

DAY 4

Stakeholders & Communication

Identifying who matters on your project, and how to keep them informed

1. Who Is a Stakeholder?

A stakeholder is anyone with an interest in, or influence over, a project's outcome, positive or negative. This is a much wider group than most new PMs expect. It includes the obvious people, the sponsor funding the work, the team delivering it, the end users, but also less obvious ones: a regulator whose approval you need, a competing department whose budget you are drawing from, or a community group affected by a construction project. Missing a key stakeholder early is one of the most common causes of late-stage project surprises.

2. Mapping Stakeholders: The Power-Interest Grid

Not every stakeholder needs the same level of attention, and treating them all identically wastes time and dilutes focus on the people who matter most. The power-interest grid is a simple tool that sorts stakeholders into four groups based on two questions: how much power do they have to affect the project, and how much interest do they have in its outcome?

High Power, High Interest — Manage Closely

Your sponsor, your client, key decision-makers. These people can significantly help or block the project, and they care deeply about the outcome. They need frequent, detailed engagement and should never be surprised by bad news.

High Power, Low Interest — Keep Satisfied

A senior executive who approved the budget but is not following daily progress. They do not need constant updates, but if they are ignored entirely and something goes wrong, their lack of engagement can turn into a serious problem fast. Keep them briefed at a high level, periodically.

Low Power, High Interest — Keep Informed

End users, or a team that will depend on your project's outcome. They cannot block the project, but their buy-in matters, and well-informed stakeholders in this group often become your strongest advocates.

Low Power, Low Interest — Monitor

Peripheral stakeholders who need minimal effort, light, occasional updates are enough. Over-investing in this group is a common time-management mistake for new PMs.

WORTH KNOWING

The power-interest grid is not static. A stakeholder with low interest today can become high interest overnight if something affects them directly, a delay, a budget cut, a scope change. Revisit the grid at major project milestones rather than building it once and forgetting it.

3. Building a Communication Plan

Once stakeholders are mapped, the next step is deciding, deliberately, how each group will be kept informed. A communication plan answers four questions for every stakeholder group: what information do they need, how often do they need it, through what channel (email, meeting, dashboard, report), and who is responsible for sending it?

Sponsor	Weekly summary — email or short call — owned by the PM.
Delivery team	Daily stand-up — in person or chat — owned by the PM or team lead.
End users	Milestone updates — newsletter or announcement — owned by comms lead.
Executive sponsor (low interest)	Monthly one-page summary — email — owned by the PM.

4. Why This Matters More Than It Sounds

New project managers often assume communication is a soft skill that matters less than the technical planning work. In practice, research on project failure consistently points to poor communication and unclear expectations, not technical mistakes, as the leading cause of projects going off track. A brilliant plan that nobody understands or agrees with will fail just as surely as a weak one.

5. Reflection Questions

- Think of a group project or team effort you have been part of. Who had high power but low visible interest, and what happened as a result?
- Pick a hypothetical project, a school fundraiser, a product launch, and sketch out two stakeholders for each quadrant of the power-interest grid.

- Why might a 'keep satisfied' stakeholder become the most dangerous one to ignore, even though they rarely ask questions?

6. Key Terms Introduced Today

- Stakeholder — anyone with an interest in, or influence over, a project's outcome.
- Power-interest grid — a tool for prioritizing stakeholder engagement based on influence and interest.
- Communication plan — a deliberate plan for what information goes to which stakeholders, how often, and through what channel.

7. Week 1 Wrap-Up

Over four days you have covered what a project actually is and where PM careers lead, the five-phase life cycle every project follows, the triple constraint that every PM must balance, and how to identify and communicate with the people who can make or break a project. These four ideas are the foundation everything else in this track builds on.