

**UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF STAKEHOLDER
ENGAGEMENT IN SUCCESSFUL COMMENCEMENT AND
COMPLETION OF PROJECT**

Student Name: Sandra Cecilia Fuerez

Student ID: 2441385

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Executive Summary

The current report was based on the strategies of stakeholder engagement, which focused on the successful implementation of ConnectPlus in Marks and Spencer, which was an AI enabled customer loyalty as well as engagement platform. The report also identified both the external as well as internal stakeholders through the use of Salience Model and Interest-Influence Matrix along with examining their roles, benefits, challenges, and responsibilities. Additionally, in the report, the application of models like stakeholder engagement planning, 4C model and OWAN and SWAN approaches were applied, which were used for strengthening the collaboration. It also included the recommendations which were provided for strengthening the governance, continuous customer feedback and technology partnership.

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Introduction



Figure 1: Marks and Spencer

(Source: Marks and Spencer Group plc, 2026)

Marks and Spencer is one of the largest multinational retail companies and e-commerce organizations in the UK which is currently headquartered in London, Greater London, United Kingdom. The organization was founded in 1888 by Michael Marks and Thomas Spencer to become a global retailer with physical and digital stores in multiple International markets. Marks and Spencer has been operating over 1000 stores across the globe with 63,000 associates it has been employing in its operation (EBSCO, 2026, p. 1). The company has been generating revenue which is over £17.27 billion highlighting the significant market scale it is operating in.

The Marks and Spencer business focuses on premium private label retail model which is supported by the Global supply chain and advanced logistics infrastructure. It is to be understood that the rapid growth of digital commerce has allowed Marks and Spencer to make sure that substantial investment is present within the E-Commerce and Technology innovation. The online sales have also supplemented the organization's growth which are currently being supported by mobile application and data analytics capability. The company has followed Omnichannel strategy to enable the customers in transitioning from online to in-store shopping experience making it convenient.

Marks and Spencer has been focused on innovation to enhance the customer experience and offer them seamless convenience. For this purpose it is preparing to launch ConnectPlus which is a digitally enhanced customer loyalty and engagement platform. The following initiatives are in alignment to the objective of Marks and Spencer which includes leveraging Modern Technology like artificial intelligence, digital technology and customer data Analytics so that there is improvement in customer retention and improvement of brand loyalty. Considering the scale of

Marks and Spencer operation the digital capability and strategic priorities are very important for engaging the stakeholders in the Connectplus project.

SMART Objectives

Smart objective Framework would be used for the purpose of creating Precise and realistic objectives that can be achieved through appropriate measures:

- ❖ ConnectPlus will be increasing its customer retention in the UK Market by 15% which will be achieved in the next 6 months of the launch through AI driven recommendation and loyalty rewards.
- ❖ The organization would be following the objective of achieving 25% customer adoption rate within 3 months which will be achieved through Integrated Marketing campaigns and on boarding incentive.
- ❖ Improving data driven decision making would be done where 100% of the marketing and customer experience team have access to a real time customer insight dashboard within 4 months and evening effective and personalized campaign strategy.

Identifying the list of key internal and external stakeholders involved in the project

Stakeholder Type	Stakeholder Group	Main Role
Internal	Marketing & Customer Experience Team	Promote ConnectPlus and understand customers.
Internal	Product Development Team	Develop and improve the platform.
Internal	IT Systems & Data Analytics Team	Manage technology and customer data.
External	Customers	Use the platform and provide feedback.
External	ICO	Ensure data protection compliance.
External	Technology Vendors	Provide technology and technical support.

Interest/Influence matrix

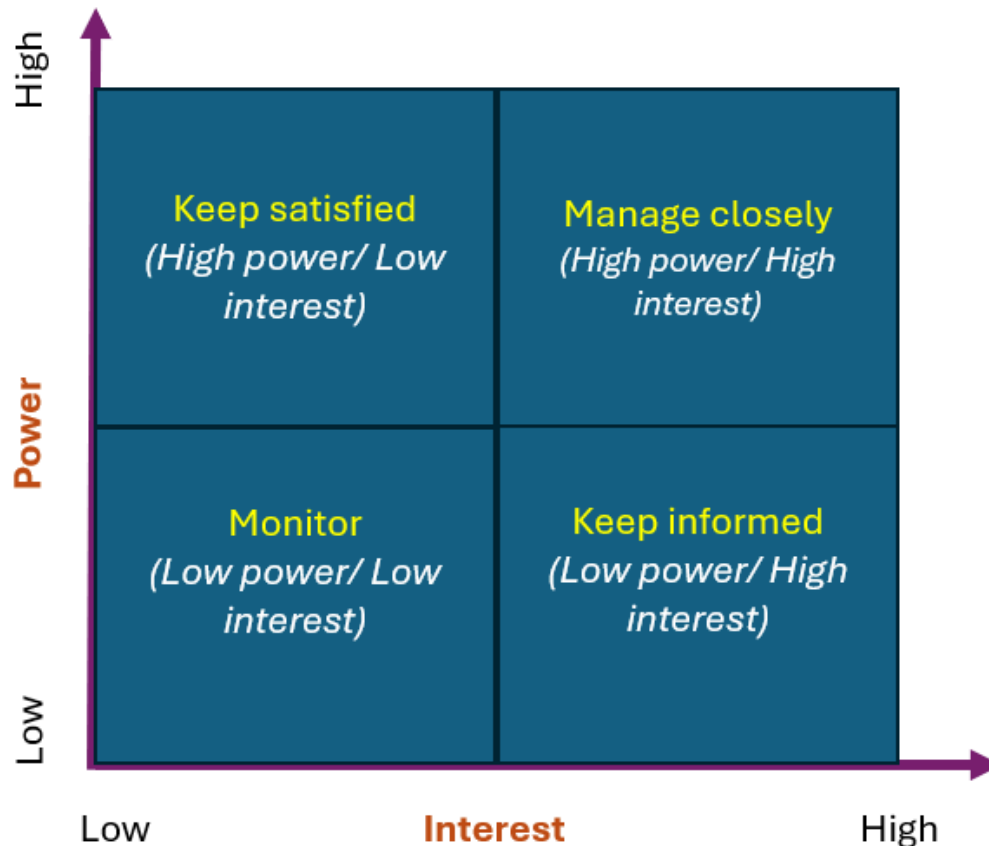


Figure 2: Interest influence matrix

(Source: RIGCERT Education, 2024)

The interest influence matrix is significant in terms of categorising stakeholders upon their interest within the project and the power they have to influence the project outcome (Reed et al. 2026, p. 3). In the case of Marks and Spencer it's retail operation in the UK will affect different stakeholders that fall into the following quadrants.

- Key Players: High Influence/High Interest

The IT system and Data Analytics team have high interest and influence within the digital infrastructure of Marks and Spencer considering cyber security and data driven decision making systems. They will be directly shaping the performance of the system and the way in which customer data is handled through innovation. The UK Information Commissioners Office has a

strong interest and influence over the data protection such as GDPR compliance aspect of the project. The interest is high due to the large scale of operations conducted by Marks and Spencer in the country which is why there is a requirement of effective customer data processing and protection.

- Keep Satisfied: High Influence/Low Interest

The external Technology vendors that would be supplying the cloud systems, setup the payment platforms and logistics tech such as Microsoft, Azure and SAP partners will have high influence as Marks and Spencer depends on their infrastructure. Although their interest is limited to the contractual performance rather than the strategic outcome which is why the company must maintain a strong relationship for the purpose of avoiding any dispute or disruption.

- Keep Informed: Low Influence/High Interest

The marketing and customer experience team is highly interested in the project because it is associated with customer engagement, brand perception and sales outcome although their influence is moderate compared to it and regulators because they rely on insights and systems being developed by the other team which is why they must be informed and consulted. On the other hand customers have high interest in the project as it will directly affect their experience of Marks and Spencer services in shopping also they have low influence on the outcome. Customer relationship management activity involves collecting and using data with the support of technology to develop long-term customer relationships (Ledro et al. 2022, p. 48). They must be informed for the purpose of entering transparency and to also be responsive in relation to feedback and reviews.

- Monitor: Low Influence/Low Interest

The product development team of the retail company like Marks and Spencer has relatively very low influence compared to the IT and marketing team because the project does not involve a new product the interest is moderate but in the case they are very less central to the strategic digital initiative.

Saliience Model

Stakeholder Saliency Model

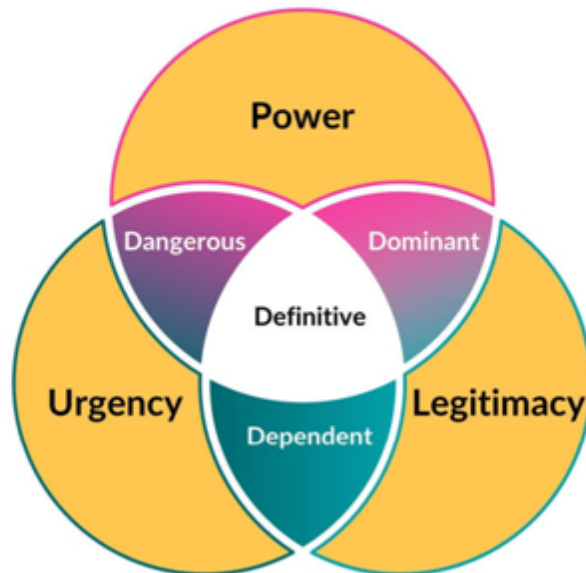


Figure 3: Saliience model of stakeholder

(Source: Harrin, 2026)

The Saliience model of stakeholder categorisation basically categorises stakeholders based upon 3 characteristics which includes power, legitimacy and agency. Saliience is the degree to which managers must pay attention to specific stakeholders (Shafique and Gabriel, 2022, p. 2). Under the following model stakeholders are classified as definitive, latent or expectant based on the characteristics they possess.

- **Definitive Stakeholders:** UK information commissioners office which is an external stakeholder has all the characteristics of a definitive stakeholder which includes the power of imposing fines in case of breach, the legitimacy of being an official regulatory authority and the urgency of making immediate action against any directions made by the body. In regards to the IT system and Data Analytics teams they have the power of controlling the critical systems and have the legitimacy to operate core operational function as well as there is high urgency to make sure immediate response is given to them for the purpose of maintaining operational continuity and innovation.

- **Expectant Stakeholders:** The marketing and customer experience team which is an internal stakeholder has moderate influence determining customer facing strategies they are an internal department giving them legitimacy while the urgency of response may differ. The customers are a dependent stakeholder that are core to the business of Marks and Spencer and there is high urgency of meeting their service requirements but lack direct individual power to address their need whereas indirect influence through collective voice can be significant. Technology vendors that have the power of providing essential Infrastructure and the legitimacy of carrying out contractual relationships.
- **Latent Stakeholders:** The degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholders claims in their decision-making process is called stakeholders salience (del Águila and del Sagrado, 2023, p. 1). In Connect Plus project the stakeholders that will require minimal effort but monitoring is the project development team which has delegator chemistry of carrying out internal function all those the lack power and urgency in this specific context.

Explanation of the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders as well as the benefits they bring and challenges these stakeholders may face

Marketing and Customer Experience Team

It is the responsibility of the marketing and customer experience team for managing the customer feedback development of customer communication strategies and also promoting ConnectPlus. Although this will ensure an experience of seamless omnichannel across the physical retail channels as well as online channels, this particular stakeholders group provides value through the encouraging adoption, strengthening the loyalty of customers and also personalizing campaigns. The insights of these stakeholder groups into the behaviours of customers may also support data driven decision making along with improving the promotional strategies, effectiveness (Derakhshan and Turner, 2022, p. 2). Analyzing critically it has also been found that the team might encounter challenges while addressing the data, privacy concerns and managing the customer expectations.

Product Development Team

It has been analysed that the major responsibility of the product development team is to continuously improve the platform of ConnectPlus and also making proper designs. This includes reward structures, features of customer, engagement and recommendation systems that are AI-based. The roles also include coordinating with IT teams and marketing teams, ensuring the alignment of the platform with the strategic objective of Marks and Spencer that includes brand differentiation and improving customer retention. Analysing the contribution of the team, it has been found that significant benefits are driven by innovation and also it helps in ensuring that the platform remains competitive even in the e-commerce retail environment (Costa and Rodrigues, 2024, p. 2520). However, the challenges may also be faced by the team that is associated with meeting the deadlines, ensuring the fairness of AI algorithms and balancing the cost of innovation.

Customers

Customers are considered to be the primary stakeholders that are external and also the main users of the platform ConnectPlus. The responsibility of the customer is limited, but still their feedback and participation are necessary for the adoption of a successful platform and constant improvement. In the context of benefits. It may be stated that the customer provides advantages through the help of repeating purchases, loyalty and valuable data behavioural. A positive experience of any customers can also enhance the market positions of Marks and Spencer significantly. The major challenge includes concerns associated with transparency for maintaining AI driven recommendation. Miss use of personal information and data privacy.

UK Information Commissioner's office (ICO) and Technology Vendor

The main responsibility of ICO includes ensuring that Marks and Spencer is complying with the requirements of GDPR and regulating the practices of data protection. It is evident to understand that legal risks are reduced by strengthening the compliance along with increase in the stakeholders trust. However, the implementation cost may increase through the help of regulatory processes and it also requires constant monitoring. Specialised cloud capabilities and AI is provided by the technology vendor, which has the capacity of accelerating the deployment

along with reducing the time of development (Shaban and Zeebaree, 2025, p. 3). In addition, risk may also be created with the total dependency on the external vendors, which may be associated with data security and service reliability

IT Systems and Data Analytics Team

The team of data analytics and IT systems are responsible for integrating the existing infrastructure of Marks and Spencer with ConnectPlus platform through the help of managing cloud systems and maintaining cyber security. The advanced analytics is capable of helping Marks and Spencer for identifying the trends of processing and improving the satisfaction of customers. However, the challenges might include threats associated with cyber security, ensuring compliance with the regulations of data protection and complexities in system integration.

Critical explanation of the process

Critical explanation of the process undertaken as the project manager to engage key stakeholders

4C's model

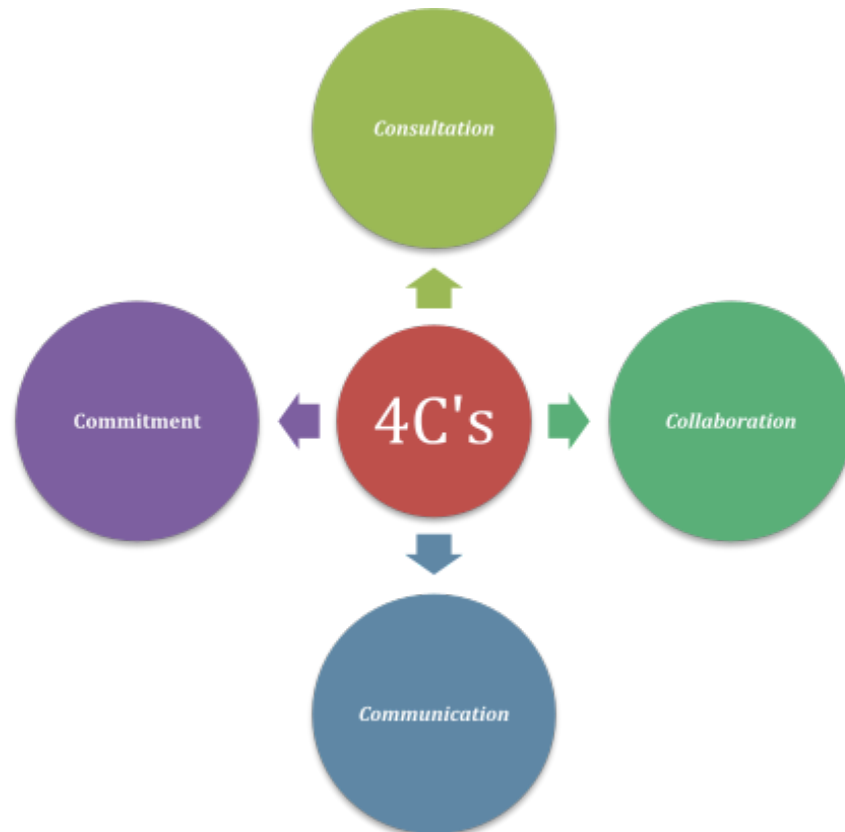


Figure 4: 4C model of stakeholder

(Source: Self Generated)

Implementation of ConnectPlus Platform on Marks and Spencer successfully mainly depends on the process of stakeholder engagement which promotes collaboration among the external and internal cycles throughout the life-cycle of the project. As a manager of the project, the **4C model**, which comprises **commitment**, **collaboration**, **communication**, and **consultation**, provides a proper framework for engaging the internal and external stakeholders (Prajapati, 2025, p. 3). The initial component of the model is **communication** which ensures that stakeholders need to receive timely, consistent and accurate information related to the project

implementation milestones, objectives, potential risk, and benefits. Communicating regularly through the help of dashboards, email updates and project meetings enables the internal team to remain aligned with the development of the project. For instance, the external stakeholders like the ICO and customers' transparent communication regarding the privacy safeguards and practices of data collection helps in strengthening the trust and also encourages the acceptance of the platform ConnectPlus.

The second important component of the model includes ***consultation***, which mainly focuses on active involvement of stakeholders into the process of decision making before the finalisation of project decisions. Pilot testing employee workshops, discussions with the technology, vendor and customer service allows companies like Marks and Spencer for gathering feedback regarding operation feasibility and technical performance. Therefore, the consultation with the ICO also ensures that the GDPR obligations and privacy requirements are considered during the development of the system (Oluoha et al., p. 622). Such type of proactive approach reduces the implementation risk while also improving the project quality outcomes through the incorporation of diverse perspectives of stakeholders.

Collaboration is the third important component, which encourages the stakeholders to work in a collective order towards the common objectives of the project. It has been analysed that with the help of cross functional collaboration between marketing team, IT system, teams and product development team helps in ensuring that the customer expectations goals of the business and technical capabilities remains aligned.

The last component is ***commitment*** which mainly aims for securing long-term support of the stakeholder through the establishment of accountability and shared responsibility. In the context of internal teams, it may be stated that it is necessary to provide the objectives of clear performance that is linked to the rollout of ConnectPlus successfully. The executive leadership on the other hand also needs to reinforce the organisational commitment through the strategic guidance and allocation of resources. In a similar way the customers are also likely to remain engaged, especially when consistency is demonstrated by Marks and Spencer and their feedback is used for platform improvements.

Engagement plan

An engagement plan which is well structured is necessary for coordination of the activities of each and every stakeholders that are involved in the implementation of ConnectPlus. As the manager of the project, it is necessary to understand that engagement of stakeholder needs to begin with identification of the expectation of stakeholder determining appropriate strategies of engagement and assessing their interest and influence. For the development of the product team, the engagement needs to focus mainly on technical workshops, progress meetings, and sprint reviews that will help in ensuring proper timely delivery of the features of the platform (Dugbartey and Kehinde, 2025, p. 1245). On the other hand, constant engagement with the data analytics and IT system team is also important for monitoring the system, integration, AI performance and cyber security. Similarly, the team of marketing and customer experience needs to participate in campaign planning sessions along with the customer feedback reviews that will help in the alignment of promotion strategies with the expectations of customers.

Additionally, the regular consultation with the ICO should also ensure compliance with the GDPR along with evolving the requirements of data protection. From the analysis, it has also been developed that the engagement with the technology vendor needs to include technical support, discussions, service level, monitoring and performance review meetings. In these contacts, it may also be stated that such a plan of structured engagement helps in promoting collaboration along with minimising the risk of implementation which ensures that the expectations of stakeholders is aligned with the strategic objectives of Marks and Spencer throughout the project of ConnectPlus.

Evaluating methods to manage conflicts among stakeholders

SWANS and OWANS



Figure 5: SWANS and OWANS

(Source: Self Generated)

The use of Stakeholder Wants and Needs (SWANs) and Organisational Wants and Needs (OWANs) will be done for the purpose of analysing and balancing cocktail priorities of the stakeholders that are associated with the ConnectPlus Project of Marks and Spencer. The following model approach basically emphasizes upon the aspect of aligning and balancing between what these stakeholders expect and what the organisation wants to achieve in a large-scale digital initiative like ConnectPlus. SWAN is an approach to focus on the wants and needs of the stakeholders which includes the internal team, regulator, customer and Technology vendor. Marks and Spencer customers may want to have a personalized experience, the needs of the marketing and customer extend experience team is to enhance engagement whereas in the case of IT system and Data Analytics team they require infrastructure and lastly the regulator requires treaty compliance and the windows require contractual operations. In such a case Contractual ambiguity causes conflicts and opportunism rather than restraining them (Ali and

Haapasalo, 2023, p. 68). In accordance to the following conflict is managed through the prioritization of diverse needs and requirements of the stakeholders which has the strength of being stakeholders and trick promoting inclusive satisfaction and long term relationship building. Although the critical consideration of the approach also states that over prioritization of stakeholder demands and requirements leads to distraction from the scope of the project leading to high cost and conflict when the stakeholder expectations are contradictory. This is why it is important to develop and improve conflict management and eliminate it at the earliest stage because the stakeholders are sensitive to conflict caused by different values and interests in companies' growth (Lyulyov et al. 2023).

On the other hand considering the OWAN Approach to conflict management there would be prioritization of organisation strategic goal operational requirements and resources inclined towards privatising its organisation strategic goals which will offer clear strategic direction ensuring that decisions are aligned with the organisational priorities. This will be significant in terms of creating long term value creation. However, one of the key limitations of the following is that it undervalues stakeholder perspective which can lead to reduced engagement and resistance. This means that reliance only on one of the two is insufficient in managing the stakeholder concrete which is why in practice conflict resolution would be a balanced integration of both approaches were stakeholder requirements would be evaluated considering the organisational objectives and priorities based upon which informed decision would be made. Agile frameworks like the blended approach will address conflict through collaborative decision-making practices such as facilitated workshops and stakeholder alignment meetings, where conflicting views can be reconciled (Dugbartey and Kehinde, 2025, p. 1245). This would make sure that Marks and Spencer is able to reduce conflict and support successful implementation of ConnectPlus.

Communication plan

Effective communication is important and it plays a significant role for the management of stakeholder conflicts especially during ConnectPlus implementation. Communication needs to be structured as power the needs of the stakeholder this ensures that the actual information is delivered prosperity with the help of relevant channels. Additionally the transparent communication also reduces misunderstandings and it also provides support to the

decision-making throughout the lifecycle of the project (Ishola et al., 2024, p. 26). The focus of external communication should focus mainly on building the confidence of stakeholders and transparency. It may be stated that communication with the ICO needs to involve the scheduled consultations and compliance reports for ensuring the alignment of regulations. Therefore, conducting regular meetings with the technology vendor also needs to address the performance system, implementation, progress and cybersecurity risk. It may be stated that communication with the ICO needs to involve the scheduled consultations and compliance reports for ensuring the alignment of regulations. Hence, a communication plan that is well designed strengthens the trust of stakeholders, facilitates the collaborative method of problem-solving and reduces the uncertainty along with supporting the proper implementation of ConnectPlus Platform in Marks and Spencer.

Evaluate the impact of sustainable stakeholders' engagement on your business performance

Improving Decision-Making Through Data Quality

The stakeholders that are engaged contribute high-quality data along with making better strategic decisions. Customers who have a trust on the platforms are likely to provide consent for collecting the data while the teams that are internal are likely to share the insights across various departments. Improving data quality is responsible for management of inventory, pricing strategies, effectiveness in marketing and forecasting (Gudavalli and Ayyagari, 2022, p. 1657). Therefore, from a resource based perspective there is a value in stakeholder relationship as it becomes valuable for the organisation assets, which cannot be replicated by the competitors.

Strengthening Regulatory Compliance and Risk Management

The operational and legal risks are reduced through the help of sustainable engagement with the team of internal compliance and ICO. It is necessary to note that the early consultations with the regulators also helps in the identification of compliance requirements before the changes in costly systems become important. Compliance practices also protect Marks and Spencer from any type of financial penalties, reputational, damage and litigation that are related to the breach

of data or any miss use of the customer information (Rodrigues et al., p. 3). Reputational risk is believed to create a direct impact on the retention of customers and investor confidence in digital retail, henceforth constant engagement with the technology. Vendors also help in improving the preparedness of cyber security and ensuring that threats that are emerging are addressed in a proactive manner.

Enhancing Customer Retention and Revenue Growth

In the context of enhancement of revenue, growth and customer rotation, it may be stated that engagement of sustainable stakeholders can create a strong impact for improving the business performance of Marks and Spencer. This is done with the help of strengthening the trust of customers supporting long-term growth of revenue and increasing loyalty. When there is an engagement of customers in a transparent manner, their feedback is also incorporated in the platform for improvement for their more likely to continue the use of ConnectPlus along with participating in reward programmes.

Financial Implications

Although it has been analysed that investment is required by the stakeholder engagement in the communication system, consultation, activities and training, these courses need to be viewed as a strategic investment. The financial benefits might include reducing the customer return, improving the vendor performance, increase, repeat purchases, lowering the regulatory as well as legal cost and market expenditure in a more efficient manner. Therefore, these benefits over time can also outright the cost of initial engagement along with contributing towards sustainable profitability.

Employee Engagement and Operational Performance

In this context, it may be stated that employees support new initiatives when they are either involved or a consultant in the process of decision-making. Sustainable engagement reduces the resistance for change and improves morale along with encouraging knowledge that is shared in various departments. Therefore, for a digital project, which has complexity like ConnectPlus the

dependency of operational performance is on the employees willingness for collaborating across the boundaries of traditional functions.

Supporting innovation and Organisational Learning

The engagement of stakeholders is responsible for creating a loop of continuous feedback, which supports the innovation. The customer also provides insights into the vendor's contribution towards technical knowledge and employees. Identity towards the operation. Inefficiencies. Such a collaborative environment is responsible for enhancing the learning of organizations along with helping Marks and Spencer for adapting quick changes in the technology and consumer behaviour.

Challenges and Limitations

One of the challenges is coordination of multiple stakeholders across the international markets can be both resource intensive and time consuming. Secondly, the expectations of conflicting stakeholders might also slow the process of decision-making which can be the reason for project delays. The limitation on the other hand is related to the engagement outcomes which are not measurable easily always. Hence, in order to maintain credibility, it is necessary for Marks and Spencer to demonstrate that the inputs of stakeholders leads to some meaningful actions.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

Some of the recommendations are given below in the following points:

- It is recommended to Marks and Spencer that it should establish a framework for formal stakeholder engagement for ConnectPlus that will integrate communication, continuous feedback and governance across each phase of the project.
- Secondly, it is also recommended to Marks and Spencer that it should implement an approach of privacy by design through the involvement of internal compliance specialists and ICO in the early development for reducing the regulatory risk (Bawa, 2024, p. 170).

- Marks and Spencer should also introduce a program associated with continuous customer feedback through the help of usability, testing, pilot, market analytics, and service that will ensure that the platform features remain user friendly and relevant.
- Fourthly, it is also strongly recommended to the collaboration with the technology vendor that it should strengthen with the help of service level agreements, joint innovation reviews and cyber security requirements that will minimise operational as well as risk related to security.
- Lastly it is also recommended to monitor the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement through the help of KPIs like satisfaction, score, employee engagement levels, and customer adoption rates (Sakyi et al., 2022, p. 87).

Conclusion

The current report has demonstrated the successful launch of ConnectPlus which depends on the analysis, engagement of external and internal stakeholders and effective identification. It has been concluded that the marketing and customer experience team., IT systems and data analytics team, the ICO, product development team and technology vendor play significant roles in the delivery of the platform. Therefore, the sustainable stakeholder engagement also supports the innovation regulatory compliance and customer retention which makes it a strategic capability within the digital transformation agenda of Marks and Spencer, which ensures long-term success of ConnectPlus.

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