

# : *What should stakeholders expect in an Agile environment?*

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People have expectations that influence behavior. In an organization environment, both internal and external stakeholders have and develop expectations when interacting with, engaging or participating in an Agile process/project. As more teams, departments and organizations endeavor to be more agile it is important for managers and other stakeholders to anticipate and shape expectations about what is most likely to happen. Managers must be excellent communicators to manage expectations effectively.

Stakeholders are individuals with a vested interest in the success of a project. The role of the stakeholder varies depending on the project methodology. Scrum methodology for software development projects takes a narrow view of the role of stakeholders. Scrum prescribes three well-defined stakeholder roles: product owner, scrum master, and development team. The product owner is responsible for understanding what other interested parties want and for summarizing their views. More traditional project management methodologies and certifications, such as Project Management Professional (PMP) certification or Projects IN Controlled Environments (PRINCE2), define stakeholders as anyone impacted or affected by a project. This broad view means stakeholders can include the development team, product owner, project manager, customers, and other employees. Stakeholders want to understand what progress an agile team has made.

Stakeholders typically affect or are affected by the process or project in some way. All stakeholders should not have the same expectations but there should be some similar ones. During the course of the project, all stakeholders are not directly involved in creating the product/result, but they may participate or contribute to the process in various ways at different intervals. Some stakeholders provide technical expertise, while others contribute to decisions about which features are important. An agile project evolves through continuous improvement cycles of development, inspection, and adaptation.

Stakeholders have different duties and authority when participating in a project. Roles may change as a project proceeds. A stakeholder role may range from occasional contributions to full project sponsorship. The product owner will expect ongoing involvement. This goes beyond articulating the requirements and returning at the end of the project to inspect the results. Project/product owners should expect to be heavily engaged throughout. Product users should expect to provide feedback in a structured way during the course of the project. Other stakeholders may include employees in the organization who may provide input at key stages depending on the focus of the project. Stakeholders should expect stability and little consultation during project sprint activities.

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Stakeholders have different stakes and vary in influence/power and their interest/attention to a project. Stakeholders with high power and high-interest should be consulted regularly. Other stakeholders should be kept informed as appropriate and high power and low-interest stakeholders should be kept satisfied, cf., Mitchell et al (1997), Usmani (2019).

For an agile approach to succeed, stakeholders should participate actively during the course of an agile process/project/interaction. This engagement needs to be planned, communicated, and revised during the course of the interaction. Stakeholder management implements actions and strategies to meet stakeholder needs and interests and ensures effective implementation of communication plans, engagement actions, and strategies. It is important that members of an agile team know the relevant stakeholders, their interests, and what stake they have in the project. Agile projects benefit when stakeholders understand agile values, principles, and practices. Stakeholders should expect uncertainty and they should expect the project team will manage uncertainty through short, time-boxed iterations, anticipation of impediments, and adaptation and rapid response to create value.

Managing stakeholder expectations around their engagement with a project is integral to success. Often stakeholders have diverse or conflicting objectives, these differences need to be articulated and resolved if possible. Expectations can make or break the delivery of successful outcomes in an Agile work environment. Stakeholders should expect to be actively involved in providing information, knowledge, and opinions. Active stakeholder participation is a core Agile principle.

### References

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