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Executive Summary

This report evaluates stakeholder management for Zara's proposed ConnectPlus digital loyalty and engagement platform. The platform will use AI-driven recommendations, mobile rewards and customer insights to improve customer retention and support data-driven decision-making across selected international markets.

The report identifies key internal and external stakeholders, including senior management, project teams, IT and product development, marketing, employees, customers, technology suppliers and regulators. Stakeholder theory and engagement frameworks are applied to assess their levels of influence, interest and importance. The report recommends using structured communication, stakeholder mapping, RACI responsibilities and the 4C's of communication, collaboration, consultation and commitment.

The analysis finds that sustainable stakeholder engagement can improve customer loyalty, employee support, innovation, risk management and Zara's reputation. However, challenges including conflicting stakeholder interests, cultural differences, privacy concerns and the responsible use of AI must be carefully managed.

Overall, Zara should adopt a continuous, transparent and internationally adaptable approach to stakeholder engagement. This will help build trust, manage conflict and increase the likelihood of successful ConnectPlus adoption and long-term business performance.

Introduction

Zara is a leading international fashion retailer and one of the principal brands within the Inditex Group. The company operates through an integrated physical and digital retail model, allowing customers to interact with the brand through both stores and online platforms. Inditex reported that its brands operated across 97 markets in 2025, while Zara continued to invest in technology to improve both the in-store and online customer experience (Inditex, 2026). This international and digitally connected business environment makes Zara an appropriate organisation for examining stakeholder management in a global technology project.

This report considers the proposed launch of ConnectPlus, a digitally enhanced customer loyalty and engagement platform that will be introduced across selected local and international markets within six months. The platform will use artificial intelligence (AI) to provide personalised product recommendations, mobile-based rewards and customer insight capabilities. The intended benefits include improving customer retention, supporting data-driven decision-making and strengthening Zara's competitive differentiation. However, the success of ConnectPlus will depend not only on the technology itself but also on the support, cooperation and acceptance of stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle.

Stakeholder management is therefore a significant project management consideration. Stakeholders may have different levels of power, interest, expectations and influence over the project. Customers may prioritise personalisation and convenience, while employees may require training and support. Senior management may focus on strategic and financial outcomes, whereas regulators may be concerned with data protection, privacy and responsible use of AI. These interests may also differ between international markets because of cultural, legal and technological differences.

This report therefore identifies and categorises the key internal and external stakeholders involved in the ConnectPlus launch. It applies stakeholder theory and engagement frameworks to evaluate appropriate engagement strategies, while critically examining the

potential benefits, challenges and ethical considerations associated with managing stakeholders across diverse international markets. The report aims to demonstrate how effective stakeholder engagement can contribute to the successful implementation and adoption of ConnectPlus.

SMART Objectives

The ConnectPlus project will use SMART objectives to provide clear direction and measurable targets for Zara. SMART objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound, helping project teams monitor progress and align stakeholder expectations (Doran, 1981; Project Management Institute, 2013). The project will launch ConnectPlus across selected international markets within six months. Zara will aim to achieve 70% customer registration among targeted loyalty customers within six months of launch and increase customer engagement with personalised recommendations and mobile rewards by 15% within 12 months. In addition, 100% of relevant employees will receive training before launch, while compliance with applicable data protection and AI requirements will be maintained across participating markets. These objectives provide clear measures for evaluating project success.

Identification and Analysis of Key Stakeholders

Stakeholders are individuals, groups or organisations that can affect a project or are affected by its outcomes. Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory argues that organisations should consider the interests of different stakeholder groups when making strategic decisions. For Zara's ConnectPlus project, this is particularly important because the platform involves customers, employees, technology, customer data and international markets. Therefore, successful implementation will depend on identifying stakeholders early and understanding their different interests and levels of influence.

Internal Stakeholders

Several internal stakeholders will have an important role in the ConnectPlus project. Senior management and executives are key stakeholders because they provide strategic direction, approve investment and determine whether the project supports Zara's wider business objectives. They have high power and high interest because they can influence major decisions relating to the project's budget, scope and implementation.

The Project Manager and project team are also central stakeholders. They will coordinate the project, manage risks, monitor the six-month deadline and ensure that different departments work together. Their interest and influence are high because poor coordination could result in delays, increased costs or failure to achieve the project's objectives.

The product development and IT teams will design, develop, test and maintain ConnectPlus. Their responsibilities may include mobile application development, AI integration, cybersecurity and connection with Zara's existing digital systems. They therefore have high interest and influence because technical problems could directly affect the quality and timing of the launch.

The data and analytics teams are also important because ConnectPlus will use customer information to provide personalised recommendations and customer insights. These employees will need to ensure that data is accurate, secure and used appropriately.

The marketing and sales departments will be responsible for promoting ConnectPlus and encouraging customer adoption. Marketing can develop campaigns explaining the benefits

of the platform, while sales and store employees can introduce customers to ConnectPlus. Customer service employees will also be important because they will need to answer customer questions and resolve problems.

Other internal stakeholders include finance, legal, compliance and human resources. Finance will monitor project costs and expected returns. Legal and compliance teams will help ensure that the platform meets relevant legal and data protection requirements, while HR can coordinate employee training and support organisational change.

External Stakeholders

The most important external stakeholders are Zara's customers. Customers will directly use ConnectPlus and will therefore have a high interest in the platform. Their adoption, feedback and continued use will influence whether the project achieves its objectives. Customers may also have concerns about privacy, the use of AI and how their personal information is collected and analysed.

Technology suppliers and AI providers are also important because Zara may depend on external organisations for software, cloud services, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and technical support. Their performance could affect the project's cost, quality, security and delivery time.

Payment providers and digital partners may also be involved in connecting ConnectPlus with existing payment and digital services. Their systems need to operate reliably to provide customers with a smooth experience.

Regulators and government authorities* are particularly important because ConnectPlus will operate across international markets and process customer data. Regulators may have significant power because they can impose legal requirements or restrictions if the platform does not comply with applicable regulations.

Other external stakeholders include shareholders and investors, who will be interested in the financial and strategic benefits of ConnectPlus, as well as business partners involved in rewards and promotional activities. Consumer and privacy organisations may also have an interest in how Zara uses customer information and AI.

Stakeholder Analysis Using the Salience Model

To prioritise these stakeholders, the Stakeholder Salience Model developed by Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) can be applied. The model considers three characteristics: power, legitimacy and urgency. Stakeholders with more of these characteristics are likely to require greater management attention.

For ConnectPlus, senior management, regulators and key technology suppliers can be considered highly salient stakeholders because they have significant power and legitimate involvement in the project. Regulators may also have high urgency when issues involving customer privacy, data protection or AI arise. These stakeholders should therefore be managed closely through regular meetings, formal reporting and early involvement in important decisions.

Customers and employees have strong legitimacy because they are directly affected by the project. However, they may have less formal power than senior management or regulators. Their importance should not therefore be underestimated. Customers can influence the success of ConnectPlus through adoption, feedback and purchasing behaviour, while

employees can either support or resist the new system. Zara should therefore use customer research, surveys, focus groups, employee workshops and training to involve these groups.

The Salience Model is useful because stakeholder importance is not fixed. A stakeholder with relatively low influence at the beginning of the project could become more important later. For example, a customer privacy group may become highly salient if concerns about data collection become public. Similarly, a technology supplier may become more important if a technical problem threatens the launch deadline. This demonstrates why Zara should regularly review its stakeholder analysis throughout the project rather than treating it as a one-time exercise.

Overall, Zara's ConnectPlus project involves a wide range of internal and external stakeholders with different interests, responsibilities and levels of influence. Applying stakeholder theory and the Salience Model allows the Project Manager to move beyond simply identifying stakeholders and instead determine who requires the greatest attention and why. This will provide a strong foundation for developing appropriate stakeholder engagement strategies in the next stage of the project.

Roles, Responsibilities, Benefits and Challenges of Key Stakeholders

Each stakeholder involved in the ConnectPlus project has different roles and responsibilities. Understanding these differences is important because each stakeholder can contribute to the project's success but may also experience challenges during the implementation process.

Senior management is responsible for providing strategic direction, approving the project budget and ensuring that ConnectPlus supports Zara's wider business objectives. Their involvement provides authority, financial resources and support for important project decisions. However, senior management may face challenges if the project experiences delays, increased costs or does not achieve its expected customer and business benefits.

The Project Manager and project team are responsible for planning, coordinating and monitoring the project. Their responsibilities include managing the schedule, budget, risks, resources and communication between stakeholders. They bring strong coordination and leadership to the project and help ensure that different departments work towards the same objectives. However, they may experience pressure from the six-month deadline, conflicting stakeholder expectations and unexpected technical or operational problems.

The product development and IT teams are responsible for developing, testing, integrating and maintaining ConnectPlus. Their technical expertise can help Zara create a reliable, secure and user-friendly platform. They can also identify technical problems before the platform is launched. However, these teams may face challenges such as system integration difficulties, cybersecurity risks, limited resources and pressure to deliver the platform within a short timeframe.

The marketing and sales teams are responsible for promoting ConnectPlus and encouraging customers to use the platform. Their contribution can increase awareness, customer registrations and engagement with rewards and personalised recommendations. However, they may face difficulties if customers do not understand the benefits of the platform or have concerns about the use of their personal information.

Store employees and customer service teams will support customers during the introduction and ongoing use of ConnectPlus. They may explain the platform, assist with registration and resolve customer problems. Their involvement can increase customer confidence and improve adoption. However, employees may experience resistance to change, additional workloads or uncertainty about new responsibilities. Appropriate training and communication will therefore be important.

Customers are central to the success of ConnectPlus because they will use the platform and determine whether it provides genuine value. Their participation can provide Zara with useful feedback about customer preferences and behaviour, helping the company improve its products and services. However, customers may be concerned about privacy, data collection, AI recommendations and whether the rewards offered are attractive enough. These concerns could reduce adoption if they are not addressed effectively.

Finally, technology suppliers and regulators have important external roles. Technology suppliers may provide AI, software, cloud services and cybersecurity solutions, while regulators ensure that ConnectPlus meets relevant legal and consumer requirements. Suppliers can provide specialist knowledge and technical capabilities that Zara may not have internally. Regulators can help protect customers and strengthen trust in the platform. However, suppliers may face performance and contractual pressures, while regulators may raise concerns about privacy, cybersecurity, consumer protection and responsible AI use.

Overall, stakeholder involvement can provide Zara with specialist knowledge, financial support, technical expertise, customer insight and organisational commitment. At the same time, stakeholders may have different priorities and expectations, creating potential disagreements or resistance. Zara should therefore maintain regular communication, provide appropriate support and review stakeholder needs throughout the ConnectPlus project.

Stakeholder Engagement and Conflict Management Process

As Project Manager for Zara's ConnectPlus implementation, my approach to stakeholder engagement would be continuous, structured and based on the different needs of each stakeholder group. The purpose would not simply be to provide stakeholders with information, but to encourage participation, build trust, identify concerns early and create commitment to the project's objectives. Because ConnectPlus will involve AI, customer data, employees and international markets, disagreements are likely to occur between stakeholders with different priorities. A structured engagement process would therefore be required from project initiation through to implementation and post-launch evaluation.

Stakeholder Identification and Prioritisation

The first stage would be to identify all stakeholders and assess their potential influence on the project. I would begin by creating a stakeholder register containing each stakeholder's role, level of interest, level of influence, expectations, concerns and preferred communication method. This register would include senior management, the Project Manager and project team, IT and product development, marketing, sales, store employees, customer service, data and analytics teams, finance, legal and compliance, customers, technology suppliers, regulators and other external partners.

I would then use a Power–Interest Matrix to prioritise stakeholders. Stakeholders with high power and high interest would be managed closely because they can significantly affect the project's success. These would include senior management, the core IT and product development teams, major technology suppliers and relevant regulators. High-power stakeholders with lower day-to-day interest would be kept satisfied through concise reports and milestone updates. Customers and employees would generally require regular

information and consultation because, although they may have less formal power, their adoption or resistance can significantly influence the outcome of ConnectPlus.

This process would ensure that stakeholder engagement resources are used appropriately rather than applying the same level of communication to everyone.

Developing a Stakeholder Engagement and Communication Plan

The second stage would be to create a detailed Stakeholder Engagement Plan supported by a Communication Plan. The engagement plan would establish what each stakeholder needs to know, what Zara needs from them, how they will be involved and how frequently engagement should take place.

For example, senior management could receive monthly project dashboards covering progress, budget, risks and key decisions. The IT and product development teams would require frequent technical meetings and workshops. Employees would receive training, internal communications and opportunities to provide feedback. Customers could be engaged through surveys, focus groups and pilot testing. Regulators would require formal communication and early consultation regarding relevant legal and data protection requirements.

Communication should also be two-way. Simply sending information to stakeholders does not represent effective engagement. Stakeholders should have opportunities to ask questions, challenge decisions and provide feedback. I would therefore establish clear feedback channels, such as project meetings, employee feedback sessions, customer surveys and digital feedback systems.

For an international rollout, the communication plan would also need to recognise cultural and language differences. Messages should be adapted to local markets rather than assuming that one communication style will be effective everywhere. Local Zara teams should be involved in communication planning because they are more likely to understand local customer expectations and cultural sensitivities.

Using the RACI Matrix

A RACI Matrix would be used to clarify stakeholder roles and prevent confusion during the project. RACI identifies who is Responsible, Accountable, Consulted and Informed for specific activities.

For example, the IT and product development team could be Responsible for technical development, while the Project Manager would be Accountable for ensuring that the work is delivered according to the agreed project requirements. Legal and compliance teams could be Consulted on data protection and regulatory issues, while senior management could be Informed of major progress and risks.

A simplified example for ConnectPlus would be:

Project Activity	Project Manager	IT/Product	Marketing	Legal/Compliance	Senior Management
Platform development	A	R	C	C	I

Marketing strategy	A	C	R	C	I
Data protection review	A	C	I	R	I
Employee training	A	C	R	C	I
Final launch approval	R	C	C	C	A

The RACI approach would reduce duplication and uncertainty because stakeholders would understand their responsibilities before work begins. It would also make it easier to identify gaps where nobody has been given responsibility for an important activity.

Applying the 4C's of Stakeholder Engagement

The engagement process would also be based on four key principles: Communication, Collaboration, Consultation and Commitment.

Communication would ensure that stakeholders receive accurate, timely and relevant information. For example, employees would need to understand how ConnectPlus changes their responsibilities, while customers would need clear information about rewards, personalisation and data use.

Collaboration would involve stakeholders working together to solve problems and develop solutions. For example, IT, marketing and customer service teams could collaborate during pilot testing to ensure that the platform is technically effective while also meeting customer needs.

Consultation would allow Zara to obtain stakeholder opinions before important decisions are made. Customer focus groups, employee workshops and regulatory discussions could identify problems that may otherwise be missed. Consultation is particularly important where decisions could affect stakeholder trust.

Commitment would focus on gaining long-term support for the project. Stakeholders are more likely to support ConnectPlus if they understand its purpose, feel that their views have been considered and believe that the project provides value. Senior management commitment would provide organisational support, while employee and customer commitment would be important for successful adoption.

These four areas should not be treated as separate activities. They should operate throughout the project lifecycle. Communication can create understanding, consultation can identify concerns, collaboration can develop solutions and commitment can support implementation.

Managing Stakeholder Conflict

Conflict should be expected in a complex project such as ConnectPlus because stakeholders may have different objectives. For example, the marketing team may want to collect more customer data to improve personalisation, while the legal and compliance team may recommend limiting data collection to reduce privacy risks. Similarly, senior

management may want the platform launched within six months, while IT teams may argue that additional testing is required to ensure reliability and security.

As Project Manager, I would first identify the source of the conflict rather than immediately trying to choose one stakeholder's position. I would establish whether the disagreement relates to project scope, resources, timing, technical requirements, risk, customer expectations or ethical concerns. The relevant stakeholders would then be brought together in a structured discussion.

The first method would be collaborative problem-solving. Stakeholders would be encouraged to explain their interests and evidence rather than simply defend their preferred solution. For example, marketing and compliance could work together to identify the minimum customer data required to provide useful personalisation while maintaining appropriate privacy controls.

If agreement could not be reached, I would use objective criteria such as the project's business case, customer requirements, legal obligations, risk assessments and agreed project objectives to evaluate the alternatives. This reduces the possibility of decisions being based on personal influence or departmental politics.

Where necessary, I would escalate major unresolved conflicts to the appropriate senior decision-maker. However, escalation should be used carefully because excessive escalation could slow decision-making and reduce stakeholder ownership. Minor disagreements should be resolved at project-team level wherever possible.

I would also maintain a decision and issue log recording major disagreements, decisions made, reasons for those decisions and the person responsible for following up. This would create transparency and reduce the likelihood of the same issue being repeatedly discussed.

Monitoring and Evaluating Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement should be measured throughout the project rather than assumed to be successful. I would review stakeholder engagement at regular project milestones and update the stakeholder register and Power–Interest Matrix when stakeholder influence or concerns change.

Measures could include employee training completion, customer feedback, stakeholder meeting attendance, response rates to surveys, number of unresolved issues, stakeholder satisfaction and the speed at which concerns are addressed. For example, a high number of unresolved customer privacy concerns could indicate that the communication strategy needs to be improved.

I would also conduct stakeholder reviews after the pilot launch and following the wider implementation. Feedback would be used to identify what worked well and what needs to change. This creates a continuous improvement process rather than treating stakeholder engagement as a one-off project activity.

Overall, my approach as Project Manager would combine stakeholder prioritisation, structured communication, clear responsibilities, consultation, collaboration and conflict management. The Power–Interest Matrix would help determine where engagement effort should be focused, while the RACI Matrix would establish clear responsibilities. The 4C's approach would then support meaningful relationships through communication, collaboration, consultation and commitment. By monitoring stakeholder relationships throughout the project, Zara would be better positioned to manage conflicting interests, build

trust and increase the likelihood of successful ConnectPlus adoption across different international markets.

Impact of Sustainable Stakeholder Engagement on Business Performance

Sustainable stakeholder engagement involves building long-term relationships with stakeholders rather than communicating with them only when a project requires their involvement. For Zara, sustainable engagement is particularly important for ConnectPlus because the platform will operate across different markets and involve customer data, artificial intelligence, employees, technology providers and regulators. Effective long-term engagement can influence financial performance, customer loyalty, operational efficiency, innovation and Zara's reputation. However, stakeholder engagement also requires time, resources and careful management, meaning that its benefits need to be balanced against its costs.

One of the most significant impacts is customer loyalty and retention. ConnectPlus is designed to provide personalised recommendations and mobile-based rewards, meaning that customer feedback is important in determining whether the platform provides genuine value. By continuously engaging customers through surveys, feedback channels and user testing, Zara can identify changing expectations and improve the platform. A positive customer experience may increase repeat purchases and customer loyalty, which can contribute to stronger long-term business performance. However, personalisation can also damage customer trust if customers believe that Zara is collecting or using excessive amounts of personal information. Sustainable engagement therefore requires transparency about data collection and allowing customers to understand how their information is being used.

Stakeholder engagement can also improve innovation and decision-making. Employees, customers, IT specialists and external technology providers have different knowledge and experiences. Bringing these perspectives together can help Zara identify new ideas and problems that may not be recognised by senior management alone. For example, customer feedback may identify that a reward system is difficult to understand, while store employees may identify practical problems with customer registration. Addressing these issues before a full international launch can improve the quality of ConnectPlus and reduce the cost of correcting problems later.

Another important impact is employee performance and organisational commitment. Employees are more likely to support a new digital platform when they understand its purpose and receive appropriate training. Engaging employees during the development and implementation stages can reduce resistance to change and encourage them to become advocates for ConnectPlus. This can improve customer service and increase adoption. However, employee engagement can become ineffective if Zara asks employees for feedback but does not demonstrate that their views have been considered. Stakeholder engagement must therefore be genuine rather than simply a communication exercise.

Sustainable stakeholder engagement can also improve risk management and regulatory performance. ConnectPlus will process customer information and use AI, creating potential risks involving privacy, cybersecurity, discrimination and inappropriate use of personal data. Regular engagement with legal, compliance and regulatory stakeholders can help Zara identify these risks at an early stage. This can reduce the likelihood of regulatory penalties, reputational damage and loss of customer trust. It can also support the development of stronger data governance processes. However, regulatory requirements may differ between

countries, meaning that Zara may need to invest additional resources in local compliance and stakeholder consultation.

Another benefit is stronger relationships with suppliers and external partners. ConnectPlus may depend on technology providers, AI suppliers, payment providers and other digital partners. Sustainable relationships can improve communication and make it easier to resolve technical problems. Suppliers that understand Zara's long-term objectives may also be more willing to contribute ideas and provide additional support. However, Zara should avoid becoming overly dependent on individual suppliers because this could increase costs and reduce flexibility. Supplier relationships should therefore be supported by clear contracts, performance measures and contingency planning.

Stakeholder engagement can also influence Zara's reputation and competitive position. Customers increasingly expect companies to behave responsibly, particularly when using personal data and AI. Demonstrating that Zara listens to customers, treats employees fairly and uses technology responsibly can strengthen stakeholder trust. A strong reputation may support customer loyalty and differentiate Zara from competitors. In contrast, poor stakeholder management could result in negative publicity, customer complaints or reduced confidence in the brand. This demonstrates that stakeholder engagement can have an impact beyond the immediate ConnectPlus project.

There are, however, potential costs and limitations. Meaningful engagement requires staff time, training, market research, consultation activities and communication systems. In a global project, these costs may increase because Zara needs to adapt engagement activities to different languages, cultures and regulatory environments. In addition, stakeholders may have conflicting expectations. Customers may want greater personalisation, while regulators and privacy stakeholders may favour reduced data collection. Attempting to satisfy every stakeholder could therefore increase project complexity and delay decision-making.

The Project Manager must therefore balance stakeholder expectations with Zara's strategic objectives. Engagement should be prioritised according to stakeholder influence, interest and the potential impact of their concerns. Not every stakeholder requires the same level of involvement, and sustainable engagement should focus resources where they can create the greatest value.

Overall, sustainable stakeholder engagement can have a positive impact on Zara's business performance by improving customer loyalty, innovation, employee commitment, risk management, supplier relationships and corporate reputation. Its value is strongest when engagement is genuine, continuous and connected to business decision-making. However, it should not be viewed as automatically beneficial. Poorly managed engagement can increase costs, create delays and produce conflicting demands. For ConnectPlus, Zara should therefore adopt a balanced approach that combines stakeholder participation with clear business objectives, ethical data management and measurable performance indicators. This would allow stakeholder engagement to contribute to both the successful launch of ConnectPlus and Zara's longer-term business performance.

Recommendations & Conclusion

Based on the stakeholder analysis, Zara should adopt a structured and continuous approach to stakeholder engagement throughout the ConnectPlus project. First, the Project Manager should maintain an updated stakeholder register and Power–Interest Matrix to ensure that stakeholder priorities are reviewed as the project develops. High-power and high-interest

stakeholders, including senior management, IT teams, key suppliers and regulators, should be managed closely through regular meetings and progress reporting.

Second, Zara should involve customers and employees early through surveys, focus groups, pilot testing and training. Their feedback should be used to improve the platform before the international launch. This can increase user acceptance and reduce resistance to change. Third, Zara should establish clear responsibilities using a RACI Matrix so that stakeholders understand who is responsible, accountable, consulted and informed for each major project activity.

Finally, Zara should place strong emphasis on ethical data management. Clear information about AI recommendations and customer data usage should be provided, with appropriate privacy and security controls established across each market. Stakeholder engagement should also be adapted to local cultural and regulatory requirements rather than using an identical approach in every country.

The successful implementation of ConnectPlus will depend on more than delivering the technology within six months. Effective stakeholder management will be essential to achieving customer adoption, employee support, regulatory compliance and long-term business value. The analysis demonstrates that Zara has a wide range of stakeholders with different levels of power, interest and expectations. Using stakeholder mapping, structured communication, RACI responsibilities and the 4C's approach can help Zara manage these relationships effectively.

Sustainable engagement can provide significant benefits, including stronger customer loyalty, improved decision-making, reduced project risks and increased trust. However, stakeholder conflicts, cultural differences, privacy concerns and the cost of engagement must also be managed. Overall, Zara should view stakeholder engagement as a continuous strategic activity rather than a one-time project task. A transparent, inclusive and internationally adaptable approach will give ConnectPlus a stronger opportunity to achieve successful adoption and contribute to Zara's long-term digital and business performance.

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