

Stakeholder Engagement Strategy for the Launch of ConnectPlus at Marks & Spencer (M&S)

Module: Understanding and Engaging Stakeholders

Company: Marks & Spencer plc (M&S)

Project: Launch of ConnectPlus Digital Loyalty Platform

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1. Executive Summary

Stakeholder engagement is an important part of successful project management because projects depend on the support of people and organisations that influence their success. Effective communication, collaboration and stakeholder participation help reduce project risks, improve decision-making and increase the possibility of achieving project objectives.

This report develops a stakeholder engagement strategy for the launch of ConnectPlus, a new AI-powered digital loyalty platform proposed for Marks & Spencer (M&S). The platform aims to improve customer experience by providing personalised offers, digital rewards and recommendations based on customer shopping behaviour. The project also supports M&S's digital transformation strategy and strengthens customer relationships in an increasingly competitive retail market.

The report first introduces the company and explains the importance of stakeholder management in project success. It then develops SMART objectives that guide the implementation of ConnectPlus. Internal and external stakeholders are identified and analysed using recognised stakeholder management models, including the Interest–Influence Matrix and the Salience Model.

The report also evaluates the roles, responsibilities, benefits and challenges of each stakeholder group. A stakeholder engagement strategy is developed using a Communication Plan, a RACI Matrix and the 4Cs Model (Communication, Consultation, Collaboration and Commitment). Possible conflicts between stakeholders are discussed together with practical methods for resolving them.

Finally, the report evaluates how sustainable stakeholder engagement contributes to customer satisfaction, employee commitment, innovation, business reputation and long-term business performance. Recommendations are provided to help M&S successfully implement ConnectPlus while maintaining strong relationships with all key stakeholders.

Overall, the report concludes that effective stakeholder engagement is one of the most important factors for delivering the ConnectPlus project successfully and supporting the future growth of Marks & Spencer.

2. Introduction

Stakeholder engagement is recognised as one of the most important factors in successful project management. Every project involves individuals and organisations that can influence project decisions, provide resources, or be affected by the project outcomes. When stakeholders are actively involved, projects are more likely to achieve their objectives, reduce risks, and create long-term value. For this reason, organisations should identify stakeholders early, understand their expectations, and maintain effective communication throughout the project lifecycle.

Marks & Spencer (M&S) is one of the largest and most recognised retailers in the United Kingdom. Founded in 1884, the company operates hundreds of stores across the UK and several international markets. M&S sells clothing, home products, beauty products, and food through both physical stores and online platforms. Over the last few years, the company has invested heavily in digital technologies to improve customer experience and remain competitive in the retail industry. These investments support the company's long-term business strategy, which focuses on innovation, sustainability, and customer satisfaction.

As customer expectations continue to change, retailers are increasingly using digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), data analytics, and mobile applications to improve customer engagement. Customers now expect personalised services, faster communication, and digital shopping experiences that meet their individual needs. To respond to these changes, this report proposes the launch of ConnectPlus, an AI-powered digital loyalty platform for Marks & Spencer.

ConnectPlus is designed to improve customer loyalty by offering personalised product recommendations, digital rewards, exclusive promotions, and real-time communication through a mobile application. By analysing customer purchasing behaviour, the platform can recommend products that match customer preferences while helping M&S better understand consumer needs. The project also supports the company's digital transformation strategy by improving customer relationships and increasing business efficiency.

Although ConnectPlus offers many potential benefits, the project's success depends on effective stakeholder engagement. Internal stakeholders such as senior management, project managers, IT specialists, marketing teams, customer service staff, and store employees all play important roles during planning, development, testing, and implementation. External stakeholders, including customers, technology partners, suppliers, investors, regulators, and local communities, also influence the project's success. Each stakeholder group has different expectations, interests, and levels of influence, making stakeholder management an essential part of project planning.

Different stakeholder management tools can help organisations understand stakeholder needs and develop suitable engagement strategies. Models such as the Interest–Influence Matrix and the Salience Model allow project managers to prioritise stakeholders and allocate communication resources more effectively. Similarly, stakeholder engagement plans, communication plans, and responsibility matrices support collaboration and reduce misunderstandings throughout the project.

However, no single stakeholder management model is sufficient on its own. For example, the Interest–Influence Matrix is useful for identifying stakeholders who require close management, but it does not fully consider how stakeholder priorities may change during different stages of the project. The Salience Model provides additional value by considering legitimacy and urgency alongside stakeholder power. Using several stakeholder management tools together allows project managers to make better decisions and respond more effectively to changing stakeholder needs.

This report aims to develop a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy for the implementation of ConnectPlus at Marks & Spencer. It identifies key stakeholders, analyses their roles and responsibilities, evaluates stakeholder engagement approaches, and examines how sustainable stakeholder relationships contribute to long-term business performance. The report concludes with practical recommendations that support the successful delivery of the project while strengthening stakeholder relationships across the organisation.

Overview of the ConnectPlus Project

Project Element	Description
Company	Marks & Spencer (M&S)
Project	ConnectPlus Digital Loyalty Platform
Main Technology	Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Main Purpose	Improve customer loyalty and personalised shopping
Project Goal	Increase customer engagement and support digital transformation
Key Success Factor	Effective stakeholder engagement

3. SMART Objectives

To ensure the successful implementation of ConnectPlus, Marks & Spencer (M&S) should establish clear project objectives. SMART objectives are widely used in project management because they help organisations create goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. These objectives provide clear direction, support effective decision-making, and make it easier to measure project performance.

For the ConnectPlus project, the following SMART objectives are proposed.

Objective 1: Increase Customer Registration

Specific: Increase the number of customers registered on the ConnectPlus platform.

Measurable: Achieve 500,000 registered users.

Achievable: Promote the platform through email campaigns, the M&S mobile app, social media, and in-store marketing.

Relevant: A larger customer base will improve customer engagement and provide more accurate data for personalised services.

Time-bound: Achieve the target within 12 months after the platform launch.

Objective 2: Improve Customer Retention

Specific: Increase customer loyalty by encouraging repeat purchases through personalised rewards and offers.

Measurable: Increase the customer retention rate by 15%.

Achievable: Use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to provide personalised recommendations based on customer purchasing behaviour.

Relevant: Higher customer retention supports long-term business growth and increases customer lifetime value.

Time-bound: Achieve this objective within one year of implementation.

Objective 3: Improve Customer Satisfaction

Specific: Improve customer satisfaction with the digital shopping experience.

Measurable: Achieve an average customer satisfaction score of 90% from surveys completed through the ConnectPlus application.

Achievable: Improve platform usability, provide faster customer support, and regularly update platform features based on customer feedback.

Relevant: Customer satisfaction is directly linked to customer loyalty and business performance.

Time-bound: Measure customer satisfaction every quarter and reach the target within 12 months.

Objective 4: Increase Employee Readiness

Specific: Prepare employees to support customers using the new ConnectPlus platform.

Measurable: Train 100% of customer service staff and store employees before the official launch.

Achievable: Deliver online training sessions, practical workshops, and user guides.

Relevant: Well-trained employees can improve customer experience and reduce operational problems.

Time-bound: Complete all training activities one month before the platform launch.

Objective 5: Ensure Data Security and Legal Compliance

Specific: Protect customer information and ensure that ConnectPlus complies with all UK data protection regulations.

Measurable: Achieve zero serious data protection breaches during the first year of operation.

Achievable: Implement strong cybersecurity measures, regular security testing, and employee awareness training.

Relevant: Protecting customer data helps maintain trust and supports the company's reputation.

Time-bound: Monitor compliance continuously throughout the project and during the first year after launch.

SMART Objectives for ConnectPlus

SMART Objective	Success Measure	Target	Deadline
Increase customer registration	Number of registered users	500,000 users	12 months
Improve customer retention	Retention rate	+15%	12 months
Improve customer satisfaction	Customer survey score	90% satisfaction	12 months
Train employees	Percentage of trained staff	100%	One month before launch
Ensure legal compliance	Data breaches	Zero serious breaches	Continuous monitoring

Critical Evaluation

The SMART framework provides a clear structure for planning and monitoring the ConnectPlus project. Each objective has a defined target, making it easier for project managers to measure progress and identify areas that require improvement. The objectives also align with the strategic goals of Marks & Spencer, including digital transformation, customer satisfaction, and long-term business growth.

However, SMART objectives also have some limitations. Business environments change quickly, especially in the retail sector, where customer expectations and technology continue to evolve. As a result, some objectives may need to be reviewed and updated during the project lifecycle. For example, customer adoption may be influenced by market conditions or competitor activities, making some targets more difficult to achieve than originally planned.

For this reason, project managers should regularly review project performance and adjust objectives when necessary while ensuring they remain aligned with the overall business strategy.

4. Identification of Internal and External Stakeholders

Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organisations that can influence a project or are affected by its outcomes. Identifying stakeholders at the beginning of a project helps project managers understand different expectations, reduce risks, and improve communication. For the ConnectPlus project, Marks & Spencer (M&S) must work with both internal and external stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of the new AI-powered loyalty platform.

Effective stakeholder identification allows project managers to allocate resources efficiently, prioritise communication activities, and build positive relationships throughout the project lifecycle. Since different stakeholders have different levels of influence and interest, it is important to analyse each group before developing the stakeholder engagement strategy.

Internal Stakeholders

Internal stakeholders are people who work within the organisation and directly contribute to the project.

Senior Management

Senior management provides strategic direction, approves project budgets, and ensures that ConnectPlus supports the long-term business strategy of M&S. Their commitment is essential because they make major project decisions and allocate organisational resources.

Project Manager

The Project Manager is responsible for planning, coordinating, monitoring, and controlling the entire ConnectPlus project. This role also ensures that communication between stakeholders remains effective throughout all project phases.

IT and Digital Development Team

The IT team designs, develops, tests, and maintains the ConnectPlus platform. They are responsible for Artificial Intelligence integration, cybersecurity, mobile application performance, and system maintenance.

Marketing Department

The marketing team develops promotional campaigns, introduces ConnectPlus to customers, and encourages customer registration. They also analyse customer behaviour and evaluate marketing performance.

Customer Service Team

Customer service employees answer customer questions, solve technical problems, and collect customer feedback after the platform is launched.

Store Employees

Store employees introduce customers to ConnectPlus during everyday shopping and encourage customers to register for the loyalty programme. They also explain platform benefits and provide basic assistance.

External stakeholders are individuals or organisations outside M&S that influence project success.

Customers

Customers are the most important external stakeholders because ConnectPlus has been developed specifically to improve their shopping experience. Their satisfaction and continued use of the platform determine whether the project achieves its objectives.

Technology Partners

Technology companies provide cloud services, Artificial Intelligence solutions, cybersecurity software, and technical support for the platform. Their expertise is necessary for delivering a secure and reliable digital system.

Suppliers

Suppliers support inventory management by responding to customer purchasing trends generated through ConnectPlus. Improved demand forecasting can help reduce stock shortages and product waste.

Investors and Shareholders

Investors expect ConnectPlus to improve customer loyalty, increase sales, and strengthen the financial performance of Marks & Spencer. They monitor project performance and business growth.

Government and Regulatory Bodies

Government organisations and regulators ensure that ConnectPlus complies with UK legislation, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and consumer protection requirements.

Local Communities

Local communities benefit when M&S continues investing in technology, employment opportunities, and sustainable business practices. Positive community relationships also strengthen the company's reputation.

Summary of Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Type	Main Interest	Level of Influence
Senior Management	Internal	Business growth and project success	High
Project Manager	Internal	Project delivery	High
IT Team	Internal	Platform development	High
Marketing Team	Internal	Customer engagement	Medium
Customer Service	Internal	Customer satisfaction	Medium
Store Employees	Internal	Customer support	Medium

Stakeholder	Type	Main Interest	Level of Influence
Customers	External	Better shopping experience	High
Technology Partners	External	Successful system delivery	High
Suppliers	External	Efficient supply chain	Medium
Investors	External	Financial performance	High
Regulators	External	Legal compliance	High
Local Communities	External	Corporate responsibility	Low

Interest - Influence Matrix

The Interest–Influence Matrix is one of the most widely used stakeholder management tools. It helps project managers decide how much attention each stakeholder group requires by analysing two factors:

- the stakeholder's **level of interest** in the project;
- the stakeholder's **ability to influence** project decisions.

For ConnectPlus, the stakeholder groups can be classified as follows.

Category	Stakeholders	Engagement Strategy
High Influence / High Interest	Senior Management, Project Manager, Customers, Technology Partners	Manage closely
High Influence / Low Interest	Investors, Government Regulators	Keep satisfied
Low Influence / High Interest	Store Employees, Customer Service Team	Keep informed
Low Influence / Low Interest	Local Communities	Monitor occasionally

The matrix allows project managers to prioritise communication resources and maintain stronger relationships with the stakeholders who have the greatest impact on project success.

Salience Model

The Salience Model provides a more detailed method of stakeholder analysis by considering three characteristics:

- **Power**
- **Legitimacy**
- **Urgency**

Unlike the Interest–Influence Matrix, this model recognises that stakeholder importance may change during the project.

Stakeholder	Power	Legitimacy	Urgency	Overall Priority
Senior Management	High	High	High	Very High
Customers	Medium	High	High	High
Project Manager	High	High	High	Very High
Technology Partners	High	High	Medium	High
Investors	High	High	Medium	High
Regulators	High	High	High	Very High
Employees	Medium	High	Medium	Medium

The Salience Model allows project managers to recognise stakeholders who may become more important if their needs become urgent during the project lifecycle.

Critical Evaluation of Stakeholder Identification Models

Both the Interest–Influence Matrix and the Salience Model are valuable tools for stakeholder management, but they have different strengths.

The Interest Influence Matrix is simple, easy to understand, and useful during the early planning stages of a project. It helps project managers identify which stakeholders require more communication and where project resources should be focused. However, the model assumes that stakeholder influence remains relatively stable and does not consider changing stakeholder priorities over time.

The Salience Model provides a more flexible approach because it considers not only stakeholder power but also legitimacy and urgency. This allows project managers to recognise changes in stakeholder importance as the project develops. For example, customers may become more influential after the launch of ConnectPlus if they experience technical problems or raise concerns about data privacy.

Although the Salience Model provides a deeper analysis, it is also more complex and requires regular stakeholder reviews. For this reason, using both models together provides a more complete understanding of stakeholder priorities. The Interest Influence Matrix can support initial stakeholder planning, while the Salience Model helps project managers adapt stakeholder engagement strategies throughout the project lifecycle.

Using both approaches together enables Marks & Spencer to improve communication, reduce stakeholder conflicts, and increase the likelihood of successfully delivering the ConnectPlus project.

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

The success of the ConnectPlus project depends on the active participation of different stakeholder groups. Each stakeholder has specific responsibilities and contributes to different stages of the project. At the same time, every stakeholder receives benefits from the project but may also face challenges during implementation. Understanding these factors helps the project manager develop an effective stakeholder engagement strategy and reduce potential risks.

Senior Management

Senior management is responsible for providing strategic leadership throughout the ConnectPlus project. They approve the project budget, define business objectives, allocate resources, and monitor overall project performance. Their decisions ensure that the project supports the long-term digital transformation strategy of Marks & Spencer.

The main benefit for senior management is improved business performance. If ConnectPlus is successful, the company can increase customer loyalty, improve sales, strengthen its competitive position, and achieve higher profitability.

However, senior management also faces several challenges. The project requires a significant financial investment, and there is always a risk that customer adoption may be lower than expected. In addition, managers must balance investment in digital innovation with other business priorities.

Project Manager

The Project Manager is responsible for coordinating all project activities from planning to final implementation. This includes developing project schedules, managing risks, organising meetings, monitoring project progress, and maintaining communication between all stakeholder groups.

One of the main benefits of this role is the successful delivery of the project within the agreed budget, schedule, and quality standards. A well-managed project also improves organisational performance and strengthens professional credibility.

Despite these benefits, the Project Manager must deal with many challenges. Different stakeholders often have conflicting priorities, making decision-making more complex. Unexpected technical problems, resource limitations, and changing customer requirements may also affect project delivery.

For these reasons, strong communication, leadership, and problem-solving skills are essential throughout the project.

IT and Digital Development Team

The IT team has one of the most important responsibilities in the ConnectPlus project. They design, develop, test, and maintain the platform while ensuring that Artificial Intelligence features operate correctly. They are also responsible for cybersecurity, software updates, and system reliability.

The project allows the IT team to work with advanced digital technologies and improve their professional knowledge. Successfully delivering ConnectPlus also increases the company's digital capabilities.

The main challenge is ensuring that the platform remains secure, reliable, and easy to use. Technical failures, cybersecurity threats, and software integration problems could delay the project or reduce customer confidence.

Marketing Department

The marketing department introduces ConnectPlus to customers through advertising campaigns, social media, email marketing, and promotional activities inside stores. Marketing employees also analyse customer behaviour and monitor campaign performance.

Successful marketing increases customer awareness, encourages platform registration, and improves customer engagement. This contributes directly to higher customer loyalty and increased sales.

However, marketing teams face challenges in reaching different customer groups. Some customers may not be interested in digital technologies, while others may have concerns about sharing personal information. Marketing messages must therefore be clear, honest, and easy to understand.

Customer Service Team

Customer service employees play an important role after the platform is launched. They answer customer questions, solve technical problems, collect customer feedback, and report common issues to the project team.

Their work helps improve customer satisfaction and supports continuous improvement of ConnectPlus.

One challenge is dealing with customer complaints during the early stages of implementation. Employees require appropriate training to solve problems quickly and maintain customer confidence.

Store Employees

Store employees are often the first people customers speak to when learning about ConnectPlus. They explain the benefits of the platform, encourage customers to register, and provide basic assistance when required.

Their direct contact with customers allows M&S to promote the platform more effectively and increase customer participation.

The main challenge is ensuring that all employees receive sufficient training before the platform is launched. Without adequate knowledge, employees may provide inconsistent information or be unable to answer customer questions.

Customers

Customers are the most important external stakeholders because they are the main users of ConnectPlus.

They benefit from personalised recommendations, exclusive discounts, digital rewards, and a more convenient shopping experience. The AI-powered platform also provides offers that match individual purchasing preferences.

Despite these benefits, some customers may worry about data privacy and how their personal information is collected and used. Others may find it difficult to use new digital technologies, especially customers with limited digital skills.

For this reason, M&S should provide simple instructions, clear privacy information, and accessible customer support.

Technology Partners

Technology partners provide cloud infrastructure, Artificial Intelligence systems, cybersecurity services, and software maintenance.

Successful collaboration allows both organisations to improve innovation and strengthen long-term business relationships.

However, technology partners must ensure that software updates, security systems, and technical support remain available throughout the project. Delays or technical failures could affect customer experience and project performance.

Suppliers

Suppliers support the ConnectPlus project indirectly by improving inventory planning using customer purchasing information generated by the platform.

More accurate demand forecasts help suppliers reduce waste, improve product availability, and increase operational efficiency.

However, suppliers may need to adjust their production schedules and information systems to respond more quickly to changing customer demand.

Investors and Shareholders

Investors expect ConnectPlus to improve business performance by increasing customer loyalty and supporting long-term revenue growth.

If the project is successful, investors benefit from improved financial performance and greater confidence in the company's future strategy.

Their main concern is project risk. Delays, budget overruns, or low customer adoption could reduce expected financial returns.

Government Regulators

Government regulators ensure that ConnectPlus complies with legal requirements, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), consumer protection legislation, and cybersecurity standards.

Compliance protects customer information and helps maintain public confidence in the company.

Failure to meet legal requirements could result in financial penalties, legal action, and damage to the reputation of Marks & Spencer.

Summary of Stakeholder Roles

Stakeholder	Main Responsibility	Main Benefit	Main Challenge
Senior Management	Strategic leadership	Business growth	Financial risk
Project Manager	Project coordination	Successful delivery	Managing different stakeholder expectations
IT Team	Platform development	Digital innovation	Cybersecurity risks
Marketing	Customer promotion	Higher customer engagement	Customer privacy concerns
Customer Service	Customer support	Better customer satisfaction	Handling complaints
Store Employees	Customer guidance	Increased registrations	Staff training
Customers	Platform users	Personalised shopping	Data privacy concerns
Technology Partners	Technical support	Long-term partnership	System reliability
Suppliers	Inventory support	Better demand forecasting	Supply chain adjustments
Investors	Financial support	Higher business value	Investment risk
Regulators	Legal compliance	Consumer protection	Ensuring continuous compliance

Critical Evaluation

The analysis demonstrates that every stakeholder contributes differently to the success of ConnectPlus. Internal stakeholders are mainly responsible for planning, implementation, communication, and operational delivery, while external stakeholders influence customer acceptance, legal compliance, technological support, and financial performance.

Although each stakeholder group has different priorities, they all share a common objective: delivering a successful digital platform that creates value for both customers and Marks & Spencer. However, balancing these different interests is one of the biggest challenges for the Project Manager.

For example, senior management may prioritise cost control, while the IT team focuses on technical quality and customers expect an easy-to-use platform with strong data security. These priorities may sometimes conflict. Therefore, continuous communication, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative decision-making are essential throughout the project lifecycle.

Overall, understanding stakeholder roles, responsibilities, benefits, and challenges allows the project team to reduce risks, improve cooperation, and increase the likelihood of successfully delivering ConnectPlus.

6. Stakeholder Engagement Process

Stakeholder engagement is a continuous process that helps organisations build positive relationships with people who influence or are affected by a project. Effective stakeholder engagement improves communication, reduces project risks, increases stakeholder trust, and supports better decision-making. For the ConnectPlus project, Marks & Spencer (M&S) should use a structured engagement process to ensure that all stakeholders remain informed and involved throughout the project lifecycle.

The stakeholder engagement process should begin during project planning and continue after the platform has been launched. Regular communication and feedback allow the project team to respond to stakeholder concerns quickly and improve project performance.

Stakeholder Engagement Process

The ConnectPlus project will follow five main stages of stakeholder engagement.

Stage 1: Identify Stakeholders

The first stage is identifying all individuals and organisations that may influence or be affected by ConnectPlus. This includes both internal and external stakeholders.

Examples include:

- Senior Management
- Project Manager
- IT Team
- Marketing Department
- Customer Service Team
- Store Employees
- Customers
- Technology Partners
- Suppliers
- Investors
- Government Regulators

Early stakeholder identification helps reduce future communication problems and ensures that no important stakeholder is overlooked.

Stage 2: Analyse Stakeholders

After stakeholders have been identified, the project manager should analyse their:

- level of influence;
- level of interest;
- expectations;
- possible risks;
- communication needs.

Tools such as the Interest–Influence Matrix and Salience Model help determine which stakeholders require closer management.

For example, senior management and technology partners have high influence over project decisions, while customers have high interest because they will use the platform every day.

Stage 3: Develop the Stakeholder Engagement Plan

The next stage is creating a stakeholder engagement plan.

This plan explains:

- how each stakeholder will receive information;
- how often communication will occur;
- who is responsible for communication;
- what information will be shared;
- how stakeholder feedback will be collected.

A well-developed engagement plan improves transparency and reduces misunderstandings.

Stage 4: Engage Stakeholders

Once planning has been completed, active stakeholder engagement begins.

Communication activities include:

- project meetings;
- workshops;
- email updates;
- training sessions;
- online surveys;
- customer feedback forms;
- progress reports.

Engagement should be continuous rather than occurring only at major project milestones.

Stage 5: Monitor and Review

Stakeholder engagement should be monitored throughout the project.

The project manager should regularly evaluate:

- stakeholder satisfaction;
- communication effectiveness;
- stakeholder participation;
- project risks;
- new stakeholder expectations.

Feedback collected during this stage can be used to improve future communication and strengthen stakeholder relationships.

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

The stakeholder engagement plan identifies the most suitable communication approach for each stakeholder group.

Stakeholder	Engagement Method	Frequency	Main Objective
Senior Management	Executive meetings	Monthly	Strategic decisions
Project Manager	Daily project meetings	Daily	Coordinate activities
IT Team	Technical meetings	Weekly	System development
Marketing Team	Campaign meetings	Every two weeks	Marketing coordination
Customer Service	Team briefings	Weekly	Customer support
Store Employees	Training sessions	Monthly	Platform knowledge
Customers	Surveys, App notifications	Monthly	Collect feedback
Technology Partners	Progress meetings	Monthly	Technical coordination
Suppliers	Supply chain meetings	Quarterly	Inventory planning
Investors	Performance reports	Quarterly	Financial performance
Regulators	Compliance reports	When required	Legal compliance

7. Communication Plan and RACI Matrix

Communication Plan

Good communication helps build trust between stakeholders and reduces project uncertainty.

The communication plan explains:

- what information will be shared;
- who receives it;
- how it will be communicated;
- how often communication occurs.

Information	Audience	Communication Method	Frequency
Project Progress	Senior Management	Monthly report	Monthly
Technical Updates	IT Team	Team meetings	Weekly
Marketing Progress	Marketing Department	Meetings	Every two weeks
Customer Feedback	Project Team	Survey reports	Monthly
Employee Training	Store Staff	Workshops	Before launch
Legal Compliance	Regulators	Compliance reports	When required
Business Performance	Investors	Financial reports	Quarterly

Regular communication increases transparency and encourages stakeholder participation throughout the project.

RACI Matrix

A RACI Matrix clearly defines stakeholder responsibilities.

R = Responsible

A = Accountable

C = Consulted

I = Informed

Activity	Senior Management	Project Manager	IT Team	Marketing	Customer Service	Store Staff
Project Planning	A	R	C	I	I	I
Platform Development	I	A	R	I	I	I
AI Testing	I	A	R	I	C	I
Marketing Campaign	I	C	I	R	C	I
Employee Training	I	A	C	C	R	R
Platform Launch	A	R	R	R	R	R

The RACI Matrix reduces confusion because every stakeholder understands their responsibilities.

The 4Cs Model

The 4Cs Model supports effective stakeholder engagement through four important principles.

Communication

Project information should be shared clearly and regularly.

For ConnectPlus, communication includes project meetings, newsletters, email updates and digital dashboards.

Consultation

Stakeholders should have opportunities to express their opinions before important decisions are made.

Customers can complete surveys.

Employees can attend workshops.

Technology partners can provide technical recommendations.

Collaboration

Different departments should work together throughout the project.

Marketing, IT, Customer Service and Store Operations should regularly share information to improve project performance.

Collaboration also encourages innovation and reduces duplication of work.

Commitment

Successful projects require commitment from all stakeholders.

Senior management should demonstrate leadership.

Employees should support customers.

Technology partners should provide reliable technical support.

Customers should actively participate by using ConnectPlus and providing feedback.

8. Conflict Management and Sustainable Stakeholder Engagement

Conflict Management

Projects involving many stakeholders often experience disagreements.

For ConnectPlus, several conflicts may occur.

Conflict 1 – Marketing vs IT Team

Marketing may request additional platform features shortly before launch.

However, the IT team may require more time to complete software testing.

This disagreement can delay the project.

Solution

The Project Manager should organise joint meetings, prioritise essential features and agree on realistic deadlines.

Conflict 2 – Customers vs Management

Customers may have concerns about personal data collection.

Management wants to use customer information to improve AI recommendations.

Solution

M&S should clearly explain its privacy policy, comply with UK GDPR and allow customers to control their data preferences.

Conflict 3 – Senior Management vs Project Team

Senior management may expect faster project delivery, while the project team may require additional time to ensure software quality.

Solution

Project progress reports supported by project performance data can help managers make informed decisions and balance cost, quality and schedule.

Critical Evaluation

The stakeholder engagement process provides a structured approach for managing stakeholder relationships throughout the ConnectPlus project. The Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Communication Plan, RACI Matrix and 4Cs Model work together to improve communication, increase collaboration and reduce project risks.

However, these tools also have limitations. Preparing engagement plans and maintaining regular communication require considerable time and organisational resources. In addition, stakeholder expectations may change as the project develops, requiring frequent updates to communication strategies.

The RACI Matrix clearly defines responsibilities but does not explain how conflicts should be resolved. Similarly, communication plans improve information sharing but cannot guarantee stakeholder support if trust has not been established.

For this reason, project managers should combine these tools with continuous stakeholder monitoring, regular feedback collection and flexible leadership. Using several stakeholder management techniques together allows M&S to respond more effectively to changing stakeholder needs and improve the likelihood of successfully delivering ConnectPlus.

Evaluate the Impact of Sustainable Stakeholder Engagement on Business Performance

Sustainable stakeholder engagement is essential for organisations that want to achieve long-term success. It is not only about communicating with stakeholders during a project but also about building strong relationships based on trust, transparency, collaboration, and continuous improvement. For Marks & Spencer (M&S), sustainable stakeholder engagement is particularly important because the success of ConnectPlus depends on the support of customers, employees, suppliers, technology partners, investors, and regulators.

A well-managed stakeholder engagement strategy helps organisations improve customer satisfaction, reduce project risks, encourage innovation, and strengthen business performance. When stakeholders feel involved in decision-making, they are more likely to support organisational objectives and contribute to project success.

Improving Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Customers are the main users of ConnectPlus, making them the most important stakeholder group in the project. The platform has been designed to provide personalised product recommendations, digital rewards, exclusive promotions, and a more convenient shopping experience.

However, these benefits can only be achieved if customers actively use the platform and trust the company with their personal information.

M&S should therefore maintain continuous communication with customers through:

- online surveys;
- mobile app notifications;
- customer feedback forms;
- social media;
- customer service channels.

Regular feedback allows the company to identify customer needs and improve the platform over time.

Higher customer satisfaction usually leads to stronger customer loyalty, repeat purchases, and positive recommendations to other customers. This contributes directly to increased sales and stronger business performance.

Employee Engagement and Productivity

Employees are another key stakeholder group because they interact directly with customers every day.

When employees understand the objectives of ConnectPlus and receive appropriate training, they become more confident when explaining the platform to customers.

Well-informed employees can:

- answer customer questions;
- solve simple technical problems;
- encourage customer registration;
- collect valuable customer feedback.

Employee engagement also improves motivation and job satisfaction. Staff members who feel involved in organisational decisions are generally more committed to achieving project objectives.

For this reason, M&S should continue providing regular training sessions and opportunities for employees to share ideas throughout the project lifecycle.

Better Collaboration with Technology Partners and Suppliers

Technology partners play an essential role in developing and maintaining ConnectPlus.

Long-term collaboration helps ensure:

- reliable software performance;
- strong cybersecurity;
- continuous platform improvement;
- faster technical support.

Similarly, suppliers benefit from improved customer demand information generated through the platform.

More accurate sales forecasts allow suppliers to improve inventory planning, reduce waste, and respond more effectively to changing customer demand.

These improvements increase operational efficiency across the entire supply chain.

Supporting Innovation

Sustainable stakeholder engagement also encourages innovation.

Customers regularly provide suggestions for improving the platform.

Employees identify operational problems.

Technology partners recommend new digital solutions.

Marketing teams analyse customer behaviour and identify changing market trends.

By listening to different stakeholder groups, M&S can continuously improve ConnectPlus and respond more quickly to changes in customer expectations.

Continuous innovation is particularly important because the retail industry is becoming increasingly competitive and technology develops rapidly.

Improving Business Reputation

A company that communicates openly with stakeholders usually develops a stronger public reputation.

Customers trust organisations that protect personal information and provide honest communication.

Employees prefer working for organisations that value their opinions and invest in staff development.

Investors are also more confident when companies demonstrate responsible project management and transparent decision-making.

For Marks & Spencer, maintaining strong stakeholder relationships strengthens its reputation as a responsible retailer that values both customers and employees.

A positive reputation also attracts new customers and business partners.

Supporting Legal and Ethical Responsibilities

ConnectPlus collects customer information to provide personalised recommendations.

This creates important legal and ethical responsibilities.

M&S must ensure that customer information is collected, stored, and processed according to UK data protection legislation.

Customers should understand:

- what information is collected;
- why it is collected;
- how it will be used;
- how their privacy is protected.

Maintaining transparency increases customer trust and reduces concerns about personal data.

Ethical stakeholder engagement also includes fair treatment of employees, responsible relationships with suppliers, and honest communication with investors.

Improving Financial Performance

One of the main objectives of ConnectPlus is improving business performance.

Sustainable stakeholder engagement contributes to this objective in several ways.

Satisfied customers make more repeat purchases.

Engaged employees provide better customer service.

Reliable suppliers reduce operational costs.

Technology partners improve innovation.

Investors continue supporting business growth.

Together, these improvements help increase sales, improve efficiency, reduce project risks, and strengthen the long-term financial performance of Marks & Spencer.

Critical Evaluation

Sustainable stakeholder engagement provides significant benefits for organisations, but it also requires continuous investment.

Maintaining regular communication with many stakeholder groups demands time, financial resources, and skilled project management. In addition, stakeholder expectations change over time. For example, customer priorities may change as new technologies become available, while government regulations regarding data protection may also change.

Another challenge is balancing the interests of different stakeholders. Customers expect high levels of privacy and personalised services, while senior management focuses on profitability and operational efficiency. Technology partners may prioritise innovation, whereas regulators focus mainly on legal compliance.

These different expectations sometimes create conflicts that require careful management.

Despite these challenges, the long-term benefits of sustainable stakeholder engagement are much greater than the costs. Organisations that actively involve stakeholders usually experience higher customer satisfaction, stronger innovation, lower project risk, and better financial performance.

Therefore, stakeholder engagement should be considered a continuous business strategy rather than a single project activity.

9. Recommendations

Based on the analysis presented in this report, several recommendations can improve the successful implementation of ConnectPlus at Marks & Spencer.

First, M&S should continue engaging stakeholders throughout the entire project lifecycle rather than only during the planning stage. Continuous communication allows the organisation to identify concerns early and respond more effectively to stakeholder needs.

Second, the company should increase customer involvement during platform testing. Pilot testing with selected customer groups before the official launch would allow technical problems to be identified and resolved before full implementation.

Third, M&S should continue investing in employee training. Employees who understand the platform are more confident when assisting customers and can improve the overall customer experience.

Fourth, technology partners should work closely with the IT department to maintain high cybersecurity standards and regularly update the platform. Protecting customer information should remain one of the highest priorities throughout the project.

Finally, the company should regularly measure stakeholder satisfaction through surveys, performance indicators, and review meetings. Continuous monitoring will help M&S improve ConnectPlus after launch and maintain strong stakeholder relationships in the future.

10. Conclusion

This report has developed a stakeholder engagement strategy for the implementation of ConnectPlus at Marks & Spencer. The report identified the main internal and external stakeholders involved in the project and evaluated their roles, responsibilities, benefits, and challenges.

Several stakeholder management tools were applied, including the Interest–Influence Matrix, Salience Model, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Communication Plan, RACI Matrix, and the 4Cs Model. These tools help project managers prioritise stakeholders, improve communication, and support effective decision-making throughout the project lifecycle.

The report also demonstrated that sustainable stakeholder engagement contributes significantly to customer satisfaction, employee commitment, innovation, organisational reputation, legal compliance, and long-term financial performance.

Although managing different stakeholder expectations can be challenging, effective communication, collaboration, and continuous stakeholder involvement help reduce project risks and improve project success.

Overall, ConnectPlus has the potential to strengthen Marks & Spencer's digital transformation strategy and improve customer loyalty in an increasingly competitive retail market. By maintaining strong stakeholder relationships before, during, and after implementation, M&S can maximise the long-term value of the project and support sustainable business growth.

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