Stakeholder Mapping: Power-Interest Grid

A stakeholder is anyone who can affect a project or is affected by it, such as customers, staff, managers and suppliers. Academics such as Aubrey Mendelow studied stakeholder power in a conference paper in 1981, and the power-interest grid was popularised later in strategy textbooks. The power-interest grid sorts people using two questions: how much power does this person have over the project, and how much interest do they have in it? The answers place each stakeholder in one of four boxes. Each box calls for a different way of engaging, so effort goes where it matters most. Without this step, teams often spend their time on the loudest people instead of the most important ones.

1. Manage Closely

Stakeholders with high power and high interest are managed closely. They can strongly influence the project, and they care about every detail. We involve them early, meet them often and use their advice in important decisions. Their trust grows through honest, regular contact. Losing their support can put the whole project at risk.

Example: A family plans a big wedding, and the parents pay for it and care about every detail. Instead of surprising them, the planner manages them closely with weekly meetings, and they approve every choice.

At work: Omar leads an office move, and the finance director has high power and high interest. He manages her closely: he meets her every week and asks her to approve the budget, so no last-minute surprise stops the move.

2. Keep Satisfied

We keep satisfied the stakeholders with high power but low interest. They can stop the project, but they do not follow its daily details. They often decide on budgets, permits or contracts, so their approval matters. We give them short, clear updates and ask for their approval when needed. Too much information can annoy them, and too little can surprise them.

Example: A city council can stop a street festival, but it has little interest in the details. The organiser keeps it satisfied with a one-page plan, so the permit arrives on time.

At work: The legal manager has high power but little interest in the move. Omar keeps him satisfied with a one-page summary of the contract risks, and he signs off without delay.

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3. Keep Informed

We keep informed the stakeholders with low power but high interest. They cannot decide, but they are affected and often have useful ideas. Listening to them early often shows problems that managers cannot see. Regular news, open questions and a place to share concerns keep them supportive. They can also become strong supporters who spread good messages to others.

Example: The neighbours of a new cafe have little power but strong interest. The owner keeps them informed with a notice about opening hours, and they welcome the cafe.

At work: The staff who will move to the new office have low power but high interest. Omar keeps them informed with a weekly email and a question session, and one person suggests a useful idea for the seating plan.

4. Monitor

We monitor the stakeholders with low power and low interest. They need only a little effort, such as general announcements. A quick check every few weeks is usually enough. We watch for changes, because people can move between boxes as the project develops. Spending too much time on them takes attention away from the key groups.

Example: A shop in the next street has little power and little interest in a school fair. The organisers only monitor it with a general notice, and they review the grid if the road is closed.

At work: The company that cleans the old building has little power and little interest in the move. Omar monitors it with a single message and reviews its box if the move date changes.

Conclusion

In summary, the power-interest grid helps us choose how to engage each stakeholder. Power and interest give four boxes: manage closely, keep satisfied, keep informed and monitor. This idea builds on early work such as Aubrey Mendelow's in 1981. The grid is a snapshot, so it should be reviewed as the project changes. When effort follows the grid, the right people get the right attention at the right time.

Sources

• Mendelow, A. L. (1981). Environmental Scanning: The Impact of the Stakeholder Concept. Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Information Systems – https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis1981/20

• Stakeholder analysis and the power-interest matrix, overview (the grid was popularised later, e.g. in Johnson and Scholes, Exploring Strategy) – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stakeholder_analysis

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