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Wider definition and inclusion of 'stakeholders'[Post rep](#)

| Wider definition and inclusion of 'stakeholders'

**MyMarketingLife Team**

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This brief article aims to consider the wider definition and beneficial inclusion of stakeholders by the boards and marketing leaders of major organisations in the commercial and public sectors.

| Stakeholder types are numerous and varied

The term stakeholder is now generally used to represent any organisation or individual that contributes to or benefits from (i.e. has a stake in its success) the operations and outcomes of your organisation.

The most obvious stakeholder examples are customers and employees, but there may also be groups that represent these, such as workers representatives, trade unions or third sector (usually charitable) organisations such as Help The Aged, or the Citizens Advice Bureau – or even the citizen's MP or a civil rights group such as Fathers 4 Justice.

Shareholders of commercial companies are also recognised as stakeholders, as lenders, suppliers, creditors and partners could be too. For public sector organisations the taxpayer as stakeholder also needs to be considered. Where an organisation believes it is ahead in managing interactions with customers and employees, compared to other stakeholder, the organisation often develops a new category of 'other stakeholders' for special focus.

With such a wide definition of stakeholders, and therefore potentially so many groups and individuals to be considered, it can initially appear too difficult and time consuming to gain their input and even their direct support, also to maintain sufficient two-way communications with them.

| Stakeholder communications provides marketing and the board with an additional challenge

Gaining stakeholder input isn't just a first step it has to be an ongoing process. Traditional research methods were often large-scale, infrequent and aimed to be statistically correct, however a more useful approach to stakeholders informing your organisation's decisions tends to be more frequent and smaller sampling. Online

member's comment.

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research techniques, supplemented by face to face focus groups or other forums, usually offer the right mix of timeliness of input and cost effectiveness of operation.

When the board need to make decisions related to the handling of new customers it could be appropriate to engage with a subset of customers that have just completed this process, also with employees that faced them and other stakeholders that are also engaged at these early process stages. Other key stages in the customer journey (such as changes and complaints) can complete more of the 'jigsaw pieces', adding a few more at each organisational development stage. It is also useful to consider different segments of customers, employees or other stakeholders to identify significant differences in their perceptions and needs, rather than averaging-out their input by combining it with others.

A major objective of learning from stakeholders should be to better align your organisation's outcomes to their needs and expectations. Alison Bond and The Haloworks, have clearly identified through their research that 'focusing on benefits makes an organisation better, while focusing on transactional measures just makes it busier'. A well aligned organisation will deliver an exceptional customer experience, motivated and productive employees and outcomes that stakeholders can relate to and support.

Of course it may prove very difficult, if not impossible, to completely satisfy your organisation's stakeholders where their desired outcomes or timescales seem incompatible with those of others. 'Standing further back' when reviewing these needs usually makes them appear more similar and less in conflict. Moving closer (towards detail) in stages can help negotiate common ground where it exists.

Good governance benefits from appropriate stakeholder engagement

Many boards now include representative stakeholders and in some cases this can provide the additional insights and direct support that the board needs to achieve the outcomes it has committed. In other situations, stakeholders have been known to represent their own group in such a single-minded manner that they fail to contribute fully and as a rounded board member, perhaps standing in the way of achieving the operational changes that are required.

From my own research and experience it appears that operational board meetings benefit most from the direct inclusion of independent directors (non-executives) and from separately meeting wider stakeholders in other forums where the timing and approach are carefully chosen to ensure the best opportunities for two-way stakeholder communications.

Just as marketing departments have always been responsible to develop external and internal communications plans for customers and employees, additional and well integrated 'other stakeholder' communications plans are often added to plans that are already in place. Where stakeholders may be either individuals or organisations different communication techniques may need to be used, for example Key Account Management methods and business-to-business email communications programmes have been used successfully in organisation to organisation environments such as peer partnerships. CEO blogs and social networking capabilities are more often used to support staff and partners as stakeholders, but increasingly are being trialled for wider use with customers, investors and any others.

| Summary

Interacting with your organisation's stakeholders can provide much improved alignment, which should translate into changes in culture, values, measures and delivered outcomes. There are many types of stakeholder and much to do with each type to include their input and to keep them updated on progress. Staging the development of stakeholder management can deliver early benefits while also ensuring that your organisation doesn't become swamped with additional communications activities. The best boards of directors understand the positive part that stakeholders can play in setting and achieving appropriate outcomes, but also don't allow the negative influences of some stakeholders to disrupt that achievement!

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