Stakeholder Integration: 3 Critical Factors

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Stakeholder integration is vital to achieving project goals since it will maximize collecting all the project definitions and approvals—and will help identify stakeholders’ expectations and needs. The integration itself is directly related to the teamwork concept that involves an optimum work environment: respect among team members, a common goal (in this case, the project’s goal) and team solidarity and cohesion that encourage effective performance and good results. After all, it all comes down to teamwork interaction.

Additionally, integration should be considered an ongoing communication process among the stakeholders. Communication becomes a key variable to achieve effective integration and should be applied through management. From a communication perspective, knowing the number of relationship channels resulting from the total number of stakeholders is essential to determine the level of complexity of the project.

To reach this number, the mathematical formula to be applied is:

\[ n \times \frac{(n-1)}{2} \]

…where “n” is the number of participants in the team or in the environment who should interact.

For example, if there are seven professionals in the team, the number of available channels would be \( 7 \times \frac{(7-1)}{2} = 21 \) communication channels. However, each new member added to the team does not imply a new communication channel. Following the previous example, if now there are eight professionals in the team, the existing channels would be \( 8 \times \frac{(8-1)}{2} = 28 \), which means that by adding one professional, seven communication channels were added to the team.

In order to achieve successful integration, the project must be based on three critical success variables:

- **Identification** means detecting all stakeholders, regardless of their degree of involvement and influence in the project
- **Classification** enables the design of the integration strategy among the different stakeholder roles in the project execution, since it frames them according to their role, thus simplifying management and control:
  - *Executive Stakeholders*: define the strategic needs of the business project, and expect that the defined goals are met
  - *Business Stakeholders*: define the business requirements, and work jointly with the project team
- Sponsor: leads the project from the business perspective
- Project Manager: integrates and manages all the project stakeholders
- Project Team: works seamlessly with business stakeholders.
- Other Stakeholders: refers to the rest of the stakeholders that may be part of the business areas of the project team.

- **Management and control** integrates and consolidates stakeholders’ commitment and the compliance of their activities in the project according to the classification. To manage this critical success variable, an effective communication management is essential to maximize stakeholder integration.

If the stakeholders’ integration is inaccurate, the project will be wrong no matter how well the knowledge areas from *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)* are handled, and will have a direct impact on project goals.

An example: A large IT project was planned, but two business stakeholders were not identified in the planning process group. What do you think happened? When the execution process group had advanced 60% into the plan, the project team detected that a critical business function had not been defined, implying that the project development could not be continued unless the appropriate definition was obtained.

The project suffered a 15% deviation from its time baseline. This forced the project manager to identify the business stakeholders that should be added and integrated to the project in order to define the missing function--and therefore continue with the project development.
Stakeholders should be detected at the start of the project and considered a single work team strategically outlined according to the classification. This will enable the project to build knowledge synergy among all the team members regardless of their role in the project, and enable the development of group tasks based on the different knowledge, expectations and influences.

In addition, we should always ensure that stakeholders work jointly on the basis of trust and sincerity, maintaining a fluid communication that enables team members to share their needs and expectations for the purpose of converging to define unique and agreed project goals, and support the project to achieve them.

The more accurate the stakeholders’ identification, classification, management and control are, the greater their integration and--above all--the achievement of the project goals.

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