanding of project failure. And foster the development of comprehensive strategies that can address the multifaceted challenges in project management (Shenhar and Dvir 2007).

Recent efforts have been made to address the gap concerning project failure by advocating for more diverse and comprehensive strategies. Scholars and practitioners alike have recognized the limitations of conventional approaches. And are actively working towards a more inclusive understanding of project management challenges (Turner and Zolin 2012). The works of authors like Turner and Zolin (2012) highlight the importance of embracing a multi-disciplinary perspective. Integrating insights from fields such as psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior.

This cross-disciplinary approach aims to capture the intricate interplay of human and organizational factors that contribute to project outcomes. Moreover, contemporary research emphasizes the significance of adaptive and agile methodologies. Recognizing the dynamic nature of projects and the need for flexibility in response to changing circumstances (Turner and Zolin 2012). These collective efforts signify a shift towards a more holistic and nuanced understanding of project failure. Reflecting a commitment to developing diverse strategies that can effectively address the complexities inherent in project management.

Project efficiency plays a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of service delivery across various industries. The successful execution of projects directly impacts the effectiveness and timeliness of delivering services to end-users or clients. Efficient project management ensures that resources are utilized optimally, timelines are adhered to, and costs are controlled. Thereby enhancing the overall delivery process. According to a study by Shenhar and Dvir (2007), effective project management significantly contributes to project success. By aligning project goals with organizational objectives and ensuring that projects are completed on time and within budget.

This alignment between project efficiency and service delivery is particularly critical in service-oriented sectors. Where client satisfaction is closely tied to the timely and high-quality delivery of services (Shenhar and Dvir 2007). Organizations that prioritize project efficiency are better positioned to meet client expectations, enhance customer satisfaction, and maintain a competitive edge in the market. The influence of project efficiency on service delivery underscores the interconnectedness of effective project management. And the overall success of service-oriented endeavors (Shenhar and Dvir 2007).

3. Research Method

The choice of research methodology is influenced by the specific focus of the investigation, revolving around the issues inherent in the study. To ensure the credibility of the work, it is crucial to identify a research methodology that aligns well with the objectives of the study (To explore the influence of project efficiency on service delivery). A model proposed by Saunders, Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) known as the research onion encompasses three options: mono, mixed, and multi-methods. Additionally, Grover (2015) highlights the use of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches to define research methods.

The mono method requires researchers to collect data exclusively of one type, whether quantitative or qualitative. In qualitative research, non-numerical data such as texts, pictures, or observations is gathered and analyzed to identify themes or patterns. On the other hand, the mixed approach allows the blending of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive set of data. It is important to note that the mixed method and the multi-method share similarities, but they differ in the integration of methodologies. The multi-method does not combine methodologies to establish a specific set of data, while the mixed method does (Saunders 2020).

In the context of this study, which investigates the impact of project efficiency on service delivery, a mono-qualitative research method was employed. This specific method was chosen to facilitate in-depth engagement with participants, aiming to comprehend their actions and behaviors related to project inefficiencies. Qualitative case study methodology affords researchers opportunities to explore and explain a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack 2008).

This approach ensures that the phenomenon under study is explored through a variety of lenses. Which allows an in-depth understanding and multi-facets of the case under study to be revealed and understood (Baxter and Jack 2008). The qualitative case study approach aligns with the goals of this research in that the focus of the study is to explore and explain “how” Project inefficiency influences service delivery. It covers the contextual conditions in which the phenomenon under study occurs. Patton (2003) stipulates that a hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy that also enhances data credibility (Baxter and Jack 2008).

This case study applied the following triangulation of data sources i) document analysis and archival records; ii) field notes; and iii) process observation. It is rational to apply document analysis in this research since it is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation. That is the combination of methods in the study of the same phenomenon. To enable a researcher to draw upon multiple sources of evidence and, to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data sources (Bowen et al. 2017).

Yin and Patton (2003) stipulate that a hallmark of case study research is using multiple data sources, a strategy that enhances data credibility (Baxter and Jack 2008). Bowen et al. (2017) found that document analysis is particularly applicable in qualitative research for intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon (Bowen 2015). The decision to gather and analyze archival records is supported by the claim that archival data is an increasingly viable resource. The rationale for applying field notes is supported by Patton's (2003) reflections that field notes are applied in qualitative research to understand the true perspective of the subject being studied

The observation method enables the researcher to observe theory-in-action rather than espoused theory. An observer can write a description of what is observed. Then develop a theoretical framework to help explain the process or phenomenon observed, in the context that it is manifested (Bowen et al. 2017). It is therefore rational to apply the observation method as a data collection tool in this research. Particularly the application of informal participant observation. Baxter & Jack (2008) alludes to the fact that it is typical for qualitative studies to use informal participant observations. Where data are the interpretations of what is seen by the observer (Petty et al. 2012).

4. Analysis and Discussion

The Organizations aim to achieve efficiency in project execution and deliver high-quality services to clients. Effective project management practices play a crucial role in ensuring timely delivery, staying within budget, and meeting quality expectations (Kaluai et al. 2020). This section explores commonly used project management practices in the industry to enhance project efficiency and customer service delivery. The study employed reflexive thematic analysis and coding analysis with direct quotations from qualitative data collected, at a blue-chip enterprise's data-capturing center.

Figure 1 presents evidence of management practices within the organization, highlighting four themes and two corresponding codes. The four themes encompass poor monitoring and evaluation, poor communication, poor planning, and poor competency management practices. The codes include poor quality assurance and poor consistency management practices. Overall, the results indicate ineffective management practices within the enterprise. Contradicting project execution components essential for ensuring project efficiency. Such as effective monitoring and evaluation, planning, project competence, quality provision, and consistency (Zidane and Olsson 2017).

Poor monitoring and evaluation management practices are associated with weaknesses in assessing contractors, lack of project reports, and negative perceptions of employees due to inadequate monitoring and evaluation. Kambwale et al. (2015) assert that the absence of monitoring and evaluation negatively influences project success and service delivery in the industry. Therefore, an effective monitoring and evaluation system is crucial for tracking project progress and taking corrective actions (Kaluai et al. 2020). Regarding poor communication management practices, weaknesses include inadequate project time details, limited contributions in meetings due to poor commitment, and a lack of preventive measures against information duplications. Effective communication is vital to prevent information duplications and ensure timely project delivery (Damoah 2015). The absence of such practices at the studied enterprise is evident from the study results.

The third theme, poor planning, is reflected in management's weaknesses in detecting process sluggishness during decision-making and limited support throughout the project duration. Early studies emphasize the importance of effective planning management practices. In identifying risks, allocating resources efficiently, and setting realistic project timelines (Kathure 2020). However, the study results indicate ineffective planning management practices at the enterprise. In terms of poor competence management practices, the study reveals a lack of effective implementation at the enterprise. Competence is crucial for identifying necessary proficiencies to achieve project outputs (Zidane and Olsson 2017). Lastly, poor quality assurance and poor consistency management practices are highlighted. Evidence of a rejected and canceled project due to inconsistencies in the selection process of the successful bidder (Immanuel 2016), aligns with the study findings.

Organizations seek to attain project efficiency and effective and quality service delivery to their clients. Effective project management practices play a key role in ensuring that projects are delivered promptly, within the estimated budget, and with the expected quality (Kaluai et al. 2020). Therefore, the research sought to assess project management practices utilized in the industry in pursuit of project efficiency for effective service delivery (see Fig. 1).

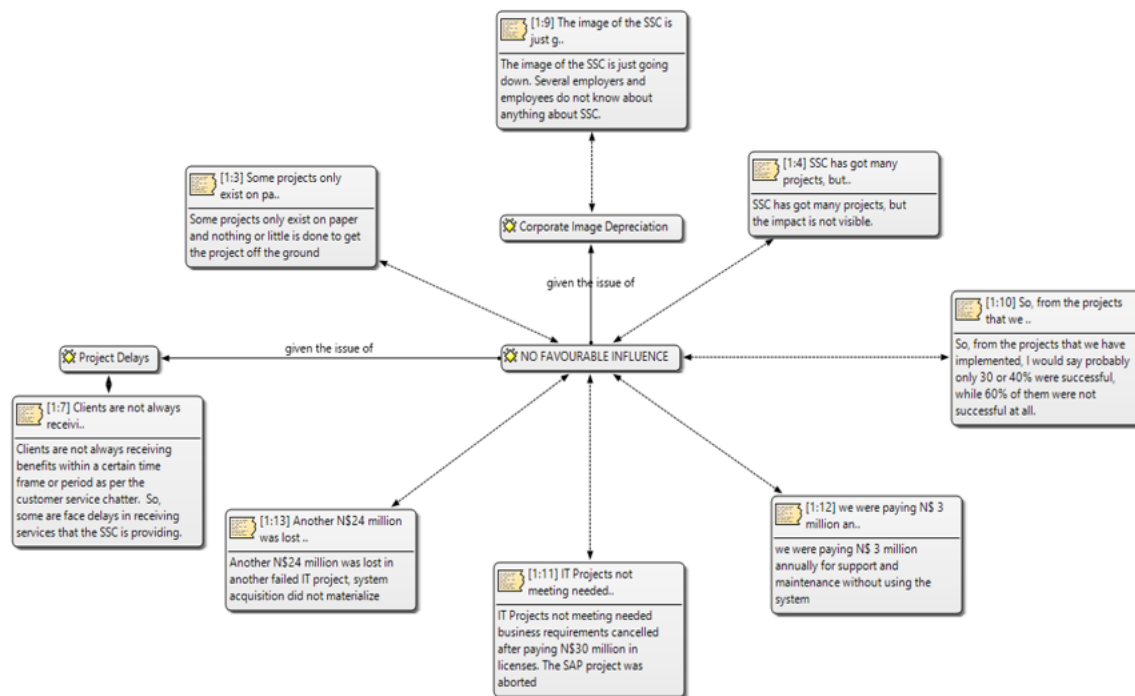


Figure 1: The influence of project efficiency on customer service delivery (Source: EDWIG, 2023)

The findings from the analysis are inconsistent with the key components of effective management practices essential for ensuring project efficiency. These components include effective monitoring and evaluation, comprehensive planning, proficient project execution, quality provision, and consistency (Kalui 2020). In this context, inadequate management of monitoring and evaluation practices is highlighted through three specific instances. These instances point to the management's weaknesses in assessing contractors. The absence of project reports, and the development of incorrect and negative perceptions toward employees, result in deficient monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Addressing this issue is crucial, as Kambale et al. (2022) argue that the absence of proper monitoring and evaluation negatively impacts project success and service delivery. Therefore, it is imperative to establish an effective monitoring and evaluation system as part of project management practices. This system will enable the ongoing tracking of project progress against established goals and objectives, allowing for timely corrective actions when necessary (Retta 2021).

This research aims to devise a model that is intended to improve project efficiency for effective service delivery. There is a need to ensure effective management practices, and project methodologies for the betterment of project efficiency and effective service delivery. Following the results of this study, evidence shows that the execution of projects is riddled with weaknesses in ensuring the effectiveness of management practices. Relative to effective project planning, monitoring and evaluation, effective communication, and stakeholder involvement, which impedes project efficiency.

Hence, the model proposed needs to improve these aspects to attain the desired goals. In that light, ensuring effective management practices through these aspects is also supported by the literature (Kalui 2020). As a key strategy for improving project efficiency and effective customer service delivery. Regarding all aspects of project execution management attributes studied in the research, e.g., human competence. The findings of this study reveal that these are challenges in most project execution management, which leads to project failure and therefore poor customer service delivery.

Hence, to ensure effective human competence, the model in Figure.2 suggests the need to enhance management competence through training and other means, ensure legal competence, which will deal with strict accountability, and financial competence to focus on the financial aspect of the SSC and ensure effective management of funds. The

literature (Kaluai 2020; Tsotetsi and Mugova 2018) supports the need to ensure effective human competence for project efficiency.

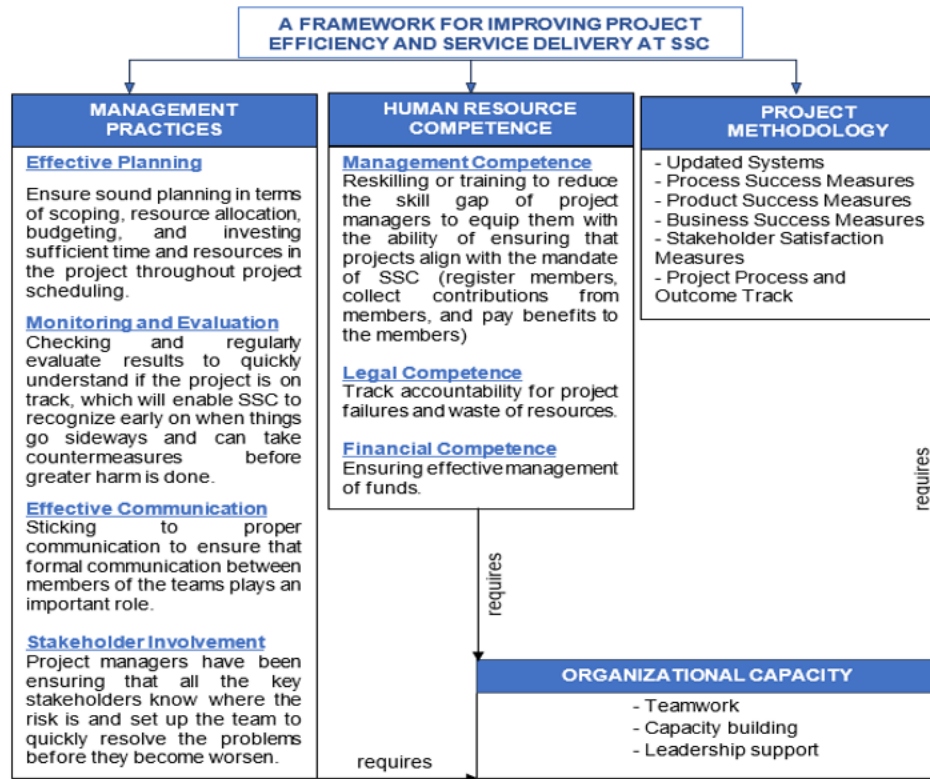


Figure 2: A model for project execution efficiency and service delivery improvement. (Source: EDWIG, 2023)

The model proposes effective project management practices to improve project efficiency for effective service delivery. This is based on the results of this study, which reveal that there is a lack of project methodology expertise that can result in project failure. This is backed up by Joslin and Muller (2016), detailing that effective project methodologies provide a structured approach for managing the projects effectively and ensuring effective service delivery. Nonetheless, the model also illustrates ensuring effective management practices, human competence, and project management methodology. Needs to be complemented by organizational capacity through teamwork, capacity building, and leadership support. As emerged from the study’s findings, the current state of project execution efficient management is lacking. Hence, a model that acts towards improving these aspects of project execution is favorable, given their significant power in driving project efficiency for effective customer service delivery.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study undertook a thorough examination of the factors impeding project execution efficiency and their subsequent impact on customer service delivery. Drawing on primary qualitative data, the research employed reflexive thematic analysis and provided insight into project execution management practices. The in-depth analysis uncovered key impediments to project execution efficiency, evaluated the utilized project management practices, and elucidated the interconnectedness between project efficiency and service delivery. Leveraging both the study results and additional project execution experience details. The chapter proposed a model aimed at enhancing project efficiency for more effective service delivery. As a result, the following recommendations emerge:

Enhance Project Management Practices: Implement improvements in project management practices to streamline processes and overcome identified efficiency barriers. **Training and Skill Development:** Invest in training programs to enhance the skills and capabilities of employees involved in project execution, addressing specific areas identified in the study. **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish a system for continuous monitoring and evaluation of

project execution efficiency, allowing for prompt identification and resolution of issues. Communication and Collaboration: Foster improved communication and collaboration among project teams, stakeholders, and management to ensure a cohesive approach to project execution.

Regular Review of Service Delivery Impact: Conduct regular assessments of how project efficiency improvements directly impact customer service delivery, ensuring a sustained positive effect on overall organizational performance. Implementing these recommendations is anticipated to contribute to enhanced project execution efficiency and, consequently, improved customer service delivery at the organization.

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Biographies

Ngaka Mosia is a Lecturer in the department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering, in the school of Engineering and a College of Science, Engineering, and Technology at the University of South Africa (Unisa), in Gauteng, South Africa. He holds a BSc (Hons) in Applied Science from the University of Pretoria (UP), a BTech in Industrial Engineering from the University of Johannesburg (UJ), and a post-graduate certificate in Distance education from the University of Maryland University College (UMUC). He has conference papers and posters. His research interests include technology-mediated teaching and learning and Productivity improvement through mechanization. He is a member of SAIIE & IEOM and Nadeosa & DEASA.

Kemlall Ramdass is currently a full professor in the Department of Industrial Engineering and Director of the School of Engineering in the College of Science, engineering, and Technology. He is a Certified Industrial Engineering consultant and PR Tech certified academic. He has taught courses in entrepreneurship, management, research, and innovation for engineers. He has journal and conference papers. His research interests include education, teaching and learning, and Productivity improvement. He is a member of SAIIE & IEOM.