Prioritising your stakeholders

This guide provides a brief overview of the stakeholder prioritisation process.

This method helps to determine each stakeholder's level of involvement in the change process. This will help identify the broad engagement strategy under which each stakeholder would sit. The procedure should be followed as part of the development of your communication plan.

This is an iterative process and there is rarely a single, correct answer regarding the status of a stakeholder. This analysis process should be completed with as many people involved as possible. Try to include the project sponsor, project manager, change manager, and members of the project team. You will want to revisit this process a number of times over the course of your project.

Templates to help with prioritising your stakeholders
Stakeholder prioritisation

How to do it

1. Identify stakeholders

First identify key internal and external stakeholders for the change initiative. Consider a stakeholder as someone who can *impact the success of the change project* or who will *be impacted by the change project.* Naturally a larger project will often have a larger number of stakeholders involved. However, don't underestimate the numbers involved in simple projects. Your list should be as exhaustive as possible.
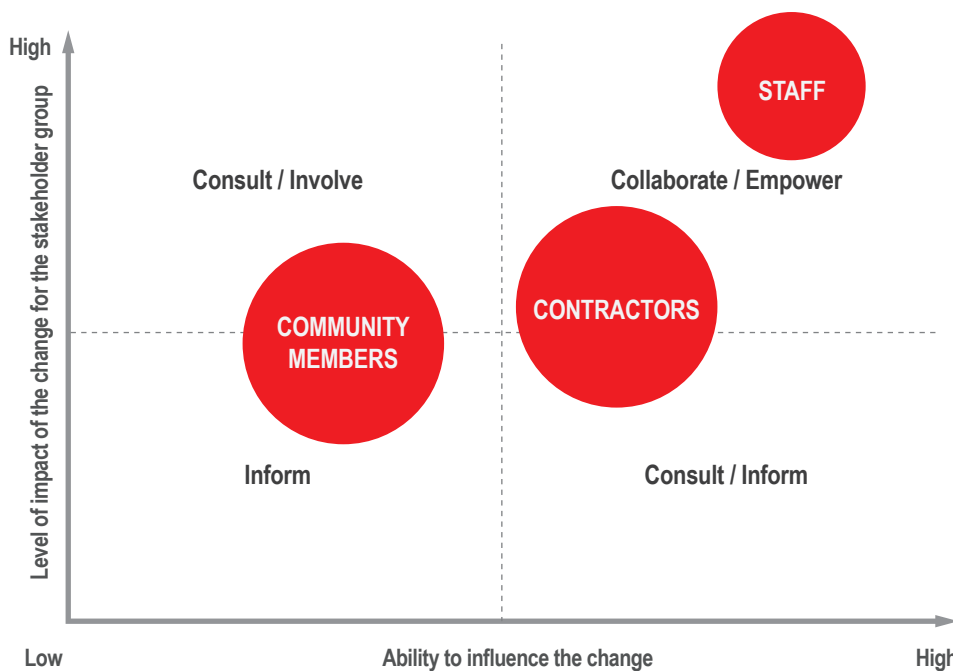
2. Analyse stakeholder influence and impact

You will need a white board or large sheet of paper for the following exercise. This step involves analysing the stakeholders against certain criteria and provides a visual representation for you to create a prioritised list and engagement strategy.

The criteria to analyse stakeholders are:

- their ability to influence change outcomes
- the extent to which they are impacted by the change.

Here is an example for you to copy:

Once you have drawn the table, simply place the names of stakeholders or stakeholder groups in places that you think reflect their relationship to the project. For instance, if a stakeholder has the capacity to impact the success of the change program and will be highly impacted by the change project, place their name in the upper right quadrant. The correlating engagement approach within this quadrant is classified as "collaborate/empower".

3. Prioritise stakeholders

Once you have completed your analysis, prioritise the key stakeholder list on the template provided. Note:

- their ability to influence change outcomes
- the extent to which they are impacted by the change
- their level of awareness of the program
- their level of support.

Prioritise according to the quadrant into which stakeholders fall. If the stakeholder has low impact and low influence, they will naturally be a lower priority in engagement. The opposite is true for those who have a high impact and high influence.

For a simple project this may be all that is required.

4. Deeper analysis of stakeholders

For large and complex projects it is worth mapping stakeholder networks to be able to illustrate and influence a complex stakeholder environment.

It will also be important to undertake a more intensive stakeholder analysis that assesses the forces that influence change for larger or more controversial change programs.

Instructions to help with deeper analysis of stakeholders
Mapping your stakeholder network
Analysing forces that influence change