

Your stakeholders are more than an engagement plan

A Tregaskis Brown LinkedIn Series



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Are your stakeholders adding value to the project and the final outcome?

Stakeholder engagement is an essential component of any project. However, few project managers take the time and effort required to engage their stakeholders in a way that will add true value. But when they do, it pays off every time.

This is the first of our four-part series 'Nailing the project management must-do's' where we will discuss ways to proactively engage stakeholders, build enduring relationships and meaningfully collaborate with them to contribute to a project's success and end user satisfaction.

The New Zealand Treasury's Gateway Review [lessons learned reports](#) lists Stakeholder Management in the top 8 issues for concern in 2013, 2015 and 2017. The report indicates the importance of effective engagement, particularly in complex projects which require input from multiple parties.

Simply put – the benefits of effective stakeholder engagement include:

- Early and ongoing support of the project and final product
- Gaining champions for the adoption of change throughout the organisation
- Improved end product/s that are fit for purpose and will meet the expectations of ultimate users
- Support with addressing resistance and resolving roadblocks

Who are Stakeholders?

A stakeholder is defined as a person or group that will either be impacted by or can influence the outcome of a project. They can be internal to the organisation delivering the project, or an external party.

The influence a stakeholder can have on a project can be positive or negative and is wide ranging, for example influencing the project approach, the delivery performance and even outcomes.

Therefore, getting to know your stakeholders and having a strong working relationship is vital to the project's success.



Where do I begin?

1

Identify your stakeholders

The first step is to identify who the stakeholders are. This means identifying groups and individuals that can influence the project or who will be impacted by the outcome being delivered. Don't forget to think outside of your organisation; often your external stakeholders can have more influence than you think!

Seek input from others in identifying the stakeholders. The Project Sponsor and wider project team can support you to identify stakeholders and their likely influence and impacts.

2

Analyse your stakeholders

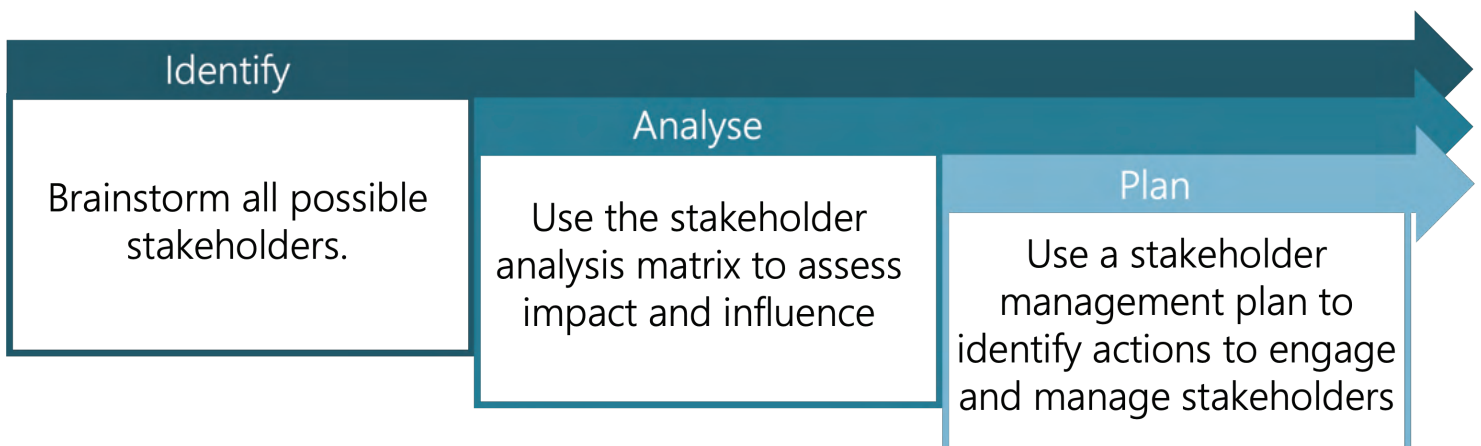
Once your stakeholders are identified, it's important to understand the influence and impact of each stakeholder group. This is best captured in a stakeholder matrix which will help you understand which stakeholders to invest the most time in i.e. those with the most influence, and those who will be most impacted. Stakeholders may come and go throughout the lifecycle of the project, and the degree of a stakeholders influence or impact may change over time. It's important to understand when in the project they'll have an influence and when they will be impacted.

3

Plan your stakeholder engagement

No two stakeholder groups are engaged the same way. Being able to tailor the engagement approach specific to the needs and desires of each group will set you up for success.

A stakeholder engagement plan is a consolidated view of the *who, what, when and how* of your project's engagement. A plan typically will include the identified stakeholders, analysis of stakeholders influence / impact, known expectations and the approach needed for each. It documents the strategies to engage each stakeholder and benefits the project by having clarity from the outset which reduces risk.



This three-step approach is summarised in the diagram above. No matter the complexity of a project, these steps support clear, frequent, and consistent communication to support your engagement with stakeholders throughout the life of the project. [Click here](#) to find Tregaskis Brown's Stakeholder Management Plan and Stakeholder Matrix templates.



What YOU can do to add value to this process:

Successfully carrying out the *identify, analyse and plan* approach above, enables you to set off on the right foot. However, there is more that you can do to maximise the value that stakeholder engagement can contribute to your project. Things such as establishing relationships with your stakeholders through interpersonal skills, taking initiative and, at times, having empathy and compassion for their perspective can all have a positive impact. Consider the following to assist you:

Develop strategies for dealing with each stakeholder:

From analysing your stakeholders, you will know they are not all equal. Tailor your approach to provide the appropriate engagement and communication for each stakeholder, based on their influence on, and impact from the project.

Effective engagement and communication involves determining:

- How to engage – informal or formal? Detailed or high level?
- How often – some may need frequent communication, others just the odd update
- When – in relation to the project lifecycle, what decisions or events require engagement?
- Under what circumstances stakeholders want to be and should be engaged?
- Who – who is best to lead the engagement e.g., the Sponsor, Chief Executive, or project manager?

Invest time in your stakeholders:

By investing time into your stakeholders, you can build relationships and trust; these can benefit yourself and the project further down the line. When communicating with your stakeholders aim to:

- Build and maintain solid relationships through frequent two-way communication. Interactive meetings, face to face meetings, informal dialogue and knowledge sharing activities encourage collaboration
- Tap into their diverse range of knowledge, opinions, and perspectives – you'll gain insights you didn't previously have.
- Agree on what will make the project a success, so that if things change, you can ensure the project aligns with the stakeholder's objectives and goals.
- Value potential change champions as their advocacy will support any change management needed once the project has been finished.



About the Author

Rebecca joined Tregaskis Brown as a graduate consultant in March 2021, after completing a Bachelor of Business, majoring in Management.

“During my time with Tregaskis Brown I have seen how effective stakeholder engagement can positively impact a project. It is clear that project teams that value and encourage stakeholder engagement more consistently achieve the results they are after.”

Another important relationship for a Project Manager is with their SRO or project sponsor. Look out for the next article in this series which will explore how to develop a confidence-based relationship with your SRO or Sponsor.

Something that will help....

If you, or your team want to advance your stakeholder engagement techniques, contact Tregaskis Brown - we can provide the expertise to help you navigate towards success.

[Click here](#) for existing stakeholder engagement resources we have available on our website and to view the [range of courses](#) Tregaskis Brown offers that can upskill yourself or your project team.