

Instrumental Approach for a More Effective Management of Project Stakeholders

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Annotation: Stakeholders play a critical role in determining whether a project succeeds or fails. This essay suggests a method for more efficient project management that takes into account the political implications of the project. It asks four main questions, using a theoretical context and two real-life examples, to help define, evaluate, involve, and manage stakeholders on a continuous basis. This methodical approach reflects on stakeholder profiles and the contrast between their declared views and their true interests. This enables improved control of current partners, as well as the addition of new ones if necessary, and improvements in the project's political sense. The project can be co-produced by taking partners on board and acting on their true - but sometimes secret - needs, resulting in a "win-win" scenario for everyone.

Obama is told "No, you can't"

Barack Obama is no longer a prophet in Chicago (Lesnes, 2018). This is not the title of a film, but of a newspaper article. It reports on Barack Obama's plan to build a presidential library in Chicago, which, surprisingly, is hotly contested by residents. Concerned about the risk of gentrification of their neighborhood, many of them have mobilized.

However, this project was not unusual at first. It is customary for American presidents to build a library to house their presidential archives when they leave the White House. Obama, no exception, partnered with the University of Chicago to launch his project on Chicago's South Side rather than in Honolulu, his birthplace. What could be more natural than to locate his library on the South Side of Chicago, where 93% of the population is African-American, where he was a social worker, where he got his start in politics, and where people voted for him in 2008 and 2012? So everything was in place for the project to pass like "a letter in the mail" (Lesnes, 2018).

Against all odds, this project met with strong opposition in the African-American community, despite being a supporter of the former president. It mobilized "stakeholders" against him, in Freeman's (1984) broad sense, including neighborhood associations and tenants' unions. Professors and staff at the University of Chicago have even called the project a "social regression. Other opponents are convinced that the presidential complex will only accelerate a dispossession programmed by City Hall and the University. Worse, some go so far as to accuse it of "ethnic cleansing". In addition to these recriminations, there are grievances about the exorbitant cost of the project and the land needed to build it, graciously donated by Chicago City Hall, whose mayor, Rahm Emanuel, was former President Obama's first chief of staff.

Clearly, the project manager did not perform the necessary identification of these stakeholders or an analysis of their expectations and interests. Based on the support for candidate Obama, the project designers believed they knew the stakeholders and even anticipated their support. However, their expectations were not met when the former president took office. Clearly, this project presented a different set of issues for this community than Obama's two elections: "Yes, you can, Mr. President" at the national level, "No, you can't" at the municipal level.

So the designers erred in taking for granted the support of this community for anything Obama would do. Yet there were indications that their support was not unconditional. "We trusted him enough to elect him to the White House, not once, but twice, and we wouldn't trust him or Michelle to do good in their own community" (Lesnes, 2018), expressed one member of this community. Didn't Rev. Finley Campbell say that Barack Obama's presidency brought positive change, even triumph for black elites and bourgeoisie, but failed the working class?

This project, which illustrates several stakeholder buy-in problems raised in the academic and professional literature, is not an isolated case (Cleland, 1986; Littau, Jujagiri, & Adlbrecht, 2010; PMI, 2017; Winch, 2017). Therefore, it would be desirable to convert stakeholder interest and influence into active participation, and thus achieve better outcomes for all. Indeed, adopting a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to managing with stakeholders would be relevant to meeting stakeholder expectations (Eskerod and Huemann, 2014). From this perspective, there are a number of questions that are critical for practitioners to ask in order to get stakeholder buy-in.

This article is based on four starting questions, framed in a way that places them within a concrete project implementation approach (Frooman, 1999; Carroll and Näsi, 1997; Pinto, Slevin, and English, 2009) :

1. Who are the stakeholders and what do they want?
2. What power and influence do they have, and how do they exercise it?
3. How do we change the political context of the project?
4. How do we gain and manage stakeholder buy-in?

First, we briefly present our theoretical benchmarks, and then we address in turn the four key questions we suggest for stakeholder buy-in.

Theoretical benchmarks used

Stakeholder theory dates back to the early 1960s, notably to an internal memorandum from 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 an organization's strategy, stakeholder theory was quickly taken up in project management, particularly with the pioneering work of Cleland (1986).

There is often confusion about the term "stakeholder" (Littau et al., 2010). Like Freeman (1984), the Project Management Institute (PMI) considers stakeholders to be "individuals, groups, or organizations that may affect or be affected by the project" (PMI, 2017, p. 503). In general, stakeholder analysis includes four main steps: 1) identification, 2) assessment, 3) scheduling, and 4) planning of stakeholder engagement or disengagement (Eskerod & Huemann, 2014). This approach can be expanded to include input from new stakeholders that could be elicited as needed.

Alternatively, stakeholder buy-in can be viewed as a process whereby, in an iterative fashion, stakeholders are mapped, new stakeholders are solicited as needed, and the power, stance, and interest of each stakeholder is assessed, to bring them together around the project and thereby change its political context in order to be successful. Similarly, trust is critical to the buy-in of project stakeholders (Pinto et al., 2009). In addition, project performance means different things to different stakeholders at different times. Therefore, the views of a project's stakeholders on its performance are often subjective, perceived, dynamic, and idiosyncratic, and even divergent, conflicting, and contradictory (Ika, 2014). Thus, all projects have 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. These resources, being allocated to a particular project, cannot be used for other purposes. It follows that any project is likely to benefit some individuals or groups at the expense of others.

The approach proposed in this article is largely based on Freeman's (1984) "who and what really matters" criterion, in particular the work of Frooman (1999). Frooman (1999) posits that the stakeholder management process is primarily concerned with three questions: 1) Who are the stakeholders? 2) What do they want? 3) How do they get what they want? We incorporate these into the proposed questions and expand them to include ongoing stakeholder management throughout all phases of the project.

The following is a summary of the approach to designing and implementing strategic stakeholder management:

- Stakeholder mapping;
- Assessing stakeholders
- changing the policy environment; and
- Managing the relationship with stakeholders on an ongoing, win-win basis.

Question 1: Who are the stakeholders and what do they want?

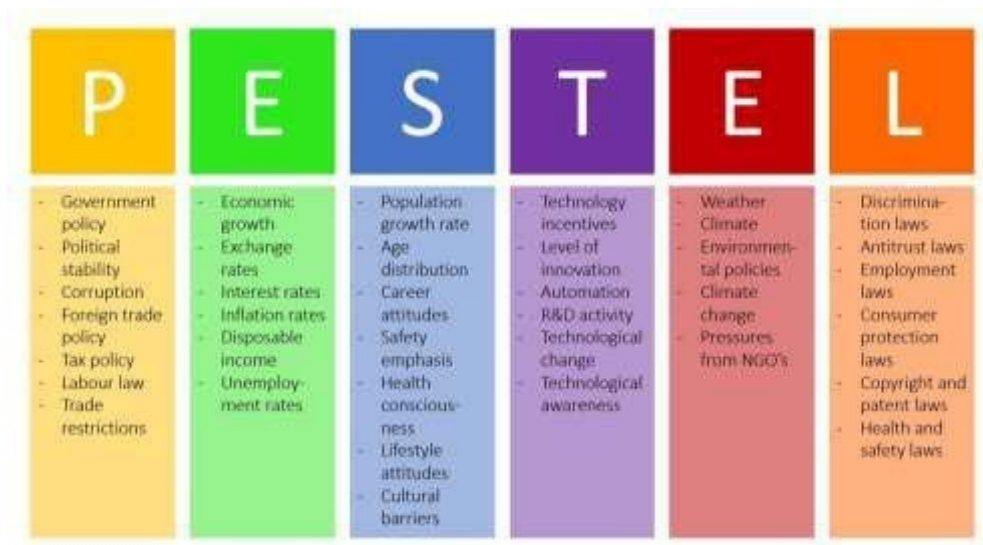
While it is recognized that the project manager and his or her team are not the only stakeholders in the project, it is not easy to list them all. Moreover, identifying them is only the first step, because you also need to know: Who is for the project? Who is against it? Who is weighing in? Who can put obstacles in the way? In short, who are the stakeholders and what do they want?

In order to identify the stakeholders inside and outside the

In order to properly identify stakeholders inside and outside the organization, two formal identification approaches can be used: one circular (see Bourne and Walker's Stakeholder Circle, 2006) and the other matrix (see Aaltonen, Kujala, Havela and Savage's Importance/Position Matrix, 2015). The stakeholder identification process could also use informal techniques, for example, based on the intuitive experience of the project team (Yang and Shen, 2015). In the academic and professional literature, these parties are considered primary or secondary, depending on whether they are directly or indirectly affected by the project, respectively. They are also referred to as formal or informal stakeholders depending on whether they have a contractual relationship with the project (Newcombe, 2003; Freeman, Harisson, Wicks, & De Colle, 2010; Aaltonen & Kujala, 2010).

To better identify stakeholders, it is useful to use a checklist, remembering that many of the stakeholders are from the following internal and external groups. To broaden the scope of thinking and identify as many stakeholders as possible, it is also useful to think about the six dimensions of the various contexts of any project, known by the acronym PESTEL: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological and Legal.

PESTEL Analysis



Source; Online

More concretely, in this first step of stakeholder identification, each member of the project team is invited to make his or her own list, which should include all people and organizations whose interest in the project may be positive or negative. Team members may also suggest the names of other organizations and individuals who could usefully contribute to the list. By combining their individual suggestions, the project manager could prepare the longest list possible. This is important because the most serious mistake is omission. Often, a single, highly motivated and well-mobilized stakeholder can contribute to the success of the project or cause serious harm to it.

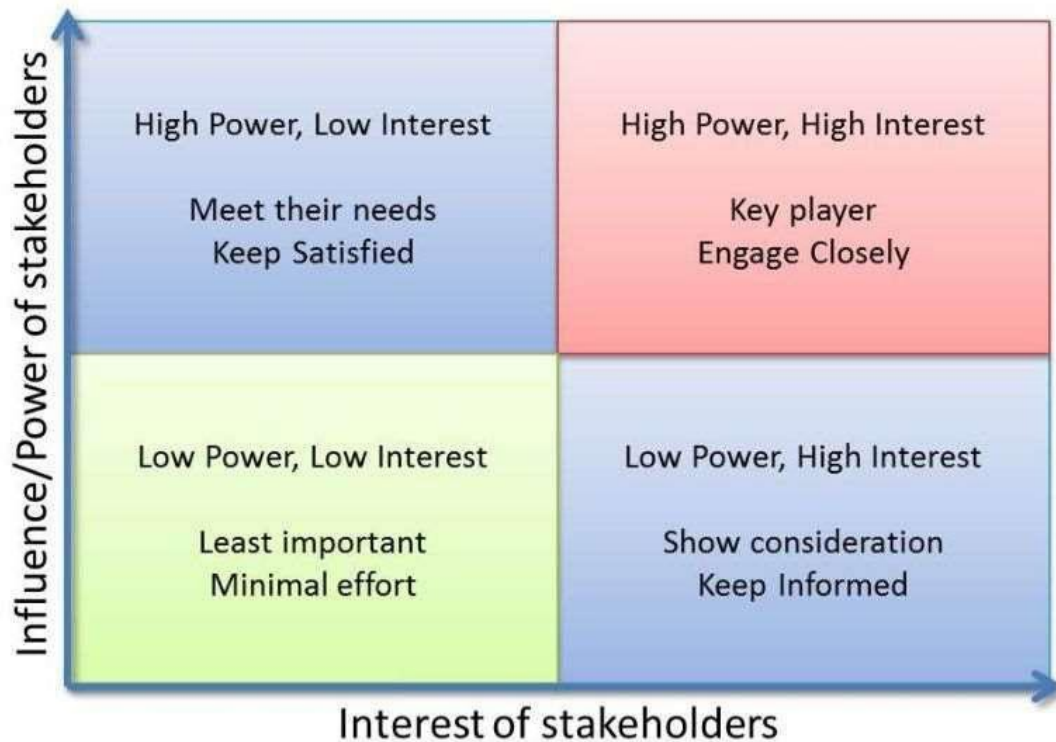
The first part of question 1, "Who are the stakeholders?" will allow for a long list to be compiled without necessarily generating major debates. The second part, "What do they want?" which deals with the expectations and interests of stakeholders. Aaltonen et al.'s (2015) importance/position matrix, which is based on the three-attribute model (power, legitimacy, urgency) proposed by Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), could be useful in this regard. However, rather than simply averaging the placements made by different people, it is better to seek to understand the reasons for the discrepancies in their individual judgments. This will lead to enlightening discussions and a better understanding of the political context of the project. In addition, it is important to build a more complete picture of the stakeholders by analyzing their interpersonal relationships and social networks. Finally, it is also necessary to ensure that stakeholders are identified and assessed not in a static, but in a dynamic way, and thus to take into account changes in their expectations over time. Indeed, stakeholders' interests and their ability to influence the project change as the project progresses.

Question 2: What power and influence do these stakeholders have, and how do they exercise it (oppose, veto, support or authorize)?

In practice, this question is important because it allows the project team to visualize the influence strategies of stakeholders and to prepare its response strategies accordingly (Aaltonen et al., 2015). This requires visualizing the relative influence of each stakeholder or analyzing the potential for impact on project decisions (Bourne and Walker, 2006). As can be seen with the example of the Obama library project, people in Chicago are using certain strategies to oppose the project. Media intervention gives visibility and legitimacy to their claims, which can lead to

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Influence and power of stakeholders



Source; Online

In addition, it is important to understand the influence strategies of external stakeholders who are most likely to oppose the project. Finally, pay particular attention to those stakeholders who have resources or inputs that the project needs, and keep in mind that while some stakeholders may not be able to significantly influence the project on their own because they do not have resources or inputs, they may be able to ally themselves with other stakeholders who do. In other words, one must recognize that some stakeholders use direct strategies and others use indirect strategies (Frooman, 1999). Assessments of the degree of stakeholder power and influence will undoubtedly generate much debate. Again, it is important to avoid simple averages between the positions on the diagram that will be offered by different people. As we saw in the discussions around Question 1, it is always important to carefully consider the reasons for varying judgments about the power and influence of particular stakeholders. This will lead to edifying discussions and a better understanding of the political context of the project.

At this point, we will illustrate the application of the first two proposed questions and prepare for the last two. For these purposes, we will use the Ford Mustang launch project, which, with more than 10 million cars sold in 2019, has more owner clubs than any other car in the world. Conducted more than half a century ago, this project was brilliantly managed by Lee Iacocca, in conjunction with very powerful stakeholders who would have defeated most managers (see Box 1).

Launched in 1964, the Ford Mustang was such a spectacular and sustained commercial success that, 55 years later, the company no longer considers it necessary to include the words "Ford" and "Mus-

tang" on the bodywork: the emblematic logo, a mustang horse in full gallop, is enough to identify the product in the eyes of the public.

However, this audacious project to offer "a sports car at an affordable price", led by Lee Iacocca, ex-director of marketing promoted to general manager, faced numerous and formidable opponents. The fiercest of them was none other than his immediate superior, Henry Ford II, the company's CEO and grandson of its famous founder. To carry out his project, Iacocca cajoled, neutralized and circumvented several stakeholders. He was able to foment coalitions among some of them and even managed to provoke the emergence of new stakeholders, both inside and outside the organization.

A Torn Organizational Context

In its early days, the Ford Motor Company was known as a "production-oriented" company, as indicated by founder Henry Ford I's quip in his autobiography, "The customer can have a car of any color, as long as it is black" (Carlson, 2007, n.p.). This vision translated into the mass production of a limited range of models at a good price and at the lowest cost.

In the early 1960s, the Ford Motor Company was finally recovering from the gigantic fiasco it had experienced with the launch of the Edsel less than a decade earlier. The brainchild of Henry Ford II, then president, CEO, and chairman of the board, the word Edsel later appeared in Webster's dictionary to refer to "a product, project, etc. that fails to gain public acceptance despite high expectations and costly promotional efforts" (Carlson, 2007, n.p.). This business setback had cost the company half of the \$650 million raised when it went public in 1956.

Less than 10 years later, two perspectives were needed for new model introduction projects at Ford Motor Company: a production perspective, inherited from the past, and a marketing vision, emerging but with great difficulty, since the "great fiasco" of Edsel.

The more cautious production perspective relied on the offer of new models that Ford could produce with the least possible modification of its assembly line. By relying on a stable and limited range of products combined with rigorous control of production costs, this perspective guaranteed profitability

This view was strongly supported by financial specialists. In the worst case, this vision hindered the offer of new products and favored models that were more adapted to production requirements than to those of the customer.

The more daring marketing perspective, on the other hand, favored the development of innovative products that responded to the wishes and "needs" of customers, even if they were unacknowledged. It thus aimed as much at increasing the market shares already served as at conquering new market segments. Pushed to the extreme, this vision encouraged the use of all kinds of tricks - such as term financing of purchases - to promote sales, rather than the intrinsic and long-term quality of the products offered.

Both perspectives had their supporters, and they did not mix well in the organization. The infighting over the production of the Mustang in the early 1960s illustrates these differences of opinion among specialists within the organization.

The Mustang concept was the brainchild of a Ford engineer named Don Frey. He had conceived the innovative idea of building an affordable, two-seat sports car to compete with GM's Corvette. While Frey was the brilliant engineer, Lee Iacocca was the marketing persona. He believed that everything had to be customer-focused and that he wanted to offer exciting options to the customer. But Iacocca was also the consummate politician who knew that to get what you want, you have to know how to use power and influence.

The target audience for the Mustang was the growing youth market. Ford analysts estimated that 50,000 cars would be sold annually of this model, a standard that guaranteed, in the eyes of their financial experts, attractive profit margins with little risk. Thus, as a general rule, unless a new product was likely to exceed this minimum threshold, the financial experts considered it too risky and therefore "problematic."

According to these experts, the Frey-designed vehicle unfortunately fell into this problematic category. So Iacocca proposed the idea of adding bucket seats to the back of the Mustang and succeeded in to convince the marketing department to increase its estimates to 100,000 cars sold. This was better, but still not enough to overcome the fierce opposition of the finance department, as this model would require significant changes to the assembly line. So there was double uncertainty, both about sales projections and manufacturing costs.

At this point, the stakeholder management challenge Iacocca faced was largely political. To get things moving, he worked hard to counter the opposition of Henry Ford II, a staunch detractor, by gradually involving him in the project's progress. Avoiding official channels, Iacocca shared his ideas with Ford II in informal meetings to give him time to evaluate them and talk to others. His goal was to allow Ford II to participate in the evolution of the concept and gradually make the Mustang idea his own.

However, this proved more difficult than expected, as the finance department continued to be vehemently opposed to the project because of its "problematic" effect on the company's profitability. Iacocca then took the major risk of telling people at Ford headquarters and the board of directors about the Mustang. At the same time, he "leaked" information about the Mustang to the automotive press. Eager to learn more about this new automotive sensation and its release date, journalists and dealers began asking questions of Ford executives. As a result, new stakeholders gradually emerged: the public, Ford dealers, the production department, the union, board members and shareholders.

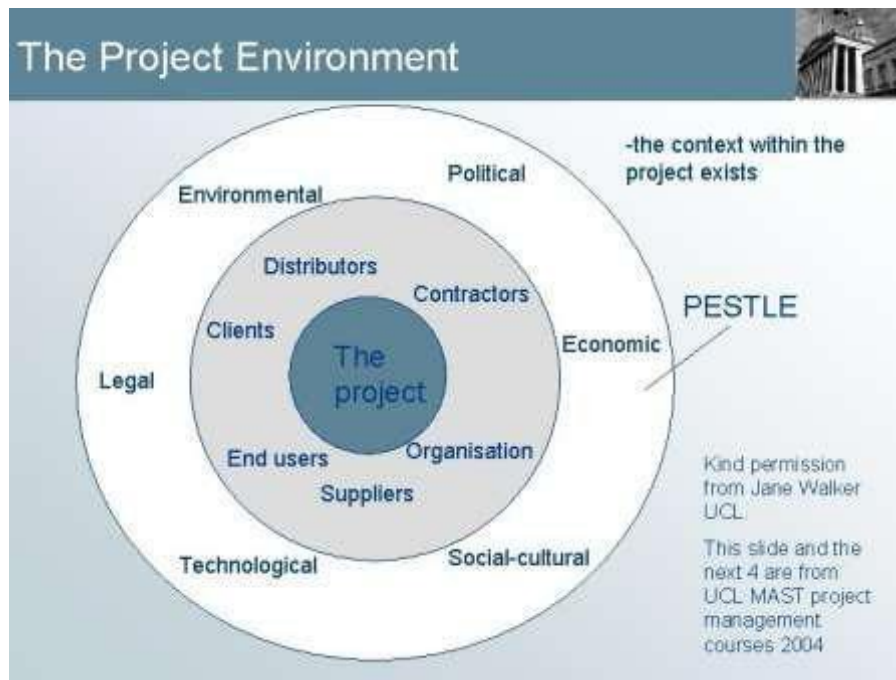
On the eve of the Mustang's launch, the marketing department had maintained its sales forecast at 100,000 cars. The Mustang was released in 1964. With the first few months of sales proving successful, Iacocca persuaded management to move production of the Mustang to a second plant and then to build a third, bringing production capacity to 400,000 cars.

Building on his success, Iacocca eventually became president of Ford Motor Company in 1970, but never fully won over Henry Ford II. Ford II fired him in 1978, when the company was posting record profits of \$2 billion. Iacocca later became famous as the CEO of Chrysler, which he saved from bankruptcy

Questions 3: How to change the political context of the project (mobilize, neutralize, co-opt or stakeholders to emerge)?

This question is particularly relevant when stakeholders' expectations and interests are divergent, even conflicting, while the resources to deal with them are limited. This is the case with the Ford Mustang. Two levels of stakeholder buy-in can be distinguished: 1) stakeholder involvement, when stakeholders are informed and consulted, and 2) actual participation, as a higher level of stakeholder buy-in that reduces resistance to the project. Since stakeholder buy-in consists of a process of consultation, communication, dialogue and exchange, negotiation becomes a de facto imperative, given the differences between the project and its various stakeholders on the one hand, and between the stakeholders themselves on the other. Only through negotiation can a compromise be reached that satisfies all parties. Indeed, the project is probably facing what Freeman (1984) calls

The project environment



Source; Online

The project is likely to face what Freeman (1984) calls the "stakeholder dilemma": negotiation or conflict. Communication is the tool that will help bring the negotiation process to a successful conclusion. Hence the need to (Assudani & Kloppenborg, 2010) put in place an appropriate communication strategy and plan to ensure that stakeholders receive the right messages in the right format and at the right frequency. Communication vehicles can include emails, informal conversations, formal meetings, and regular project reports, among others (PMI, 2017).

Let's return to the Ford Mustang case to illustrate the application of question 3. Iacocca wisely set out to change the political context in which his project was struggling to move forward. He did this by partially neutralizing some stakeholders and co-opting others.

Despite his feelings about the project, Henry Ford II gradually became an objective ally of Iacocca. Perhaps Ford II was recovering badly from the commercial failure of the Edsel project, which he had sponsored less than 10 years earlier. In any case, Iacocca managed to contain his opposition to the Mustang to the Mustang by associating him to this very promising project. Subsequently, the resounding volume of the first sales sealed this alliance based on their mutual interests. Logically, with sales of 22,000 cars on the day the Mustang was launched, neither Henry Ford II nor the finance department could distance themselves from Iacocca.

Without taking a break, Iacocca worked hard to bring out new stakeholders. Articles he had "blown" to the press attracted the attention of board members, Ford dealers, the production department, and ultimately the union, who began to express favorable interest in the Mustang project. A second and then a third plant were built to meet the demand. Gradually, the production department and the union became new stakeholders, supportive of the project.

Thus, the more interest, positive or negative, one has in a project, the more likely one is to intervene, for or against it. Furthermore, the degree of influence or power one has is proportional to the impact one can have on the progress and outcome of a project. In short, interest is related to the probability of intervention, while power is related to its impact. Knowledgeable project managers must therefore be attentive to both dimensions and move stakeholders from their position in the lower left-hand corner

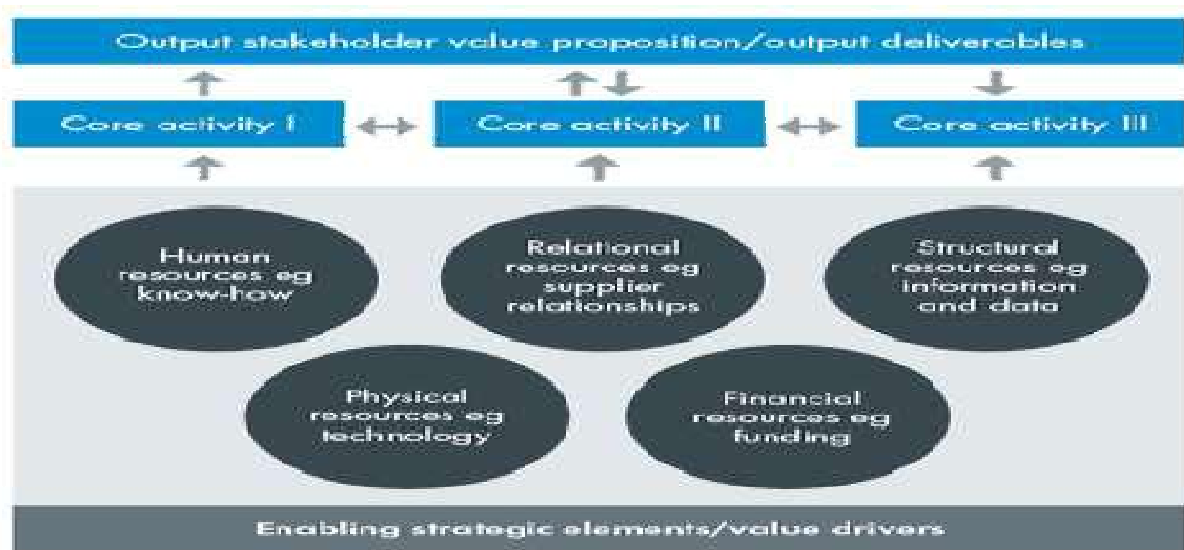
of the matrix to the upper right-hand corner (see Table 3). Their efforts, on both tracks, should all be aimed at the top right corner.

Question 4: How to win and manage stakeholder buy-in, on an ongoing basis and in a win-win manner (including and listening to stakeholders; assessing and adjusting their power relationships)?

When negotiating from a win-win perspective, it is important to distinguish between the position taken by the stakeholder and their real interests. It is by focusing on the latter and working together that innovative and mutually beneficial options can be found (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2006). For example, Henry Ford II's very personal stance against the Mustang is essentially contrary to 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 associated him with it in the public eye, that caused Henry Ford II to moderate his opposition to the project.

By practicing a win-win approach, a climate of trust can be established over time that strengthens the project's relationship with stakeholders, facilitates communication, and shortens the duration of negotiations. The more trust stakeholders have, the more they share their knowledge and the more they take actions that benefit 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 et al, 2009. In addition, it is possible to take advantage of the fact that projects and their stakeholders are, to varying degrees, interdependent. The project needs the financial and non-financial contributions of the stakeholders, while the stakeholders need the project to satisfy certain needs and expectations of another kind.

Financial and Non-Financial Contributions of the Stakeholders



Source; Online

Trust is not a binary or immutable, absolute or non-existent concept. Trust is not all or nothing. It is rather a matter of degree. Moreover, it evolves over time. The goal of the project team should be to gradually build mutual trust as the project progresses. In the Presidential Library construction project, there was some breakdown in trust between the former President of the United States and his base. This was confirmed by the fact that he was asked for written commitments, a community benefits agreement (CBA) (Lesnes, 2018). Barack Obama, in turn, demands trust instead. He does not want to sign any CBA, claiming that his foundation is a non-profit organization, not a real estate developer to

be trusted. The reality is that trust is not claimed, it is earned. It is therefore very difficult to re-establish it when it is lost.

Conclusion

This article has raised four fundamental questions that need to be addressed when seeking to secure stakeholder buy-in for a project. These four questions relate to the identification, assessment, buy-in and ongoing management of stakeholders and their interests. They are complementary and cannot be addressed in silos. They must also be asked repeatedly, on an iterative basis. And it is by addressing them in an interdependent way that it is possible to bring a project to the highest possible level of stakeholder management maturity, as intended by Freeman's model (1984). Table 5 below provides a checklist for the four questions and some recommendations to help achieve stakeholder buy-in.

As critical as these four questions are, they are not always enough to get stakeholder buy-in. The approach used is both descriptive and instrumental (Donaldson and Preston, 1995), and therefore does not address the ethical dimension of stakeholder theory (Derry, 2012). Unfortunately, project management often still seeks to manipulate or otherwise influence stakeholders in the sole interest of the project. So, isn't it time that, from a win-win perspective, we ensure that we co-create and co-develop the project with the stakeholders? Are they not true partners in the project, and not objects that the project manager and his team can manipulate at will (Woermann and Engelbrecht, 2019)? This is a question that all managers must address in order to successfully complete their projects.

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