What Project Managers Should Know
About the **Stakeholder Management Plan**

Management Plans are critical tools for project managers. During the conception phase, they are used as communication tools to capture expectations and ensure stakeholders' needs are managed. Once the plan is approved, it is the duty of the project manager to ensure its correct execution. Finally, if any unexpected issue or need for change arises, project managers are in charge of managing updates as needed.

The first step to take when developing a stakeholder management plan is to identify key stakeholders and conduct a stakeholder analysis. This will give you a view of their role and responsibility; how and when interactions may occur; and how their presence and influence may impact the project. Developing the stakeholder management plan is also part of your effort in strategic planning. What key players will be involved and what can you do about it? What strategy will you use to obtain the highest level of support for your project? What type of interaction is expected and will serve your project best?

In project-oriented organizations, you will most likely lead cross-functional teams and you want to make sure to connect with functions' supervisors as their power over team members supersedes yours. Fostering collaboration by sharing information can help you manage risks with conflicts of resources and anticipate possible resistance to change. Another typical key stakeholder is the customer or end-user. Making sure to integrate customers' feedback and manage expectations is essential to your project's success. Educating your customer may also prove useful to manage the project's scope. Depending on the complexity of your project, you may need to establish useful connections with people outside of your organization, for example, vendors or government agencies, and learn the usage and policies in place you will need to know as you develop such relationships. As you interact with skilled team members, your role may involve coaching or mentoring. How will you manage to obtain commitment and support from your organization's executives and project sponsor? You will wear many hats as you interact with key stakeholders.

After you have identified the most important stakeholders, you may find it beneficial to use tools such as a power/interest grid to classify stakeholders in categories associated with their level of influence/power as well as engagement/interest level. You want to make sure that stakeholders with a high level of interest and power are engaged throughout the project lifecycle to ensure that issues are addressed early on and their opinion and concerns are taken into account, especially when changes are discussed. These key players could provide you with invaluable support or negatively impact the course of your project. Knowing the specific requirements of each stakeholder can also help you to develop an appropriate communication plan. For example, you may want to keep stakeholders with a low level of interest but a high level of power informed by asking them about their preference and sending them reports and minutes of meetings accordingly.

Lastly, we will examine briefly some of the typical challenges project managers may face when implementing the plan throughout the project lifecycle. Your plan will need to be updated when a key stakeholder quits the project or when new stakeholders enter. The balance of power may change and your project could be impacted positively or negatively. Going back to square one by conducting a new stakeholder analysis can help you assess the magnitude of the change and reposition yourself and your project as needed.