



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

BA (Hons) Leadership and Management

Student Name: Fatima Bangura

Student Number: 2412981

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Lecturer Name: Mohammad Rahman

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Executive Summary

This report critically examines stakeholder identification, engagement, and management strategies in relation to the launch of the StaySmart+ service within Marriott International. StaySmart+ is an innovative, AI-driven hospitality solution designed to enhance guest experience through personalised services and sustainable practices. The successful implementation of such a service requires effective stakeholder engagement across both internal and external environments.

The report applies stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), relationship management theory (Christopher et al., 2013), and the relational lens framework (Ashcroft, 2017) to analyse stakeholder roles, influence, and engagement strategies. Strategic tools including SWOT, PESTLE, RACI matrix, and stakeholder mapping are utilised to assess the organisational environment and stakeholder dynamics.

The findings highlight that stakeholder engagement is a critical driver of organisational performance, innovation, and competitive advantage. However, challenges such as cultural differences, resistance to technological change, and ethical concerns regarding data privacy must be carefully managed. The report concludes with recommendations to enhance stakeholder collaboration, improve communication strategies, and ensure long-term sustainability.

1. Introduction

The global hospitality industry is characterised by intense competition, rapid technological advancement, and evolving customer expectations. Organisations operating within this sector must continuously innovate to maintain competitive advantage and deliver superior customer experiences. **Marriott International** is one of the world's largest hospitality organisations, with a strong global presence spanning over 130 countries and thousands of properties. The company operates across multiple market segments, offering luxury,

premium, and budget accommodation, and has established itself as a leader in customer service and brand loyalty.

In response to changing consumer demands and technological advancements, Marriott International is preparing to launch a new premium service known as StaySmart+. This service integrates artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, personalised travel planning tools, and sustainability-focused amenities to enhance guest experience and operational efficiency. The initiative aligns with broader industry trends towards digital transformation and environmentally responsible practices.

The rollout of StaySmart+ is planned over a six-month period across selected international markets. This project presents significant opportunities for innovation and growth but also introduces complexity due to the involvement of multiple stakeholders across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. As Project Manager, the primary responsibility is to ensure that all stakeholders are effectively identified, analysed, and engaged throughout the project lifecycle.

Stakeholder engagement is widely recognised as a critical success factor in project management. According to Freeman (1984), organisations must consider the interests of all stakeholders who can affect or are affected by organisational activities. Effective engagement fosters collaboration, reduces resistance, and enhances the likelihood of successful project outcomes.

This report aims to critically analyse stakeholder engagement strategies for the StaySmart+ project. It will evaluate the organisational environment, identify key stakeholders, examine their roles and responsibilities, and apply relevant frameworks and theories to develop effective engagement strategies. Furthermore, the report will assess the impact of stakeholder engagement on business performance and provide recommendations for future improvement.

2. Situational Analysis: SWOT, PESTLE, SMART Objectives

A situational analysis is essential to evaluate the internal capabilities and external environment influencing the StaySmart+ project. (Johnson, Scholes and Whittington, 2017).

The SWOT analysis highlights Marriott International's strong global brand reputation and extensive operational network as key **strengths**. These factors provide a solid platform for introducing innovative services such as StaySmart+. Additionally, the organisation's established customer loyalty programmes and prior investments in digital transformation support the integration of AI-driven technologies. However, **weaknesses** exist in the complexity of managing large-scale global operations, which may create challenges in standardising the StaySmart+ service across different regions. Furthermore, integrating advanced AI systems into existing infrastructure may require significant training and financial investment.

Opportunities for the project are substantial, particularly due to the increasing demand for personalised and technology-enhanced travel experiences. Consumers are also becoming more environmentally conscious, creating a favourable environment for sustainability-focused initiatives within StaySmart+. This positions Marriott to strengthen its competitive advantage. However, **threats** such as intense competition from other global hospitality providers and economic uncertainty may impact customer spending. Additionally, data privacy concerns related to AI technologies present reputational and legal risks.

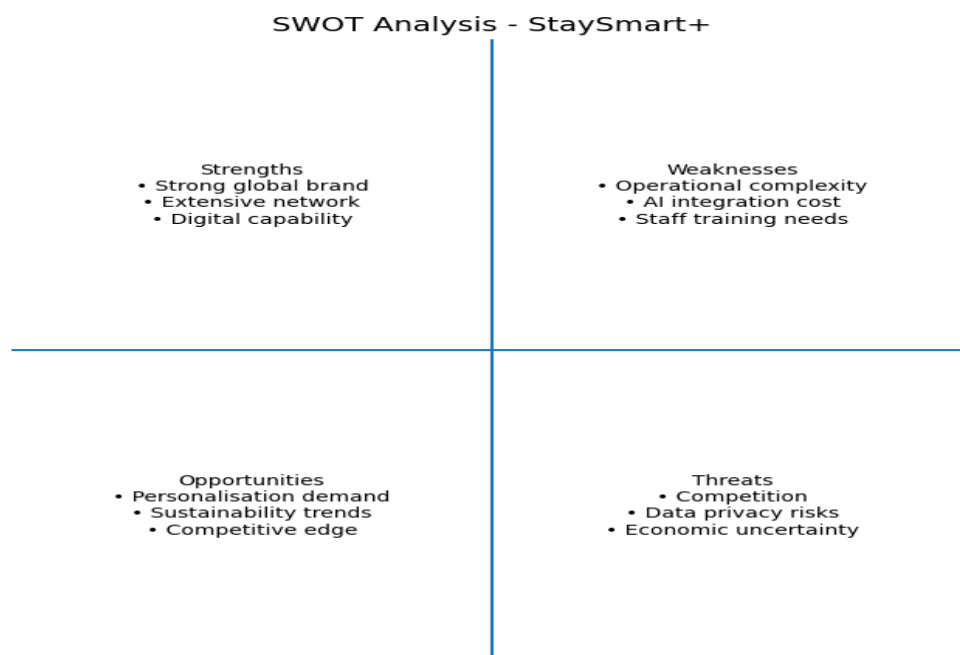


Figure 1-SWOT Analysis for StaySmart+ (Author's own)

The PESTLE analysis further evaluates external influences. **Politically**, strict data protection regulations such as GDPR require careful handling of customer data, particularly when

implementing AI-based services. **Economically**, global inflation and potential recessionary pressures may reduce discretionary spending on travel, affecting demand for premium services. **Socially**, changing consumer expectations favour personalised, seamless, and sustainable experiences, aligning strongly with the StaySmart+ concept.

Technologically, rapid advancements in AI create both opportunities and challenges. While they enable innovation, they also require continuous updates and cybersecurity measures.

Legally, compliance with international laws regarding data protection, employment, and consumer rights adds complexity to implementation across multiple markets.

Environmentally, increasing pressure on organisations to adopt sustainable practices supports the integration of eco-friendly amenities within StaySmart+, enhancing brand image and stakeholder trust.

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that while Marriott International is well-positioned to successfully launch StaySmart+, careful management of external risks and internal challenges is essential.

SMART Objectives

The StaySmart+ project is guided by clear SMART objectives. The primary objective is to launch the service in at least 50 international hotels within six months. The project aims to increase customer satisfaction scores by 20% and improve operational efficiency through automation. These objectives are achievable due to the organisation's existing infrastructure and align with its strategic goals of innovation and sustainability.

3. Stakeholder Identification and Categorisation

Stakeholders play a crucial role in the success of any project. They can be defined as individuals or groups who have an interest in or are affected by the project. Effective stakeholder identification and categorisation are essential for developing appropriate engagement strategies.

Internal Stakeholders

Internal stakeholders include senior management, project teams, IT departments, marketing teams, operations staff, and human resources. Senior management provides strategic direction and financial resources, while the project team is responsible for planning and execution. The IT department plays a critical role in developing and implementing AI technologies, and marketing teams are responsible for promoting the service. Operations staff are directly involved in delivering the service to customers, making their engagement essential.

External Stakeholders

External stakeholders include customers, technology partners, suppliers, investors, government bodies, and local communities. Customers are central to the project, as their acceptance determines its success. Technology partners provide the expertise required for AI development, while suppliers ensure the availability of sustainable materials. Investors provide financial support, and government bodies regulate compliance. Local communities may be affected by the implementation of new services, particularly in terms of employment and environmental impact.

Stakeholder Mapping

Using Mendelow's Matrix, stakeholders can be categorised based on their level of power and interest. High power and high interest stakeholders, such as senior management and investors, require close management. High power but low interest stakeholders, such as regulatory bodies, must be kept satisfied. Low power but high interest stakeholders, such as employees and customers, should be kept informed and engaged. This classification helps prioritise stakeholder engagement efforts.

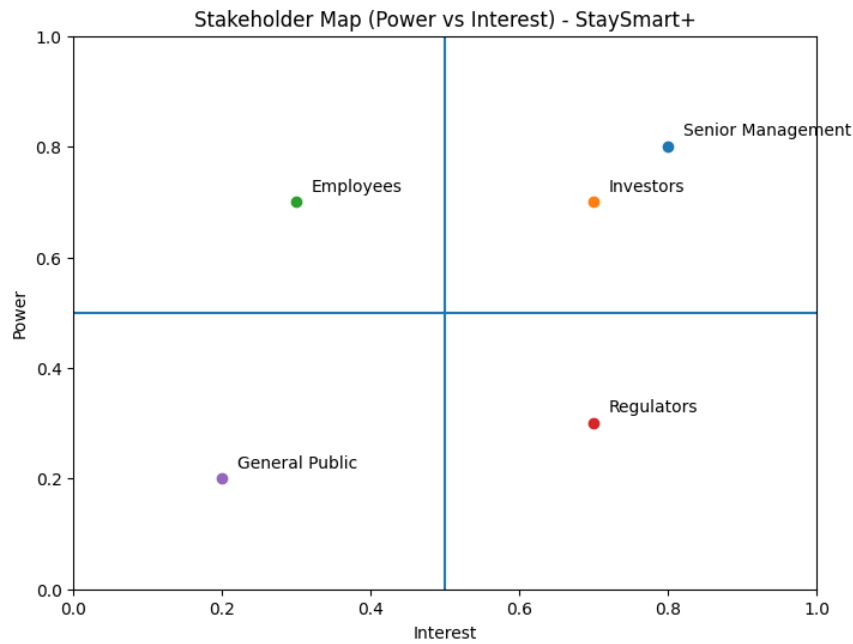


Figure 2-Stakeholder Power–Interest Matrix for StaySmart+ (Author’s own)

The stakeholder above illustrates that senior management, and investors require close management due to their high power and interest, while employees require active engagement. Regulators must be kept satisfied due to their high power but lower interest, and the public requires minimal effort but should remain informed.

Additional Critical Analysis of Stakeholder Dynamics

Stakeholder relationships within global hospitality projects such as StaySmart+ are rarely static and often evolve throughout the project lifecycle. While initial stakeholder mapping provides a useful foundation, it is important to recognise that stakeholder power and influence can shift as the project progresses. For instance, customers may initially have low direct power; however, their influence increases significantly post-launch through feedback, reviews, and brand perception. This highlights the dynamic nature of stakeholder engagement, which requires continuous monitoring and adaptation.

Furthermore, conflicting stakeholder interests present a significant challenge. Investors may prioritise return on investment and cost efficiency, whereas customers are more concerned with service quality, privacy, and personalised experiences. Similarly, employees may resist the introduction of AI technologies due to concerns about job security, while management

may view automation as a means of improving operational efficiency. These conflicting priorities require careful balancing to ensure that no stakeholder group is marginalised.

Another critical consideration is the role of cultural differences in stakeholder engagement. In international markets, cultural norms can influence communication styles, decision-making processes, and expectations. For example, stakeholders in collectivist cultures may prioritise group consensus, whereas those in individualistic cultures may favour faster, independent decision-making. Failure to account for these differences may result in miscommunication and reduced stakeholder engagement.

Therefore, effective stakeholder management for StaySmart+ requires a dynamic and flexible approach that goes beyond traditional models. Continuous stakeholder analysis, cultural awareness, and proactive engagement strategies are essential to ensure alignment and minimise conflict across diverse markets.

4. Roles, Responsibilities, Benefits, and Challenges

Each stakeholder group contributes to the project in different ways and faces unique challenges.

Senior management is responsible for strategic decision-making and resource allocation. Their support is critical for project success, but they may face challenges in balancing competing organisational priorities.

The project team is responsible for planning, coordination, and execution. They ensure that project objectives are met within the specified timeframe. However, they may encounter challenges related to resource constraints and stakeholder conflicts.

The IT department develops and implements AI systems, ensuring functionality and security. Their expertise is essential, but they may face challenges related to system integration and cybersecurity risks.

Marketing teams are responsible for promoting StaySmart+ and communicating its value to customers. They must adapt strategies to different cultural contexts, which can be challenging.

Operations staff deliver the service directly to customers. Their engagement is crucial for maintaining service quality, but they may resist changes due to increased workload or lack of training.

External stakeholders also bring significant benefits. Customers provide feedback and drive demand, while technology partners contribute specialised knowledge. Investors provide financial resources, and suppliers support sustainability initiatives.

However, challenges include resistance to change, cultural differences, communication barriers, and ethical concerns. According to Ashcroft (2017), managing stakeholder relationships requires understanding their expectations and aligning them with organisational goals.

5. Frameworks, Models, and Theories

Effective stakeholder engagement requires the application of structured frameworks and models to ensure clarity, accountability, and strategic alignment. One of the most widely used approaches is Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory, which emphasises the importance of considering all stakeholders in organisational decision-making. This theory supports a more inclusive approach to project management, ensuring that both internal and external stakeholders are actively involved in the StaySmart+ initiative.

However, while stakeholder theory promotes inclusivity, it can be challenging to balance competing stakeholder interests in practice. For example, investors may prioritise profitability, whereas customers may focus on service quality and data privacy. This highlights the need for structured tools to manage these competing expectations effectively.

The stakeholder matrix (Mendelow's Matrix) is a valuable tool for categorising stakeholders based on their level of power and interest. This enables the project manager to prioritise engagement strategies accordingly. For instance, senior management and investors fall into the high power–high interest category and require close management, while customers require continuous engagement to ensure satisfaction. Nevertheless, a limitation of this model is that it assumes stakeholder positions remain static, whereas in reality, stakeholder influence can shift throughout the project lifecycle, particularly in dynamic global markets.

The RACI matrix further enhances stakeholder management by clearly defining roles and responsibilities. By identifying who is responsible, accountable, consulted, and informed, the

model reduces ambiguity and improves coordination across departments. In the context of StaySmart+, this is particularly important given the involvement of geographically dispersed teams. However, the effectiveness of the RACI matrix depends on consistent communication and adherence to defined roles, which may be difficult in complex international projects.

RACI Matrix - StaySmart+

Task	Responsible	Accountable	Consulted	Informed
AI Development	IT Team	Project Manager	Tech Partners	Management
Marketing	Marketing	Project Manager	Sales	Staff
Implementation	Operations	Senior Mgmt	HR	Customers

Figure 3-RACI Matrix for StaySmart+ Project (Author's own)

A stakeholder engagement plan outlines how stakeholders will be involved throughout the project, including regular meetings, feedback mechanisms, and collaborative workshops. This supports the development of trust and long-term relationships, as highlighted by Christopher et al. (2013) in their relationship marketing theory. Similarly, a communication plan ensures that stakeholders receive relevant information in a timely and appropriate manner, considering cultural differences and communication preferences.

Overall, while these frameworks provide a structured approach to stakeholder engagement, their effectiveness depends on the project manager's ability to adapt them to real-world complexities, particularly in a global hospitality context.

6. Stakeholder Engagement Process & Conflict Management (The 4C'S)

The stakeholder engagement process for the StaySmart+ project is guided by the 4C's model: communication, collaboration, consultation, and commitment. This model provides a

structured approach to building strong stakeholder relationships and ensuring project success.

Communication is fundamental to stakeholder engagement, as it ensures that all parties are informed about project objectives, progress, and expectations. In the context of StaySmart+, communication must be clear, consistent, and culturally sensitive, particularly when operating across international markets. Digital tools such as dashboards, video conferencing, and project management software can facilitate real-time communication. However, a limitation of communication strategies is that differences in language, cultural norms, and organisational hierarchies may lead to misunderstandings, reducing their effectiveness.

Collaboration involves actively working with stakeholders to achieve shared goals. This includes cross-functional teamwork within the organisation and partnerships with external stakeholders such as technology providers. Collaboration fosters innovation by encouraging the exchange of ideas and expertise. However, excessive collaboration may slow decision-making processes, particularly when multiple stakeholders with differing priorities are involved.

Consultation ensures that stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute to decision-making processes. This can be achieved through surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder meetings. Involving stakeholders in this way increases their sense of ownership and reduces resistance to change. Nevertheless, consultation can be time-consuming and may lead to conflicting opinions, which require careful management.

Commitment refers to the level of stakeholder support for the project. Building commitment requires trust, transparency, and alignment of stakeholder interests. This is particularly important for employees who are responsible for delivering the StaySmart+ service. Without their commitment, the quality of service delivery may be compromised.

Conflict management is an essential aspect of stakeholder engagement. Conflicts may arise due to differences in stakeholder objectives, resource allocation, or resistance to technological change. For example, employees may resist AI implementation due to fears of job displacement, while management may prioritise efficiency gains. Additionally, ethical concerns regarding data privacy may create tension between customers and the organisation.

To manage conflicts effectively, the project manager must adopt strategies such as negotiation, mediation, and compromise. Open communication and active listening are critical in identifying the root causes of conflict and finding mutually beneficial solutions.

Furthermore, cultural awareness is essential when managing conflicts in international contexts, as different cultures may have varying approaches to conflict resolution.

While the 4C's model provides a useful framework, it does not fully account for the complexity of global stakeholder engagement. Therefore, the project manager must adopt a flexible and adaptive approach to ensure successful stakeholder management throughout the project lifecycle.

Advanced Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

Beyond the application of the 4C's model, advanced stakeholder engagement strategies are necessary to address the complexities of a global project such as StaySmart+. One such strategy is the use of digital engagement platforms, which enable real-time communication and collaboration across geographically dispersed teams. These platforms allow stakeholders to access project updates, provide feedback, and participate in decision-making processes regardless of location. This is particularly important for StaySmart+, where coordination between international hotel locations is essential.

Another important strategy is stakeholder segmentation, which involves tailoring engagement approaches based on stakeholder characteristics such as influence, interest, and cultural background. For example, high-power stakeholders such as senior management may require formal reporting and strategic updates, whereas employees may benefit from interactive workshops and training sessions. This targeted approach ensures that engagement efforts are both efficient and effective.

In addition, trust-building is a critical component of stakeholder engagement. Trust can be developed through transparency, consistency, and ethical practices. In the context of StaySmart+, this is particularly relevant in relation to data privacy and the use of AI technologies. Customers must feel confident that their personal data is being handled responsibly, while employees must trust that technological advancements will not negatively impact their job security.

However, implementing these strategies is not without challenges. Digital engagement tools may create information overload, while stakeholder segmentation may lead to perceptions of unequal treatment if not managed carefully. Therefore, the project manager must ensure that engagement strategies are balanced, inclusive, and aligned with organisational objectives.

7. Impact of Stakeholder Engagement on Business Performance & Recommendations

Stakeholder engagement has a significant impact on organisational performance, particularly in the context of launching an innovative service such as StaySmart+. Effective engagement contributes to improved customer satisfaction, enhanced innovation, and stronger brand reputation. By actively involving stakeholders in the development and implementation process, organisations can ensure that their services meet customer expectations and market demands.

One of the key benefits of stakeholder engagement is its ability to drive innovation. Collaboration with technology partners and feedback from customers enable the organisation to continuously improve the StaySmart+ service. Additionally, engaged employees are more likely to be motivated and committed, resulting in higher levels of service quality. This aligns with relationship marketing theory (Christopher et al., 2013), which emphasises the importance of building long-term stakeholder relationships to create value.

However, stakeholder engagement also presents challenges. Excessive involvement of stakeholders may lead to delays in decision-making, particularly when there are conflicting interests. For example, balancing the need for profitability with customer expectations for data privacy and sustainability may create tensions. Furthermore, ineffective engagement can result in miscommunication, reduced trust, and reputational damage.

The impact of stakeholder engagement on business performance is therefore dependent on the effectiveness of engagement strategies. Organisations that successfully manage stakeholder relationships are more likely to achieve competitive advantage and long-term sustainability.

Long-Term Strategic Impact of Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to short-term project outcomes, stakeholder engagement has significant implications for the long-term strategic performance of the organisation. Effective engagement contributes to the development of strong stakeholder relationships, which are essential for sustaining competitive advantage in the hospitality industry. By fostering trust and collaboration, organisations can enhance their reputation, attract new customers, and retain existing ones.

Moreover, stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in organisational learning and continuous improvement. Feedback from customers, employees, and partners provides valuable insights that can be used to refine services and improve operational processes. In the case of StaySmart+, ongoing stakeholder feedback can inform future updates to AI systems, ensuring that the service remains relevant and responsive to changing customer needs.

Another important consideration is the role of stakeholder engagement in risk management. Engaged stakeholders are more likely to identify potential risks and provide early warnings, allowing organisations to take proactive measures. For example, employees may highlight operational challenges, while customers may raise concerns about privacy or usability. Addressing these issues early can prevent more significant problems in the future.

However, it is important to recognise that stakeholder engagement requires significant time and resources. Organisations must balance the benefits of engagement with the associated costs, ensuring that engagement activities are efficient and aligned with strategic priorities. Failure to do so may result in diminishing returns and reduced overall effectiveness.

Ultimately, stakeholder engagement should be viewed as a long-term investment rather than a short-term requirement. By prioritising stakeholder relationships, organisations can achieve sustainable growth and maintain a strong competitive position in the global hospitality market.

Recommendations

To enhance stakeholder engagement for the StaySmart+ project, several recommendations can be made. The effectiveness of stakeholder engagement directly influences organisational performance by enhancing service innovation; however, excessive stakeholder involvement may slow decision-making processes.

First, the organisation should invest in advanced digital communication tools to facilitate real-time interaction between stakeholders across different geographical locations. This will

improve transparency and ensure that stakeholders remain informed throughout the project lifecycle.

Second, cultural training programmes should be implemented to improve cross-cultural communication and collaboration and reduce misunderstandings in global terms. Given the global nature of the project, understanding cultural differences is essential for effective stakeholder engagement and conflict management.

Third, the organisation must strengthen data protection measures to address ethical concerns related to AI and customer data. This includes compliance with international regulations and transparent communication with customers بشأن how their data is used.

Fourth, stakeholder feedback mechanisms should be enhanced through regular surveys, focus groups, and digital platforms. This will enable the organisation to continuously improve the StaySmart+ service based on stakeholder input.

Finally, the organisation should focus on building long-term relationships with stakeholders by adopting a relationship marketing approach. This includes recognising stakeholder contributions, maintaining open communication, and fostering trust.

8. Conclusion

The launch of StaySmart+ represents a significant opportunity for Marriott International to enhance its competitive position in the global hospitality industry. However, the success of this initiative depends largely on effective stakeholder engagement.

This report has demonstrated that identifying and managing stakeholders through structured frameworks and theories is essential for achieving project objectives. The application of stakeholder theory, SWOT and PESTLE analysis, and engagement models highlights the importance of communication, collaboration, and trust.

While challenges such as cultural differences and technological risks exist, they can be mitigated through strategic planning and strong leadership. Ultimately, stakeholder engagement is a critical factor in driving organisational performance, innovation, and long-term success.

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