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Search

Leadership Skills
Team Management
Strategy Tools
Problem Solving
Decision Making
Project Management
Time Management
Stress Management
Communication Skills
Creativity Techniques
Learning & Study Skills
Career Skills

Quick Tools

- 💬 **Tell a friend**
- ⭐ **Most Popular**
- 🔍 **Tool/Resource Finder**

Stakeholder Management
Planning stakeholder communication

by *Rachel Thompson*, who has fifteen years experience of helping organizations and business leaders to manage change and work more effectively.

"Stakeholder management is critical to the success of every project in every organization I have ever worked with. By engaging the right people in the right way in your project, you can make a big difference to its success... and to your career."

Having conducted a **Stakeholder Analysis** exercise, you will have most of the information you need to plan how to manage communication with your stakeholders.

Who needs to know what, and when?
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You will have identified the stakeholders in your job and in your projects, and will have marked out their positions on a stakeholder map.

The next stage is to plan your communication so that you can win them around to support your projects. Stakeholder Planning is the process by which you do this.

To carry out a Stakeholder Planning exercise, download our free Stakeholder Communications **worksheet**. This is a table with the following column headings:

- **Stakeholder Name**.
- **Communications Approach**.
- **Key Interests and Issues**.
- **Current Status** – Advocate, supporter, neutral, critic, blocker.
- **Desired Support** – High, medium or low.
- **Desired Project Role** (if any).
- **Actions Desired** (if any).
- **Messages Needed**.
- **Actions and Communications**.

Using this table, work through the planning exercise using the steps below:

1. Update the Worksheet with Power/Interest Grid Information:
Based on the Power/Interest Grid you created in your **stakeholder analysis**, enter the stakeholders' names, their influence and interest in your job or project, and your current assessment of where they stand with respect to it.

2. Plan Your Approach to Stakeholder Management:
The amount of time you should allocate to Stakeholder Management depends on the size and difficulty of your projects and goals, the time you have available for communication, and the amount of help you need to achieve the results you want.

Think through the help you need, the amount of time that will be taken to manage this and the time you will need for communication. Help with the project could include sponsorship of the project, advice and expert input, reviews of material to increase quality, etc.

3. Think Through What You Want From Each Stakeholder:
Next, work through your list of stakeholders thinking through the levels of support you

want from them and the roles you would like them to play (if any). Think through the actions you would like them to perform. Write this information down in the 'Desired Support', 'Desired Project Role' and 'Actions Desired' columns.

4. Identify the Messages You Need to Convey:

Next, identify the messages that you need to convey to your stakeholders to persuade them to support you and engage with your projects or goals. Typical messages will show the benefits to the person or organization of what you are doing, and will focus on key performance drivers like increasing profitability or delivering real improvements.

5. Identify Actions and Communications:

Finally, work out what you need to do to win and manage the support of these stakeholders. With the time and resource you have available, identify how you will manage the communication to and the input from your stakeholders.

Focusing on the high-power/high-interest stakeholders first and the low-interest/low-power stakeholders last, devise a practical plan that communicates with people as effectively as possible and that communicates the right amount of information in a way that neither under nor over-communicates.

Think through what you need to do to keep your best supporters engaged and on-board. Work out how to win over or neutralize the opposition of skeptics. Where you need the active support of people who are not currently interested in what you are doing, think about how you can engage them and raise their level of interest.

Also, consider how what you are doing will affect your stakeholders. Where appropriate, let people know as early as possible of any difficult issues that may arise, and discuss with them how you can minimize or manage any impact.

> **Tip:**
> It is usually a good idea to manage people's expectations about likely problems as early as possible. This gives them time to think through how to manage issues, and preserves your reputation for reliability.

Once you have prepared your Stakeholder Plan, all you need to do is to implement it. As with all plans, it will be easier to implement if you break it down into a series of small, achievable steps and action these one-by-one.

Summary

As the work you do and the projects you run become more important, you will affect more and more people. Some of these people have the power to undermine your projects and your position. Others may be strong supporters of your work.

Stakeholder Management is the process by which you identify your key stakeholders and win their support.

Stakeholder Analysis is the first stage of this, where you identify and start to understand your most important stakeholders. The first step in this is brainstorm who your stakeholders are. The next is to prioritize them by power and interest, and to plot this on a Power/Interest Grid. The final step is to get an understanding of what motivates your stakeholders and how you need to win them around.

Once you have completed your Stakeholder Analysis, the next stage is Stakeholder Planning. This is the process you use to plan how to manage your stakeholders and gain their support for your projects.

Stakeholder Planning can usefully be conducted using a planning sheet like the one described. To prepare your plan, go through the following steps:

1. Update the planning sheet with information from the power/interest grid.
2. Think through your approach to stakeholder management.
3. Work out what you want from each stakeholder.
4. Identify the messages you need to convey.
5. Identify actions and communications.

Good Stakeholder Management helps you to manage the politics that can often come with major projects. It helps you win support for your projects and eliminates a major source of project and work stress.

FREE Worksheet ➜