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Stakeholder Engagement for the Global Launch of the ConnectPlus Customer Loyalty and Engagement Platform

An academic report prepared for the Senior Management Team and Board of Directors of Enduramaxx Ltd

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Executive Summary

This report sets out how stakeholder engagement will be managed for the launch of ConnectPlus, a digitally enhanced customer loyalty and engagement platform that Enduramaxx Ltd plans to roll out across its United Kingdom home market and selected international markets within six months. Drawing on stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), it identifies and categorises the key internal and external stakeholders using Mendelow's power-interest matrix and the salience model of Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997). The analysis indicates that the Board, the cross-functional project team, the external technology partner and the distributor network are the definitive stakeholders: without their active collaboration the platform will not succeed.

A five-stage engagement process is then proposed, delivered through a stakeholder engagement plan, a communication plan, a RACI matrix and the 4Cs of communication, consultation, collaboration and commitment, and underpinned by commitment-trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Cross-cultural frameworks (Hofstede, 2001; Meyer, 2014) are used to adapt engagement in the export markets, and conflict management options are weighed using the Thomas-Kilmann model and principled negotiation. The report concludes that sustained stakeholder engagement can genuinely improve business performance through better customer retention, richer data-driven insight and stronger relationships (Ashcroft, 2017), but only if customer data is handled ethically, algorithms stay transparent and engagement is genuine rather than cosmetic (Greenwood, 2007). The key recommendations are to phase the international rollout, embed privacy by design, formalise a distributor advisory panel and review the engagement plan at every project gate.

1. Introduction: Enduramaxx Ltd and the ConnectPlus Project

Enduramaxx Ltd, founded in 2014 and based near Peterborough in Lincolnshire, is one of the United Kingdom's leading manufacturers of rotationally moulded polyethylene tanks and liquid storage vessels. From two UK sites the company makes products from 50 to 40,000 litres, including water storage tanks, rainwater harvesting systems, chemical dosing tanks, sprayers and bowsers, and serves agricultural, industrial, construction and water treatment customers (Enduramaxx, 2026). It is ISO 9001 accredited, a member of the Made in Britain campaign, and runs an in-house CAD and fabrication team that lets it offer bespoke solutions. Although an SME of around thirty employees, Enduramaxx competes with larger rivals on product quality, customisation and close trading relationships with a national network of distributors and online resellers, while also selling directly to end-users through its e-commerce channel.

ConnectPlus is the next step in the company's digital strategy and reflects a wider reality: digital transformation has become a strategic necessity even for established manufacturers (Verhoef et al., 2021). The platform combines three capabilities. It offers AI-driven personalised product recommendations, for example suggesting compatible fittings, dosing equipment or replacement schedules based on purchase history; a mobile rewards scheme for repeat trade and distributor purchases; and a customer-insight dashboard that turns transactional and behavioural data into usable intelligence for sales, marketing and product development. Launch is planned in six months across the UK, Ireland and selected European export markets where the company already has a distributor presence.

As Project Manager, my job is to make sure that the stakeholders on whom the design, launch and adoption of ConnectPlus depend are identified, analysed and engaged effectively throughout the project lifecycle. The report therefore identifies and categorises the key stakeholders, explains their roles and responsibilities, sets out and justifies the engagement and conflict management approach, and critically evaluates the impact of sustainable stakeholder engagement on business performance.

2. SMART Objectives

Clear objectives discipline both delivery and engagement. Each one is framed to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (Doran, 1981), and the project is governed by five of them:

1. Launch ConnectPlus in the UK, Ireland and two further European export markets within six months (by January 2027) and within the approved budget of £250,000.
2. Enrol at least 60 per cent of active distributors and trade accounts and 25 per cent of direct e-commerce customers onto the platform within three months of each market launch.
3. Increase twelve-month customer retention from the current 68 per cent to 78 per cent within one year of launch.
4. Achieve and maintain a stakeholder satisfaction score of at least 4 out of 5 in quarterly engagement pulse surveys across all stakeholder groups.
5. Achieve full UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 compliance, confirmed by a completed Data Protection Impact Assessment before launch, with zero reportable data breaches.

Each objective has a named owner and is reviewed at the monthly steering group, and the £250,000 budget carries a 10 per cent contingency reserve, a realistic safeguard for an SME delivering its first AI-enabled platform. Objectives two to four cannot be delivered by the project team alone, which is why engagement has to be measured and managed.

3. Identification and Categorisation of Key Stakeholders

3.1 Defining and identifying stakeholders

Freeman (1984, p. 46) defines a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives". That definition is still the foundation of the field, and recent scholarship continues to treat it as the point of departure (Freeman, Dmytriiev and Phillips, 2021). Donaldson and Preston (1995) add that stakeholder theory has descriptive, instrumental and normative dimensions: stakeholders are not just instruments for delivering project outcomes but holders of legitimate interests in their own right. That distinction matters here, because the platform's core asset, customer data, belongs in a moral as well as a legal sense to the very stakeholders the project is trying to engage.

Stakeholders for ConnectPlus were identified through a facilitated workshop with departmental heads, a review of the organisational chart, the contract and supplier registers, and an environmental scan of each target market. Two broad categories emerged. **Internal stakeholders** comprise the Board and Managing Director (project sponsor), the cross-functional project team, the sales and marketing department, the IT and digital function, production and customer service staff, and the finance function. **External stakeholders** include the distributor and merchant network, end-user customers across the agricultural, industrial, construction and water treatment segments, the external technology partner supplying the AI recommendation engine and mobile application, regulators (principally the Information Commissioner's Office and the data protection authorities of the EU markets), suppliers and logistics carriers, competitors, trade media and industry bodies such as Made in Britain, and the local community around the company's manufacturing sites.

3.2 Applying Mendelow's power-interest matrix

Mendelow's (1991) matrix places stakeholders according to their power over the project and their level of interest in it, which produces four broad engagement strategies, as shown in Figure 1.

	Low interest	High interest
High power	KEEP SATISFIED ICO and EU data protection authorities; Finance Director; major industrial and water-treatment accounts	MANAGE CLOSELY Board / Managing Director; ConnectPlus project team; technology partner; key distributors and merchants
Low power	MONITOR Competitors; trade media; local community; industry bodies	KEEP INFORMED Agricultural and trade end-users; employees; suppliers and logistics carriers

Figure 1: Power-interest matrix for the ConnectPlus project (adapted from Mendelow, 1991)

The Board and Managing Director hold both budgetary power and strategic interest, so they are managed closely through the project steering group. The distributor network needs the same treatment. Distributors generate the majority of Enduramaxx's revenue, and a loyalty platform that appears to favour the company's direct e-commerce channel could provoke channel conflict and open resistance. The technology partner sits here too, because the AI engine, data architecture and mobile application all depend on its performance. Regulators are classic keep-satisfied stakeholders: their day-to-day interest is low, but their power is decisive, including the ability to fine up to 4 per cent of turnover under the UK GDPR. End-users and employees must be kept genuinely informed, because adoption ultimately rests on their willingness to use the platform.

The matrix is useful for allocating scarce engagement effort, but it has well-known weaknesses: it is a static snapshot even though power and interest shift across the lifecycle, it treats each group as homogeneous, and it ignores the legitimacy or moral weight of a claim (Bourne, 2009). A regulator, for instance, jumps from keep satisfied to manage closely the moment a data breach occurs. For these reasons a second framework is applied alongside it.

3.3 Applying the salience model

The salience model (Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997) ranks stakeholders by how many of three attributes they hold: power, legitimacy and urgency. On this test the Board, the project team and the key distributors hold all three and are definitive stakeholders demanding immediate priority. Regulators are dominant (power and legitimacy) but become definitive if urgency arises through a complaint or a breach. End-user customers are dependent: their claims to fair treatment and data privacy are legitimate and urgent, but individually they lack power,

relying on the company or on aggregation through online reviews and social media to have those claims heard. Competitors are dormant, holding power without legitimacy, and the local community is discretionary.

The salience model brings the dynamism and moral dimension that Mendelow lacks, recognising that salience is socially constructed and changes over time; a twenty-year review confirms its enduring value, along with the difficulty of operationalising its attributes (Wood et al., 2021). Its weakness is that those attributes are hard to measure objectively, and the model reflects managerial perception rather than stakeholder reality (Greenwood, 2007). Used together, though, the two frameworks provide a defensible basis for prioritisation. The matrix decides where engagement resources are concentrated, while the salience model acts as an early warning for stakeholders whose position may change. That matters in a multi-market rollout, where a German distributor may expect a very different level of formality and consultation from a UK merchant. Table 1 consolidates the categorisation; the full matrix is in Appendix A.

Stakeholder	Category	Power-interest position	Salience class
Board / Managing Director (sponsor)	Internal	Manage closely	Definitive
ConnectPlus project team (IT, marketing, sales, product development)	Internal	Manage closely	Definitive
Distributors and merchants (UK and export)	External	Manage closely	Definitive
Technology partner (AI / mobile platform vendor)	External	Manage closely	Dominant
Finance function	Internal	Keep satisfied	Dominant
ICO and EU data protection authorities	External	Keep satisfied	Dominant (latent urgency)
End-user customers (agricultural, industrial, construction)	External	Keep informed	Dependent
Employees (production, customer service, warehouse)	Internal	Keep informed	Dependent
Suppliers and logistics carriers	External	Keep informed	Discretionary
Competitors, trade media, local community	External	Monitor	Dormant / discretionary

Table 1: Consolidated stakeholder categorisation for ConnectPlus

3.4 SWOT analysis of the ConnectPlus initiative

The stakeholder mapping is complemented by a SWOT analysis, which places the project in its strategic context and remains a robust tool when it is applied critically rather than as a box-ticking exercise (Puyt, Lie and Wilderom, 2023). **Internally**, the project's strengths are Enduramaxx's product quality, its ISO 9001 accreditation, established distributor relationships, an existing e-commerce channel and the credibility of the Made in Britain badge. Its weaknesses are those of a thirty-person SME: stretched management capacity, limited in-house expertise in artificial intelligence, dependence on an external technology vendor, and uneven digital confidence among staff and trade customers.

Externally, the opportunities are considerable. Business customers increasingly expect digital self-service and personalisation, the insight dashboard offers a data advantage over larger but slower rivals, and engaged export distributors provide a low-cost route to international growth. The threats mirror the stakeholder risks already identified: channel conflict, competing platforms, regulatory exposure under the UK GDPR and its European equivalents, and cyber-security risk. Several of these weaknesses and threats, vendor dependence and channel conflict in particular, are relational problems that only effective stakeholder engagement can mitigate (see Appendix D for the full matrix).

The SWOT becomes more valuable once it is turned from a static list into strategy, following the TOWS logic of matching internal and external factors (Puyt, Lie and Wilderom, 2023). Matching strengths to opportunities produces the platform's core proposition: established distributor relationships and Made in Britain credibility become the vehicle for introducing digital self-service to conservative trade customers. Matching strengths to threats uses the loyalty scheme itself as a defence, raising switching costs before competing platforms gain a foothold. Matching weaknesses to opportunities points to partnering: the AI expertise the SME lacks is bought in through the technology vendor, with knowledge-transfer clauses to reduce long-run dependence. The weakness-threat combination of limited management capacity and regulatory exposure shows where the project is most fragile and where the Board's attention must concentrate. Read this way, the SWOT is not a neutral audit but an engagement agenda: every quadrant points to a stakeholder whose cooperation turns analysis into action.

4. Roles, Responsibilities, Benefits and Challenges of Key Stakeholders

Table 2 summarises the roles and responsibilities of the definitive and dominant stakeholders, along with the benefits they bring and the challenges they are likely to face. Each group also differs in its stake, attitude and expectations. Distributors expect protected margins and are initially wary; employees expect job security and clear training; end-users expect tangible rewards and respect for their data; and the Board expects a defensible return. Appendix B records each group's current and desired level of support.

Stakeholder	Role and responsibilities	Benefits brought	Challenges faced
Board / MD (sponsor)	Owns the business case; approves budget and gates; champions the project; resolves escalated conflicts	Strategic authority, resources, organisational legitimacy	Balancing ConnectPlus against competing capital demands in an SME; limited digital expertise at Board level
Project team	Day-to-day delivery: requirements, data migration, campaign design, testing, training and rollout	Cross-functional knowledge of products, customers and systems	Resource stretch, as members retain business-as-usual duties; skills gaps in AI and analytics
Sales and marketing	Designs reward mechanics, segmentation and launch campaigns; owns customer messaging in each market	Deep customer knowledge; existing relationships to drive enrolment	Adapting propositions to different market cultures; fear that automation erodes their advisory role
IT / digital function	Systems integration, data security, e-commerce alignment, first-line support	Technical continuity and data governance	Small team dependent on the external vendor; cyber-security burden
Distributors and merchants	Promote the platform to trade customers; share sell-through data; provide market feedback	Market reach, local credibility and cultural knowledge in export markets	Perceived disintermediation if rewards favour direct sales; data-sharing sensitivities
Technology partner	Builds and hosts the platform; delivers the AI engine; meets SLA and security obligations	Specialist capability the SME cannot build internally	Scope creep; balancing Enduramaxx's demands against other clients
End-user customers	Adopt the app; consent to data use; provide feedback and reviews	Revenue, data and advocacy; co-creators of the insight the platform sells itself on	Privacy concerns; digital exclusion among some rural users; loyalty fatigue
Regulators (ICO / EU DPAs)	Enforce data protection law; provide guidance; investigate complaints	Legal certainty and public trust when engaged early	None from the project directly; the challenge lies with the company to demonstrate compliance

Table 2: Roles, responsibilities, benefits and challenges of key stakeholders

Three points stand out. First, the distributor network is at once the project's greatest asset and its greatest risk. Distributors provide the local credibility and cultural fluency that a thirty-person SME cannot replicate in export markets, yet a loyalty platform that steers end-users towards direct purchase would threaten their commercial position, which makes early co-design

essential. Second, the relationship with the technology partner is one of mutual dependency rather than a simple buyer-supplier exchange and should be governed relationally as well as contractually (Ashcroft, 2017). Third, end-user customers are not passive recipients. Under the UK GDPR, they control the consent on which the whole AI recommendation engine depends, so a precondition of the platform working at all. Finally, employees will field the questions and redemptions that shape how the platform is experienced, so involving them early protects against internal resistance.

5. The Stakeholder Engagement Process and Conflict Management

5.1 A staged engagement process

As Project Manager I will follow the five-stage engagement plan set out in the NHS commissioning toolkit (NHS Midlands and East, no date): Identify the stakeholders; carry out a stakeholder assessment and mapping; be clear about what engagement means and what stakeholders can realistically influence; draw up engagement activities; and feed back on progress. Although developed for public-sector commissioning, the plan transfers directly to a commercial launch and sits comfortably with the PMBOK Guide (Project Management Institute, 2021) and Bourne's (2009) Stakeholder Circle methodology. Stages one and two were completed in Section 3. Stage three uses a matrix to assess stakeholder engagement and record each stakeholder's current level of engagement (unaware, resistant, neutral, supportive or leading) against the level needed, so effort goes where the gap is largest (Appendix B). At initiation, distributors are assessed as neutral-to-resistant but needed as supportive; employees are unaware but needed as supportive; and the Board is supportive but needed as leading. The engagement plan, communication plan and RACI matrix below are the tools for closing these gaps. Stage five then closes the loop through quarterly pulse surveys, advisory panel minutes and adoption analytics, supported by an engagement log and a 'little and often' feedback rhythm (NHS Midlands and East, no date).

This process has limits. Bourne (2009) herself stresses that stakeholder positions are dynamic, and a plan drafted at initiation quickly goes stale if it is not refreshed; the assessment matrix is therefore treated as a living document, reviewed at every project gate rather than filed as a one-off deliverable. There is also a resourcing tension in an SME: formal engagement processes designed for large programmes can swallow a disproportionate share of a thirty-person company's management capacity. The answer is proportionality. Intensive, face-to-face engagement is reserved for the definitive stakeholders, lighter-touch digital

channels serve those who only need to be kept informed, and engagement health is measured through enrolment rates, panel attendance, survey scores and how quickly issues are closed.

5.2 The 4Cs model as the engagement philosophy

Stakeholder engagement is understood here in the contemporary sense synthesised by Kujala et al. (2022), covering the aims, activities and impacts of stakeholder relations across moral, strategic and pragmatic dimensions. The strategy itself is organised around the 4Cs: communication, consultation, collaboration and commitment. Its theoretical anchor is commitment-trust theory, which holds that relationship commitment and trust, built through shared values, open communication and the avoidance of opportunistic behaviour, are the key mediating variables of successful relational exchange (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne (2013) make a similar point: value is created not in single transactions but across a network of stakeholder markets, of which the customer market is only one.

In practice each C maps to concrete mechanisms, and every stakeholder group receives a summary of engagement activities that records objectives, key messages, channels, timing and key performance indicators (NHS Midlands and East, no date), so engagement can be evidenced rather than asserted (the distributor worked example is in Appendix C; matching summaries exist for each other group). Communication runs through the plan in Table 3, supported by the company's CRM system and the platform's own app. Consultation takes the form of distributor workshops on reward mechanics, farmer and installer focus groups on app usability, and staff briefings that invite challenge rather than announce decisions. Collaboration happens through a pilot with ten key trade accounts in the UK and Ireland, agile sprint reviews attended by sales and distributor representatives, and joint go-to-market planning with export distributors. Commitment is secured through a distributor charter guaranteeing that platform data will not be used to divert trade customers to the direct channel, service level agreements with the technology partner, and steering group membership for the functions that will ultimately own the platform.

Trust, once built, has to be maintained: it is slow to earn and quick to lose. Morgan and Hunt (1994) identify shared values, communication quality and the absence of opportunism as the antecedents of trust, and each translates directly into this project. Shared values are expressed through the distributor charter and the published privacy commitments. Communication quality comes through the two-way channels in Table 3, where feedback visibly changes decisions. Non-opportunism means deliberately refraining from exploiting platform data to undercut trade partners, even where doing so would lift short-term direct sales. The mechanisms are also sequenced with intent: consultation before decisions,

collaboration before launch, and commitment devices such as the SLAs and the charter lock in the gains.

The Project Manager's own role within this philosophy is a varied one: communicator, facilitator, negotiator and monitor of stakeholder relationships in turn (Project Management Institute, 2021). Effective communication also means handling objections with empathy, and the feel-felt-found technique is used in distributor and staff conversations: acknowledge how the stakeholder feels, show that others have felt the same, and explain what they found once they engaged. Used with a distributor wary of disintermediation, it turns a defensive exchange into an evidence-based one and complements the two-way channels in Table 3.

Stakeholder	Key message / purpose	Channel	Frequency	Owner
Board / MD	Progress vs business case; risks; gate decisions	Steering group meeting; dashboard	Monthly	Project Manager
Project team	Sprint goals, blockers, dependencies	Stand-ups; sprint reviews	Daily / fortnightly	Project Manager
Distributors	Co-design of rewards; adoption support; charter assurances	Advisory panel; account visits; portal newsletter	Monthly panel; quarterly visits	Sales Director
Technology partner	Requirements, SLA performance, security	Joint delivery board; shared backlog	Fortnightly	IT Lead
End-user customers	Benefits, privacy commitments, how-to guidance	In-app messaging; email; distributor counter material	At launch, then campaign-driven	Marketing Manager
Employees	What changes for my role; training; feedback routes	Town halls; toolbox talks; intranet	Monthly to launch	HR / Project Manager
Regulators (ICO)	DPIA outcomes; consent architecture	Written correspondence as required	Pre-launch and on change	Data Protection Lead

Table 3: ConnectPlus communication plan (extract)

5.3 Clarifying accountability: the RACI matrix

Ambiguity over decision-making authority is a frequent source of conflict, especially in SMEs where individuals often take on multiple roles. The RACI matrix in Table 4 therefore assigns responsibility (R), accountability (A), consultation (C) and information (I) rights for the main project activities. Its value lies less in the document than in the negotiation; it forces: agreeing that distributors are consulted, not merely informed, on reward design, is a real engagement commitment.

Activity	Board/MD	Project Mgr	Sales & Mktg	IT Lead	Tech Partner	Distributors	DP Lead
Business case and budget	A	R	C	C	I	I	C
Reward scheme design	I	A	R	C	C	C	C
Platform build and integration	I	A	C	R	R	I	C
Data protection impact assessment	I	A	C	C	C	I	R
Market launch campaigns	I	A	R	I	C	C	I
Adoption monitoring and review	I	A	R	C	C	C	I

Table 4: RACI matrix for key ConnectPlus activities

5.4 Engaging across cultures

Because ConnectPlus launches in several national markets at once, engagement has to be culturally calibrated. Hofstede's (2001) dimensions warn that markets differ systematically. German trading partners, working in a higher uncertainty-avoidance culture, are likely to expect detailed documentation, precise SLAs and formal consultation before committing, whereas Irish and UK merchants may respond better to informal, relationship-led engagement. Meyer (2014) adds the distinction between low-context cultures, where communication should be explicit and written, and higher-context cultures, where meaning travels through relationships and face-to-face contact. Three practical implications follow: engagement materials will be localised rather than merely translated; export distributors will act as cultural intermediaries and co-hosts of local launch events; and feedback channels will use written consultation where formality is valued and workshop dialogue where it is not. Cultural frameworks must still be used with care: they describe national averages, not individuals, and treating them as stereotypes would itself damage trust (Meyer, 2014).

5.5 Managing conflict

Three conflicts are foreseeable: channel conflict with distributors who fear trade being diverted to the direct e-commerce channel; resource conflict between sales and IT over scarce project time; and contractual conflicts with the technology partner over scope and data ownership. The Thomas-Kilmann framework (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974) offers five conflict-handling modes, competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding and accommodating, and the skill lies in matching the mode to the stakes and the relationship. For the distributor channel conflict, collaborating is justified because both the relationship and the outcome matter

strategically: the charter and the advisory panel are designed to turn a positional dispute into joint problem-solving. For internal resource conflict, compromising through re-sequenced sprint priorities is usually enough. Where regulatory compliance is at stake, a competing stance is legitimate and necessary, because data protection obligations are not negotiable. Avoiding is kept for trivial irritations, and accommodating is appropriate only where the issue matters far more to the other party than to the project.

The Thomas-Kilmann instrument is, though, an individual-level and culturally bounded tool: open confrontation that reads as healthy assertiveness in the UK can cause a damaging loss of face in higher power-distance cultures (Hofstede, 2001). It is therefore paired with principled negotiation (Fisher and Ury, 2012), which separates the people from the problem, focuses on interests rather than positions, generates options for mutual gain and insists on objective criteria. Applied to the expected disintermediation dispute, the distributors' underlying interest is not to block digital loyalty but to protect their margin and their customer relationships; reward mechanics that route redemptions through distributor accounts satisfy that interest while keeping the platform's goals intact. Escalation routes are agreed in advance, from project level up to the steering group with the sponsor as final arbiter, so conflict is dealt with quickly.

6. The Impact of Sustainable Stakeholder Engagement on Business Performance

Sustainable stakeholder engagement, kept honest and reciprocal after launch rather than switched off at project close, is an investment in relationships that pays measurable returns. Ashcroft (2017) argues that the quality of an organisation's relationships is a strategic asset that can be measured and managed and that relational proximity directly conditions the value the parties can create together. Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne (2013) add that firms compete through networks of relationships spanning customer, supplier, referral, influence, recruitment and internal markets, so engagement quality in one market spills over into the others: an engaged distributor is at the same time a referral channel, a data supplier and an advocate in the influence market.

The most direct impact runs through customer retention, which is the platform's stated purpose. The economics are well established: Reichheld and Sasser (1990) showed that cutting customer defections by 5 per cent can lift profits by 25 to 85 per cent depending on the industry, because retained customers cost less to serve, buy more and refer others. For Enduramaxx, whose tanks create recurring demand for fittings and replacements, moving twelve-month retention from 68 to 78 per cent would compound across the customer base and

support the revenue case. Industry experience backs the mechanism. Tesco's Clubcard converted loyalty data into insight that reshaped ranging, pricing and promotion (Humby, Hunt and Phillips, 2008), and Amazon Prime shows how a loyalty ecosystem raises switching costs and share of wallet, a pattern now central to digital marketing strategy (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). Loyalty leaders succeed by turning data into personalised experiences rather than discounts alone (McKinsey & Company, 2021), with artificial intelligence augmenting rather than replacing human judgement (Huang and Rust, 2021). The lesson from these cases is that the benefit comes not from the points mechanism but from the sustained, data-informed customer dialogue it makes possible.

Sustained engagement also improves decision-making and innovation. The insight dashboard is only as good as the data stakeholders are willing to contribute. Distributors who trust the charter will share sell-through data no market research agency could supply, and end-users who trust the consent model will accept the personalisation that makes recommendations worth having. This is the instrumental case for stakeholder theory made by Donaldson and Preston (1995): firms that manage for stakeholders outperform those that do not, because trust lowers the transaction costs of cooperation and unlocks information that adversarial relationships suppress. Engaged employees turn strategy into customer experience, and international evidence shows that employee engagement correlates with productivity, retention and customer satisfaction (Gallup, 2023); in the internal market described by Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne (2013), staff who understand and believe in ConnectPlus become its most credible advocates. Engagement also works as risk management: consulting regulators early through the DPIA process, and distributors before launch, is far cheaper than remediating a breach or a channel revolt afterwards. It protects the licence to operate in each market too, consistent with the shared-value argument that competitiveness and stakeholder wellbeing are interdependent (Porter and Kramer, 2011).

These benefits have to be weighed against the challenges and ethical questions of a global digital launch. The first is data ethics. An AI-driven loyalty platform monetises personal data, and the line between helpful personalisation and intrusive surveillance is contested. The Information Commissioner's Office fined British Airways £20 million in 2020 for security failures affecting more than 400,000 customers (ICO, 2020), a reminder that careless data stewardship can cost far more than any loyalty uplift. ConnectPlus therefore embeds privacy by design, meaningful consent and human review of algorithmic outputs, in line with the regulator's guidance on artificial intelligence and data protection (Information Commissioner's Office, 2023) and the risk-based obligations of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act in its European markets (European Union, 2024). The second is algorithmic fairness. Recommendation engines can embed bias, for example, by systematically steering smaller rural customers

towards lower-service tiers, so periodic bias audits are a governance requirement rather than an optional extra, echoing wider calls for accountable and transparent governance of AI in business (Dwivedi et al., 2021). The third is digital exclusion. Some of Enduramaxx's agricultural customers are older or work in areas with poor connectivity, and a mobile-only scheme would shut out exactly the loyal customers it claims to reward, so offline enrolment and redemption routes are retained. Fourth, engagement can itself be unethical when it is cosmetic: Greenwood (2007) warns that more engagement does not automatically mean more responsibility, because consultation can be used to legitimise decisions that have already been taken. Keeping the performance benefits therefore requires that consultation can genuinely change outcomes, that reward mechanics avoid manipulative dark patterns, and that cross-cultural engagement respects local norms rather than exporting UK assumptions. Managed this way, engagement becomes self-reinforcing: trust generates data and advocacy, which improve personalisation and performance, which in turn justifies continued investment in the relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Ashcroft, 2017).

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

The following recommendations are made to the Board:

1. Phase the rollout: launch in the UK and Ireland first and enter the two further European markets only after distributor co-design is complete in each (Meyer, 2014).
2. Formalise the distributor advisory panel and charter before launch, with an explicit commitment that platform data will not be used to disintermediate trade partners (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).
3. Embed privacy by design: complete the DPIA, appoint a named Data Protection Lead, and commission an annual independent audit of the recommendation algorithms (Information Commissioner's Office, 2023).
4. Resource engagement properly: allocate a dedicated engagement budget line and review the engagement assessment matrix at every project gate.
5. Retain offline enrolment and redemption routes to prevent digital exclusion of rural and older customers.
6. Continue engagement beyond launch: convert the project steering group into a standing ConnectPlus governance board with distributor and customer representation (Kujala et al., 2022).

7. Use ConnectPlus to support organic growth, building on existing resources and relationships: the distributor network, in-house CAD capability and the Made in Britain brand, so that retention gains fund growth from within.

In conclusion, ConnectPlus's success will depend more on relationships than on technology. The analysis using Mendelow's matrix and the salience model shows that a small number of definitive stakeholders, the Board, the project team, the technology partner and, above all, the distributor network, hold the keys to adoption, while regulators and end-users hold latent power that becomes decisive the moment trust is breached. A staged engagement process built on the 4Cs, disciplined through a communication plan and a RACI matrix, adapted to the culture of each market and backed by collaborative conflict management, offers the most credible route to launch within six months. If that engagement is sustained ethically after launch, the evidence reviewed here suggests it will repay the investment through retention, insight, lower risk and durable relationships (Ashcroft, 2017).

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Power-interest matrix for the ConnectPlus project

Figure A1 plots the principal stakeholders on Mendelow's (1991) power-interest matrix, visualising the categorisation summarised in Table 1 and Figure 1 of the main report.



Figure A1: Stakeholder power-interest matrix (adapted from Mendelow, 1991)

Appendix B: Stakeholder engagement assessment matrix

Figure B1 records each key stakeholder's engagement level at project initiation against the level desired for a successful launch, using the unaware-resistant-neutral-supportive-leading scale (Project Management Institute, 2021). The gap between current and desired positions indicates where engagement effort must be concentrated.

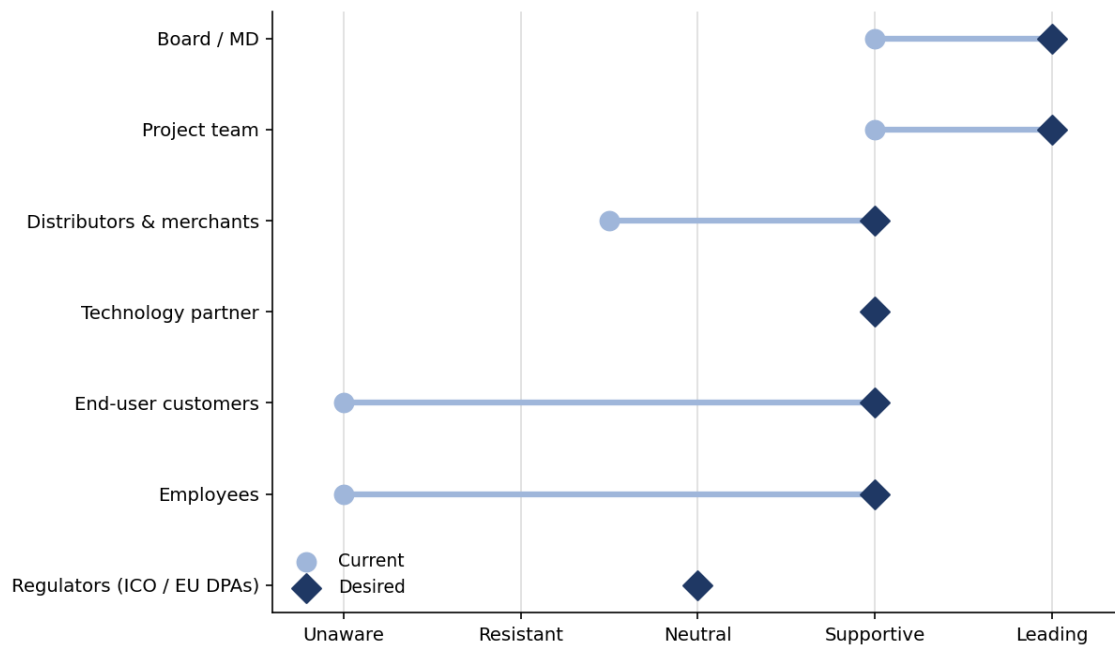


Figure B1: Current versus desired stakeholder engagement levels at project initiation

Appendix C: Individual stakeholder engagement activity summary - distributor network

The summary below follows the format recommended in the NHS engagement toolkit (NHS Midlands and East, no date) and is the template applied to each key stakeholder group; the distributor network is shown as the worked example.

Target audience	UK and export distributors and builders' merchants; sub-audiences: key trade accounts, export distributors (Ireland and two EU markets), online resellers
Why engage?	Distributors generate the majority of revenue, hold local market credibility and cultural knowledge, and could block adoption if they perceive disintermediation
Objectives	Co-design reward mechanics; secure sign-up of at least 60 per cent of active trade accounts within three months of launch; obtain sell-through data sharing agreements
Key messages	ConnectPlus grows the whole channel; platform data will not be used to divert trade customers to the direct channel (distributor charter); rewards route redemptions through distributor accounts
Channels	Distributor advisory panel (monthly); joint go-to-market workshops; quarterly account visits; trade portal newsletter; co-hosted local launch events in export markets
Timing	Advisory panel from month 1; charter agreed by month 3; pilot with ten key accounts months 3-5; phased market launches from month 6
KPIs	Panel attendance; charter signed; pilot account enrolment; trade account sign-up rate; sell-through data coverage; quarterly pulse survey score of at least 4 out of 5
Feedback loop	Panel minutes published; 'you said, we did' updates in the portal newsletter; escalation route to the steering group

Table C1: Engagement activity summary for the distributor network (format adapted from NHS Midlands and East, no date)

Appendix D: SWOT analysis of the ConnectPlus initiative

Figure D1 presents the SWOT analysis discussed in Section 3.4 in matrix form.

STRENGTHS (internal) • Product quality and ISO 9001 accreditation • Established distributor relationships • Existing e-commerce channel • Made in Britain brand credibility	WEAKNESSES (internal) • Constrained SME management capacity • Limited in-house AI / analytics expertise • Dependence on external technology vendor • Uneven digital confidence among staff
OPPORTUNITIES (external) • B2B expectation of digital self-service • Data-driven insight over slower rivals • Low-cost international growth via distributors • Richer personalisation and retention	THREATS (external) • Channel conflict with distributors • Competing platforms and marketplaces • UK GDPR / EU regulatory exposure • Cyber-security risk

Figure D1: SWOT matrix for the ConnectPlus initiative