PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. IX, Issue VIII – August 2020
www.pmworldjournal.com

Featured Paper

Mobilizing Stakeholders for Project Success
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Mobilizing Stakeholders for Project Success [1]

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Abstract

Stakeholders are undeniably a key component in the success or demise of projects. This article proposes an instrumental approach for a more effective management of stakeholders, by taking into account the rational as well the political aspects of projects. Using an explicit theoretical framework and illustrations from two real-life cases, it builds on four key questions to identify, assess, engage, and manage stakeholders on an ongoing basis. This novel approach focuses on the profiles of the stakeholders and the distinction between their stated positions and their real interests. It allows for the management of existing stakeholders and the inclusion of new ones, as required for the success of the project. By partnering with stakeholders and focusing on satisfying their real —but often veiled— interests, the project can be co-produced, resulting in a "win-win" for all.

Key words: Stakeholders, Stakeholder Management, Trust, Project management, New Product Development

The Challenge of Mobilizing Stakeholders in Projects

Obama, "No, you can't".

"Barack Obama is no longer a prophet in Chicago[3]". This newspaper headline describes the unexpected resistance faced by Obama's Presidential library project in Chicago. Many local

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[1] How to cite this paper: Ika, L.; Saint-Macary, J.; Bandé, A. (2020). Mobilizing Stakeholders for Project Success; *PM World Journal*, Vol. IX, Issue VIII, August.

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[3] Translation of a French-language article available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/article/2018/04/03/obama-n-est-plus-prophete-a-chicago_5279795_3222.html#gCdc938i05IZtcF4.99

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residents mobilized and took to the streets to express their concern about the gentrification of their neighbourhood.

The project was quite ordinary and should have gone smoothly. It is traditional for outgoing presidents to build a library to house their archives, so Obama's project was not unexpected. Though he was born in Honolulu, Obama had partnered with the University of Chicago and chosen to build his library on the South Side of the city. That location might have seemed ideal to his team: the neighbourhood is 93% African-American, and it was where Obama worked as a community organizer, made his debut in politics, and had received overwhelming support in the elections of 2008 and 2012. On the face of it, the library was in the perfect place, and should have been seen as a boon to the community.

Despite broad support for Obama himself in the South Side of Chicago, the project met with strong opposition from the African-American community. "Stakeholders", in Freeman's (1984) broad definition, mobilized against it, including neighborhood associations and tenant unions. Professors and staff at the University of Chicago described the project as socially regressive[4]. Other opponents also argued that the presidential complex would only accelerate a gentrification of the area, and denounced the support of the mayor's office and the University. Worse, some even accused Obama of "ethnic cleansing". In addition, there were grievances about the exorbitant cost of the project and the large parcel of land needed to build it, offered to Obama by Chicago City Hall and Mayor Rahm Emanuel, President Obama's former chief of staff.

Evidently, there were shortcomings both in the identification of these stakeholders and in the assessment of their expectations and interests. Considering the support given to presidential candidate Obama, the designers of the project wrongly assumed they knew the stakeholders well and took their support for granted. For the South Side community, this project presented different stakes than the election and reelection of Obama: "Yes you can", at the national level, "No, you can't" at the municipal level.

The project managers erred in assuming that the Chicago community would support anything undertaken by Obama. Clearly, such support was not unconditional. "(While) we trusted him enough to elect him to the White House, not once but twice, we wouldn't trust him or Michelle to do good in their own community", said one local citizen. The well-respected Reverend Finley Campbell opined that Barack Obama's presidency brought positive change for the black elites and bourgeoisie, but that its presidency had failed the working class.

Negative reactions to this project illustrate many of the stakeholder engagement issues raised in scientific and professional literature (Cleland, 1986; Littau, Jujagiri, & Adlbrecht, 2010; PMI, 2017; Winch, 2017). While gaps between the interests of a project and its stakeholders are not

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[4] Washington Times, February 28, 2018 available at: https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/feb/28/obama-cheers-gentrification-as-plans-for-president/

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uncommon, it is possible to adopt a proactive, rather than reactive, approach in managing stakeholders and meeting their expectations. It is also possible to channel stakeholder interest and influence into active participation in the project, and thus achieve better results for all (Eskerod & Huemann, 2014).

Some basic questions must be addressed to foster stakeholder collaboration. In this article, we submit that exploring these questions can serve as a concrete approach to project implementation (Frooman, 1999; Carroll & Nasi, 1997; Pinto, Slevin, & English, 2009). Next, we briefly present our theoretical benchmarks and then we propose four key questions for engaging stakeholders.

Our Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder theory dates back to the early 1960s when it was included in an internal memorandum by the Stanford Research Institute. Freeman (1984) is credited with popularizing this theory and making it one of the foundations of modern strategic management. Given the prominent role that projects play in the implementation of the organization's strategy, stakeholder theory was quickly adopted in project management, propelled by the seminal work of Cleland (1986).

The use of the term "stakeholder" is often confusing (Littau, Jujagiri, & Adlbrecht, 2010). Various publications may lead you to consider, as did Freeman (1984), that stakeholders are: "persons, groups or organizations that are likely to affect or be affected by the project" (PMI, 2017, p.503). In this more rational approach, stakeholder analysis comprises four systematic steps: identification, assessment, scheduling, and planning, either for stakeholder mobilization or demobilization (Eskerod & Huemann, 2014). We expand this process to include input from new stakeholders as needed.

Stakeholder engagement can be seen as a sequential process by which the project team identifies various stakeholders; attracts new ones as needed; assesses the power, position and interest of each of them; and brings them all together around the project, thus modifying the project's political context in order to make it a success.

Trust is of paramount importance in rallying project stakeholders throughout this process (Pinto et al., 2009). Research suggests, however, that project performance means different things to different stakeholders at different times. As a result, stakeholder views of project performance are often a matter of perception and are thus dynamic, idiosyncratic, or even divergent, conflicting and contradictory (Ika, 2018). It is inevitable that every project has both supporters and opponents. This antagonism stems from the fact that the implementation of any project requires the allocation of significant material, financial and managerial resources. Since these are earmarked for one particular project, they cannot be used for anything else. It follows that any project can benefit certain individuals or groups to the detriment of others.

In essence, this chapter draws on Freeman's (1984) criterion of "who and what really matters", and on the work of Frooman (1999). The latter author suggests that the stakeholder management

process should address these questions: Who are the stakeholders? What do they want? How do they go about getting what they want? We incorporate them into our four questions, and expand their scope to include ongoing stakeholder management throughout all phases of the project.

The following summarizes our approach to designing and implementing strategic stakeholder management:

- Identifying and mapping out stakeholders

- Assessing stakeholders

- Changing the political context

- Managing the relationship with stakeholders on an ongoing, "win-win" basis.

The Four Questions

Question 1: Who Are the Stakeholders and What Do They Want?

Compiling a complete list of stakeholders, beyond the project manager and their team, can be a challenge. Moreover, identifying them is only a first step, because it is also important to know: Who among these stakeholders is for the project? Who is against it? Who has clout? Who may help or hinder its implementation? In other words, who are the stakeholders, what do they want, and what power do they have?

Two formal approaches can be used to identify stakeholders inside and outside an organization: one is circular – the *stakeholder circle of* Bourne and Walker (2006) – the other matrix-based, the *importance/position matrix of* Aaltonen, Kujala, Havela and Savage (2015). Some informal techniques may yield further benefits. In academic and professional publications, stakeholders are considered primary or secondary, depending on whether they are directly or indirectly affected by the project. Stakeholders are also characterized as formal and informal depending on whether or not they have a contractual relationship with the project.

In identifying stakeholders, it is useful to start with a generic checklist, remembering that many of them will be drawn from the internal and external groups shown in Table 1. In order to broaden the search and identify as many stakeholders as possible, it is also useful to explore the six generic environments of all projects, known by the acronym "PESTEL": Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological and Legal.

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Table 1: Internal and External Stakeholders

Internal	External
– Upper management, functional managers – Project team members – Employees, departments, unions – Sponsors	– Customers, distributors and end-users – Suppliers, providers of funds or of information – Competitors – Politicians, social groups, governments – Sponsors

In stakeholder identification, each team member should compile a list of people and organizations who could be impacted positively or negatively by the project, or who could positively or negatively influence its implementation. Team members can also suggest other individuals and organizations who should be consulted in drafting that list. Thus, the project manager will be able to prepare the longest list possible. At this stage, the most serious misstep is that of omission, since you cannot manage those that are not on your radar. Moreover, a single motivated and well-mobilized stakeholder can significantly help or hinder the success of a project.

In addressing the first part of Question 1, "*Who are the stakeholders?*", it is best to compile a long list without much debate. However, this should not be the case with the second part, "*What do they want?*", which addresses the expectations and interests of stakeholders. The importance/position matrix of Aaltonen et al (2015), based on the three-attribute model (power, legitimacy, urgency) proposed by Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997), could help in this regard. However, rather than simply averaging the assessments made by different people, our approach advocates exploring the reasons why they differ from one another. This will generate more worthwhile discussions and give a better understanding of the political context of the project. By analyzing the interpersonal relationships and social networks of the stakeholders, a complete and robust picture will emerge. Finally, it is best to identify and assess stakeholders periodically, and take into account changes in their expectations over time. Be mindful of the fact that the interests of stakeholders and their ability to influence the project change as the project progresses.

> Question 2: What Powers and Influence Do These Stakeholders Have, And How Do They Exercise Them (Opposition, Veto, Support or Authorization)?

Addressing this important question will lead to the formulation of custom-made strategies for influencing stakeholders, and making adjustments as needed (Aaltonen et al., 2015). The influence each stakeholder may have on project decisions, along with their subsequent impact on project success must be assessed on an ongoing basis (Bourne & Walker, 2006).

Great attention must be paid to stakeholders who control the key resources and inputs of the project. It is also important to understand the strategies used by stakeholders opposed to the

project, even if they have little power initially, for they may ally themselves with other stakeholders. As was the case with Obama's library project, the protesters gradually became better organized. The involvement of the media conferred visibility and legitimacy to their claims, gave them leverage, and allowed them to alter the implementation of the project significantly.

As well, it must be stressed that some stakeholders may use direct strategies, and others indirect strategies that are harder to detect (Frooman, 1999). Consequently, assessing the degree of power and influence of stakeholders is likely to generate much debate. Once again, refrain from averaging the assessments made by different observers. Instead, as with Question 1, carefully consider the justifications underlying different assessments of their power and influence. This will foster discussions and inform the teams' understanding of the political context of the project.

Next, we will illustrate the application of the first two questions and set the stage for the last two, using the Ford Mustang project. Implemented more than half a century ago, this project was successfully managed despite opposition from powerful stakeholders (see Box 1). By 2019, over 10 million Mustangs were sold, and it had its own museum, and boasted more car owners' clubs than any other car in the world.

Box 1: Lee Iacocca's Ford Mustang Project and the Challenge of Stakeholder Engagement

Launched in 1964, the Ford Mustang was such a spectacular and sustained commercial success that 55 years later the company no longer displays "Ford" or "Mustang" on the body of the car: the emblematic galloping Mustang logo is enough to identify the product in the eyes of the public. Yet, this ambitious project to sell "an affordable sports car", led by ex-Marketing Director and newly promoted Managing Director Lee Iacocca, faced many formidable opponents. The toughest one was none other than Iacocca's boss, Henry Ford II, company CEO and grandson of its famous founder. In order to bring the project to fruition, Iacocca cajoled, neutralized, and bypassed many stakeholders. He managed to build coalitions among some of them and even succeeded in finding entirely new stakeholders, both within and outside the organization.

An Organization Under Strain

In its early days, the Ford Motor Company was known as a "production-oriented" company. As its founder Henry Ford used to say: "The customer can have a car of any color as long as it's black". This vision led the company to mass produce a limited number of models at the lowest possible cost.

In the early 1960s, the Ford Motor Company was finally recovering from the Edsel disaster it had suffered less than a decade earlier. Borne out of the imagination of Henry Ford II, who was then President, CEO and Chairman of the Board, the word "Edsel" later appeared in the Webster's Dictionary to refer to "a product, project, etc. that is not accepted by the public despite high expectations and costly promotional efforts" (Carlson, 2007). This catastrophic business setback cost the company half of the $650 million it had raised when it went public in 1956.

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It is not surprising that, less than ten years later, two "visions" prevailed when it came to launching new models at the Ford Motor Company: a production vision that was deeply rooted in the company's past, and a marketing vision which was having good success after the "great Edsel fiasco".

The more cautious production vision was based on only offering new models that Ford could produce with limited modifications to its assembly line. By relying on a stable and limited product offer, combined with strict production cost controls, this approach guarantees profitability at lower risk, a vision fiercely shared by financial specialists. In the worst case, this vision impedes the offer of new products and favors models more adapted to production demands than those of the customer.

The bolder marketing vision favours the development of innovative products that meet the needs and "wishes" of customers. It aims to increase market share where the company is already active, as well as conquer new market segments. Taken to the extreme, this vision encourages the use of techniques of all kinds - such as term financing - to increase sales, rather than the intrinsic and long-term quality of the products offered.

Each of these two visions had their own supporters and triggered clashes within the company. The infighting over the production of the new Mustang in the early 1960s illustrates the strong differences of opinion within the organization.

The Mustang was the product of the imagination of a Ford engineer named Don Frey. He had the innovative idea of building an affordable, two-seat sports car that could compete with GM's Corvette. While Frey was a brilliant technician, Lee Iacocca was a marketing whiz. He had a customer-focused approach aimed at offering people exciting and irresistible options. As well, Iacocca was a politician *par excellence*, as he knew that to get what you want you have to know how to use power and influence.

The target for the Mustang was the expanding youth market. Ford analysts estimated potential annual sales of 50,000 units for this model, just below the threshold that their financial experts thought would guarantee good profit margins at low risk. As a general rule, unless a new product exceeded that threshold it was deemed too risky and therefore "problematic".

To address this problem, Iacocca came up with the idea of adding bucket seats in the rear of the Mustang and succeeded in convincing the marketing department to raise its estimates to 100,000 units. While the estimate was better, it was still not enough to overcome the strong opposition from the finance department because this model would require major changes to the assembly line. In this context, this new model had two areas of uncertainty: sales forecasts and manufacturing costs.

At this stage, the stakeholder management problem facing Iacocca was largely political. In order to move things forward, he endeavoured to thwart the opposition of Henry Ford II, a staunch critic of the project, by gradually involving him in its evolution. Shunning official channels, Iacocca shared his ideas early on with Henry Ford II during informal meetings, giving him time to evaluate

them and talk to others about them. The objective was to allow Henry Ford II to participate in the evolution of the concept and gradually make the Mustang idea his own.

But this proved more difficult than expected, as the finance department continued to fiercely oppose the project due to its "problematic" effect on the company's profitability. Iacocca then took the major risk of talking about the Mustang to people at Ford's head office and to members of the board of directors. At the same time, he leaked information about the Mustang to the specialized automotive press. Eager to learn more about this new automotive sensation and its release date, journalists and potential buyers began asking Ford executives about it. Thus, some new stakeholders gradually emerged: the public, Ford dealers, the production department, the union, board members and shareholders.

When the Mustang was launched in 1964, the marketing department still had a sales forecast of 100,000 units. Within the first few months, sales exceeded expectations and Iacocca persuaded management to enlist a second plant to produce the Mustang, and then build a third plant, eventually increasing production capacity to 400,000 units.

On the strength of his success, Iacocca eventually became president of the Ford Motor Company in 1970, without ever fully rallying Henry Ford II. He fired him in 1978, a year when the company posted record profits of $2 billion. Iacocca became famous as CEO of Chrysler, which he saved from bankruptcy.

Figure 1: Initial Mapping of Stakeholder Power and Interest
(At the Beginning of the Project and from the Point of View of Lee Iacocca, the Project Manager)

			Board of Directors		
(High)					
	Henry Ford II				
P o w e r (influence)		Finance			
					- Frey- Marketing
(Low)				Manufacturing	

(Low)   I n t e r e s t   (High)

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> Question 3: How Can the Political Context of the Project Be Altered? Which Stakeholders Can Be Mobilized, Neutralized, Co-opted or Even "Created" To Help the Implementation of the Project?

This question is particularly relevant when stakeholder expectations and interests are divergent or conflicting, and while resources to address these differences are limited, as was the case with the Ford Mustang. In such cases, project managers often face what Freeman (1984) calls "the stakeholder dilemma": negotiation or confrontation.

A preliminary distinction needs to be made between two levels of stakeholder buy-in: 1) stakeholder involvement, in which stakeholders need to be kept informed and consulted; and 2) stakeholder participation, with a higher level of commitment that curtails their resistance to the project. Since stakeholder engagement is a process of consultation, communication and exchange, a dual track of ongoing negotiations is required: between the project and its stakeholders, on one hand, and among the stakeholders themselves, on the other.
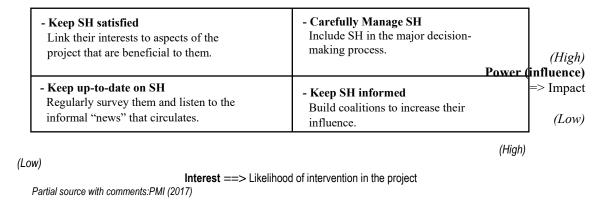
Communication is a helpful tool throughout the many phases of the negotiation process. An appropriate communication strategy has to be in place to ensure that stakeholders receive the right message, in the right format, and at the right time. Communication materials may include emails, informal conversations, formal meetings, and regular project reports (PMI, 2017). Returning to the Ford Mustang case to illustrate Question 3, Iacocca wisely changed the political context of his project, which had faced many roadblocks. This was achieved by partially neutralizing some stakeholders and co-opting others, as identified in Figure 1.

For example, Henry Ford II was strongly opposed to the Mustang project. It is likely that he had not recovered from the catastrophic failure of the Edsel project he had personally sponsored less than ten years earlier. Despite his negative feelings about the Mustang, Henry Ford II gradually became an objective ally of Iacocca's. Indeed, Iacocca managed to contain Ford's opposition by tightly linking him to the Mustang project in the eyes of the other internal and external stakeholders. The alliance between Ford and Iacocca was sealed with the resounding volume of initial Mustang sales, which obviously satisfied their mutual interests. With 22,000 cars sold on the very first day, neither Henry Ford II nor the finance department could objectively distance themselves from the project.

To achieve the success of that project, Iacocca nurtured stakeholders and created new ones. The articles he "leaked" to the press drew the attention of members of the board of directors, Ford dealers, the production department and ultimately the union which began to express favourable interest in the Mustang. A second and then a third plant were built to meet the demand. Gradually, the production department and the union became new stakeholders, even cheerleading the project. By gaining broad interest in the project, and by ensuring that each emergent stakeholder had a clear vested interest, Iacocca altered the political context, and thus trajectory, of the Mustang project.

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As illustrated in Figure 1, those who have a high level of interest (positive or negative) in a project are more likely to intervene for or against it. Furthermore, the degree of influence or power one holds is indicative of the impact one can have on the evolution of the project. In short, interest is related to the probability of intervention, while power is related to its impact. Savvy project managers must therefore be attentive to these two dimensions and bring the stakeholders from their positions in the lower left-hand side of the diagram to the upper right-hand corner. Their efforts must focus on influencing these two dimensions towards the upper right-hand corner.

Figure 2 – Stakeholders' (SH) Communication and Engagement Strategies
Based on the Power / Interest Analysis

- Keep SH satisfied Link their interests to aspects of the project that are beneficial to them.	**- Carefully Manage SH** Include SH in the major decision-making process.
- Keep up-to-date on SH Regularly survey them and listen to the informal "news" that circulates.	**- Keep SH informed** Build coalitions to increase their influence.

(High)
Power (influence)
=> Impact
(Low)

(High)

(Low)

Interest ==> Likelihood of intervention in the project

Partial source with comments:PMI (2017)

As an example, reflected in Figure 3 below, Iacocca was able to provoke increased board interest in the project. By using personal communications and engaging the press, he was also able to circumscribe Henry Ford II's power and influence. Moreover, by getting Ford dealers interested in this new sports car, Iacocca made young potential Mustang buyers emerging stakeholders.

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Figure 3. New, More Favorable Mapping of Stakeholder (SH) Power and Interest
(A few months later, with some new SH and others that have moved)

				Board of Directors	
(High)					
		Henry Ford II			
Power => impact on project		Finance			
		Ford dealers (clients)		Unions (employees)	• Frey • Marketing
(Low)			The Media	Manufacture	

(Low)   **Interest =>** Likely of intervention in the project   (High)

> Question 4: How Can Stakeholder Buy-In Be Gained and Managed in a Continuous and "Win-Win" Manner? How Does One Include and Listen to Stakeholders? How Does One Reassess and Adjust the Power Relations They Can exercise?

When negotiating from a "win-win" perspective, it is important to distinguish between the "position" adopted by a stakeholder and their actual "interests". By focusing and collaborating on their "interests", innovative and mutually beneficial options can be found together (Fisher, 2006). For example, Henry Ford II's very personal position against the Mustang fundamentally conflicted with his interests as a shareholder, CEO and chairman of the board. It was the commercial success of the Mustang, combined with the fact that Iacocca had publicly linked Ford with the Mustang project, that led Henry Ford II to temper his opposition to the project.

By practicing the "win-win" approach, a climate of trust is built up over time that solidifies the project's relationship with stakeholders, facilitates communication, and shortens the duration of negotiations. The more stakeholders trust a project manager, the more they share their knowledge and take action in favour of the project. This makes it possible to make decisions more quickly, reduce transaction costs related to monitoring and control, and avoid delays and cost overruns (Pinto, Slevin, & English, 2009). The fact that projects and their stakeholders are to varying degrees interdependent must be capitalized on. The project needs the financial and non-financial contributions of the stakeholders, while the stakeholders themselves need the project to meet certain needs and expectations of perhaps a different nature.

Therefore, project managers should avoid an all-or-nothing approach, where trust is seen as absolute or non-existent and unchanging, rather than being a matter of degree and changing over time. Instead, they should gradually build mutual trust as the project progresses. For example, in the Presidential library project, there was a breakdown of trust between the former president of

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the United States and his base. Indeed, Barack Obama refused to sign a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), contending that his foundation was a non-profit organization and not a real estate developer to be wary of. He claimed that, instead of a CBA, the community in the south side of Chicago should trust him.

However, as any good project manager knows, trust is never a given, it is earned. Worse, once it is questioned, it is very difficult to restore.

Table 2: Summary of the Four Questions

Questions Regarding Stakeholders (SH)	Sub-Questions	Recommendations
Question 1: Who are they and what do they want?	What formal approaches are being used to identify and assess SH in your project?	Several tools such as the SH circle and the importance/position matrix are useful, if updated periodically. You must also use the experience of your team members and the formal SH you identify.
	Are these calls formal or informal?	Most organizations only target formal calls, which are easier to identify. Be more interested in informal calls, as they are more likely to oppose your project.
	Do you take into account the dynamic aspects of SH and the interactions between them?	The SH evolve as the project progresses. Measure them continuously and take into account the interactions between them. Social network analysis can help you in this regard.
Question 2: What powers and influence do they have and how do they want to exercise them?	Do the SH have the resources that the project needs?	Yes: expect them to have a direct influence on your project.
		No: think about the alliances they can build with resource holders and the implications for the project.
	Do you have strategies for responding to the influence of certain SH?	Your response strategies must be individualized, taking into account the source(s) of influence and the level of interest of each SH
Question 3: How to change the political context of the project?	Which other SH should be moderately involved in the project?	Take a long-term perspective, give them the facts and consult with them.
	Which SH would you like to be fully involved in the project?	Listen to them, respect their values, adopt their language and, above all, give them the opportunity to participate in decision-making.
Question 4: How can	Do you trust your SH?	Communicate with them regularly. Focus on their

Questions Regarding Stakeholders (SH)	Sub-Questions	Recommendations
SH buy-in be managed in a continuous and "win-win" manner?	Do you have the confidence of your SH?	interests, rather than on the positions taken. Trust will gradually build up.

Final Words

This article has raised four fundamental questions that should be asked when seeking stakeholder buy-in for a project. These four questions relate to the identification, assessment, engagement, and ongoing management of stakeholders and their interests. They are complementary and cannot be addressed in silos. They must also be asked on an iterative basis throughout the process. By addressing them interdependently, it is possible to bring a project to the highest possible level of maturity in stakeholder management, as Freeman's (1984) model aims to do. Table 2, presented above, provides a checklist for the four questions and some recommendations to optimize stakeholder engagement.

As crucial as these four questions are, they are not enough to bring all stakeholders on board. Since our approach is both descriptive and instrumental (Donaldson & Preston, 1995), it overlooks the ethical dimension of stakeholder theory (Derry, 2012) in that one seeks to influence stakeholders in order to take advantage of their positive actions and limit their negative influences. So, isn't it time that we strive to co-create and co-deliver the project with the stakeholders using a "win-win" approach? Are they not real partners in the project, rather than objects that the project manager and their team can manipulate at will (Woermann and Engelbrecht, 2019)? This is something that every project manager will have to work on to make their project a success.

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PM World Journal *(ISSN: 2330-4480)*
Vol. IX, Issue VIII – August 2020
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