Stakeholder Mapping

November 2011

BSR's Five-Step Approach to Stakeholder Engagement

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Introduction

Stakeholder mapping is **Step 2** in the BSR Five-Step Approach to Stakeholder Engagement. Mapping is an important step to understanding who your key stakeholders are, where they come from, and what they are looking for in relationship to your business. To be most effective, this process should be driven by an engagement strategy developed in **Step 1: Engagement Strategy**.

What Is Stakeholder Mapping?

Stakeholder mapping is a collaborative process of research, debate, and discussion that draws from multiple perspectives to determine a key list of stakeholders across the entire stakeholder spectrum. Mapping can be broken down into four phases:

1. **Identifying:** listing relevant groups, organizations, and people
2. **Analyzing:** understanding stakeholder perspectives and interests
3. **Mapping:** visualizing relationships to objectives and other stakeholders
4. **Prioritizing:** ranking stakeholder relevance and identifying issues

The process of stakeholder mapping is as important as the result, and the quality of the process depends heavily on the knowledge of the people participating.

Action: Gather a cross-functional group of internal participants to engage in this process. Identify sources external to the company who may have important knowledge about or perspective on the issues, and reach out to these sources for input and participation. Finally, identify a resource who can facilitate your work through the following activities. Capture all your work in writing to help with future steps.

1.1 IDENTIFYING

The first step in the mapping process is to understand that there is no magic list of stakeholders. The final list will depend on your business, its impacts, and your current engagement objectives—as a result it should not remain static. This list will change as the environment around you evolves and as stakeholders themselves make decisions or change their opinions.

Action: Brainstorm a list of stakeholders without screening, including everyone who has an interest in your objectives today and who may have one tomorrow. Where possible, identify individuals. Use the following list to help you brainstorm:

❑ Owners (e.g. investors, shareholders, agents, analysts, and ratings agencies)
❑ Customers (e.g. direct customers, indirect customers, and advocates)
❑ Employees (e.g. current employees, potential employees, retirees, representatives, and dependents)
❑ Industry (e.g. suppliers, competitors, industry associations, industry opinion leaders, and media)

Who Is This Approach For?
This executive introduction to stakeholder mapping:
- Reinforces the importance of stakeholder mapping as a process
- Helps businesses organize an internal mapping team and begin brainstorming
- Produces a prioritized list of stakeholders with relevant issues

- Community (e.g. residents near company facilities, chambers of commerce, resident associations, schools, community organizations, and special interest groups)
- Environment (e.g. nature, nonhuman species, future generations, scientists, ecologists, spiritual communities, advocates, and NGOs)
- Government (e.g. public authorities, and local policymakers; regulators; and opinion leaders)
- Civil society organizations (e.g. NGOs, faith-based organizations, and labor unions)

Here are some additional considerations to help you brainstorm:

- **Learn from past and ongoing engagement:** Look at your organization's existing engagement activities. What are the objectives of these activities? What stakeholders communicate regularly with your company? What groups do they cover well? Where can you reach beyond this existing comfort zone to engage with lesser-known stakeholders?
- **Be forward thinking:** Consider potential stakeholders from new markets, new technologies, new customers, and new impending regulations. Depending on your objectives, the relevant stakeholders you need to engage with may not play the usual sustainability roles but may instead serve other functions relevant to your business.
- **Be diverse:** Make sure to include a rich diversity of stakeholder expertise, geography, and tactics from across the spectrum. This is an opportunity to reach out and mix the old with the new, including individuals from each of the following stakeholder categories: influencers, collaborators, advocators, and implementation partners.
- **Be social:** Social media provides an unparalleled opportunity to identify and reach lesser-known stakeholder groups. Canvas blogs, forums, networking, reviews, and news sites to discover stakeholders relevant to your business and to learn about their interest in your activities.
- **Be aware:** People have a tendency to focus on formal authorities in the mapping process, but the loudest voices or heaviest campaigners are not necessarily your key stakeholders. Step back and add silent members to your list because they may have a hidden wealth of expertise.

1.2 ANALYZING

Once you have identified a list of stakeholders, it is useful to do further analysis to better understand their relevance and the perspective they offer, to understand their relationship to the issue(s) and each other, and to prioritize based on their relative usefulness for this engagement. BSR has developed a list of criteria to help you analyze each identified stakeholder:

- **Contribution (value):** Does the stakeholder have information, counsel, or expertise on the issue that could be helpful to the company?
- **Legitimacy:** How legitimate is the stakeholder's claim for engagement?
- **Willingness to engage:** How willing is the stakeholder to engage?
- **Influence:** How much influence does the stakeholder have? (You will need to clarify "who" they influence, e.g., other companies, NGOs, consumers, investors, etc.)
- **Necessity of involvement:** Is this someone who could derail or delegitimize the process if they were not included in the engagement?

Action: Use these five criteria to create and populate a chart with short descriptions of how stakeholders fulfill them. Assign values (low, medium, or high) to these stakeholders. This first data set will help you decide which stakeholders to engage. See example that follows.

	Expertise		Willingness	Value	
Stakeholder	**Contribution**	**Legitimacy**	**Willingness to Engage**	**Influence**	**Necessity of Involvement**
SH1	**High:** Knowledge in X issue is of value to the company	**High:** Directly affected by our company's activity	**High:** Proactive group that is already engaging	**Low:** Relatively unknown group	**Low:** Not an outspoken stakeholder
SH2	**Medium**	**Medium**	**High**	**Medium**	**Medium**
SH3	**Low**	**Low**	**Medium**	**Low**	**Medium**
SH4	**Low**	**Medium**	**Low**	**Medium**	**Medium**
SH5	**High**	**Medium**	**Low**	**High**	**High**

1.3 MAPPING

Mapping stakeholders is a visual exercise and analysis tool that you can use to further determine which stakeholders are most useful to engage with. Mapping allows you to see where stakeholders stand when evaluated by the same key criteria and compared to each other and helps you visualize the often complex interplay of issues and relationships created in the criteria chart above.

**Action:** Draw a mapping as follows to identify key stakeholders.

1. Draw a quadrant using two axes labeled "Low" to "High."
2. Add "Expertise," "Willingness," and "Value" to the criteria chart, as above.
3. Assign "Expertise" to the Y-axis and "Willingness" to the X-axis
4. Discuss and debate where each stakeholder falls.
5. Plot the stakeholders on the grid.
6. Use small, medium, and large circle sizes to denote their "Value."
7. To illustrate relationships, use arrows to depict "Influence."

Consider quadrants, circle size, and influence arrows when prioritizing.

Sample Mapping

Quadrant Tactics

(Tactics discussed further in **Step 3: Preparation**)
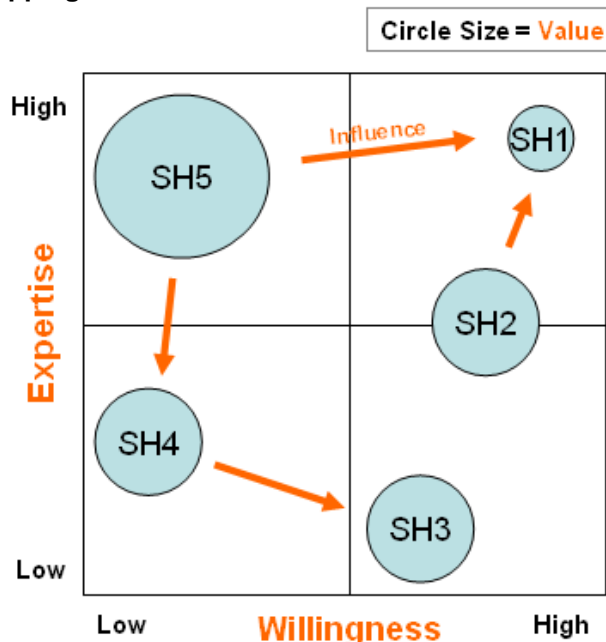
Note: This is just an illustrative mapping example, and your approach may vary depending on your needs: You may need to use more or less criteria in Analysis depending on the mix of your stakeholder list; more ambitious objectives may require a more strategic, detailed Mapping; and your process may be influenced by outside variables such as tools and frameworks already in place at your company. Look closely at your needs and decide whether this example will work for you as is.

1.4 PRIORITIZING STAKEHOLDERS AND IDENTIFYING ISSUES

It is not practical and usually not necessary to engage with all stakeholder groups with the same level of intensity all of the time. Being strategic and clear about whom you are engaging with and why, before jumping in, can help save both time and money.

Action: Look closely at stakeholder issues and decide whether they are material to your engagement objectives, asking yourself the following questions:

> ❒ What are the issues for these priority stakeholders?
> ❒ Which issues do all stakeholders most frequently express?
> ❒ Are the real issues apparent and relevant to our engagement objectives?

Combined with your criteria chart and mapping, use issue materiality to rank your stakeholders into a prioritized engagement list. You should now have captured the most relevant issues and the most relevant stakeholders.

Have You Developed the "Right" List?

The key is not to agonize over whether your stakeholder list is "right." By working through the four steps in the mapping process you will have created a robust, relevant, prioritized stakeholder list—but it will change over time. Instead, focus on whether your list will help you further prepare for your engagement activities.

Action: Answer the following questions to see if you are ready to move on:

> ❒ Is our list focused on relevant stakeholders who are important to our current and future efforts?
> ❒ Do we have a good understanding of where stakeholders are coming from, what they may want, whether they would be interested in engaging with our organization, and why?
> ❒ How can we further understand and qualify these stakeholders? Through discussions with internal colleagues? Reading reference reports? Finding specific blogs or Twitter accounts to follow?
> ❒ Based on our prioritized stakeholders, can we define a granular level of engagement? Will this list inform tactics, formats, and investment considerations?
> ❒ Have we given thought to what type of resources (expertise, people, and budget) we need to support our engagement strategy and follow-up activities?

Next Step: Think Tactics

You are ready to move on to preparing engagement goals, tactics, and format. In **Steps 3 and 4: Preparation and Engagement** you will better prepare for the engagement by more deeply examining your stakeholders to understand their interests, concerns, and positions. With this knowledge you can frame and lead the process of engagement to anticipate their needs. **Step 3 and 4** will also show you how to match the method of engagement to the issue and to the specific stakeholder, considering the level of formality, ease, and risk associated with certain engagement formats.

Contact

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