Use stakeholder maps to secure support for your SAP projects and ensure successful implementations

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(Full bio appears on page 80.)

I started my career in corporate IT 30 years ago, and I remember well my first-day-let-me-impress-my-new-boss conversation, when I said, "My responsibility is to get the job done. I avoid politics, so you won't see me getting caught up in emotional baggage and senseless behind-the-scenes drama!" My boss's response (once he stopped laughing) was, "Then would you prefer to resign now or at the end of the day?"

Now, after spending 25 years designing and implementing proprietary and SAP systems, I truly appreciate and understand the wisdom of his comment. SAP projects are wrought with politics involving your project team, your business clients, your steering team — the list goes on and on. You can try to wish it away. You can try to hide from it. You can attempt to close your eyes and avoid it. But the reality is that internal politics within organizations exists. Ignoring the fact doesn't make it go away. It does nothing to help you move your project forward. In fact, ignoring or over-looking internal politics can ultimately be the deciding factor of whether or not your project meets its financial and organizational objectives.

There are two givens you can always count on when you implement an SAP system. First, you will be dealing with a multitude of different stake-holders, each with different expectations, needs, and behaviors. Second, the more stakeholders you encounter in the initiative, the more you'll find yourself mired in internal politics on a daily basis. These politics manifest themselves in a variety of ways — from outright resistance to loss of executive support at critical decision points, from individuals leaving the project team to pockets of business users failing to attend the training before go-live, and so on (and on and on).

Every SAP project is about change — change in business processes and rules, change in technology, change in roles and responsibilities, change in vocabulary and field names, change in something as "simple" as the appearance of a screen viewed by users. And every change touches someone
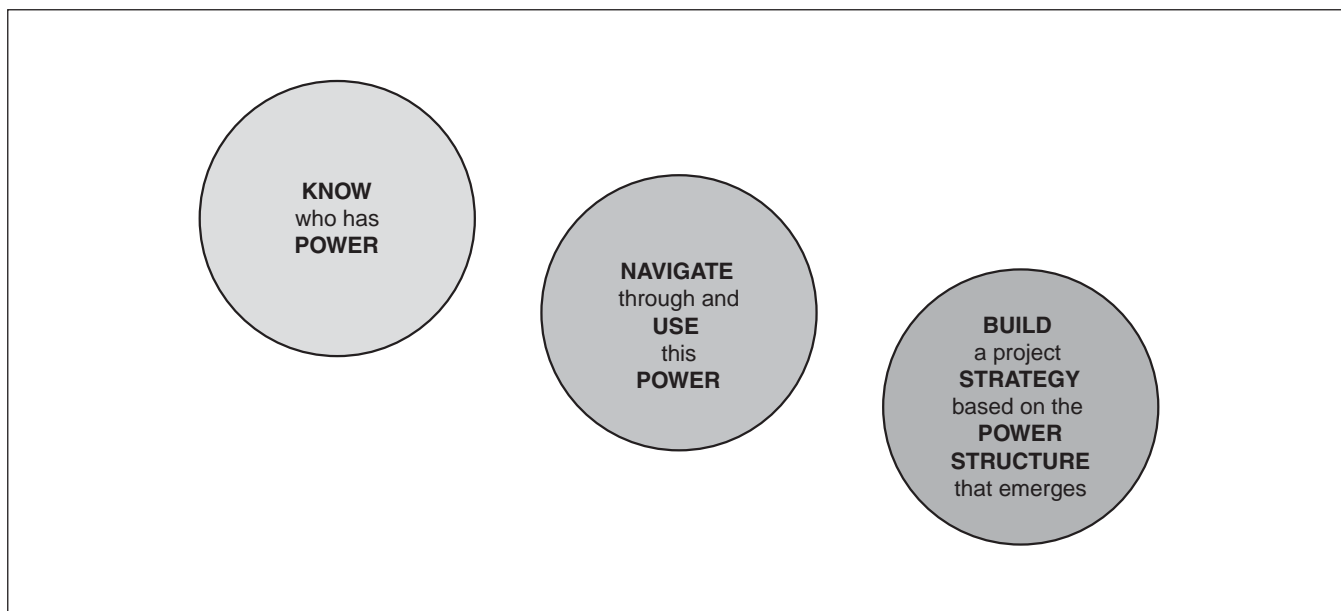
Figure 1   Principles for effectively managing internal politics

— either in a significant "rock-my-world" way, such as an entirely new accounting system would, or in a subtle "no-big-deal" way, such as a keyboarding change would. The standard formula for SAP implementations, therefore, becomes *Change + People = Politics*.

Your challenge, then, is to figure out how you're going to work within the world of internal politics — before it occurs, while it's happening, and even after you think you've managed to please everyone. As you start thinking about how to meet this challenge, you may find yourself asking:

- How do I figure out what individuals are thinking?

- Who influences these individuals?

- Whom do they influence?

- How significant are these pockets of influence? Which ones have the potential to stall, or even derail, my project?

- What are they expecting from me?

- What do I need from them?

- What will it take to get key stakeholders on board?

- What does a stakeholder strategy look like and how do I begin to make one?

The journey through the sometimes intriguing, yet always challenging world of internal politics upon which you are about to embark is based on three key principles, as depicted in **Figure 1**:

- Know who has power.

- Navigate through and use this power.

- Build a project strategy based on the power structure that emerges.

To help you on this journey, I will guide you in this article through the process of building and using what I refer to as "stakeholder maps" — physical views of your stakeholders, arranged and labeled according to "circles of influence" (both positive and negative). There are three steps needed to build and use stakeholder maps (**Figure 2**):

1. Take inventory of stakeholders.

2. Map relationships between stakeholders.

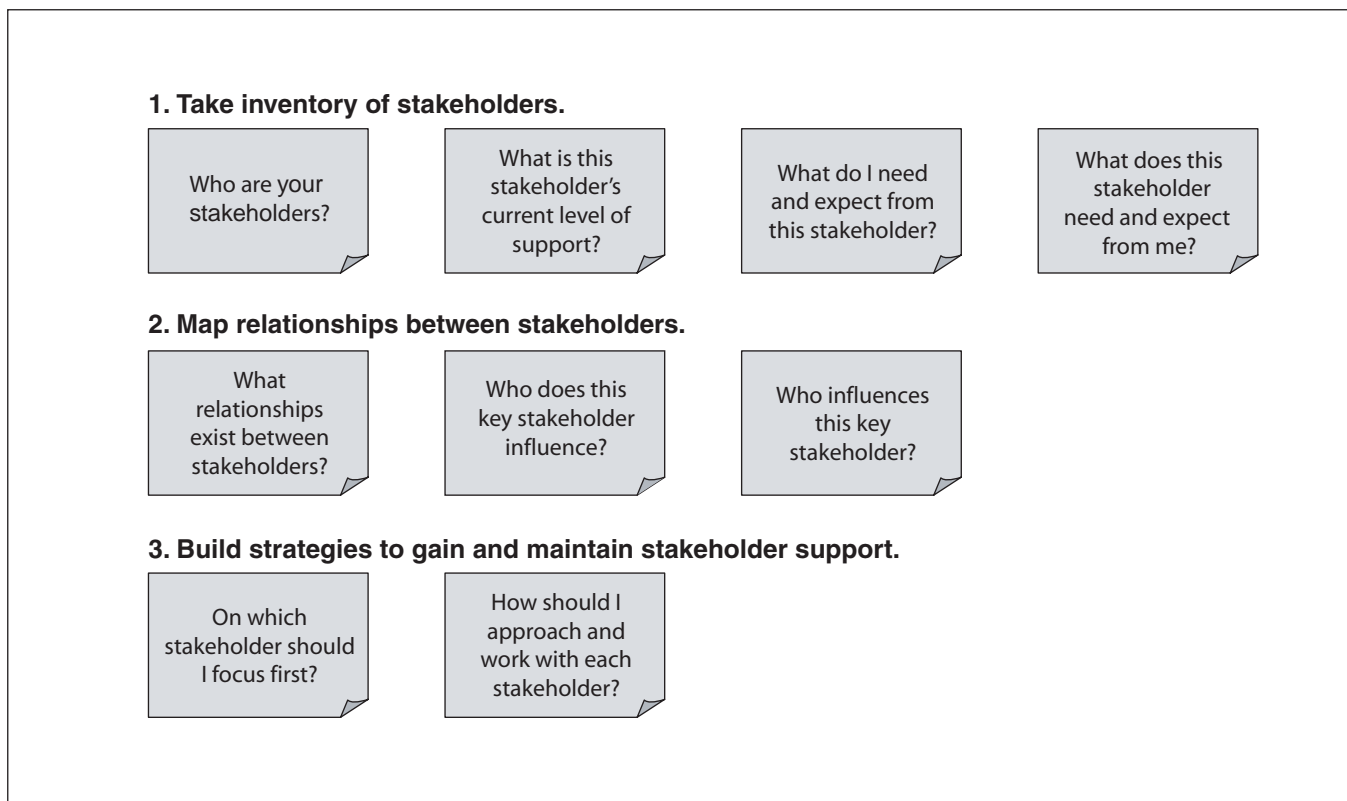3. Build strategies to gain and maintain stakeholder support.

1. Take inventory of stakeholders.

Who are your stakeholders?	What is this stakeholder's current level of support?	What do I need and expect from this stakeholder?	What does this stakeholder need and expect from me?

2. Map relationships between stakeholders.

What relationships exist between stakeholders?	Who does this key stakeholder influence?	Who influences this key stakeholder?

3. Build strategies to gain and maintain stakeholder support.

On which stakeholder should I focus first?	How should I approach and work with each stakeholder?

Figure 2   Three steps for building and using a stakeholder map

You use stakeholder maps to minimize the disruption that can result from resistance to your SAP project and better manage the multitude of relationships that will ultimately make or break the success of your project. I will also show you how to use a stakeholder "engagement grid" to help identify the degree of impact each stakeholder has, and to identify the level of commitment you need from each one. Ultimately, I hope to provide you with tools and strategies to help you not only gain support for your SAP project, but also maintain and continue to build that support throughout the project to ensure its success.

This article is for project managers and any others who need to engage and maintain support for a wide variety of projects, including department or company mergers, software implementations, migrations, etc. Anyone can perform stakeholder mapping, as long as you have the right knowledge about those stakeholders.

Where do I begin?

There are a few things you need to do before beginning the process of building and using a stakeholder map:

- **Organize a stakeholder mapping team.** You need a trustworthy team of people who know the organization and understand its internal workings. Working with a group of knowledgeable people will help bring to light the varying perceptions of reality within the company. Those who agree to serve on this mapping team must be able to put aside any personal biases they hold regarding a particular stakeholder. Perhaps someone has a recent negative experience with a stakeholder you are examining. This roadmapping process is not about telling "war stories." Instead, the person will be expected to focus on the goal of this process: to reach an agreement on how to engage people in your initiative. As an individual, you can't possibly

know everyone at every level. However, several well-chosen people willing to look with you at the organization under a microscope will surface a pretty detailed look at the organizational structure of the company, and validate the accuracy of each person's perception of others. One team member may observe that a stakeholder is more negative about the SAP initiative; whereas another may see that same stakeholder as being on board. The discussion should then focus on how these individuals have reached their own conclusions — through observations, experiences, discussions, etc. Working with a trustworthy group of individuals helps to keep the confidentiality that is so critical when talking about employees in any organization.

- **State mapping-session goals and set ground rules.** It is critical to clearly state the goal(s) and ground rules of your mapping session. The goals for a mapping session are simple: to identify the stakeholders for your SAP project, to map significant relationships among the stakeholders, and to build strategies that will engage stakeholders at the appropriate level to support and ensure the success of the project. Always develop a set of ground rules with the participants at the beginning of a mapping session. These rules provide a code of conduct for the members and should include basic rules of behavior including:

  - Be honest.

  - Remember that what is said here *stays* here.

  - Always focus on our primary goal(s).

Tip!

I like to start my stakeholder mapping team's discussion with a couple of rules I believe are essential for a professional discussion, but I always invite team members to add any rules they believe are critical for success to ensure buy-in from all team participants.

- **Determine locale and resources.** At the most basic and practical level, you need to find a room with a large whiteboard or flipchart, and a table for conducting the mapping session, and have some markers and a stack of sticky notes (the 3x5 inch ones work well) at hand. The question always arises: How much time will this take? An hour? A day? A week? The answer is "it all depends." You may decide to use one meeting to focus on the senior executives in your organization, and return for an additional meeting to review the managers who report to these leaders. At minimum, I recommend setting aside a full day to begin the process and to get people comfortable with how it works. Once everyone has had a chance to see how the mapping process works, individuals can work offline in small groups to focus on specific areas of the organization, then return to a full team meeting to share their results, solicit feedback and input from the other team members, and start identifying the connections and relationships between these various clusters of stakeholders.

Note!

Keep in mind that this entire process is very fluid. For example, 30 days after my team had completed our initial stakeholder mapping for our project, the director of HR left the organization. As we reviewed our map, we now had a new stakeholder name to add — one that carried a question mark since no one had yet met with her. Rumor had it that she came from an organization that had previously implemented SAP. Therefore, our next assignment was for someone to set up a group meeting with this director to introduce ourselves and our initiative, to become familiar with her SAP story and history, to assess where we perceived her support to be, to determine her (and our) needs and expectations, and ultimately to get her on board as a key supporter for the initiative.

With these pre-session tasks in place, you can begin the mapping process that, in the end, should produce a stakeholder map you can integrate into your overall SAP project plan.

Step 1: Take inventory of stakeholders

Your first step in building a stakeholder map is to identify who your stakeholders are. This step, on the surface at least, appears to be simple: Figure out who needs to be included in your SAP project — these are your stakeholders. The definition of stakeholder is anyone who has a vested interest — i.e., anyone who will be affected, either directly or indirectly — in the outcome of the project.

Who are your stakeholders?

When I ask an SAP project team the question, "Who are your stakeholders?" the first (and most obvious) answer is, "the end users!" Pretty simple, huh? Not really!

Yes, end users are a critical group of stakeholders. But even within this group, you have to ask, are your end users all alike? Do they all have the same expectations? Do they all think the same way? Do you have the same type of relationship with all of them? You should be so lucky!

Let's go back to the definition of stakeholder[1] — *anyone* who has a *vested interest* in the outcome of this project; *anyone* who will be *affected*, either *directly* or *indirectly*, by your SAP project. Suddenly, the stakeholder pool becomes wider and deeper. Just at the macro level, in addition to end users, you have executive management, the SAP project team, the

management teams within each business unit, human resources, IT, the help desk, the training department, the communications department, customers, suppliers, and even the families of project team members.[2] Your project will affect all of these groups.

The first stakeholders to be identified are most likely people who have official titles and positions that automatically carry a high degree of formal authority and power. But don't stop here. Look deeper within each group and you will find a surprising number of individuals who, when you really look at the organizational culture, have a significant amount of authority and power on an informal and unofficial level. In some cases, these individuals require even more of your attention than those who first appear on your list. For instance, it is not unusual to discover managers/supervisors at a third or fourth level down in the management hierarchy who have significant influence over the people they supervise — perhaps even greater influence than the director-level person to whom these individuals eventually report.

Figure 3 on page 66 shows what your whiteboard or flip-chart might look like at this point.[3] For example, the sponsor of the SAP project (in this case, a new accounting system) is the CIO of Company A. The depicted steering team includes a sponsor and the FI/CO, HR, and IT departments. The vice president of the FI/CO department is Pavi, who has several groups reporting to her, and one of those direct reports is Rich. John is one of the managers in the IT department, and Mya is the senior manager of the HR department. The other manager is a new hire who has yet to begin working.

Once you have your list of stakeholders, you need to identify key individuals within a stakeholder group who, in the simplest of terms, can make or break the success of your project through their words, their actions, and even their lack of actions.

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[1] For more information on stakeholders, see Evan J. Albright's article, "Ensure the success of your SAP implementation projects through meaningful communication with the right people at the right time — A guide to creating a communications plan" (*SAP Professional Journal*, November/December 2005). Stakeholder analysis is also covered in detail in the book *The Manager as Change Agent: A Practical Guide to Developing High-Performance People and Organizations* (Perseus Publishing, 2001).

[2] Dealing with outside influences that can affect your SAP project goes beyond the scope of this article. You will, however, learn strategies to help you develop and maintain extraneous relationships and influences.

[3] This article is not intended to be the definitive approach, but rather one that provides insight to help you build a stakeholder map you can use to ensure the support and success of your project. The figures are just small examples or portions of what the process might look like.
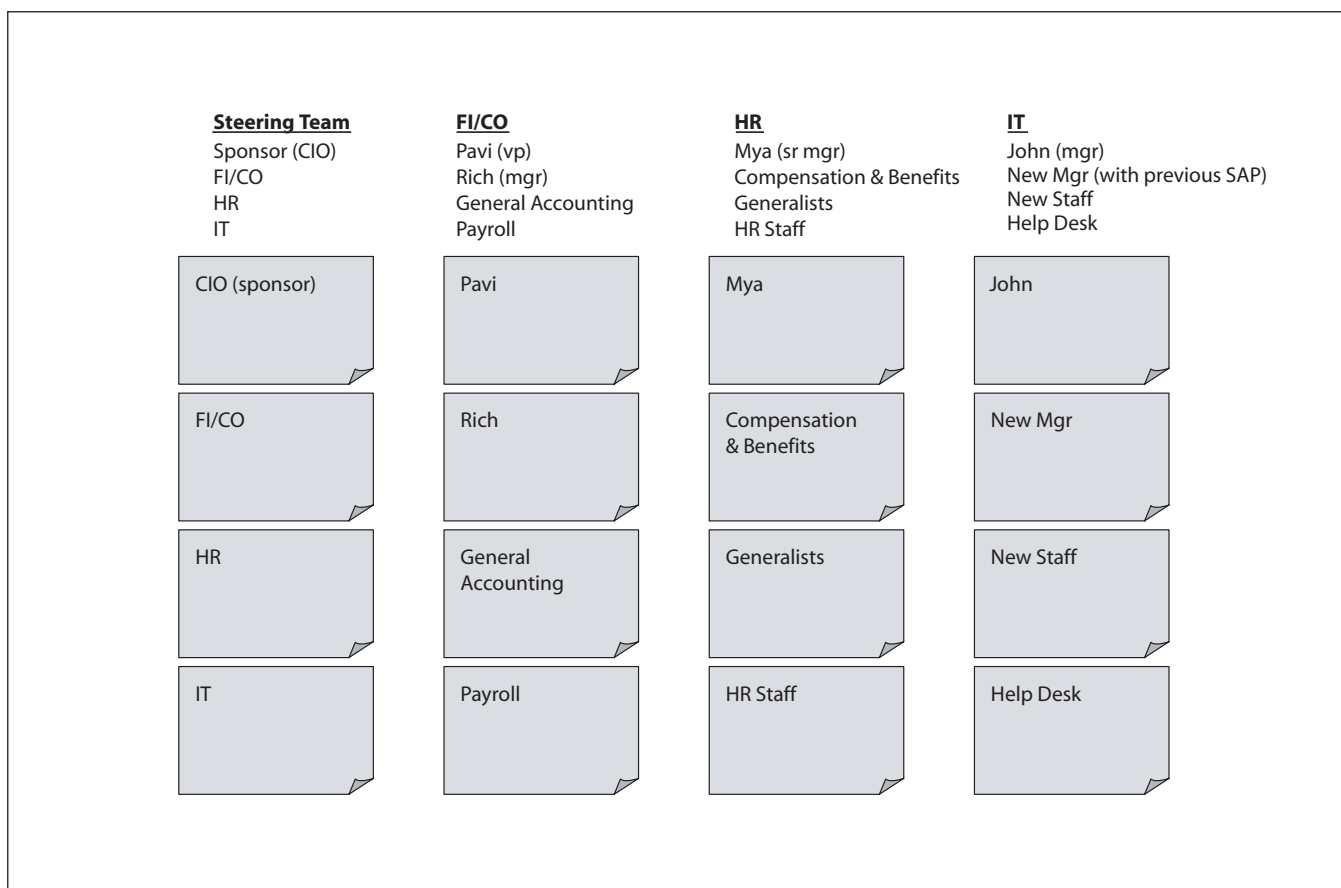

Steering Team	**FI/CO**	**HR**	**IT**
Sponsor (CIO)	Pavi (vp)	Mya (sr mgr)	John (mgr)
FI/CO	Rich (mgr)	Compensation & Benefits	New Mgr (with previous SAP)
HR	General Accounting	Generalists	New Staff
IT	Payroll	HR Staff	Help Desk
CIO (sponsor)	Pavi	Mya	John
FI/CO	Rich	Compensation & Benefits	New Mgr
HR	General Accounting	Generalists	New Staff
IT	Payroll	HR Staff	Help Desk

Figure 3   Listing the stakeholders for your SAP project

Note!

Group stakeholders as you list them. For instance, place all of the senior executives in a cluster or group. Build another group that represents your finance department, the sales team, etc. Once you start examining the relationships of individuals within these groups, you will start seeing how relationships between individuals on one team can interface with individuals from other groups and teams. Eventually, you will begin to see the social network that exists within your organization — a network not necessarily limited to membership in a specific workgroup or functional department. Grouping is especially beneficial if you have a large number of stakeholders. You will see that grouping also comes into play when you begin to mark your circles of influence.

In other words, who are the people within each group who have significant influence, within their own groups or teams, as well as with individuals in other groups? Who talks to whom? Who listens to whom? Who has enough political clout to either help your project take giant leaps forward or bring it to a screeching halt? Using questions like these is a way to ensure that you include not only the most visible stakeholders, but also the most influential as part of your stakeholder inventory.
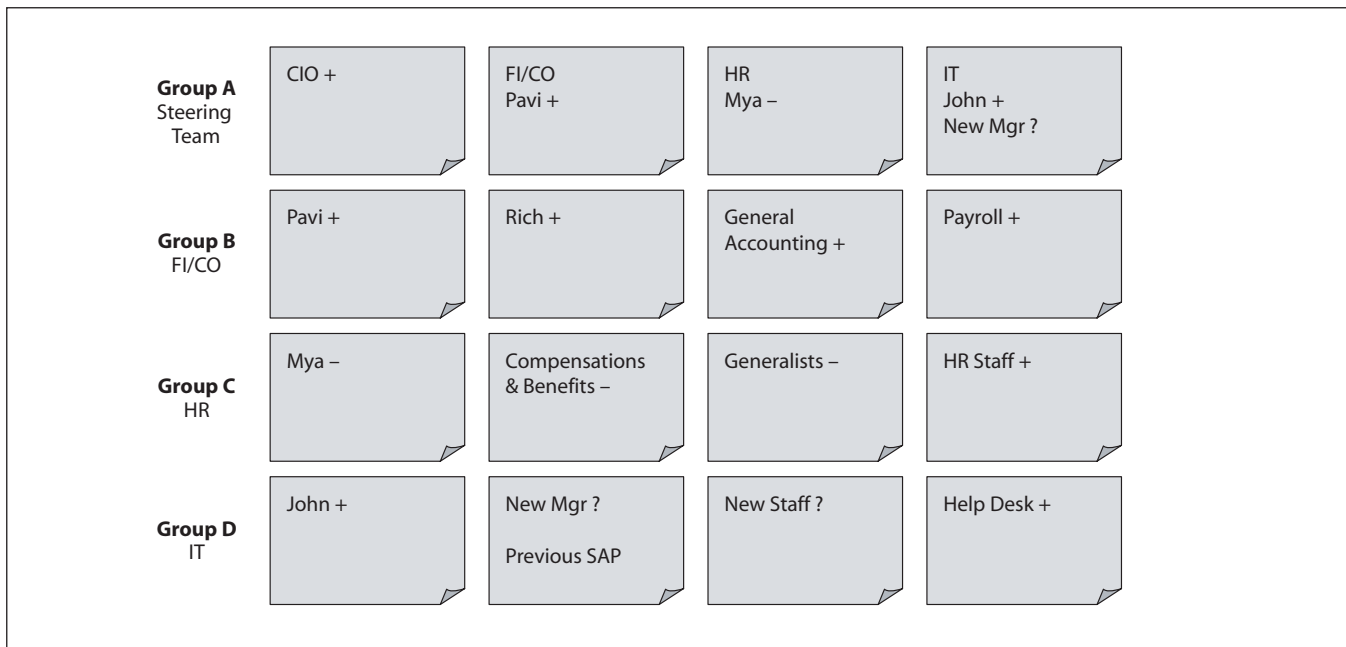
Group A Steering Team	CIO +	FI/CO Pavi +	HR Mya –	IT John + New Mgr ?
Group B FI/CO	Pavi +	Rich +	General Accounting +	Payroll +
Group C HR	Mya –	Compensations & Benefits –	Generalists –	HR Staff +
Group D IT	John +	New Mgr ? Previous SAP	New Staff ?	Help Desk +

Figure 4   Evaluating each stakeholder's current level of support

If you haven't yet figured it out, you're now digging into the political infrastructure of the organization. You're looking for all of the individuals with whom you need to build relationships to position your SAP project for success. At times, you may step into dark alleys that appear scary. You're going to identify names that you'd just as soon avoid, based on all the war stories and realities you've heard and experienced.

Office politics is a reality that accompanies every job description. It's not important to wonder whether politics is good or bad; it's simply important to understand that politics is an everyday part of organizations. You need to learn how to work those politics in the best interests of whatever project or initiative in which you are engaged. Your mission is to figure out how to build and maintain relationships that support your organization's strategies and objectives.

This step is about more than composing a list of names — it is also about knowing where your stakeholders stand, what their expectations of the project are, and what your expectations of these stakeholders are. To help you further evaluate your stakeholders, use the following three questions:

- What is this stakeholder's current level of support?

- What do I need and expect from this stakeholder?

- What does this stakeholder need and expect from me?

What is this stakeholder's current level of support?

This is one of the most important questions you can evaluate. By knowing where a stakeholder stands regarding your SAP project, you can lay the foundation of your stakeholder mapping. When making this assessment, keep it simple. If you believe they're on board and supportive, give them a plus sign (+). If, from what you've seen and heard they're against the project or have reservations, give them a minus sign (-). And if you simply don't know where they stand right now, give them a question mark (?).

Figure 4 shows what your white board or flipchart might look like at this point. The teams shown in Figure 4 represent the typical organizational view of groups or teams. The CIO of the company is the sponsor and, as indicated by the plus sign, is on board. You can expect that knowledge of his or her full

support for the project will have a positive influence on other individuals and departments in the company. On the other hand, HR and in particular its manager, Mya, seem to be against the project. She has resisted the project from its first mention. There are groups within HR that support the project. Perhaps their positive attitude will help persuade Mya to come on board.

If you're doing this exercise with others, this step will bring about some very interesting discussions. You will find differences of opinion on how to label a stakeholder's support. Encourage an open dialog about these differences — ask what your teammates have observed or heard or experienced that supports their perception. If, after discussion, the group can't agree on a label, give the stakeholder a question mark, which simply indicates that you need to find out more about this stakeholder and where he or she stands.

What do I need and expect from this stakeholder?

Do you want the stakeholders' positive support at steering team meetings? Do you need them to provide subject matter expertise? Do you want them to provide dedicated resources for the project team? Will you need them to attend training?

Be as specific as you can in terms of what you need from stakeholders or what you are asking them to provide or do. Write your abbreviated answers on their sticky note. For example, if you need a stakeholder to provide not only subject matter experts (SMEs), but also a representative from each department at meetings, your note might read:

> *3-5 SMEs and 1 rep from each dept at monthly status meetings*

However, this process of identifying stakeholders is not all about *you* and *your* needs, which leads you to the next question.

What does this stakeholder need and expect from me?

At the end of the day, what is the stakeholder looking

for? What do they need and want from you, this project, and this product? Do they want quicker response to their information inquiries? More and better data on which to base their decisions? Standardized and efficient business processes? Better integration of data? Knowledge, training, and support for completing the new business processes? List the key needs for each stakeholder on the appropriate sticky note (**Figure 5**).

Don't worry if you can't answer these questions for every individual you've identified. That's the point of stakeholder mapping — to figure out what you *do* know and what you still need to discover. Every time you find yourself saying "I don't know," simply put a question mark on the flipchart and realize that you have some homework to do!

Tip!

As you work through each step of the mapping process, you may suddenly recall some names that need to be added to the stakeholder list. No problem — grab a sticky note, capture the information, and add them.

Step 2: Map relationships between stakeholders

This step is where the process becomes intriguing — identifying the types of relationships that exist among all of the stakeholders. In every organization, some individuals have significant influence upon others, in both formal and informal ways. In some instances, you can clearly see that an individual has influence on others because of a direct-reporting, hierarchical structure and culture. But you will also discover that informal relationships may have even stronger levels of influence in some cases.

You will begin to identify who knows which stakeholders better among the people who are working with
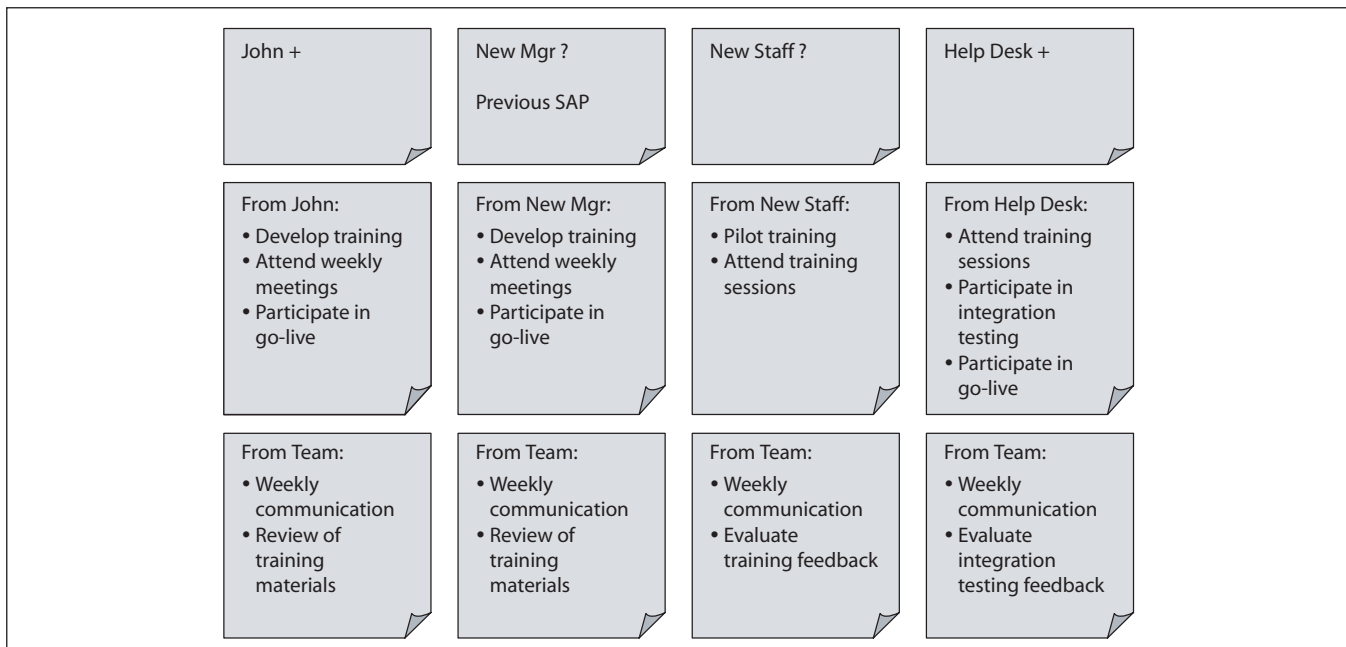
John +	New Mgr ?	New Staff ?	Help Desk +
	Previous SAP		

From John:	From New Mgr:	From New Staff:	From Help Desk:
• Develop training	• Develop training	• Pilot training	• Attend training sessions
• Attend weekly meetings	• Attend weekly meetings	• Attend training sessions	• Participate in integration testing
• Participate in go-live	• Participate in go-live		• Participate in go-live

From Team:	From Team:	From Team:	From Team:
• Weekly communication	• Weekly communication	• Weekly communication	• Weekly communication
• Review of training materials	• Review of training materials	• Evaluate training feedback	• Evaluate integration testing feedback

Figure 5   Identifying stakeholder needs and expectations

you on this stakeholder map. For instance, you may have a close relationship and knowledge of the CIO that no one else on the team has. The person sitting next to you may know quite a bit about the marketing director — someone about whom you know very little. Bottom line: you're trying to figure out as a group how you're going to build meaningful relationships with individuals and departments whose buy-in will be critical to the success of this project.

There are three groups that you want to identify:

- **Positive circles of influence:** These are stakeholders that you've identified as being on board and providing a strong base of support for the project (they're the ones you've labeled with plus signs in Step 1).

- **Negative circles of influence:** These are stakeholders that you've identified as having the potential to sidetrack the initiative (they're the ones you've labeled with minus signs in Step 1).

- **Uncertain/undecided:** These are stakeholders that you've identified as being "on the fence" (they're the ones you've labeled with question marks in Step 1).

Remember, each sticky note has the name of either an individual or a group/department on it. For each stakeholder you have also included a label (+, -, ?) to indicate your perception of their current attitude and support for your SAP project. You know their needs and expectations of you, and yours of them. Put all these sticky notes on the whiteboard or flipchart to create a visual display of who's who in relation to your SAP project — it will provide you with the circles of influence.

To determine these circles, ask the following questions:

- What relationships exist between stakeholders?

- Who does this key stakeholder influence?

- Who influences this key stakeholder?

What relationships exist between stakeholders?

It's time to stand back and look at your stakeholder

wall. Begin moving the sticky notes around based upon your perceptions of relationships that already exist within your organization. For instance, John from IT spends a lot of time with Pavi from FI/CO and Mya from HR. Pull these sticky notes together to form a cluster, or circle of influence. Continue to cluster names of individuals and departments based on what you and your team perceive to be significant relationships.

Who does this key stakeholder influence?

The next question to ask about a key stakeholder is, "Who does this stakeholder influence?" Are there other key stakeholders with whom this individual or group has strong, potentially influential relationships? Grab a marker and draw arrows connecting various names to indicate which of these key stakeholders has the greatest influence over the others. (By the way, this is why I suggest a whiteboard or flipchart. Maintenance seems to frown on employees drawing lines on the conference room wallpaper!)

For example, you might draw an arrow from Pavi pointing to John and Mya, because your experience and observations indicate that John and Mya seem to listen to Pavi and typically follow her lead. As you continue to look at the wall, you also know that Pavi's entire FI/CO team marches to whatever cadence she sets.

Of course, as you draw relationships between and among other groups and individuals, you will find yourself asking the next question.

Who influences this key stakeholder?

Once you've started clustering names and drawing arrows, take another look at which of these individuals has a plus sign, a minus sign, or a question mark. You may have put a minus sign on Mya's note, but you have a plus sign on Pavi's. If Pavi has a direct influence over Mya and maintains a fairly close relationship with her, then you may want to work through Pavi to help get Mya on board. As you map relationships, you will begin to see patterns emerging. As you

continue to work through this process of moving sticky notes around and connecting them with arrows to map the relationships that currently exist within your organization, you will begin to see patterns or circles of influence emerging. Your stakeholder map should look similar to **Figure 6**. You can see who supports your project, who doesn't, and who is still uncertain, and more importantly who influences whom.

Note!

When mapping relationships, I typically use different colors to indicate positive and negative circles of influence and those stakeholders who are on the fence. Because this article is printed in grayscale, I use different styles of lines to indicate different colors. For example, in Figure 6, to indicate a positive circle of influence I typically use a blue marker; in the figure I use a solid line (—). To indicate a negative circle of influence, I typically use a red marker; in the figure I use a dashed line (– – – –). For those stakeholders who are on the fence, I typically use a green marker; in the figure I use a dot-dash line (- — - — -).

As you work through the circles of influence, you will most likely discover *common themes* within the different groups. You need to get at the root of these themes to gain a greater understanding of your stakeholders. For example, to help determine the commonality among the negative circles of influence, ask yourself:

• Who is the ring leader of this group — the individual who appears to have the greatest influence over the majority of others within this particular cluster?

• Where does that individual stand in terms of support for the project?

If the ring leader has a negative affixed to his or her name, you need to build a communications and
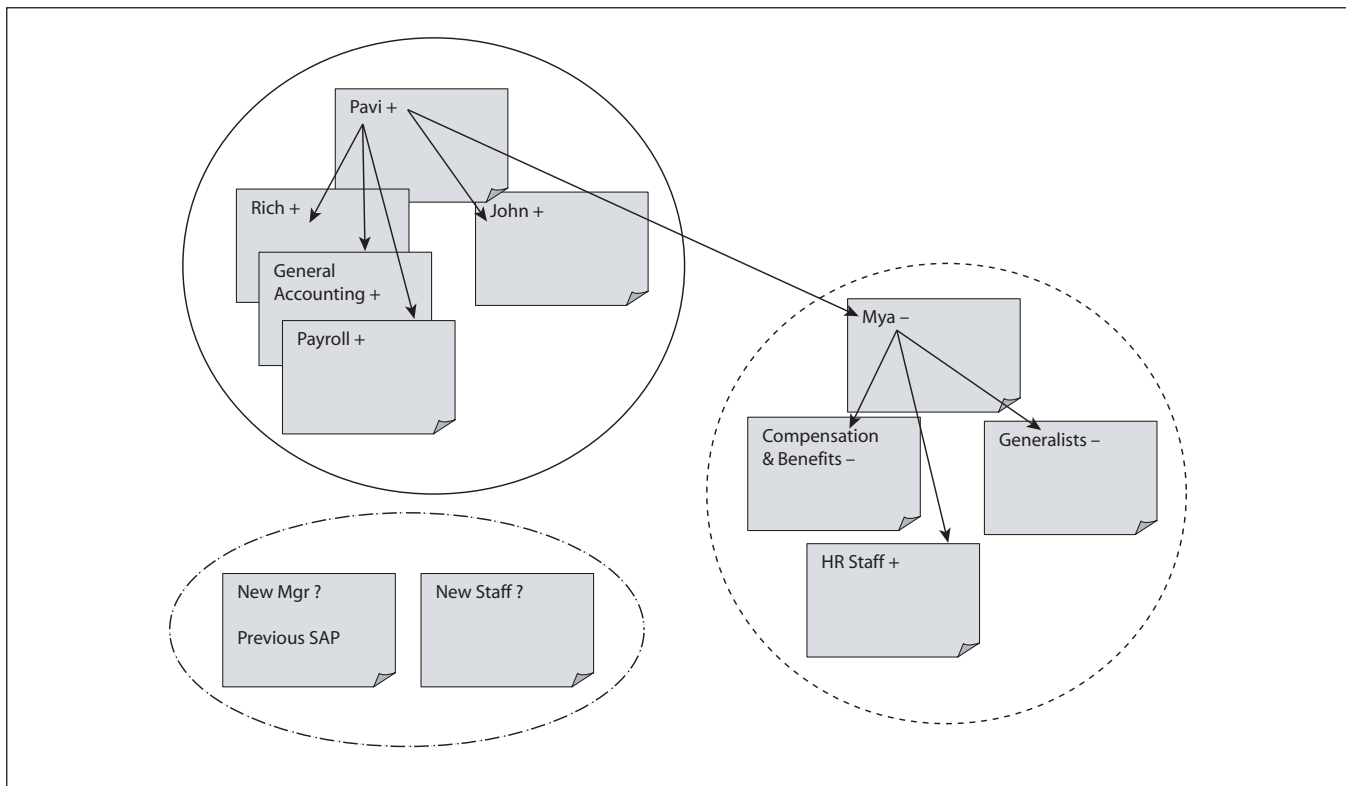
Figure 6   Mapping relationships and merging circles of influence

relationship strategy that attempts to win him or her over, because you know from your map that if this person gets on board, there is the strong likelihood that many other individuals and groups will follow suit.

At this point in the process, you have a snapshot of the political infrastructure that currently exists within your organization. You now know who has power, and you have navigated through the power structure. This structure is the current landscape from which you will develop your strategies to engage your stakeholders.

Step 3: Build strategies to gain and maintain stakeholder support

Once you have your stakeholders clustered and mapped, you can build specific strategies to gain and

maintain support and involvement from these stake-holders.[4] You need to answer two key questions:

• On which stakeholder should I focus first?

• How should I approach and work with each stakeholder?

On which stakeholder should I focus first?

Should you spend a majority of your time trying to win over those groups who appear to be most negative about this SAP project? If you get your three largest groups of negative individuals on board early in the project, how big of an impact will that have on others

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[4]   For more information on how to achieve buy-in from stakeholders, see "Performance Testing Your SAP System — Best Practices for Preparing Your Test Environment" (*SAP Professional Journal*, January/February 2004).

who perhaps don't have a strong opinion one way or the other? Perhaps you want to focus instead on those question mark groups first, with the aim of getting enough people on the positive side of the equation to help you influence the negative groups. Or you may want to first get the positive groups up and running on the SAP system, positioning your first go-live in the most positive way possible. You can then use this pilot group or test case to help persuade others who are currently reluctant.

I mentioned earlier that it's important to drill down within your organization, from senior executives to front-line employees who will be affected by the SAP implementation. At one company, we were just beginning the stakeholder mapping process for an SAP Supply Chain Management (SCM) implementation, and at first blush it seemed that the attitude toward the initiative among those who would be affected by the implementation was fairly positive. When we looked at the two key stakeholders — two senior executives who were on the steering team — we believed we were hearing the right words from them and generally getting positive vibes at steering team meetings.

It would have been tempting to stop at this level within the organization and walk away feeling that things were looking good. However, it is important not to stop the mapping process at this very senior level. Frequently, senior-level executives appear to be on board with the project simply because they have had several months (perhaps even years) to get through their respective change curves. They've been participating in passionate discussions behind closed doors. Although you always want positive support from the executive level, this alone will not be enough to succeed with your SAP initiative. A number of studies point to middle management obstacles as a significant factor in why large projects such as SAP implementations fail to meet their goals.

It's at the next two or three levels of management within your organization that you want to take a critical look at who will be supporting or resisting you. In the case of the SCM implementation project just mentioned, once the team dug deeper, we found individuals who had negative perceptions of the project. There were multiple examples of directors, managers,

and supervisors who were either very open about their resistance or were fairly subtle — but nonetheless, none were proponents of the initiative.

For the SCM implementation project, my team and I started digging deeper into where we believed the resistance to the project was originating. What we discovered was very interesting. We ultimately identified an individual in the middle management ranks whose wife had experienced a challenging SAP implementation several years prior at another company. Not only had he lived through that project-gone-bad on a vicarious level, but he was now sharing the war stories with his colleagues and employees. Thus, the corporate grapevine was alive and thriving with word that the company would be doomed to the same problems experienced by the wife's company if the implementation went forward. Since no one else in the group knew much about SAP, the first stories they were hearing were tales of woe! And for everyone in the group who believed these stories, imagine how many others within the company they would pass them on to — most likely with additional elaboration and exaggeration.

Had we stopped mapping at the top management tier, we would have assumed that all was well within this group, based on the observations of the senior executives. The reality, however, was that a lot of damage was being done deeper within the group.

As a result, the discussion focused on two key challenges:

1. How do I work with this one individual who not only is talking about SAP in a negative way, but also is having a significant negative influence over many others within this group?

2. How do I offset the many negative seeds this individual has already planted among colleagues?

Our strategy to address the first challenge was to identify someone with whom we knew he had a fairly strong business relationship — someone who we felt believed in SAP, and more importantly, could influence this individual. Next, we asked her to begin discussions with him to answer his concerns, assure him that not all SAP projects were as challenging as

he might expect, and emphasize how important his support and participation would be in this initiative. We even discussed the possibility of asking his wife to meet with our steering committee, if need be, so we could hear, from her perspective, what could have been done better in her organization's implementation — a way to glean lessons learned from someone else — and hopefully to give the right level of attention to someone who was having a surprising amount of indirect impact on our project.

For the second challenge, we knew that our communications strategy should focus heavily on building awareness and positive support in the supply-chain area to offset the negativity permeating the area. This group would require additional attention. We realized that we needed to uncover and share success stories from other companies to help sell the benefits to these individuals. A one-size-fits-all communications strategy was obviously not going to work (but then, it never does).

More recently, a large pharmaceutical company engaged us to help them build the business case for its SAP implementation. The senior-level sponsor was definitely on board. So were a majority of his senior colleagues on the steering team. A few of the leaders had reservations, so we labeled those names with the minus sign. The real question for us was, on whom should we focus our energy? Were there any unofficial partnerships or existing relationships among these leaders that could be tackled as a group? Were any of these individuals particularly negative about the initiative? And among those, were there any names that were particularly strong in their ability to influence any of their colleagues?

We discovered that one individual in particular (I'll call him Davio), seemed particularly resistant. But when we examined his resistance, it wasn't necessarily the in-your-face verbal negativity that is easy to identify. His resistance was in the form of requesting data — lots and lots and lots of data. For every piece of information we gave him, he would ask for more. An answer to one of his questions only drew three more questions in return! At every meeting, he would consume much of the discussion time with his next set of questions, which only delayed final approval of the

initiative. There was no hierarchical power for Davio — he was on a peer-level with the other members of the team. His power existed in his ability to stall the decision-making process by asking questions that would require additional offline time. Thus, each meeting ended in a no-progress conclusion.

After three meetings that followed the same pattern, it became apparent that Davio was the key stakeholder we needed to work with if any progress were to be realized. Our next step was therefore to build a strategy based on our answer to the next question.

How should I approach and work with each stakeholder?

What is the best way to connect and engage with the individuals within each group? What type of interactions will be most effective? Many organizations mistakenly assume that one approach fits all. They build a single communications strategy that they believe (or hope) will work for everyone. If only this were true! A good communications strategy addresses the specific needs of specific stakeholders. Remember to review on your sticky notes what *they* need. The more personalized you make your communications approach to address the specific concerns and needs of your stakeholders, the more likely you will get their attention and support.

For the pharmaceutical project, the team working on the stakeholder mapping discussed in detail what we knew about Davio. He was a researcher; therefore, asking deep, probing questions was what he did for a living. His mission in life was to ask the tough questions, to dig deeply into areas where no one else might venture. We didn't believe he was doing this to be a problem — we all have worked with problem stakeholders enough to recognize those signs. Davio was one of those stakeholders comfortable making decisions only when he has the data to reinforce his opinions. Individuals of that working style typically don't even realize that their quest for details is impeding progress.

As our conversation continued, we also identified Davio as an individual who handles one-on-one communication much better than group discussions. To challenge Davio's seemingly unending questions in a group setting would further delay progress since Davio could actually perceive it as an attack.

We concluded that our best strategy was to have an offline, one-on-one discussion with Davio before our next meeting. We would review with him all the data we had already provided him. We would explain to him why we believed his support was so important to this project and discuss the value he brought to this project with his ability to ask questions that many others on the steering team would never think of asking. We also decided it would be important for us to ask a question that had not yet been asked: What is it going to take to gain his support and commitment without delaying this project any further? Bottom line: We developed an approach for how we would talk with Davio, and how we would attempt to influence and persuade him to come on board.

Our final effort was to identify the best candidate for engaging Davio in this conversation. As we looked at our stakeholder map, we identified Devon, a colleague on the steering team, who was known to have a long and positive working relationship with Davio. We also knew that Devon was already on board with this initiative. We decided to visit with Devon about our discussion, our observations, our needs, and request her assistance. Devon was very receptive to our request and followed up immediately with Davio. As we suspected, Davio didn't realize just how much his questioning approach was causing delays. Because he and Devon had a mutual respect for one another, he not only agreed to support the initiative, but actually thanked Devon for her coaching.

Without going through this stakeholder process and discussion, members of the steering team most likely would have continued to be frustrated with their lack of progress. Davio would have continued to interact as he had for the past month. The initiative could have been significantly delayed or even abandoned due to unspoken and unaddressed concerns. Stakeholder mapping has the power to surface and address resistance that many times goes behind the curtain.

Because resistance can come from many sources for a wide variety of reasons, the underlying problem is often a lack of knowledge. Once you identify the source of the resistance and determine the reasons for the resistance, you can develop a communication strategy that specifically addresses these reasons. The ultimate goal of this communication strategy is to reverse negative influences and implement damage control. It should include:

• Individuals who are already on board, are knowledgeable, and can be persuasive

• The overall project plan that highlights features and benefits specific to the source of resistance to allay misconceptions and eliminate misunderstandings

• Issues and concerns specific to the stakeholder to help build support through a clearer understanding of the project's goal and its affect on this stakeholder

Stakeholder engagement grid

One easy tool to guide you is the stakeholder engagement grid (**Figure 7**). The grid consists of two axes: Commitment and Impact. In both cases, the axes go from low to high. For each stakeholder individual or group, identify the degree of impact (Low, Medium, High) they will experience from your SAP implementation, and then identify the level of commitment you need from them (Low, Medium, High).

Use the intersection of these two areas to help you plot names with one of four labels: Inform, Seek Advice, Involve, Hands-on. For example, if someone falls into the Low category of both Impact and Commitment — that is, the project will have little impact on this individual or group — and you don't need much commitment from them, put their name in the Inform box. These individuals should be kept in the information loop, but they will most likely not need to be actively involved in testing, configuration, training, etc.

At the opposite end are those who will be affected at a High level and from whom you need a High degree of commitment. In this case, you will want

	Low	Medium	High
High	Involve	Involve	Hands-on
Medium	Seek Advice	Seek Advice	Involve
Low	Inform	Seek Advice	Involve

Impact (vertical axis) **Commitment** (horizontal axis)

Figure 7   Stakeholder engagement grid

them represented at a Hands-on level. Someone from this group might sit on the steering team. One or more of them may actually be part of the full-time project team.

You should Seek Advice from those who fall closer to the Medium level of impact and commitment. You could ask them to read any communications bulletins or messages before you send them out to make sure they are easy to understand, free of jargon, and communicate your intended message. Or you can Involve them at a more intense level in integration testing, serving as business (subject matter) experts, or being part of your pilot training.

Plotting the names of individuals and groups into this stakeholder engagement grid has several benefits.

This exercise will help you:

• Build an organizational change and communications strategy to better meet the specific needs of your stakeholders.

• Encourage the appropriate level of involvement for your stakeholders.

• Customize your messages,[5] targeting your communications to the specific needs of your stakeholders.

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[5]   See Evan J. Albright's article, "Ensure the success of your SAP implementation projects through meaningful communication with the right people at the right time — A guide to creating a communications plan" (*SAP Professional Journal*, November/December 2005).
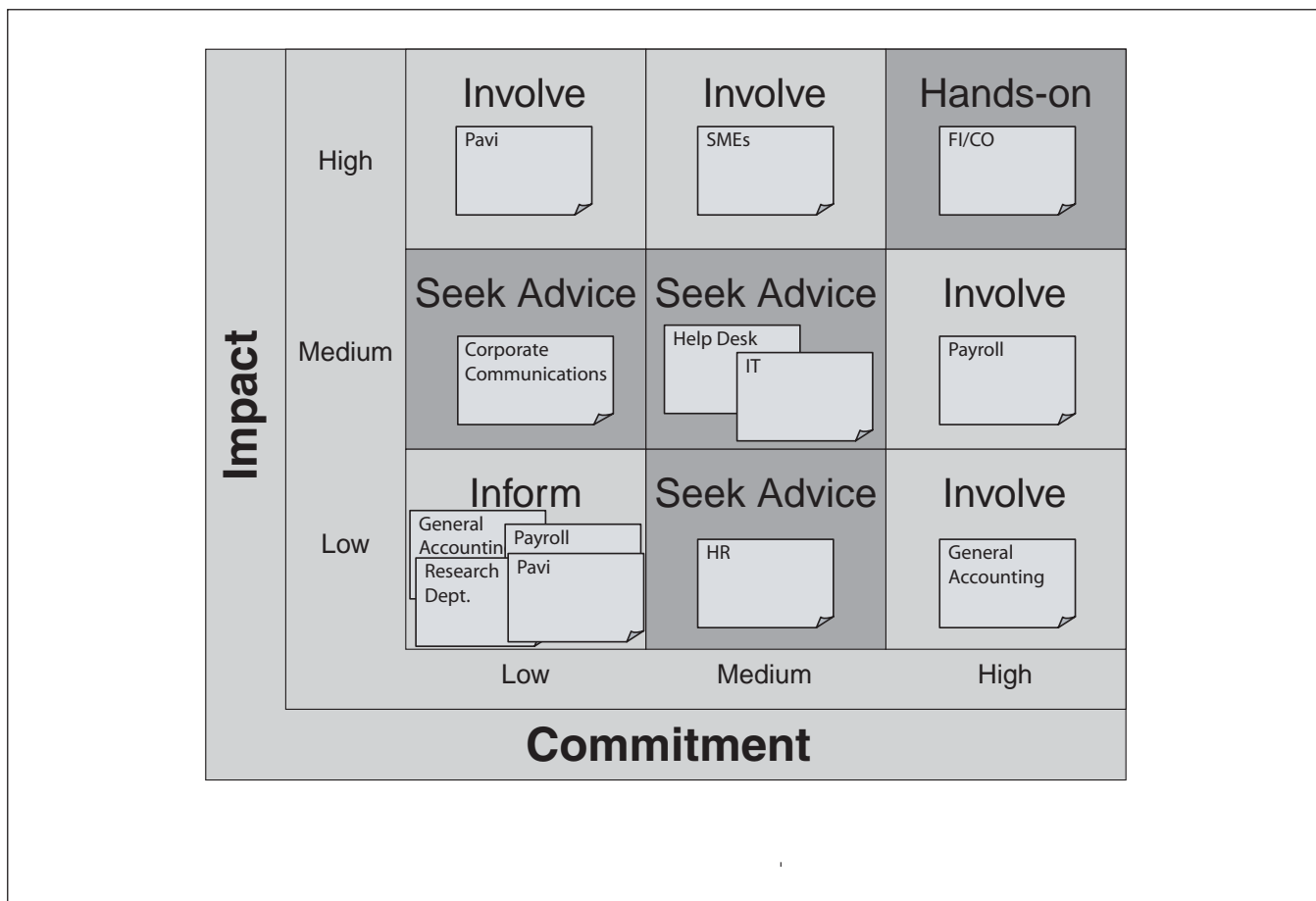
Figure 8   Evaluating each stakeholder's level of impact and commitment

- Reinforce the overall goals and benefits that can be achieved by your stakeholders by the successful completion of this SAP project. You aren't doing something *to* them; you're doing something *with* them and *for* them.

- Identify which groups need additional information. You can determine which areas of the organization may require additional attention, handholding, and support. You can determine where your attention and energy will be best spent in order to move this project along successfully.

Let's look at how this grid can work in our SAP implementation project (**Figure 8**). Assume that Company A is beginning to plan its initial SAP implementation. For its first go-live, the company is planning to implement FI/CO only, with the intentions of growing into the rest of the system in the next two

to three years. Since the FI/CO team will obviously be deeply affected *and* you will need its full commitment in order to be successful, you should place this department in the chart's upper right-hand corner — Hands-on. As you further develop your strategy, you will identify specific names of stakeholders from the FI/CO team to recruit for full-time assignment to the project team (in this example, Pavi, who is the VP of the FI/CO department). In truth, you will populate all four labels of this grid with names from FI/CO, depending upon the roles you see various individuals playing in this project: Everyone will be included in the Inform area. You will Seek Advice from some members as SMEs. You will Involve a number of their employees in piloting your training, participating in integration testing, mapping business process, and eventually serving as super users in the training and support areas.

But let's not stop with the FI/CO team. Who are other stakeholder groups and individuals that will be affected now — or later — by this project? Take the Research Department. Right now, it doesn't appear that there will be any significant impact upon this division for at least the next 12 months. However, once you implement the Purchasing module, you know they will become part of your user base. In this case, you'll include them in the Inform cell — making sure that this department receives communications along the way that are appropriate to this particular audience. In truth, I would argue that everyone in the company should be included at the Inform level, regardless of if they will ever use the SAP system. The types of information you share with each group should be tailored to their particular information needs, but everyone needs to understand why and how the organization is moving towards an SAP strategy.

Because this company is doing a lean-and-mean implementation, it doesn't appear that it will have access to a full-time communications lead for the project. That assignment has been given to you (just in case you didn't already have enough to do). So why not meet with the corporate communications department and ask them to serve as internal consultants for you, to let you Seek Advice on an as-needed basis. They can also help you set up a Web site for the project, assist you in getting distribution lists built, serve as watchdog over the appropriate use of the corporate name and identity, and so on.

As you review your project plan, you also know that there will be changes in the roles and responsibilities of a number of employees — starting with the current project team, but eventually including the FI/CO employees. Now is the time to meet with Mya, who is the head of the HR team and resists your project, and Involve her in discussions on how you will work through job descriptions, reporting structures, competency definitions, etc.

You also know that you will need some type of support infrastructure in place once you go live. For now, you should include the name of the help desk manager in your Seek Advice list, with full intentions

of working with John, the manager of the IT group, to Involve him as you begin to build your support strategy. You also need to work and establish a relationship with the new IT manager.

Whether you use the physical layout of the actual grid illustrated in Figures 7 and 8 or simply use the four labels — Inform, Seek Advice, Involve, and Hands-on — you are gathering all the names of individuals who need to become part of your overall project strategy, and determining in advance the appropriate levels of involvement. Keep in mind that as you move along on the project timeline, you will see some members move from Inform to Seek Advice, or even to Hands-on. This tool is simply another means of making sure that the change you are bringing to your organization is happening *with* the stakeholders rather than happening *to* them.

So what do you do with all the sticky notes, flip chart pages, etc.? I recommend that you transfer this information to some form of documentation that can be revised throughout the process. You can use software such as Visio or Mindjet MindManager especially if you are looking for a more visual interface. You could also create a simple set of visuals using PowerPoint or simply document this information using Microsoft Word.

In terms of timeline, people ask "how long do you do this process?" Again, the simple answer is "it all depends." My recommendation is to set several milestones within your overall project plan at which point you can review the most recent stakeholder map from which you've been working. Examine the maps. Identify if any new individuals should be added to the maps. Determine which stakeholders have moved from negative (-) to positive (+). Review your communications strategies to identify which individuals or departments need to be further engaged in the next phase of the project. Think of the stakeholder map as a project timeline, but one in which the milestones are actually individuals and groups of stakeholders that you will be bringing into focus.

Tips, tricks, and cautions

Stakeholder mapping helps you manage the organizational dynamics that will affect the outcome of your project. It aids you in identifying and utilizing sources of support for the project, and enables you to proactively address resistance. It provides the basis for communication, organizational change, and promotional strategies for your SAP project, and ensures that you have engaged stakeholders at an appropriate level.

Because this process directly engages in organizational politics, some individuals become very nervous. They wonder if it isn't dangerous to be discussing specific names of what many times will be very powerful people within the organization. Others will say that this process appears rather manipulative. They worry about it degenerating into gossip and backstabbing. Keep the following guidelines in mind when you implement a stakeholder mapping strategy:

- **Stay focused on the goal of developing a stakeholder map.** You are mapping your stakeholders to ensure the highest degree of success for your SAP implementation. You are attempting to minimize the costs that accompany resistance to change. You want to gain rapid acceptance and use of the SAP system. You want your stakeholders to be *ready, willing, and able* to complete their jobs using the SAP system. It's difficult to argue with business-focused goals such as these.

- **Keep the size of the stakeholder mapping group fairly small.** The success of this process is directly related to the individuals involved. Invite people who have a good knowledge of the overall organization. Seek people who can be objective and who don't carry a lot of organizational baggage.

- **Use a skilled facilitator.** The mapping process does require a skilled facilitator — someone who can keep the group focused on their goals. A good facilitator ensures that any discussions

At the end of the day…

Successful projects, especially SAP projects, are based on the willingness of people to adapt and change. People don't resist change. They resist *being* changed.

So how do you get people to embrace the monumental change that comes with an SAP imple-

mentation? You build strong, positive relationships with them, early in the project lifecycle. In some cases, you can build those relationships directly. In other cases, you may find it more effective to tap into relationships that already exist, asking others who have greater influence within those groups to help you move forward. Once you've built these relationships, you must nurture and maintain those relationships. Strong, supportive relationships take a long time to develop and they require constant care and feeding.

of individuals and departments remain focused on how to most effectively get individuals on board. This facilitator does not allow participants to digress into grapevine gossip.

- **Seek truth and keep confidentiality.** Two key components for success in stakeholder mapping are truth and confidentiality. You must get all members of the mapping team to agree that they will speak the truth as you proceed through the dynamics of the mapping process. They need to share their honest observations and reservations about names that surface. But in order for them to feel comfortable with being truthful, everyone who participates must also agree to treat all stakeholder conversations as highly confidential — tell them what is said here stays here!

- **Set and adhere to clear ground rules.** With this in mind, the first step in a stakeholder mapping meeting should be to facilitate the group through identification and definition of core ground rules, or rules of operation. The team must agree on the key rules of behavior to which they will hold themselves and everyone else on this team accountable. Typically a good set of ground rules does not exceed five or six specific rules. Any more than this and no one will ever remember them, let alone follow them.

- **Use the stakeholder map to gauge and measure the progress of a project.** The best-developed stakeholder map is a dynamic, ever-changing tool you can use throughout a project to gauge and measure the progress of your project. As you get more individuals and groups supporting your SAP initiative, change those question marks and minus signs to plus signs — and celebrate your success! Monitor your progress as you see more people getting excited about going live. Ask those on board to help you gain the support of others still lagging behind. As new leaders step into the picture, quickly figure out where they fit into the overall map and how you will need to work with them. Remember that if one influential person within a cluster steps out of the picture, the entire dynamics of that group can quickly change — for better or worse.

Stakeholder mapping is a way to identify where these relationships exist and to help you clearly see how and where you should focus your energy and resources. It's an effective way to build conscious strategies based on organizational realities. It utilizes existing relationships and helps build new relationships critical for the success of your project.

A key benefit of an ongoing stakeholder mapping process is the ability it gives you to concretely track and measure the progress you're making in getting stakeholders on board. By reviewing your overall stakeholder map and strategy at least once a month, you will begin to see where shifts in support are occurring, where you are making progress, and where you need to focus more energy. As you see individuals move from ? or - to +, you know that your focus on building positive change within the organization is indeed paying off.

Daniele Vare, an Italian diplomat, wrote, "Diplomacy is the art of letting someone else have your way." That's exactly what you are doing with stakeholder mapping. You know your SAP vision is the right solution. You know the value it will bring to your organization. Stakeholder maps provide you with a lens that helps others see the same vision you see.

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Doug has a PhD in Organizational Leadership from Iowa State University where his research and dissertation focused on how to minimize the negative impact of mergers and acquisitions on the workforce. He is a co-author of the book "The Manager as Change Agent: A Practical Guide for High-Performance People and Organizations" and has published articles in national trade publications, as well as serving on several advisory boards for universities, professional publications, and international conferences. Doug is a popular presenter and keynoter at workshops, seminars, and conferences around the world, including those sponsored by Wellesley Information Services and ASUG, on subjects related to SAP and large systems implementations, change management, strategic/business planning, resource management, training, and project implementations. You can reach him at doug@WhittleConsultingGroup.com or by visiting www.WhittleConsultingGroup.com.