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Powering the future of STEM



An SRG Whitepaper



A guide to successful project planning using the latest developments in stakeholder engagement



An SRG whitepaper – Stakeholder Engagement

Forward by Richard Acton, Operations Director

“As the world of work becomes more interconnected and people-focused, good stakeholder engagement is increasingly crucial to business success. Whether you’re responsible for driving your organisation’s people strategy or are a gatekeeper assisting a key decision-maker in your organisation, knowing how to deal with stakeholders in an effective, timely and transparent manner is arguably the most fundamental aspect of project management. Our experience as a global STEM recruitment solutions provider means we have developed strong processes to ensure we engage effectively with our clients, the talent we work with, our internal teams and any external agencies required, stakeholder management is key to the success of any talent related project. In-fact our business thrives off the skills we have in this area.



We are experiencing an unprecedented time for business. Business units are coming under increasing pressure from macroeconomic forces such as political uncertainty, technological advancement, globalisation and migration. Meanwhile, the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine-learning technologies have improved connectivity and contributed to workforces becoming more horizontal and holistic. The management of this complex workforce is often split between departments as well as HR and Procurement which can in some cases create fragmented processes, inconsistent hiring, wasted administration time and extra costs. In such a climate, effective project management is more important than ever.

We are told by our customers that stakeholder management is a constant challenge to the projects they run, from workforce planning and recruitment processes to BAU activities. This guide covers the latest in best practice for engaging with your stakeholders to help you achieve the outcomes you need for your projects, whether they be for complex talent management or BAU projects, the skills required are the same”.

Richard

Operations Director



Management V's Engagement

Although, talent management project spend has been rising globally, by and large, the breakdown of projects is mainly due to a company's people processes falling short of the mark. According to the Project Management Institute's 2018 'Success in Disruptive Times' report, the top five causes of project failure are:

- Change in the organisation's priorities
- Change in project objectives
- Inaccurate requirement gathering
- Inadequate vision or goal for the project
- Poor communication

All these project pressure points are related to the stakeholder process and without a robust stakeholder engagement strategy in place, businesses are very likely to repeat the same mistakes time and time again. Increasingly, businesses are moving beyond the stakeholder management paradigm to one of stakeholder engagement. Instead of merely managing stakeholders, we need to develop a deep understanding of our stakeholders and adopt proactive responses to their emerging needs.

The Association of Project Management's (APM) definition of stakeholder management recognises the centrality of engagement when dealing with stakeholders. If stakeholder management is 'the systematic identification, analysis, planning and implementation of actions designed to engage with stakeholders,' then engagement is the ultimate end goal.

Throughout a project's lifecycle, entering into a constructive, respectful and collaborative dialogue with stakeholders is crucial. The stages of engaging with stakeholders are to listen, to learn, to consult, to inform, and, ultimately, to influence. It's about getting the most out of your relationship with stakeholders. If you are sitting in the talent acquisition team and know your technical guys have a recruitment need, who, outside of your team needs to get involved or at least be informed? Is it procurement and / or HR? The Senior Leadership Team or Finance?

Instead of being an ad hoc process, stakeholder engagement needs to be treated as a strategic priority.

How to effectively implement a stakeholder engagement strategy

Step 1: Identification

“Who are my stakeholders?” This is the first question you should ask at the outset of a project.

Remember, everyone involved in your project is a stakeholder. Stakeholders can include:

Managers	Partners	Colleagues	Senior executives	Shareholders
Customers	Employees	Contractors & subcontractors	Regulators	Vendors
Trade associations	Investors	Suppliers	Clients	Local communities
Local government	Advisors	Future hires	Analysts	The press

Compiling a stakeholder list

As part of the identification process, you should create a list of all the stakeholders affected by your project. Your stakeholder list should look to include diverse stakeholder voices. This will give your project a wider range of insights and expertise to call upon and importantly will contribute to your company’s diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts.

Tip:

When brainstorming a comprehensive list of all your stakeholders, make sure their details are up to date. Throughout the course of the project, some stakeholders may pull out of the project while new ones may join — so always be ready to update your initial stakeholder list, too.

Step 2: Analysis

Once you have compiled your list of all the different stakeholders, the next step is to **categorise** and **prioritise** them. This will help you put together targeted communications to engage the stakeholders and gauge their motivations. Doing so will also give clarity into who needs to be consulted and engaged with the most, as well as who will play the most prominent roles in the delivery of the project.

Categorisation

The Office of Government Commerce's 'Managing Successful Programmes' (MSP) framework identifies four types of stakeholders in project management:

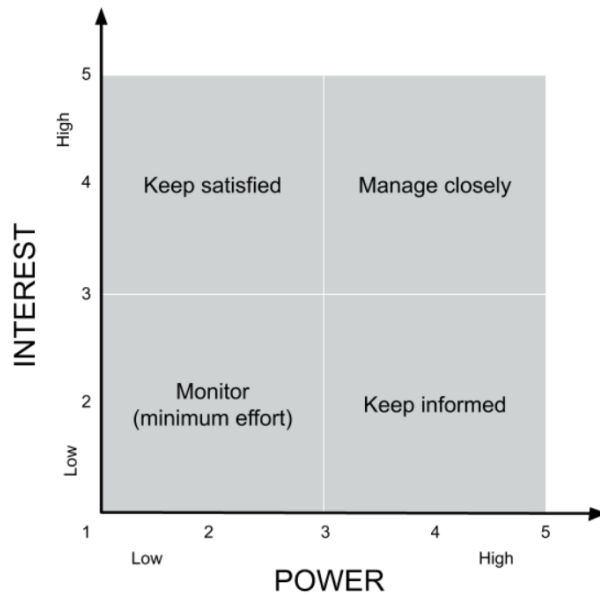
- **Users** (the beneficiaries of the outputs, e.g. customers or another internal department)
- **Providers** (e.g. suppliers, contractors, partners)
- **Influencers** (the power to influence decisions and change direction of the project)
- **Governance** (e.g. auditors, regulators, management boards)

There are several instances in which an individual or group can fall into more than one category: colleagues, for example, can be both influencers and providers. Placing stakeholders into these buckets will provide more clarity into what sort of input they will have during the project.

Prioritisation

It is important to understand the stake that people have in your project. Plotting your stakeholders onto Mendelow's power-interest grid will help you to prioritise them according to their level of influence and interest in the project.

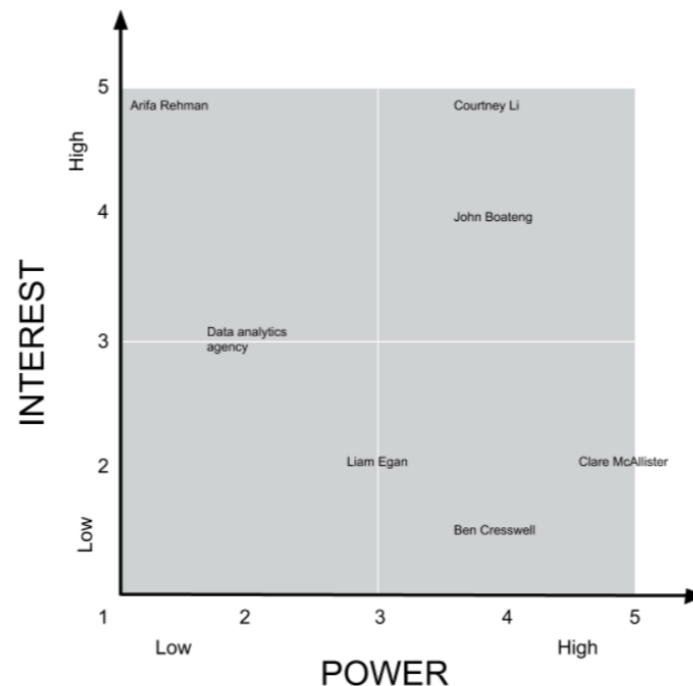
The grid below ranks stakeholders out of five on both power and influence (1 indicating low and 5 indicating high). As the figure below shows, a stakeholder's corresponding scores places them into one of four quadrants that can inform your engagement strategy.



Stakeholders who score **high on both power and interest** will be your most important stakeholders. As the grid denotes, these will need to be managed closely and kept fully engaged throughout the entire project. Stakeholders who score **high on interest but low on power** (e.g. a keen associate-level colleague) need to be regularly satisfied, while those who score **high on power but low on interest** need to be appropriately informed. Finally, stakeholders who score **low on both metrics** should be given summarized information — there's no need to bombard them with communications they don't need.

The table below can be used to determine the power and interest of each of your stakeholders, the results of which can then be plotted onto the power-interest grid.

Stakeholder name	Organisation/department	Type of stakeholder (user, governance, influencer, provider)	Power (1-5)	Interest (1-5)
John Boateng	Procurement	Influencer	4	4
Data analytics agency				
Arifa Rehman	HR			
Lucy Watson				
Ben Cresswell				
Liam Egan				
Courtney Li				
Clare McAllister				



After plotting your stakeholders onto the engagement grid, you should update your initial stakeholder list.

Step 3: Planning

You've identified your stakeholders, categorised and prioritised them according to influence and interest. Now, it's time to plan the actual engagement/outreach process.

People are unpredictable, so investing time in building a stakeholder engagement plan is much more than a laborious box-ticking exercise. Instead of feeling like a chore to project leaders, creating a deliberate, rigorous plan can help facilitate an honest dialogue with stakeholders and get the project off on the right foot. Everyone involved in the project should feel encouraged to participate rather than feel forced. Maintaining a conscientious, measured approach and proactive communication is key to forging positive relationships with stakeholders.

Arguably the most important element in the planning phase is understanding your stakeholders. Though the power-interest grid in Step 2 will have given you a broad understanding of their interests and influence on the project, it's important to expand on this knowledge. *What do you want from each stakeholder?* Some other key questions to consider include:



- What motivates your stakeholders?
- What expectations does each stakeholder have for the project?
- Which feedback and communication tools do you intend to use?
- How frequently will each stakeholder be engaged?
- How do your stakeholders view your previous work?
- If you think a stakeholder will be hostile to your project, how will you manage their expectations or win them over?
- Do your stakeholders provide accurate, up-to-date information?
- Who influences your stakeholders and who, in turn, do they influence?

While answering such questions may seem overwhelming or over-ambitious, creating an effective **planning sheet** will help you stay on top of all these considerations.

[Download our stakeholder engagement planning sheet here.](#)

Tip:

If you still have unanswered questions about key stakeholders, arrange an interview with either them or experts in their field prior to the launch of the project. Not only will an early face-to-face consultation ease any concerns you may have about your understanding of the stakeholders' motivations, but it will also demonstrate your commitment to a transparent, collaborative and process-driven working relationship moving forward.



Step 4: Implementation

The first day of putting your plan into action is the most critical point of the stakeholder engagement process. Consulting your stakeholders at the earliest opportunity gives them the chance to ask questions and gives you the opportunity to enforce a two-way process moving forward. This should remove any lingering doubts about the scope, risks and purpose of the project, as well as your approach.



To ensure early alignment with stakeholders, consider creating a project brief to document the goals, audience, channel, timeline and stakeholders of the project. Aside from providing visibility and getting all stakeholders on the same page, a detailed yet concise brief will act as a good base for collecting information and clarifying stakeholders' expectations and/or requirements as the project moves forward.




Stakeholder Engagement

Identification
Analysis
Planning
Implementation
Monitoring & Updating

Step 5: Monitoring & Updating

This step is critical to the success of stakeholder engagement. Instead of being the final stage, the monitoring and updating stage should feed back into previous steps.



Stakeholders are people, and people are complex. That's why you'll regularly need to survey for potential new stakeholders and evaluate the relevance of existing stakeholders. If a key stakeholder leaves the business and is replaced by a new recruit, for example, you will need to update your stakeholder list, plot their influence and interest on to a grid and develop an understanding of how to communicate with the new stakeholder. This is a step often missed and people find themselves out of the loop on a project that affects them.

Remember to provide regular status reports to your stakeholders. These reports should be tailored to the audience. For example, a junior colleague may want to know the nitty-gritty details, while a senior executive may want a simple five-minute overview.



Also, make sure to have a grievance procedure in place. A robust grievance management mechanism ensures the process is a fair one by letting people know their concerns have been heard — even if they are unhappy with the outcome. Doing so helps build trust between all invested parties.

The bottom line:

Stakeholder engagement is an ongoing, iterative process. Being able to demonstrate that decision-making is directly informed by the information and feedback you receive from stakeholders will bring accountability, credibility and transparency to your project.



Next steps:

SRG is adept at managing large and small recruitment projects for clients. If you require advice around how best to engage with the stakeholders in your organisation to get the outcomes you desire, we can make that part of the conversation around your recruitment needs. Often hiring managers, HR and Procurement have the same desired outcomes however approach projects from a different stance and some robust stakeholder engagement early on in the project helps to ensure speedy and positive outcomes for all. Contact us: info@srgtalent.com





4 rules for engaging stakeholders

1. Actively seek input from your stakeholders

Holding meetings and sending out emails is all well and good, but key stakeholders need to be aware of the various ways they can get in touch with you if they need to. Go above and beyond your schedule and demonstrate a commitment to face-to-face communication. If you take their opinion on board but decide to take an alternative course of action, make sure to give them feedback explaining your decision.

2. Be ready to compromise

Not all stakeholders are the same, and each will have divergent goals and opinions. To navigate different expectations and achieve a satisfactory outcome for all, the ability to compromise is crucial.

3. Be agile

Expect to encounter a few roadblocks throughout your project. A key stakeholder may be off sick when you need their feedback or take issue with an aspect of the project and cause delays and pushbacks. As the lead, it's your job to navigate these obstacles and maintain communication that is constructive for all parties.

4. Speak in their language

Nobody wants to receive communications peppered with indecipherable jargon. A good stakeholder list should incorporate a diverse range of voices, meaning communications need to be tailored to each stakeholder.

Leverage trust

Trust is the foundation of effective stakeholder engagement. Even if a key stakeholder isn't playing ball, keep any frustration to yourself. More often than not, stakeholders want the best for their team and for the project. Establishing trust as your default position will help to build meaningful relationships, diminish conflict and improve transparency

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Your standards and expectations are high, and so are ours. We do what we say and focus on what matters - building relationships, tailoring solutions and championing talent. We adapt, flex and collaborate to create talent solutions that work for you. If you would like to discuss this guide of how SRG can help you to navigate through the recruitment process for your business, please do get in touch: info@srgtalent.com www.srgtalent.com

