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# Effective Stakeholder Management Strategies for Information Technology Projects

Andrew Stephen Williams  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Andrew Williams

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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2017

Abstract

Effective Stakeholder Management Strategies for Information Technology Projects

by

Andrew S. Williams

MBA, The Open University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

December 2017

## Abstract

Information Technology (IT) projects have become critical to business strategy. However, one major issue is that, historically, IT projects have high failure rates, with scholars asserting that ineffective stakeholder management strategies were a major factor for project failure. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies IT executives use for managing IT project stakeholders by exploring the experiences of 2 CIOs and 4 IT directors in two multinational companies, based in Switzerland. Stakeholder theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and company documentation, and analyzed using Yin's 5-step data analysis process to identify and code themes. Five main themes emerged from the data analysis: organizational culture, organizational maturity, leadership, competencies, and post-implementation reviews. The results of this study revealed the importance for leaders to articulate business strategies enabling stakeholders to have a common perspective on project objectives, and to act as a foundation upon which IT executives can create effective stakeholder management strategies. Results indicated that the deployment of effective stakeholder management strategies was dependent on several factors, including organizational culture, leadership style, competencies, and organizational maturity. Findings may contribute to positive social change by encouraging effective stakeholder management to improve knowledge sharing, individual and team motivation, management across cultural boundaries, and stimulate a culture of social responsibility and sustainability.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this doctoral study to my wife, Simona, of Fey, Switzerland, who has stood by my side throughout this doctoral journey and provided moral and spiritual support. I would also like to dedicate this doctoral study to my three children, Liam, Lara, and Joalim, who inspire me daily to improve myself as a father and guardian.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Stakeholders play an important role in IT projects with their ability to influence IT project outcomes (Badewi, 2016; Beringer, Jonas, and Kock (2013); Kloppenborg, Tesch, & Manolis, 2014). Diverse stakeholders interact within an organizational network, which may be construed as a set of relationships, explicit or implicit, across both external and internal environments (Mainardes, Alves, & Raposo, 2012). Ineffective stakeholder management strategies have an adverse effect on stakeholder satisfaction (Carvalho & Junior, 2015). Moreover, Heravi, Coffey, and Trigunarsyah (2014) found that projects without committed stakeholders were more likely to fail, resulting in unpredictable consequences for the organization. Organizational leaders recognize the relative importance of addressing stakeholders' needs yet surprisingly lack effective strategies for managing stakeholders (Mir & Pinnington, 2014; Mishra & Mishra, 2013).

### **Background of the Problem**

IT projects have become critical to business strategy to achieve operational excellence (Badewi, 2016). Yet, embracing new technologies comes with a high price and risk. The United States spent USD 250 billion on IT projects in 2013 (The Standish Group, 2014). In one company alone, a total of 60% of gross sales, representing USD 27 billion was generated by IT projects (Carvalho, Patah, & Bido, 2015). The new environment in which IT project managers (IT PMs) ply their trade has a broader stakeholder community, is more technically complex, and often comprises decentralized and virtual teams (Carvalho et al., 2015). IT PMs, therefore, face an increased diversity and geographical spread of their projects' stakeholders. Davis (2014) identified that stakeholder theory compelled organizations to recognize

their responsibilities toward people and entities beyond their shareholders. IT PMs apply stakeholder theory through the creation and implementation of project stakeholder management strategies (Mainardes et al., 2012; Mir & Pinnington, 2014).

IT PMs increase an organization's economic value by understanding stakeholders' interests and integrating their knowledge, support, skills, and experience into their IT projects (Doh & Quigley, 2014). However, one major issue is that, historically, IT projects have high failure rates with scholars asserting that inadequate stakeholder management strategies were a major factor for project failure (Badewi, 2016). Mishra and Mishra (2013) identified that differences between stakeholders' perspectives created issues for IT project managers who were caught in the middle and expected by their management to "gain alignment" with stakeholders, who may hold opposing interests and expectations (p. 257). With a lack of consensus among stakeholders on the factors of project success, combined with continued evidence of project failures, there was a need to conduct fresh research into stakeholder management strategies employed by IT executive management.

### **Problem Statement**

IT projects generally run 45% over budget, while delivering 56% less value than predicted (Keil, Smith, Iacovou, & Thompson, 2014). The Standish Group reported in 2014 that 63% of IT projects failed, resulting in cost and time overruns (Ika & Hodgson, 2014). The general business problem was that when a project manager's main focus was on the traditional success criteria of cost, schedule, and quality, it was possible to neglect broader stakeholder expectations. The specific business problem was that some chief information officers (CIOs) and IT directors lack strategies for managing IT project stakeholders.

## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this multiple qualitative case study was to explore strategies CIOs and IT directors use for managing IT project stakeholders. I explored the experiences of two CIOs and four IT directors in two multinational companies based in Switzerland, who had demonstrated success in addressing the specific business problem that some CIOs and IT directors lack strategies for managing IT project stakeholders. The implications for positive social change include the potential to encourage effective stakeholder management to improve knowledge sharing, individual and team motivation, management across cultural boundaries, and stimulate a culture of social responsibility and sustainability. Project management assets were found to be a source of competitive advantage and positively contributed to organizational performance (Mathur, Jugdev, & Fung, 2014). A profitable organization should be in a better position to benefit local communities through the provision of additional employment opportunities. Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that company leaders who established strong stakeholder relationships benefitted from increased sharing of knowledge and higher levels of individual motivation.

## **Nature of the Study**

### **Method**

Researchers use three different methods to conduct research: quantitative, using numerical data; qualitative, using nonnumeric data; and mixed, which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Yin, 2014). By using the qualitative method to reveal a deeper understanding of the key business processes, researchers are better equipped to interpret individual experiences (Doh & Quigley, 2014). I selected a qualitative method to address my specific business problem.

Researchers use the quantitative method to provide answers to hypothesized relationships or differences among variables (Arrfelt, Wiseman, & Hult, 2013). Quantitative and mixed-method research contain the element of testing predetermined hypotheses, which did not support the exploratory nature of a qualitative study (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Researchers use a qualitative method to gain a deep understanding of the company's policies, processes, procedures, and individuals' lived experiences (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). A qualitative method is appropriate to identify and explore alternative or new views on a particular topic (Berg & Karlsen, 2013; Chih & Zwikael, 2015; Vom Brocke & Lippe, 2013).

### **Design**

There are several qualitative research designs including case study, ethnography, narrative, and phenomenology (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) suggested a single case study is appropriate for exploring the unique characteristics of a particular case. However, I conducted the study in multiple sites as companies only have one CIO and generally two or three senior IT directors. Hence, per Keil et al. (2014) who advocated the merits of conducting research across multiple sites, I employed a multiple case study design.

Phenomenological researchers seek to understand individuals' experiences by identifying a common experience among a selected group and articulate the meaning of experiencing the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014). Ethnographic studies are grounded in anthropology and researchers use ethnographic designs to explore cultures (Gringeri, Barusch, & Cambron, 2013). Researchers may use a narrative design to explore real-life experiences through obtaining and exploring participants' stories, (Kahlke, 2014) which was not the purpose for my study.

### **Research Question**

The overarching question for this study was: What strategies do CIOs and IT directors use for managing IT project stakeholders?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What barriers did you encounter in implementing your strategies for managing IT project stakeholders?
2. How did you address barriers, if any, in implementing your strategies for managing IT project stakeholders?
3. How did your stakeholders' IT projects behavior change during the project?
4. How did you assess the success of your strategies for managing IT project stakeholders?
5. How did you monitor and track the progress of your projects?
6. How did you report project status to your stakeholders?
7. How were your stakeholders involved in the post-implementation review of IT projects?
8. What additional information would you like to provide related to managing IT project stakeholders?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Stakeholder theory was the conceptual framework for this study. The Stanford Research Institute (SRI) introduced stakeholder theory-which emphasized the importance that stakeholders had in an organization-in 1963. Donaldson and Preston (1995) stated that stakeholder theory was a set of theories that encompassed three aspects: (a) descriptive, which described the collaborative and competitive interests of

groups; (b) instrumental, which linked stakeholder management practice to company performance; and (c) normative, which described company behavior toward stakeholders. Donaldson and Preston suggested that the normative approach was the fundamental core of stakeholder theory as it is based on ethics, morality, and corporate social responsibility. A researcher therefore may use stakeholder theory as a conceptual framework to examine how an organization employs stakeholder management strategies to obtain organizational objectives including financial performance and ethical behavior.

A lack of clarity on the definition of a stakeholder causes debate among academics and practitioners. Consequently, Mishra and Mishra (2013) found that IT project managers have difficulties analyzing and addressing stakeholders' interests because of a lack of a clear stakeholder definition. Despite Freeman's (1984) widely used definition that a stakeholder is any individual or group who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of the organization's objectives, such as employees or managers, Miles (2012) argued that a stakeholder could be anyone in the organization. A clear definition of a stakeholder is therefore essential in developing the use of stakeholder theory and improving its practical application (Mishra & Mishra, 2013).

### **Operational Definitions**

*IT project management:* IT project management is the process of planning, organizing and delineating responsibility for the completion of an organizations' specific information technology goals (Doh & Quigley, 2014).

*Project life cycle*: Refers to a series of activities, which are necessary to fulfill project goals or objectives. Projects vary in size and complexity, but, no matter how large or small, all projects can be mapped to a life cycle structure (PMI, 2013).

*Project life cycle management (PCM)*: Project cycle management (PCM) is the process of planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling of a project effectively and efficiently throughout its phases, from planning through to execution to achieve predefined objectives or satisfying the project stakeholders (PMI, 2013).

*Project management institute (PMI)*: A non-profit institution responsible for the development and distribution of a body of knowledge on project management. (PMI, 2013).

*Project manager*: The person assigned by the performing organization to achieve project objectives (PMI, 2013).

*Stakeholder*: Any individual or group who could affect or is affected by, the achievement of the organization's objectives (Freeman, 1984).

*Virtual team (VT)*: VTs are multiple individuals working together on a project, geographically separated, but using communication technology to collaborate (Lohle & Terrell, 2014).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

The following section provides information about the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study. The activity of uncovering assumptions requires a combination of techniques and habits drawn from both philosophy and empirical research. Assumptions refer to aspects of the research that are assumed to be true or plausible (Wortham, 2015). Limitations are possible weaknesses in the study, which are mostly out of the researcher's control (Newman, Hitchcock, &

Newman, 2015). Delimitations are definitions set as the boundaries by the researcher, and therefore can be controlled (Newman et al., 2015).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions influence the way a researcher views a representation of the truth and shapes the research (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). There were three assumptions in this study. First, I assumed that interview participants would answer the questions honestly to provide an accurate representation of stakeholder expectations. Second, I assumed that the quantity and quality of interview participants would be sufficient to permit a deep understanding of the subject matter and achieve the required level of saturation for the data analysis. Third, as the interview participants were senior IT executives, I assumed that they would have the requisite level of seniority to articulate the strategies that they employed. These assumptions were proven to be correct during the interview process.

### **Limitations**

Drawing on the experiences of senior IT executives has a potential limitation; their interview responses might lack sufficient insight into stakeholders' interests, needs, expectations, and their level of satisfaction with the conduct of IT projects. To mitigate this potential limitation, interview participants were selected based upon their knowledge and experience of having managed IT project stakeholders. A second mitigating factor was in the construct of the interview questions. If the senior IT executives would have displayed a disproportionate proficiency between the political, strategic, operational, and tactical levels of IT projects, I would have extended the interview schedule to include IT managers, who could provide a counterbalance. I did not need to employ either of the mitigating actions.

## **Delimitations**

Delimitations are factors that can be controlled by the researcher to define the boundaries of a research study (Yin, 2014). IT projects touch a broad group of interested people, such as employees, shareholders, management, and society. Miles (2012) found that stakeholders could be anyone in the organization or in the external environment, which make it difficult for managers to identify with whom they should collaborate. If all stakeholders had been included in the study, the number would have been unmanageable. I therefore delimited the scope of this study by selecting senior IT executives as interview participants who had already successfully implemented stakeholder strategies, and therefore could provide detailed information on stakeholders' interests, needs, and expectations. The views of stakeholders could also be found in IT project documents, such as project audit reports, internal management reviews, and IT project closing reports, which I studied to gain insight into the views and opinions of stakeholders.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Successful projects enable the implementation of organizational strategies, and therefore make an important contribution to organizational performance (Chih & Zwikael, 2015). Stakeholders contribute to project success through the provision of financial and nonfinancial resources, and by establishing some of the key criteria for assessing project performance (Eskerod, Huemann, & Savage, 2015). However, stakeholders could potentially create risk to projects through resistance or through poor decision-making (Hartono, Sulistyono, Praftiwi, & Hasmoro, 2014).

Understanding stakeholders and having effective stakeholder management strategies are important criteria influencing successful project outcomes (PMI, 2013). IT projects have historically high failure rates and researchers assert that the lack of stakeholder support is a major factor for project failure (Badewi, 2016; Mir & Pinnington, 2014). This study may be significant to business practice because the findings could potentially provide CIOs and IT directors with new knowledge to improve project success rates, which leads to increased speed and quality in the deployment of business-critical systems, and enhanced organizational effectiveness to satisfy stakeholders.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential to encourage effective stakeholder management to improve knowledge sharing, individual and team motivation, management across cultural boundaries, and stimulate a culture of social responsibility and sustainability. Furthermore, a profitable organization should be in a better position to benefit local communities through the provision of additional employment opportunities. Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that companies benefitted from establishing strong relationships with stakeholders by encouraging knowledge sharing, which led to higher levels of individual motivation. Furthermore, companies with the capacity to acquire and distribute knowledge through interacting closely with stakeholders are better positioned to create a culture of social responsibility and sustainability (Doh & Quigley, 2014). Effective stakeholder management can lead to an improvement in managing across cultural boundaries (Miska, Stahl, & Mendenhall, 2013), thereby increasing understanding and respect for different nationalities.

## **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

In this section, I present a review of the literature pertaining to stakeholder management within the context of IT project management. The notion that organizations have stakeholders has been substantiated in both academic and professional literature (Guerreiro, 2016). The literature on project stakeholder management leans on stakeholder theory as a conceptual model within strategic management and IT project management (Eskerod & Huemann, 2013). Scholars and practitioners agree that effective stakeholder management strategies influence positive project outcomes (Badewi, 2016). Yet, there is little consensus on what constitutes effective stakeholder management strategies (Eskerod & Vaagaasar, 2014; Mir & Pinnington, 2014; Mishra & Mishra, 2013).

I followed a chronological order of presenting project stakeholder management literature from the inception of stakeholder theory in the early 1960s through to its current application in IT projects. This literature review comprises three sections. In the first section, I review the history of stakeholder theory and discussed stakeholder theory as a conceptual model. The second section pertains to how stakeholder management is constituted. The third section is dedicated to comparing and contrasting how project stakeholder management is employed in relation to stakeholder theory.

The literature review encompassed peer-reviewed articles published less than 5 years before the anticipated chief academic officer (CAO) approval date of December 2017. The articles reviewed were drawn from (a) databases, such as Walden University Library, Business Source Complete, AB/INFORM, Emerald, and Sage; (b) Google Scholar; (c) Project Management Institute; (d) ProQuest for doctoral

studies; and (e) scholarly books pertaining to qualitative research and project stakeholder management. The total number of literature reviewed was 108, of which 95, representing 88% of the total literature, were published before the anticipated CAO approval date. A detailed breakdown of articles reviewed against the key word search is at Table 1.

Table 1  
*Summary of Reviewed Literature*

| Key words              | Peer-reviewed | Scholarly | Total |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------|-------|
|                        | articles      | books     |       |
| Stakeholder theory     | 12            |           | 12    |
| Stakeholder management | 30            | 3         | 37    |
| Qualitative research   | 15            | 1         | 16    |
| IT project management  | 27            |           | 27    |
| Project success        | 20            |           | 20    |
| Total                  | 104           | 4         | 108   |

### **Stakeholder Theory Origin**

Stakeholder theory has been in existence for fifty years. Freeman (1984) traced the roots of stakeholder management to 1963 when the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) introduced the notion that shareholders were not the only group important to an organization. According to Freeman, the SRI defined the term stakeholder as “a group without whose support the organization would cease to exist” (p. 5). Freeman (1984) expanded on this initial work through extensive research, which he published in his book, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Freeman, who drew on organizational theory, systems theory, corporate social responsibility, and corporate strategy, argued that organizations should consider the

interests of stakeholders when making strategic decisions. Researchers have expressed the importance of integrating stakeholder interests into organizational decision-making processes (Mir & Pinnington, 2014; Mishra & Mishra, 2013).

Organizations have evolved from having little interaction with the environment, to entities that actively engage with its internal and external stakeholder environments. Freeman (1984) provided the stakeholder model, which distinguished between an internal stakeholder (e.g., an employee, or manager) and an external stakeholder (e.g., a supplier, shareholder, government, or society). Freeman perceived stakeholders as single, independent actors. Yet, Aaltonen and Kujala (2016) argued that stakeholders sit within a broad stakeholder landscape with interdependent relationships, which creates a challenge for project managers to determine which stakeholder should receive the greatest or least attention. Mishra and Mishra (2013) asserted that project managers should not relegate external stakeholders to an inferior position, because, at any stage, they could gain sufficient power to influence managerial decisions.

The adoption of stakeholder theory in business practice has been the cause of some debate. Some researchers asserted that stakeholder theory could be successfully applied to business practice due to its simplicity (Badewi, 2016). In contrast, some critics pointed toward the theory being too vague and ambiguous (Mainardes et al., 2012). Notwithstanding, scholars appeared to agree on some basic premises of stakeholder theory in that an organization enters into relationships with individuals or groups that influence or are influenced by the company's actions (Freeman, 1984), the interests of all stakeholders are intrinsically motivated (Clarkson, 1995), the theory focuses on management decision making (Donaldson & Preston, 1995), and

organizational leaders should attempt to understand and balance the interests of various stakeholders (Friedman & Miles, 2002).

### **Stakeholder Theory in IT Projects**

Stakeholder theory is applied in IT project management and strategic management. While Freeman (1984) advocated stakeholder theory as an aid to strategic decision making, Cleland (1985), applied the theory to develop stakeholder management strategies in IT project management. Stakeholder theory is applied differently in IT projects to strategic management due to the domain specific nature of IT systems (Walley, 2013). Despite critics of stakeholder theory claiming that the theory is vague and ambiguous (Mainardes et al., 2012), several scholars agreed with the appropriateness of applying stakeholder theory to develop stakeholder management strategies in IT projects (e.g., Doh & Quigley, 2014; Miles, 2012; Mishra & Mishra, 2013; Walley, 2013).

IT projects are complex in nature and follow a predefined structured project stakeholder management process (PMI, 2013). As an IT project progresses along the life cycle, managers may switch attention from one group of stakeholders to another. For example, in the initiation phase, an IT project manager may work closely with finance and management to define business requirements, whereas for subsequent project phases focus may switch to subject matter experts (SMEs), technical staff, and possibly out-sourced partners. Eskerod and Vaagaasar (2014) identified that, despite the importance of managing stakeholders throughout the full duration of projects, research is limited regarding the notion of time and how stakeholders' expectations change during a project's life cycle. Further, for stakeholder theory to be effective in IT projects, organizations require stakeholder management strategies, which are

adapted to a specific industry (Walley, 2013). Badewi (2016) agreed and suggested that a stakeholder management strategy that works in one industry does not work in a different industry due to specificities related to that industry. Aaltonen and Kujala (2016) called upon researchers to pay more attention to conceptualize and holistically understand the nature of different types of project stakeholder environments.

### **Three Aspects of Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder theory is on the nexus with other theories, such as systems theory and organizational theory. Consequently, Mainardes et al. 2012 argued that practitioners should not view stakeholder theory in isolation. Similarly, Donaldson and Preston (1995) identified stakeholder theory as a set of theories, which encompassed three aspects: (a) descriptive, which pertains to the collaborative and competitive interests of groups; (b) instrumental, which links stakeholder management practice to company performance; and (c) normative, which describes company behavior toward stakeholders. Donaldson and Preston suggested that the normative approach was the fundamental core of stakeholder theory as it is based on ethics, morality, and corporate social responsibility, while the instrumental and descriptive aspects are nested around a normative core, as described below.

**Descriptive aspect.** The descriptive aspect of stakeholder theory describes characteristics and behaviors an organization should adopt toward its stakeholders. The descriptive aspect strengthens management's capacity for moving away from a single-minded focus on shareholder value to an enlarged perspective on stakeholder value (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). This aspect does not necessarily prove stakeholder theory as a viable conceptual framework, but rather describes how organizations react to legislative changes and succumb to new managerial trends

(Donaldson & Preston). For example, telecommunication operators could exceed legal emission levels to reduce network costs, despite the harm caused to the environment.

**Instrumental aspect.** The instrumental aspect describes how stakeholder theory is used to achieve desired performance objectives. Organizations that adopt the instrumental aspect do so in the belief that, if they address the concerns of certain stakeholders, it will result in the improvement of financial performance (Mir & Pinnington, 2014). The instrumental aspect of stakeholder theory attempts to prove with financial indicators that stakeholder oriented organizations perform comparatively better than shareholder oriented organizations. Researchers have found positive correlations between stakeholder management and conventional performance indicators (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mir & Pinnington, 2014). For example, Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2014) discovered a positive correlation between organizations that implemented stakeholder management strategies and long-term company performance.

Some scholars identified issues with the adoption of the instrumental aspect of stakeholder theory. For example, Jensen (2001) disagreed with the viability of the instrumental aspect and argued that organizations do not have the capacity to effectively manage multiple stakeholder relationships. To resolve this potential issue, PMI (2013) recommended that project managers use a prioritization matrix as part of the stakeholder analysis process to determine which stakeholder required the greatest or least attention. Donaldson and Preston (1995) identified a second potential issue in that the instrumental aspect of stakeholder theory might be exposed to similar issues as agency theory, where tensions could occur between management and stakeholder

groups. Project managers should therefore develop stakeholder management strategies that foster positive stakeholder relationships and enhance economic value to the company.

**Normative aspect.** The normative aspect pertains to organizational ethics and includes corporate social responsibility. Donaldson and Preston (1995) suggested that the normative approach was the fundamental core of stakeholder theory, and claimed that stakeholder management strategies are justified based on the premise that stakeholders have legitimate interests in the organization. Hörisch, Freeman, and Schaltegger (2014) agreed on the merits of using the normative aspect of stakeholder theory and asserted that managers should embody normative principles when setting organizational objectives. Similarly, Mainardes et al. (2012) argued that a normative approach assisted managers to differentiate between managerial action and results. The normative aspect is therefore in opposition to the narrow shareholder view that an organization's sole purpose is to generate shareholder wealth.

Stakeholders have a genuine claim to be treated with respect and fairness. Beringer et al. (2013) identified that stakeholder management and organizational performance were strongly related, and recommended that stakeholders' interests should not be ignored. Friedman and Miles (2002) created a stakeholder relationship framework, which is underpinned by principles of fairness, ethics, and morally correct behavior. Mainardes et al. (2012) shared this ethical perspective and suggested that for an organization to survive and prosper it should embody a set of moral attitudes and ethical organizational behavior as part of its stakeholder management strategy. Moreover, Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2014) identified that stakeholders would contribute to company performance if they believed that the organization was treating

them in a fair and honest manner. Organizations applying the normative aspect of stakeholder theory should therefore behave in an ethical and legitimate manner to command the respect from its stakeholders.

Stakeholders should be seen as an integral part of the organizational processes. Boesso and Kumar (2016) asserted that project managers should view stakeholders as real people and avoid seeing them as abstract and detached from the organization. Mainardes et al. (2012) concurred with the notion of integrating stakeholders and identified three levels of stakeholder participation: (1) moderate, which refers to managing stakeholders with respect; (2) intermediary, which refers to incorporating some stakeholder interests into organizational decision-making processes; and (3) demanding, which refers to fully integrating stakeholders into organizational decision-making. Despite the complexity of managing different stakeholder behaviors, Boesso and Kumar found that project managers were capable of integrating ethical and moral aspects into their decision-making processes.

### **Shareholder versus Stakeholder Perspective**

There are two different perspectives on how organizations should be positioned vis-à-vis their internal and external stakeholders. On one hand, a stakeholder could be construed as the shareholder in a very narrow sense of the term (Friedman & Miles, 2002), and on the other hand, could be anyone in the company (Miles, 2012). Because of the diversity of perceptions, researchers and practitioners have struggled to effectively use stakeholder theory because they are confused over the definition of the term stakeholder (Lucae, Rebentisch, & Oehmen, 2014; Mishra & Mishra, 2013).

**Shareholder perspective.** The shareholder perspective portrays organizations acting as vehicles to generate wealth, and within legal boundaries, excludes consideration for other stakeholders or social behavior. Scholars who support a narrow view argue that management's decision-making is more efficient, because all their attention is focused on a single objective (Mainardes et al., 2012). Jensen (2001) argued that for an organization to be effective, it should focus only on one objective, which is to maximize the value of the company. Jensen maintained that managers do not have the capacity to make purposeful decisions and face multiple trade-off situations if they pursue more than one objective. Jensen did, however, agree that an organization could not ignore some key stakeholders. For example, an organization should maintain close relationships with its creditors to ensure correct and timely payments. A shareholder should be viewed as an important stakeholder; as an organization's owners have the power and legitimacy to change organizational structures, replace senior management, and, among other options, sell the company.

**Stakeholder perspective.** The stakeholder perspective portrays organizations acting as vehicles to generate value for a broad range of individuals or groups of people. Davis (2014) identified that stakeholder theory compelled organizations to recognize their responsibilities toward people and entities beyond their shareholders. Scholars who support a stakeholder perspective suggest that IT project managers increase an organization's economic value by understanding stakeholders' interests and integrating their knowledge, support, skills, and experience into their IT projects (Doh & Quigley, 2014). Hörisch et al. (2014) maintained that a single dimensional perspective to manage IT projects was too narrow, and advocated that IT projects managers use a multidimensional approach to be equipped to respond to a broader

range of stakeholder demands. Doh and Quigley found that IT project managers who adopted a multidimensional stakeholder approach encompass a broader view on stakeholder expectations, cover a wider range of project benefits, and enable a long-term strategic perspective. Despite the recognition that a multidimensional approach leads to increased stakeholder satisfaction, organizations lack effective strategies to manage multidimensional stakeholder relationships (Mir & Pinnington, 2014).

IT project managers face challenges in finding a balance between adopting a shareholder or stakeholder perspective. Issues may arise, if shareholders perceive that organizational leaders spend too much time on activities that do not directly contribute to furthering the interests of shareholders (Mainardes et al., 2012). In this case, organizational leaders adopting a broader stakeholder view could face agency problems with its shareholders. Agency theory pertains to the relationship between the principal (shareholders) and the agent (company management) and prescribes that managers should be fully focused on those activities, which contribute to building wealth for the shareholders (Jensen, 2001). Jensen argued however that trade-offs always existed in stakeholder relationships and dismissed the possibility of gaining stakeholder consensus in all circumstances. In contrast, H $\ddot{o}$ risch et al. (2014) disagreed that stakeholder management should be viewed as trade-offs between managers and stakeholders, and proposed that organizational leaders apply stakeholder theory with consideration for mutual interests to create value for all stakeholders. IT project managers have limited resources and time to allocate equal attention to all project stakeholders, and are therefore compelled to make decisions based on prioritization (Van Offenbeek & Vos, 2016). PMI (2013) advocates that project managers should analyze stakeholders from the perspective of levels of

interest in project outcomes, power within the organization, and ability to influence other stakeholders. IT project managers can subsequently allocate time and effort toward stakeholders using this risk-based assessment model as a management tool.

### **Project Stakeholder Environment**

IT project managers face increased diversity and geographical spread of their projects' stakeholders. The environment in which IT project managers work is changing, mainly caused by organizations adapting to the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization. For example, organizations seek to optimize costs by offshoring or outsourcing shared services (Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Heravi et al. (2014) agreed that IT project managers are operating in dynamic work environments and consequently recommended for IT project managers to regularly review stakeholder management plans during the project life cycle to ensure the relevance and currency of those plans.

IT project managers engage with stakeholders to foster positive relationships. Stakeholders play an important role in IT projects with their ability to influence IT project outcomes (Badewi, 2016; Beringer et al., 2013; Kloppenborg et al., 2014). IT project managers should therefore understand how to correctly engage with stakeholders and possess the requisite skills in order to do so. Chen (2014) identified that the tenets of project stakeholder management is rooted in communication and collaboration; where communication refers to multidirectional exchanges by the project management team, and collaboration refers to the development of mutually beneficial relationships to foster win-win situations. Hörisch et al. (2014) raised the point that managing stakeholder relationships does not imply that all stakeholders should be treated equally. However, Hörisch et al. argued that managers should

identify which stakeholders contribute to business activities and commit to looking after their well-being. Badewi (2016) agreed with this normative approach to project stakeholder management and found that stakeholders are swayed by their perception of new technologies, and, as such, may display both positive and negative attitudes. Consequently, stakeholders may promote or resist change in technology projects.

IT project managers, whose projects introduce new technologies to organizations, may be engaged for several years throughout the project life cycle. During the project life cycle, IT project managers face a range of challenges to manage a diverse range of stakeholders. For example, stakeholders may enter or leave the organization during the project, or stakeholders may change priorities in response to changing market conditions. Bernroider (2013) described how stakeholders' perceptions changed over time causing misalignment between IT project managers' perceptions of stakeholders' expectations and real stakeholder expectations. IT project managers could lose momentum by expending unnecessary time and effort to mediate stakeholders if they are not aligned from the outset of a project (Beringer et al., 2013). These discrepancies and misalignment of perspectives present potential challenges to IT organizations and, in particular, IT project managers, who must gain sufficient support from a broad stakeholder community. To mitigate the problem of misalignment, Bernroider (2013) suggested that IT project managers should encourage stakeholder involvement and meaningful dialogue during the project's planning phase, and continue meaningful dialogue throughout the duration of the project.

Organizational leaders have the option to enhance the stakeholder experience through engaging IT project managers who have completed project management

training. Formal training programs, such as Prince 2 and project management professional (PMP), provide project managers with skills to identify and manage a broad range project performance criteria beyond the traditional iron triangle (e.g., cost, schedule, quality) to include broader stakeholder expectations, such as the project's impact on society or the environment. Mazur and Pisarski (2015) found that similar project stakeholder management practices exist across different industries, caused in part by institutions offering standardized project management training. Project managers therefore contribute to the industrialization process by acting as conduits to pass the same knowledge on stakeholder management from one industry to another. Despite recognizing the merits of formal project management training, Badewi (2016) cautioned organizational leaders that IT project managers may ignore broader stakeholder needs and focus on the iron triangle performance criteria, if they lack maturity, experience, and managerial support.

### **Stakeholder Identification**

The IT project manager begins the stakeholder management process by conducting an analysis to identify the project's stakeholders. IT project managers risk not being able to deliver expected project outcomes if they are unable to identify their projects' stakeholders (Mazur & Pisarski, 2015). For example, Lucae et al. (2014) found that those IT project managers who had difficulty to identify their projects' stakeholders would exceed allocated budgets and schedules. Doh and Quigley (2014) confirmed that IT project managers have difficulties to identify which person or stakeholder group should be consulted. Scholars and project management training institutes have proposed models that IT project managers could use to identify and categorize stakeholders. For example, Santana (2012) proposed a framework of

stakeholder legitimacy based on three aspects (a) legitimacy of the stakeholder as an entity, (b) legitimacy of the stakeholder's claim, and (c) legitimacy of the stakeholder's behavior. Similarly, Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) adopted the instrumental perspective to stakeholder theory, and suggested that organizations identify stakeholders' level of salience by calculating if they possess one aspect of, or a combination of, power, legitimacy, or urgency. A stakeholder who holds one aspect of legitimacy, power, or urgency is considered to have low salience, whereas a stakeholder who holds all three aspects is considered to have high salience. The salience model is dynamic and accommodates stakeholders' attributes, which may change over time.

**Power.** The power aspect of the salience model relates to the stakeholder's ability to impose themselves onto the conduct of the project management process. Mitchell et al. (1997) described stakeholders who held power, as those who could impose their will in the management-stakeholder relationship. Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2014) agreed with the notion of stakeholder power and identified several organizations that had successfully managed stakeholders using bargaining power rather than fairness. A stakeholder with power therefore has the capacity to influence other stakeholders' decisions, which they would not necessarily have taken without this external influence. Organizational leaders however should be aware that stakeholder power is a dynamic element and something that can be gained or lost (Mitchell et al.).

**Legitimacy.** The legitimacy aspect of the salience model relates to ethics and morality, similar to the normative perspective of stakeholder theory. Mitchell et al. (1997) introduced the notion that stakeholders' actions were considered legitimate if

they acted in a responsible and desirable manner, and abided by societal rules and norms. Similarly, Santana (2012) suggested that stakeholders have a legitimate claim to be treated with respect. IT project managers' credibility could be at stake depending on how stakeholders perceive their level of treatment. At the same time, IT project managers should consider each stakeholders' level of salience as stakeholders' influence on the project management process could differ. For example, a legitimate stakeholder may not hold a position of power, and conversely, a powerful stakeholder may not be legitimate (Mitchell et al.).

**Urgency.** The urgency aspect of the salience model pertains to the degree to which stakeholders expect action. This aspect is based on a stakeholder's perception of time and criticality for management to undertake a predefined activity (Mitchell et al., 1997). For example, a stakeholder who wields power may be a passive observer until a point of time when he or she expects timely action.

The salience model contains a secondary layer of subgroups for practitioners to enhance their ability to understand stakeholder behavior. In the low salience category, there are latent stakeholders who hold a single aspect of power, legitimacy, or urgency. These stakeholders have the potential to develop multiple aspects of salience. In the high salience category, there are definitive and dominant stakeholders, who possess all three aspects of salience. Definitive and dominant stakeholders correspond with Clarkson's (1995) description of primary stakeholders, who are considered essential for an organization's survival. A third sub group of stakeholders with medium salience exists, known as expectant stakeholders. Mitchell et al. (1997) claimed that expectant stakeholders could be dangerous, and

recommended for organizational leaders to pay close attention as these stakeholders possess power and urgency, but do not have legitimacy.

**Stakeholder groups.** Scholars attempt to reduce the complexity of analyzing stakeholders by grouping them into different categories. Miles (2012) remarked that, as stakeholders could be anyone in the organization or in the external environment, practitioners faced challenges to identify with whom they should collaborate. Consequently, scholars addressed this issue by grouping stakeholders based on their perspective of how they viewed the constellation of stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson & Preston, 1997; Freeman, 1984). For example, Clarkson (1995) identified two stakeholder groups, which interact with an organization: (1) primary, people with formal or contractual relationships with a company (e.g., clients, suppliers, employees, and shareholders); and (2) secondary, people without formal or contractual relationships (e.g., government authorities, the community, and media). Similarly to SRI, Clarkson viewed primary stakeholders as people without whom the organization would not survive. These primary stakeholders could withdraw their support causing serious damage, if they perceived the organization generated insufficient wealth, or inequitably distributed the wealth among other stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995). Clarkson described secondary stakeholders as those who could influence stakeholders' opinion in a positive or negative manner. IT project managers should therefore consider both primary and secondary stakeholder groups. Mishra and Mishra (2013) agreed that, to be successful, IT project managers should develop stakeholder management strategies with due consideration for secondary stakeholders who have the capacity to display, and switch between positive and negative behaviors.

Some scholars elaborated on Clarkson's (1995) model by introducing stakeholder characteristics to aid practitioners identify appropriate management strategies. For example, Walley (2013) recommended a sociodynamic approach for stakeholder classification involving the examination of human behavior from the perspective of social interaction. Walley used D'Herbemont and Cesar's (1998) *Model of Antagonism and Synergy* to build a stakeholder management strategy, based on the premise that stakeholders may display both positive and negative behaviors. The grades of synergy and antagonism interact to create eight clusters of expected behavior. At the positive end of the scale are zealots, influencers, and waverers, whereas at the negative end of the scale are opponents, mutineers, and schismatics. In the middle are passives and moaners. Practitioners first identify in which cluster the stakeholder fits, after which they develop appropriate management strategies to address the characteristics of the group. For example, a project manager could engage the support of stakeholders from the influencer group to foster a positive attitude change in stakeholders who are in the passive, moaner, or waverer clusters.

### **Stakeholder Relationships**

Building relationships with stakeholders is central to a stakeholder management strategy. Mazur and Pisarski (2015) emphasized the importance for IT project managers to develop stakeholder relationships that are effective, of high quality, and aligned to strategic stakeholder management strategies. The stakeholder landscape however is complex. Mainardes et al. (2012) identified that diverse stakeholders interact within an organizational network, which may be construed as a set of relationships, explicit or implicit, across both the external and internal environments. Tashman and Raelin (2013) found that stakeholders' objectives are not

always aligned with corporate objectives causing difficulties for the IT project manager to manage inconsistent and sometimes, conflicting points of views. Similarly, Mishra and Mishra (2013) explained that differences of opinion between stakeholders created issues for IT project managers who were expected by their management to gain alignment with stakeholders, who may hold opposing interests and expectations. For example, Keil et al. (2014) identified a misalignment between IT PMs and business stakeholders' perspectives on IT projects, where business stakeholders think that customers solutions should be brought to market without constraints, whereas IT PMs focus on costs, quality, development and delivery processes, and functionality. This misalignment hinders efforts to share the same perspective on stakeholder management strategies.

Poorly designed stakeholder management strategies have an adverse effect on project outcomes. One major issue is that historically IT projects have high failure rates. The Standish Group reported in 2014 that only 16% of software projects were completed on time. Delays in projects lead to increased costs due to the extended use of project-related stakeholders such as software developers, outsourced partners, and suppliers. Such delays and their consequential effects may partially explain why 53% of IT projects exceeded their original budgets by an average of 89% (The Standish Group, 2014). Some scholars assert that a lack of stakeholder management was a major factor for project failure (Badewi, 2016; Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Moreover, Heravi et al. (2014) agreed that projects without committed stakeholders are more likely to fail, resulting in unpredictable consequences for the organization. Moreover, Heravi et al. asserted that project managers should address stakeholders' demands and objectives early in the project lifecycle to have the highest possible effect on the

project and its outcome. Organizational leaders should therefore ensure that all projects contain appropriate and timely stakeholder management strategies. Poorly implemented stakeholder management strategies have an adverse effect on stakeholder satisfaction (Carvalho & Junior, 2015).

### **Stakeholder Definition**

A clear stakeholder definition is a prerequisite to define stakeholders' interests, needs, and expectations. Eskerod and Vaagaasar (2014) found that discrepancies in stakeholder definitions caused problems for IT project managers to apply stakeholder theory as part of a management process. Moreover, the absence of a clear stakeholder definition restricts the effective application of stakeholder theory as a conceptual or theoretical research framework (Lucae et al., 2014). Mishra and Mishra (2013) agreed with the importance of having a clear stakeholder definition and found that IT project managers have difficulties to analyze and address stakeholders' interests if a clear description is absent. A stakeholder definition therefore should be an integral part of the stakeholder analysis process. Further, a clear definition of a stakeholder is essential to develop the use of stakeholder theory and improve its practical application (Mishra & Mishra).

The issue scholars and practitioners face when studying stakeholder definitions is that there are two opposing views on what the term stakeholder denotes. On one hand, a stakeholder could be construed as a shareholder in a very narrow sense of the term (Friedman & Miles, 2002) and, on the other hand, could be anyone in the company (Miles, 2012). Friedman and Miles highlighted this dichotomy of perspectives by identifying 66 different variants for the term stakeholder. The researchers found that many users of the term could not define or provide a clear

description of a stakeholder. In 2006, the stakeholder literature contained 55 definitions for the term stakeholder, and by 2008, there were 179 different definitions (Mainardes et al., 2012). The diversity of perceptions impinges IT project managers to effectively analyze stakeholders' needs. Consequently, IT project managers may have to take a broad perspective to define a project's stakeholders, which has the disadvantage that stakeholder relationships are selected using subjective selection criteria. For example, Hsieh (2015) found that some practitioners identified stakeholders based on their economic and social relationships with the organization. IT project managers should therefore be aware that some stakeholders may have to be included in the stakeholder analysis based on their political or social ties with the organization, or a person in the organization holding a position of power.

### **Stakeholder Analysis**

IT project managers conduct stakeholder analysis as part of the initial phase in the development of a stakeholder management strategy. Stakeholders provide important inputs to IT projects, such as human and financial resources (Carvalho et al., 2015). Moreover, Donaldson and Preston (1995) identified that stakeholders influence project outcomes by taking key strategic decisions. At the same time, stakeholders expect specific outputs, which satisfy their needs or expectations (Badewi, 2016). The challenge for project managers is to identify which stakeholders are relevant to their projects and at which point in time during the project life cycle. While IT project managers can learn from scholarly research and participate in formalized project management training, not every project manager has this privilege. Consequently, organizations may be inconsistent in their approach to and conduct of

stakeholder analysis. PMI (2013) confirmed that any deficiencies in the process to define key stakeholders will have a detrimental effect on projects.

The project management institute (PMI) publishes the project management book of knowledge (PMBOK), and chapter 13 is dedicated to project stakeholder management. PMI (2013) defined a stakeholder as being an individual or group of people who are actively involved in the project, or whose interests may be positively or negatively affected by the project outcome. During the initiation phase of a project, a project manager identifies the project's stakeholders, and, in the subsequent planning phase, develops stakeholder management strategies (PMI). During stakeholder analysis, an IT project manager faces a dilemma to choose between a broad view, where a high number of stakeholders are identified, or a narrow view, where a low number of key individuals or stakeholder groups are identified (Mainardes et al., 2012). The problem with a narrow view is that the IT project manager may unknowingly exclude important individuals, who may take objection to their exclusion. Whereas, the problem with a broad view, is that an IT project manager includes a large group of people, which becomes impossible to manage (Mainardes et al.). Mitchell et al. argued that project managers adopting a narrow view might fail to identify hidden stakeholders who could eventually gain a position of power to positively or negatively influence a project's outcome. Mitchell et al. advised practitioners to identify hidden stakeholders, who could unexpectedly influence project outcomes. IT project managers should therefore attempt to identify stakeholders who they perceive have an interest, and to which degree, in the project outcome. The notion of identifying all interested parties is supported by Cleland

(1985), who defined a stakeholder as a person who has a vested interest in the outcome of a project.

### **Project Stakeholder Management**

Stakeholder management is an integral part of the project management process. Scholars, practitioners, and professional institutes share a common view that effective stakeholder management is a key factor for project success (Beringer et al., 2013; Eskerod & Huemann, 2013; PMI, 2013). To reinforce the importance of project management, Badewi (2016) asserted that IT projects were at the center of the delivery mechanism for organizations to achieve strategic objectives. Despite the common view on the importance of project stakeholder management and positive correlation to successful project outcomes, it was only recently in 2013 that PMI introduced a specific chapter in the PMBOK dedicated to stakeholder management. The late addition of Chapter 13 (stakeholder management) may partly explain why IT project managers employ inconsistent procedures pertaining to stakeholder management strategies for their respective projects.

The value of an IT project is realized through the actions of the project management. PMI (2013) referred to project management as the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to meet project requirements. Badewi (2016) identified that organizations benefitted from the institutionalization of project management practices, which comprised two elements: the organization's application of project management practices, and the organizational success in implementing projects. The former refers to the project management construct, such as resources, competencies, and methods, whereas the latter refers to the action undertaken to realize the project, such as working processes, communication, life cycle

management, and stakeholder management. Badewi asserted that when project management and stakeholder benefits management are practiced together, the more tightly coupled an organization becomes, leading to higher project performance. In other words, the researcher is drawing similar parallels to the notion of project maturity, by saying that the longer project management and benefits management are practiced, the higher the level of organizational maturity.

**Project risk management.** The identification and management of project risks is an integral part of the project stakeholder management process. Zwikael, Pathak, Singh, and Ahmed (2014) defined project risk as a scenario in which a project suffers a damaging impact. The objectives of project risk management are to increase the likelihood and impact of positive events, and decrease the likelihood and impact of negative events in a project (PMI, 2013). Organizations that fail to develop appropriate stakeholder management strategies increase a project's risk thereby rendering it more prone to failure (Carvalho et al., 2015; Lucae et al., 2014; Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Similarly, Conforto, Amaral, Da Silva, Felippo, and Kamikawachi (2016) found that within the IT project environment differing and sometimes conflicting inputs by stakeholders contributed to increased levels of risk through project uncertainty and instability. An IT project manager is therefore unlikely to deliver a project's expected benefits without the engagement and acceptance by stakeholders (PMI). The aspect of risk management within the overall project management context serves as a constant reminder to IT project managers that an appropriate stakeholder management strategy is a key factor to influencing successful project outcomes. Despite having formal project management training, however, IT

project managers sometimes fail to leverage the stakeholders' potential strengths to positively influence project outcomes (Eskerod & Huemann, 2013).

IT project managers operate in difficult working conditions, where they may be constrained from fully engaging with some stakeholders. Walley (2013) identified that project managers have limited power to resolve differences between stakeholders who are diametrically opposed. Jiang, Chang, Chen, Wang, and Klein (2014) agreed with the potential risk to IT projects caused by the complex relationships between project managers and stakeholders, which manifest in (a) resource limitations, (b) differing and often conflicting needs, (c) emergent inputs, and (d) elevated ambiguity. As some stakeholders may disagree on some project aspects, compromise is only possible if stakeholders' expectations are clearly identified and constantly verified. Despite an IT project manager's best efforts to manage stakeholder complexity, there may be times when he or she requires managerial support to rectify issues. In this case, organizational leaders have a facilitation role to play to attenuate stakeholder demands and find appropriate solutions (PMI, 2013).

**Stakeholder management competencies.** Organizations are investing in more globalized projects and consequently require leaders who can manage virtual project teams (Barnwell, Nedrick, Rudolph, Sesay, & Wellen, 2014). IT project managers are therefore challenged to adapt to this new work environment by developing a wider range of technical and analytical skills (Carvalho et al., 2015). The impact of the project manager, and his or her leadership style has been largely ignored in the study of stakeholder management (Kloppenborg & Tesch, 2015). Yet, one of the major factors influencing project success is human capital (Ayub, Hassan, Akhtar, & Laghari, 2015; Bailey & Teklu, 2016). In a study into the competencies of

IT project managers, Lindgreen, Packendorff, and Sergi (2014) found that IT project managers required a broader set of hard (technical) and soft (emotional) skills to cope with a wider range of stakeholder demands. Similarly, Badewi and Shebab (2016) found that, as IT projects often deliver a change in business processes and working practices, IT project managers should possess nontechnical skills to cope with the associated psychological pressure that accompanies organizational change programs. Organizational leaders should therefore appraise how the human resource department and departmental managers acquire IT project managers and, over time, support their professional development.

**Stakeholder cocreation.** Stakeholder relationships are reciprocal in nature, where both parties provide inputs and expect to receive outputs. Stakeholder relationships in IT project management have the potential to incur biases. In a study of 88 companies that had successfully implemented enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, Bernroider (2013) discovered that stakeholders regularly made non-participative actions that were biased toward their own interests, even to the detriment of IT project outcomes. To counter this potential bias, Bernroider recommended that IT project managers should create the project plan with stakeholders. Cicmil and O’Laocha (2016) concurred with Bernroider and proposed that project managers foster the collective action of stakeholders to cocreate projects. Gouillart (2014) explained that cocreation is a means to achieving competitive advantage and identified five processes, which promote stakeholder participation (a) community, refers to diverse relationship inside and outside the organization; (b) platform, refers to the creation of a virtual or physical open discussion forum; (c) interactions, refers to cost-effective, broad, and frequent stakeholder interactions; (d) experience-based,

refers to the level of individualized experiences by all stakeholders; and (e) economic value, refers to the value generated created through the combined stakeholder network. Further, Gouillart expressed that it is challenging for organizations to employ a cocreation strategy as, to be successful, organizations are required to open traditional value chains and to view external entities as partners in networked relationships. The idea of enhancing stakeholder relationships through cocreation can be viewed in parallel to the discussion on project manager competencies, where in today's complex working environment, IT managers are required to be resourceful and possess both technical and social skills.

**Stakeholder social contracts.** Hsieh (2015) proposed that organizations should explore the use of social contracts to formalize behaviors in the stakeholder management process. Artto, Ahola, and Vartiainen (2016) found that social interaction created value between the project team and stakeholders, yet suggested that formalizing social behavior was a difficult endeavor. Fernandes, Ward, and Araujo (2014) presented similar findings and suggested that IT project management processes should extend beyond traditional hard factors (e.g., schedules, reports, and project dashboards) to include an improved set of behaviors, routines, and ways of working with stakeholder groups. The discussion on social contracts therefore pertains to the formalization of how stakeholders should be integrated into organizational processes. Hsieh argued that a prerequisite for applying social contracts in the project manager-stakeholder relationship is that stakeholders should have a legitimate right. While Hsieh touches on the aspect of legitimacy in a similar manner to Mitchell et al. (1997) who devised the salience model, IT project managers

should consider other aspects of the model, such as power and urgency to have a holistic view on the construct of social contracts.

### **Stakeholders and Project Performance**

In project stakeholder management literature, there was little consensus among scholars on what constitutes project success. Initially, scholars focused on the reasons for project failure rather than project success, with an assumption that poor scheduling caused projects to fail to meet expected budgets (Ika, 2015). Ika reported that, while a focus on the traditional iron triangle (e.g., cost, schedule, and quality) prevailed during the 1960s to 1980s, other criteria were later added to accommodate broader stakeholder interests. More recently, scholars found that the identification of appropriate project success criteria in project stakeholder management is complex (Ika, 2015; Mir & Pinnington, 2014). Despite PMI being the international authority for formalized project management training, the most recent edition of the PMBOK, published in 2013, does not clarify the project success factors, which should pertain to project stakeholder management. For example, PMI defined project success as projects, which were completed within the constraints of scope, time, cost, quality, resources, and risk. PMI's definition falls short of explaining which success criteria project managers should use to gauge how the project outcome or the conduct of the project management process met stakeholder expectations. Moreover, PMI's definition fails to account for a broader stakeholder community other than internal staff and management.

**IT project success factors.** Rapid advances in technology are causing project success criteria to constantly change. For example, in some circumstances, speed to market as an enabler for competitive advantage may take precedence over quality

(Badewi, 2016). IT projects differ in size and complexity, and can have internal or external facing characteristics (Klein et al., 2014). Mir and Pinnington (2014) found that the level of differences between IT projects rendered the application of a universal set of measurement criteria unpractical and unrealistic. Despite the difficulties to measure project success, there is general agreement that project management has a positive effect on an organization by contributing to long-term success through the optimization of business processes and systems (Mir & Pinnington). The improvement in organizational efficiency could have positive ramifications leading to a positive impact on society, for example, through additional recruitment, or reduction in carbon footprint. However, despite stakeholders' requests for project managers to use a broader set of success criteria, some project managers continue to focus on the traditional iron triangle of cost, time, and quality (Chih & Zwikael, 2015). Consequently, the situation may arise that some stakeholders (e.g., customers) may qualify a project to be successful, despite other stakeholders (e.g., business managers) qualifying it as a failure if the project did not meet their expectations (e.g., operating margin of the product).

IT project managers face challenges to formulate and appraise project success criteria because stakeholders often disagree on what constitutes success. Despite the work by professional institutions to provide a common view on IT project performance management, there is lack of consensus on the process and frameworks that should be used to measure project success (Badewi, 2016). Mazur, Pisarski, Change, and Ashkanasy (2014) conducted an extensive study on project performance management and concluded that a clear definition of project success does not exist. Consequently, there is need to develop a discernable and measurable framework,

which integrates stakeholders' perspectives (Mazur et al., 2014). Moreover, Albrecht and Spang (2014) found that success criteria are difficult to measure objectively because of the broad range of stakeholder demands imposed on the IT project, which may include cost reduction, organizational change, and improvement of operational performance. There are therefore a number of complexities, which impinge IT project managers from developing a comprehensive project performance framework. Moreover, project management institutions do not provide a suitable solution, despite being the recognized international authority on project management. The deficiency of suitable performance measurement frameworks may partially explain why project managers are often reticent to extend their performance measurement metrics beyond the traditional iron triangle.

**Stakeholder commitment as success factor.** The commitment of stakeholders is required to increase the likelihood of project success. Chih and Zwikael (2015) found that the commitment of stakeholders is the most significant IT project success criteria, especially in large projects, where inherently long deployment times entail that stakeholders are required to be committed for long periods. There are two aspects to the topic of stakeholder commitment: project content, and project life cycle. First, stakeholders may not always agree on the IT project design, or objectives for the new IT system, resulting in different displays of commitment (Badewi, 2016). For example, a marketing manager may require additional functionality of a software system to satisfy a new regulatory requirement, but the finance manager may disagree to increase the budget to accommodate this change. Second, stakeholders may display different levels of interest during different phases of the project. For example, PMI (2013) teaches that stakeholder interests, and

therefore their commitment, change during the project, with greater interest at the beginning and end of the project life cycle. IT project managers should therefore understand that the intensity of the engagement with stakeholders might change during the life cycle. This understanding is in part due to the cyclic nature of IT projects, and in part by the level of stakeholder interest at any point of time during the project life cycle.

**Key performance indicators.** IT project managers use key performance indicators (KPI) to assign quantifiable and measureable objectives to projects. In a study on IT project management, Mir and Pinnington (2014) found that the use of KPIs provided transparency to stakeholders regarding the status of IT projects, and was considered the most significant variable contributing toward project success. Scholars tend to agree that the iron triangle (e.g., cost, schedule, and quality) is not an effective unit of measurement to assess modern day IT project performance, because it excludes stakeholders' desire for organizations to measure non-financial project success criteria (Badewi & Shehab, 2016; Mir & Pinnington, 2014). For example, some stakeholders may place importance on benefits to society and the environment, enhancing operational performance, or improving product safety, as they assume financial indicators are part of the project success criteria *per se* (Beringer et al., 2013). Mir and Pinnington agreed and advocated that KPIs should include broader measurements and recommended for IT project managers to cocreate KPIs with stakeholders to ensure alignment with stakeholders' expectations. A weakness in the use of KPIs is in their attachment to a project rather than the product or service that is being developed and deployed. Mishra and Mishra (2013) identified this weakness and found that most organizations failed to measure a project's benefits after it has

been officially closed, and consequently never understand the full impact a project has in terms of financial performance or effect on the environment. Artto et al. (2016) agreed that after closure, projects continue to create outcomes, which add value to organizational stakeholders. There is therefore a need to review the timeline to measure long-term project benefits.

**Stakeholders' interests post project closure.** Projects continue to add organizational value after IT project managers have officially closed the project. Despite IT project managers' responsibility ending at project closure, the organization has the responsibility to maintain the resulting product or service. These two different perspectives are an issue for organizations because the critical point of change is along departmental interfaces. Andersen (2016) conducted research into project managers' perspectives, and proposed two different views (a) the task perspective, which refers to traditional task-oriented projects focusing on time, cost, and quality, and (b) an organizational perspective, which takes a network view and embraces social and political aspects. An organizational perspective infers that a project in one organization can cause changes to the receiving organization's processes, structure and culture (Andersen). Artto et al. (2016) acknowledged the merits of project managers following the organizational perspective because they position the project inside a networked system lifecycle. Artto et al. argued that projects create outcomes, which continue to add value to organizational stakeholders long after a project has been closed. Morris (2013) studied the effect of projects on organizational systems and found that project management contributed most value through its effort to improve organizational processes within the project's multi-organizational system. Artto et al. presented similar findings and suggested that project management is

instrumental in generating value for stakeholders through the creation of a network of multiple organizations. For example, the implementation of a new CRM system requires several operational teams to be fully integrated into the project organization to be fully prepared to operate and continue to measure the impact of the system post project closure.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I provided an overview of the (a) background of the business problem, (b) problem and purpose statements, (c) research method and design, (d) conceptual framework, and (e) academic literature pertaining to stakeholder management within an IT project context. Researchers have previously addressed approaches to identifying stakeholders and discovering how to address their interests and expectations. However, research findings were inconsistent due to discrepancies on stakeholder definitions, industry specificities, complexity of IT projects, and increased diversity of the stakeholder community. Therefore, there was a need to conduct further research into stakeholder management strategies. I discussed the significance of the research, and how I believed the study could contribute to positive social change by having potential to foster an improved working environment.

In Section 2, I offer a more detailed discussion on the (a) research method and design, (b) data collection instruments and procedures, (c) data analysis, and (d) methods to maintain research credibility and reliability. Additionally, I provide details on my role as a researcher and how I abide by an ethical code. Finally, I demonstrate how I achieved an acceptable level of research quality to render the findings credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

## Section 2: The Project

In this qualitative case study, I explored strategies for managing IT project stakeholders. Researchers have previously addressed approaches to identifying stakeholders' expectations and discovering how to address their interests and needs. However, research results were inconsistent due to discrepancies on stakeholder definitions, industry specific research with nontransferable findings, and acceleration on the development of new and innovative IT systems, which touch a broader stakeholder community. In Section 2, I offer a more detailed discussion on the (a) research method and design, (b) data collection instruments and procedures, (c) data analysis, and (d) methods to maintain research credibility and reliability. Additionally, I provide details on my role as a researcher and how I abide by an ethical code. Finally, I demonstrate how I achieved an acceptable level of research quality in that the findings would be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this multiple qualitative case study was to explore strategies CIOs and IT directors used for managing IT project stakeholders. I explored the experiences of two CIOs and four IT directors in two multinational companies based in Switzerland, who had demonstrated success in addressing the specific business problem that some CIOs and IT directors lack strategies for managing IT project stakeholders.

The implications for positive social change include the potential to encourage effective stakeholder management to improve knowledge sharing, individual and team motivation, management across cultural boundaries, and stimulate a culture of

social responsibility and sustainability. Furthermore, a profitable organization should be in a better position to benefit local communities through the provision of additional employment opportunities. Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that company leaders who established strong stakeholder relationships benefitted from increased sharing of knowledge and higher levels of individual motivation.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in the data collection process is to observe the processes from an external perspective and remain neutral to the individuals, groups, or processes under study (Cronin, 2014; Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007). The researcher observes real-life experiences and the contextual situation to make a meaningful evaluation of logical consistency and plausibility (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). For this research, I acted as the primary data collection instrument and reviewed a range of project-related documentation, such as status reports, charters, policies, lesson-learned protocols, and audit reports. I have been working in IT project management for 25 years, during which I have observed different organizational approaches to managing stakeholder expectations. I did not, however, have any working relationship with the interviewees or the company in which they worked.

I emphasized the importance of trust and respect with interviewees to foster an environment in which integrity, privacy, and high ethical standards were upheld. I embraced three key principles recommended in the Belmont Report (1979): respect for individuals, beneficence, and justice. Produced by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, the Belmont Report (1979) serves as a guideline for researchers to apply ethical principles when engaging with human subjects during the research process. I assured

privacy and authenticity of information and data, and I made no reference to personal or professional identity in the study. I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) web-based training course to ensure compliance with ethical standards required for this doctoral study (Appendix A).

Researcher interaction bias could have a detrimental effect on the research process, and measures should be taken to minimize its occurrence (Cronin, 2014; Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007; Yin, 2014). Miyazaki and Taylor (2007) recommended employing several preventative measures, such as selecting unfamiliar interview participants, selecting the correct sample strategy, and remaining emotionally detached from the subject. I embraced these measures during the research process to avoid bias and viewing data from a personal perspective.

An interview protocol (Appendix B) provides a structured and systematic approach and serves to enhance the reliability and validity of the interview outcome (Cronin, 2014; Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). I sent the protocol to interviewees prior to the appointment. Following the initial interview, I conducted a member check to ensure that I had correctly assimilated and interpreted the conversation. Member checking is a process to eliminate anomalies and is used to validate the researcher's perception of the interview with that of the interviewee (Yin, 2014).

### **Participants**

I conducted interviews with participants as part of the data collection process. Olsen, Orr, Bell, and Stuart (2013) identified that purposeful sampling was a suitable method to facilitate the selection of interview participants. Sample selection criteria act as a filter to assure interview participants have the requisite attributes to participate in the interviews (Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2014). I set the selection criteria

to IT executives who had (a) been employed in IT for a minimum of 10 years, (b) extensive knowledge of the IT project lifecycle, (c) profit and loss (P&L) responsibility, (d) fluency in English, and (e) successfully implemented strategies for managing IT project stakeholders. The selected IT executives worked in two multinational companies based in Switzerland, and I did not encounter any linguistic issues as all interviews were conducted in English. In some interviews, a French word appeared in the conversation, which was directly converted into English, and the sentence repeated to ensure that context and meaning had been retained. As a linguist in French, I was qualified to translate text from French into English.

I employed a structured process to recruit and engage interview participants. Initial contact was made directly to CIOs and IT directors by phone, during which I explained the study purpose, the process, and requested for participation. After permission had been granted, a date for the interview was agreed and I sent the consent form by email, which included instructions that he or she could withdraw at any time from the process.

Documental data combined with new knowledge gleaned from interviews provide a deep understanding of the subject under study (Almutairi, Gardner, & McCarthy, 2014; Cronin, 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers use semistructured interviews to provide a systematic approach for gaining new knowledge and in-depth data (Cronin, 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). The interview setting should be formal, yet sufficiently convivial so that the interviewee feels confident and safe to share experiences (Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007). Cronin (2014) argued that researchers who established a trusting relationship with interviewees could build rigor into the inquiry process, leading to enhanced data

validity and reliability. Interviews were scheduled according to the participant's availability and conducted at a location of their choice. A convivial working relationship was established with the interviewee, which provided a suitable ambiance for the interview.

### **Research Method and Design**

Researchers use three different methods to conduct research: quantitative, using numerical data; qualitative, using nonnumeric data; and mixed, which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Yin, 2014). Researchers use quantitative approach studies to provide answers to hypothesized relationships or differences among variables (Sheppard, 2016). Therefore, the quantitative and mixed-method approaches contain the element of testing predetermined hypotheses, which do not support the exploratory nature of a qualitative study (Venkatesh et al., 2013). My research strategy involved the exploration of stakeholder management strategies used by IT executives, for which I needed to gain a deep understanding of business processes, procedures, and lived experiences.

### **Method**

Researchers use a qualitative method to gain a deep understanding of the company's policies, processes, procedures, and individuals' lived experiences (Chan et al., 2013). A qualitative method is appropriate to identify and explore alternative or new views on a particular topic (Berg & Karlsen, 2013; Chih & Zwickel, 2015; Vom Brocke & Lippe, 2013). By using the qualitative method to reveal a deeper understanding of the key business processes, researchers are better equipped to interpret individual experiences (Doh & Quigley, 2014). I selected a qualitative method to address my specific business problem.

Researchers have confirmed that a qualitative method is appropriate to explore stakeholder relationships in IT projects (Badewi, 2016; Gonzalez, 2014; Werwath, 2015). Today's stakeholder landscape is complex and compels researchers to explore a broad range of stakeholders' interests and expectations (Badewi & Shehab, 2016; Mir & Pinnington, 2014). For this reason, a qualitative research approach was appropriate to provide insight into a range of tangible and intangible factors, which combine to influence stakeholder perceptions (Badewi, 2016; Besteiro, Pinto, & Novaski, 2015).

### **Design**

There are several qualitative research designs, including case study, ethnography, narrative, and phenomenology (Yin, 2014). Researchers select the most appropriate design to meet their research objectives. For example, phenomenological researchers seek to understand individuals' experiences by identifying a common experience among a group and articulate this as a phenomenon (Bevan, 2014). Ethnographic studies are grounded in anthropology, and researchers use this design to explore culture (Gringeri et al., 2013). Researchers may use a narrative design to explore real-life experiences; however, this design lacks methodological rigor (Kahlke, 2014). In a case study design, the researcher explores individuals' lived experiences through the collection of multiple types of evidence (Berg & Karlsen, 2013; Cronin, 2014; Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). Yin (2014) suggested a single case study is appropriate for exploring the unique characteristics of a particular case. However, I conducted the study in multiple sites as companies only have one CIO and generally two or three senior IT directors. Keil et al. (2014) advocated the merits of

conducting a multiple site study. I employed a multiple case study design to collect data across the two companies.

## **Population and Sampling**

### **Population**

The target sample comprised two CIOs and four IT directors from two multinational companies based in Switzerland, who had demonstrated success in addressing the specific business problem. Sample selection criteria act as a filter to assure that interview participants have the requisite attributes to participate in the interviews (Robinson, 2014; Yin, 2014). I set the selection criteria to IT executives who had (a) been employed in IT for a minimum of 10 years, (b) extensive knowledge of the IT project lifecycle, (c) P&L responsibility, (d) fluency in English, and (e) successfully implemented stakeholder management strategies. Robinson (2014) argued that purposeful sampling was appropriate for studies using a small sample size. I extended the sample size beyond the initial five executives to include a sixth IT executive to achieve data saturation. Data saturation enhances the validity of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I realized I had achieved data saturation as no new data, new themes, or new codes surfaced during data analysis.

### **Sampling**

Olsen et al. (2013) identified that purposeful sampling is a suitable method to facilitate the selection of interview participants. Criterion sampling is a type of purposeful sampling and is used to narrow the range of variation and focus on similarities (Palinkas et al., 2015). This technique entails the selection of participants who have fulfilled predetermined criteria (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). Robinson (2014)

found that criterion sampling enhanced methodological rigor by specifying inclusion and exclusion criteria. Consequently, I used criterion sampling for my research.

### **Ethical Research**

A researcher is required to uphold strong ethical principles during the conduct of the research process. Ethical issues may arise during the research process due to the humanistic and naturalistic way qualitative methods are conducted (Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007). In this study, I upheld high ethical standards by (a) incorporating the three key principles from the Belmont Report (1979), (b) completing the NIH web-based training course, and (c) obtaining a signed informed consent form from all interviewees. It was essential to obtain approval from the university's institution review board (IRB) before starting the interview process (Check, Wolf, Dame, & Beskow, 2014; Lohle & Terrell, 2014). Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-12-17-0623992, which expires on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

The privacy of individuals and the companies they represent should be protected from exposure (Check et al., 2014; Michalos, 2013; Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007). I addressed this issue by ensuring that no reference was made to a person or company name by applying pseudo codes to mask their identity (e.g., using participant # A, or company # 1, etc.). Cronin (2014) argued that researchers who establish a trusting relationship with interviewees could build rigor into the inquiry process, leading to enhanced data validity and reliability. The interview protocol provided transparency of the process, while I used an informed consent form to ensure the interviewee was aware of the measures taken to protect individual privacy and authenticity. The informed consent form acts as a reassurance to interview participants regarding the safeguarding of disclosed information and serves to

reinforce trust (Check et al., 2014; Lohle & Terrell, 2014). All study-related data was stored on an encrypted, password-protected storage device with a back-up copy to be retained for 5 years to protect the confidentiality of participants and organizational documentation. Thereafter, all electronic and hard copies of the data will be permanently deleted and physical documentation shredded using an industrial standard machine.

Researchers have an ethical obligation to ensure interview participants are made aware of the benefits and risks associated with participating in research (Phillips, 2015). Lohle and Terrell (2014) identified that benefits in the form of incentives could compromise the research process. Incentives could include an incentive to participate, monetary compensation for the work, or reimbursement for the costs (Lohle & Terrell, 2014). I included a statement in the consent form to inform participants that participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and that there was no incentive.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

For this research, I acted as the primary data collection instrument and reviewed a range of project-related documentation, such as status reports, charters, policies, lesson-learned protocols, and audit reports. I enriched the data for triangulation purposes by using three primary sources: semistructured interviews, member checking interviews, and data contained within documentation. Documental data combined with new knowledge gleaned from interviews provide a deep understanding of the subject under study (Almutairi et al., 2014; Cronin, 2014; Yin, 2014).

## **Interviews**

An important factor to achieve credibility in studies is to assure consistency between the research purpose, the line of questioning, and the methods applied by the researcher (Carvalho & Junior, 2015). Carvalho and Junior (2015) found that by considering the link between the research purpose and the interview questions as an iterative process, it was possible to select appropriate interview questions to reflect the intent of the research method. Researchers use semistructured interviews to provide a systematic approach for gaining new knowledge and detailed data (Cronin, 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gale et al., 2013). Arrto et al. (2016) used semistructured interviews to explore interorganizational project integration practices across 10 sites. The researchers' study confirmed that semistructured interviews were an appropriate method to conduct interviews over multiple sites. The interview setting should be formal, yet sufficiently convivial so that the interviewee feels confident and safe to share experiences (Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007). Miyazaki and Taylor (2007) reported that a person-oriented and friendly researcher obtained higher quality data than a task-oriented and business-like interviewer. I conducted the interview in a location selected by the participant to cause least disruption and fit into the participant's schedule.

Interview protocol provides a structured and systematic approach and serves to enhance the reliability and validity of the interview outcome (Cronin, 2014; Morse, 2015; Yin, 2014). I sent the protocol to interviewees prior to the appointment. Following the initial interview, I conducted a member check to ensure that I had correctly assimilated and interpreted the conversation. Member checking is a process

to eliminate anomalies and is used to validate the researcher's perception of the interview with that of the interviewee (Yin, 2014).

I used open-ended questions and offer interviewees liberty to return to any questions to provide retrospective input. Open-ended interview questions foster a deeper discussion on IT projects and enable an open and free-flowing exchange (Gale et al., 2013; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). Interview questions can be organized into themes, which enhance reliability of data through the process of replication (Davis, 2014; Vom Brocke & Lippe, 2013). Davis (2014) analyzed and categorized project management literature to identify main themes, which helped to convert textual information into knowledge. Main themes chosen for interviews were barriers to implementing effective stakeholder management strategies, changes in stakeholder expectations during the project lifecycle, assessment of success factors, and post-implementation reviews. Interviewees were given the opportunity to extend the discussion beyond initial themes to expose emergent ideas (Vom Brocke & Lippe, 2013; Yin, 2014).

### **Documentation**

A case study design provides researchers the benefit of using different sources of evidence and pursuing converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2014). While documentation may provide a depth of evidence, the researcher should not assume that the content is an accurate record of events (Yin, 2014). Fernandes et al. (2014) conducted research into IT projects and suggested that researchers should collect a variety of documents such as project reports, protocols, workshop presentations, project status presentations, project closing reports, and steering committee reviews. Triangulation is a method used to corroborate similar datasets and acts to enhance

construct validity of the multiple case study (Yin, 2014). Artto et al. (2016) used interviews as the primary method of collecting data and analyzed supplementary documents to verify important details such as dates, places, names, and organizations.

### **Member Checking**

While the ability to construct and ask good questions is a fundamental prerequisite for researchers, it is necessary to record interviews to reduce errors in the interpretation of the conversation (Keil et al., 2014). Member checking is a process to eliminate anomalies by validating the researcher's perception of the interview with that of the interviewee (Yin, 2014). I conducted member checking to ensure that I had assimilated the interview data correctly. Based upon the interviewee's feedback, I knew that I had correctly assimilated the interview discussion. I also used member checking to deepen knowledge in specific areas and to assure saturation of the data. Member checking is also an action to enhance dependability and credibility (Yin, 2014).

### **Data Collection Technique**

The research question was, what strategies do CIOs and IT directors use for managing IT project stakeholders? To address the research question in case studies, Yin (2014) identified three types of interviews: prolonged interviews, shorter focused interviews, and formal survey interviews. While there are merits to prolonged and formal survey interviews, I employed shorter focused interviews in a semistructured manner. Semistructured interviews provide a systematic approach to gaining new knowledge and in-depth data (Cronin, 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gale et al., 2013). Fernandes et al. (2014) used semistructured interviews to identify pertinent factors in IT projects, which successfully led to the identification of new project improvement

initiatives. There are some potential pitfalls with the semistructured interview process. First, research validity may be weakened (e.g., lack of legitimacy, trustworthiness, applicability) if there is inconsistency between the research purpose and the interview questions (Carvalho & Junior, 2015). Risks to research validity can be mitigated by applying an iterative approach to the interview process and permitting freedom to explore emergent information until the research purpose has been fully addressed (Carvalho & Junior). Second, researcher interaction bias has been found in interviews, telephone surveys, and face-to-face questionnaires, and may be caused by (a) incorrectly recording or misinterpreting responses, (b) the introduction of researchers into the interviewees' environment, and (c) incorrectly evaluating participant's responses (Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007). If these biases occur, outcomes of the study could be compromised (Miyazaki & Taylor). I mitigated the potential of researcher interaction bias by recording the interview using two devices in parallel: a digital dictaphone and an Apple iPhone as a technical back-up. The interview was transcribed and synthesized, and presented to the interviewee during the member check meeting.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Researchers uphold confidentiality and integrity of the study data by applying organization techniques to record, store, and retrieve items such as articles, audio recordings, and researcher journals (Anyan, 2013). Davis (2014) recommended the use of CAQDAS programs to facilitate the research process by providing a structured environment to code, index, store, and retrieve qualitative data. Furthermore, Keil et al. (2014) identified that managing qualitative data with CAQDAS enhanced reliability and credibility of findings. I therefore used NVivo for Mac to store

transcribed interviews, scanned articles, researcher notes, content of the reflective journal, and project-related documentation.

Researchers should protect the identity of study participants. The privacy of individuals and the companies they represent should be protected from exposure (Check et al., 2014; Michalos, 2013; Miyazaki & Taylor, 2007). Researchers can protect the identity of study participants by using generic codes (Woronchak & Comeau, 2016). I ensured that no reference was made to a person or company by masking their identity by using pseudonyms. All study related data was stored on an encrypted, password-protected storage device with a back-up copy to be retained for five years to protect the confidentiality of participants and organizational documentation. Thereafter, all electronic and hard copies of the data will be permanently deleted and physical documentation shredded using an industrial standard machine.

A reflective journal is a means to capture ideas, thoughts, events, and interactions for gaining insight into self-awareness and learning (Woronchak & Comeau, 2016). Woronchak and Comeau found that students who used reflective journals improved their reflective thinking skills. For my study, I used a reflective journal to analyze my experiences during the interviews and to gain new perspectives on the data and information.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of structuring data from which to derive meaning (Gale et al., 2013). In a research to explore stress management in complex projects, Berg and Karlsen (2013) looked at the data for differences, nuances, patterns, and similarities, and argued that analysis is interplay between empirical findings and

theoretical concepts, where critical questions are raised and new conclusions made. I followed Yin's (2014) 5-step process to provide a structured approach to data analysis, which was: (1) compile the data, (2) disassemble the data, (3) reassemble the data, (4) interpret the meaning of the data, and (5) conclude the data.

During the first step, to compile the data, I consolidated and converged all raw data onto a hard disk for retaining a complete untreated dataset, and named the folder *clean data*. I created a new drive, named *stakeholder management* to store the data, which was uploaded into NVivo for Mac for analysis. The aim was to achieve a complete set of research data, which was consolidated into a single digital repository with a clean set of data as a backup. Researchers enhance credibility by confirming data and ensuring that data are complete (Houghton et al., 2013). I conducted checks on the data stored in NVivo for Mac against the raw data file to ensure that the data was complete.

During the second step, to disassemble the data, I used a process to code the data for obtaining a clear data structure. Coding is a method, which aims to structure contextualized information (e.g., place names, project phases) into hierarchical levels (e.g., level 1, level 2, etc.) so that data can be systematically analyzed (Cronin, 2014; Gale et al., 2013). Gale et al. (2013) recommended researchers to use open coding in inductive studies, and to a certain degree in deductive studies to ensure that important aspects of the data are analyzed. Lindgreen et al. (2014) suggested that combining inductive and deductive techniques is required to cover the notions of rationalist project management discourse and emotionalized work settings associated with projects. I applied open coding to obtain a structured dataset that covered all elements of the project related data. For a research into managing creative tasks in project

management, Vom Brocke and Lippe (2013) utilized perspectives (e.g., product, process, and person) for categorizing the data at the highest level, which is referred to as level 1. The initial level 1 codes used were (a) organization, (b) processes, (c) IT executive management, (d) IT project management, and (e) business stakeholders. I created level 2 sub categories and assigned these, where appropriate, to level 1 categories to maintain integrity of the data structure and continued the process until all data had been structured and categorized.

During the third step, to reassemble the data, I continued to structure the data in an iterative manner. For research into IT project management, Keil et al. (2014) employed open coding, which was followed by an iterative cycle between data collection and analysis. The aim was to query the data to identify patterns and themes. Gale et al. (2013) suggested that there were two approaches to selecting themes: deductive, where themes are based on previous literature, theories, or the specifics of the research question; and inductive, where themes are generated from the data through open coding, followed by the adjustment of themes to assure consistency. I considered both inductive and deductive aspects to ensure (a) all stakeholder-related literature was holistically captured, (b) alignment with stakeholder theory as the conceptual framework, (c) alignment with the research question, and (d) themes were generated through open coding. Lindgreen et al. (2014) found that structuring the data into themes generated higher reliability, as the structure could be replicated between different data sources. Main themes emerged from the data, and as I progressed with the analysis process using an iterative and reflective process, additional themes and sub-themes emerged. I cross-checked the data in NVivo for Mac to ensure consistency between the themes and the sources of data.

During the fourth step, to interpret the meaning of the data, I used an iterative process that included revisiting previous steps in the data analysis process. The aim of interpreting data was to derive explanations about why or how events occurred, or why or how people took particular courses of action (Berg & Karlsen, 2013). By using the query, search, and visualization functionalities of NVivo for Mac, I could identify relationships within the dataset. Berg and Karlsen (2013) looked at the data for differences, nuances, patterns, and similarities, and suggested that analysis is interplay between empirical findings and theoretical concepts, where critical questions can be raised and new conclusions made. I found that the data analysis process was dynamic and I required using a research journal to record changes. Researchers use journal entries to record and track changes to the data structure to ensure the data analysis phase is correctly documented (Cronin, 2014; Gale et al., 2013; Vom Brocke & Lippe, 2013).

During the fifth step, to conclude the data, I critically thought about the data and derived significance for my research study and for the implications for the findings, ties to conceptual framework, business practice, social change, and future research direction. The conclusion step in data analysis raises findings of the study to a higher conceptual level and captures the broader significance of the study (Gale et al., 2013). As part of the conclusion process, I provided recommendations, which potentially might benefit scholars, leaders, or project management practitioners in the development of effective stakeholder management strategies for IT projects.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Yin (2014) recommended that researchers should address issues of validity and reliability during the data collection process by (a) using multiple sources of

evidence, (b) using a case study database, (c) maintaining a chain of evidence, and (d) being attentive when using electronic sources of data. Cronin (2014) confirmed the value of these principles, and concurred that comparing multiple sources of data in an iterative manner enhanced internal validity. Mangioni and McKerchar (2013) found that testing for construct validity, internal validity, and external validity might prove validity, as an indicator of research quality. Lincoln and Guba (1985) looked at research quality from a different perspective, and proposed that credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were key assessment criteria for rigor in qualitative research.

### **Reliability**

Qualitative research is descriptive and subjective in nature, and, consequently, researchers should strive to make the research process explicit and transparent (Cronin, 2014). Cronin argued that to obtain credibility, qualitative researchers should demonstrate their application of a rigorous research process. Researchers can influence the level of reliability during the data collection and data analysis stages of the research process (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013). Yin (2014) argued that researchers could make early steps toward reliability by providing a detailed description of the research purpose. I applied therefore rigor throughout the research process to demonstrate a high level of research quality, which was credible and reliable.

I conducted interviews and collected data across multiple sites. Houghton et al. (2013) found that researchers could compare a broader set of data if it had been collected from multiple sites, which provided a more convincing and accurate case study. I recorded interviews using two different mechanisms to mitigate the risk of

losing data through instrument failure, and to assure the conversation had been correctly captured. Recorded interviews reduce errors in the interpretation of the conversation and increases reliability (Gale et al., 2013). Houghton et al. recommended using member checking to provide interviewees with an opportunity to view the interpretations of the transcripts and to confirm if the transcription is congruent with their intended statements. I integrated therefore member checking as a part of the research process.

Dependability refers to the stability of the data and is achieved when the data can withstand an audit trail (Houghton et al., 2013). Houghton et al. recommended using three types of queries to holistically test consistency within the data structure: text search, coding, and matrix. I used NVivo for Mac's query functionality to test end-to-end stability of the data structure. Researchers can enhance dependability of the data by using information gathered from live projects, or those, which have been recently concluded (Gale et al., 2013; Keil et al., 2014). I focused therefore interview discussions on recently completed projects, or those, which were nearly completed, to enhance dependability and reliability.

### **Validity**

Houghton et al. (2013) recommended for researchers to address three further principles influencing the level of quality: credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the extent to which results appear to be acceptable representations of the data (Keil et al., 2014). Transferability is the extent to which findings from a given context can be applied to other contexts (Keil et al., 2014). Confirmability refers to the quality of the interpretations of data, and the extent to which researcher biases have been minimalized (Keil et al., 2014).

Houghton et al. (2013) attested that researchers enhance the credibility of findings if data collected from multiple methods are found to be consistent. Methodological triangulation is the process of gathering data from multiple sources to gain a holistic representation of the case study (Houghton et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). Researchers can strengthen the overall research design by triangulating information drawn from multiple sources (Cronin, 2014; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; Yin, 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) asserted that the purpose of methodological triangulation is to confirm data and to ensure data is complete. Furthermore, methodological triangulation is used to test the validity of data, which has been drawn from different sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). I drew data from multiple sources, such as, semistructured interviews, IT project documentation, member checking meetings, literature review, customer reviews, and project executive committee presentations. Vom Brocke and Lippe (2013) identified that researchers sometimes encountered difficulties to triangulate unstructured data into the same empirical unit. Researchers should code data into an automated tool to obtain a coherent and consistent data structure (Cronin, 2014; Gale et al., 2013; Vom Brocke & Lippe, 2013). I triangulated the data by using NVivo for Mac and by applying Yin's (2014) 5-step data analysis process. Once coding has been completed, researchers should analyze the data to identify patterns, insights, or concepts, which are consistent with the research design (Houghton et al., 2013; Keil et al., 2014; Yin, 2014).

Member checking is a process to eliminate anomalies by validating the researcher's perception of the interview with that of the interviewee (Yin, 2014). I conducted member checking to ensure that I had assimilated the interview data

correctly. Based upon the interviewee's feedback, I knew that I had correctly assimilated the interview discussion. I also used member checking to deepen knowledge in specific areas and to assure saturation of the data.

Transferability is the extent to which findings from a given context can be applied to other contexts (Keil et al., 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) argued that transferability was possible when meanings and inferences from the original study were preserved. Houghton et al. emphasized the importance for researchers to create a description of the research methods, accounts of the context, and examples of the raw data for readers to make informed decisions on the feasibility of the findings to fit different contexts. Moreover, Houghton et al. suggested using direct quotes from interview participants and to use excerpts from the reflective journal to illustrate how themes developed from the data. I employed the use of a reflective journal during the research process. Burchett, Mayhew, Lavis, and Dobrow (2013) found that transferability of findings could be achieved when the researcher proved that the study design and methods were effective, recognized sampling and data analysis methods were employed, and evidence of strong internal validity was provided. Individuals have different perceptions on transferability and therefore some factors will be construed as important to some people and not to others (Burchett et al., 2013). As I had documented in detail the research data collection and analysis techniques, readers and future researchers should be able to independently assess if the findings correspond to their perception of transferability.

Confirmability refers to the quality of the interpretations of data, and the extent to which researcher biases have been minimalized (Keil et al., 2014). While readers may not share a researcher's interpretation of the data, they should be able to

identify the logic applied to the research process (Houghton et al., 2013). I employed two measures to provide an audit trail of the research process. First, I ensured that the reflective journal contained sufficient detail of the process, personal thoughts, and self-reflection. Second, I used the full functionality of NVivo for Mac to test end-to-end completeness of the data structure.

Data saturation enhances the validity of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I achieved data saturation when no new data, new themes, or new codes surfaced during data analysis. To assure data saturation, I continued the interview process until an acceptable level of saturation had been achieved (Cronin, 2014; Yin, 2014).

### **Transition and Summary**

In Section 2, I provided a detailed account of the research method and design, sampling strategy, data collection and organization instruments and techniques, data analysis, quality measures and ethical considerations. Qualitative research is descriptive and subjective in nature, and, consequently, researchers should strive to make the research process explicit and transparent (Cronin, 2014). Cronin argued that to obtain credibility qualitative researchers should demonstrate their application of a rigorous research process. Yin (2014) recommended that researchers should address issues of validity and reliability during the data collection process by (a) using multiple sources of evidence, (b) using a case study database, (c) maintaining a chain of evidence, and (d) being attentive when using electronic sources of data. Cronin confirmed the value of these principles, and concurred that comparing multiple sources of data in an iterative manner enhanced internal validity. Researchers can strengthen the overall research design by triangulating data drawn from multiple sources (Cronin, 2014; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; Yin, 2014).

In Section 3, I include the presentation of results. The main components in Section 3 are: the presentation of findings, ties to the conceptual framework, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, reflections, and the conclusion.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice & Implications for Social Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies CIOs and IT directors use for managing IT project stakeholders. I explored the experiences of two CIOs and four IT directors in two multinational companies based in Switzerland, who had demonstrated success in addressing the specific business problem that some CIOs and IT directors lack strategies for managing IT project stakeholders. Interview participants consisted of three female and three male IT executives who had (a) been employed in IT for a minimum of 10 years, (b) extensive knowledge of the IT project lifecycle, (c) P&L responsibility, (d) fluency in English, and (e) successfully implemented stakeholder management strategies. I created a synthesis of the interview and shared this with the interviewee during a member check meeting. I also used member checking to deepen knowledge and to assure saturation of the data. Data saturation enhances the validity of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I realized that I had achieved data saturation as no new data or new themes emerged during the data analysis process.

During the data analysis process, I employed Yin's (2014) 5-step process to (a) compile the data, (b) dissemble the data, (c) reassemble the data, (d) interpret the meaning of the data, and (e) conclude the data. I systematically structured the data to ensure I could fully understand the content and to assure that the dataset was complete. Researchers enhanced credibility by ensuring that data were complete (Houghton et al., 2013). Five main themes emerged during data analysis: (a) organizational culture, (b) organizational maturity, (c) leadership, (d) competencies, and (e) post-implementation reviews.

I used an iterative process to analyze the data, which included revisiting previous steps in the data analysis process to ensure I could interpret meaning from the data. To complete the data analysis cycle, I critically thought about the data to derive significance for addressing the research problem, linking findings to the conceptual framework, application to business practice, implications for social change, recommendations for actions, and suggesting avenues for future research.

All participants confirmed the importance of managing stakeholders in IT projects. Eighty three percent of participants claimed that in IT projects where stakeholders' expectations had not been appropriately addressed, projects had completely or partially failed resulting in delays, budget overruns, project cancellations, and general discontent among stakeholders and IT PM teams. All participants mentioned that for most projects post-implementation reviews were neglected, which they believed stemmed from leaders' short-term focus on projects' results, rather than taking time to improve future project efficiency through a formal learning process. Furthermore, as stakeholders and project sponsors avoided critical reflection and displayed an unwillingness to learn from past experiences, process gaps and misalignment exist between business stakeholders and IT PM teams causing inefficiency, poor relations, and miscommunication. All participants recognized the need for effective stakeholder interactions and proposed that leaders should avoid installing bureaucratic processes and procedures, which stifled flexibility and agility.

Leaders have an opportunity to rectify the effects of poor stakeholder management by installing a project management framework, which embodies organizational strategy, aligns objectives, and fosters a culture of openness, trust, and mutual respect. Furthermore, leaders have a strong role to play in encouraging

organizational learning by insisting that post-implementation reviews are systematically conducted and improvement initiatives discussed, agreed upon, and implemented.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

This study addressed the overarching research question: What strategies do CIOs and IT directors use for managing IT project stakeholders? Five main themes emerged from the data analysis, which were (a) organizational culture, (b) organizational maturity, (c) leadership, (d) competencies, and (e) post-implementation reviews. The themes provided a holistic representation of the strategies employed by CIOs and IT directors for managing IT project stakeholders. Furthermore, I identified subthemes that provided a deep understanding of organizational dynamics and highlighted the interplay between stakeholders and IT PMs during the execution of these strategies.

#### **First Theme: Organizational Culture**

Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that organizations with the capacity to acquire and distribute knowledge through close stakeholder interactions were better positioned to create a culture of trust, social responsibility, and sustainability. All participants confirmed the importance for stakeholders and IT PMs having an open and collaborative culture to work effectively together. Participant A stated that organizational culture dictated the nature of the engagement with stakeholders. Effective stakeholder management can lead to an improvement in managing across cultural boundaries, thereby increasing understanding and respect for different nationalities (Miska et al., 2013). Five subthemes emerged during data analysis: (a)

market driven versus IT centric, (b) resources and capabilities, (c) power and fear, (d) communication and trust, and (e) attitude.

**Market driven versus IT centric.** Participant A mentioned that organizations could be IT centric or market driven and, if the latter, leaders focused on seizing and adapting to market opportunities or countering competitor actions irrespective of having sufficient resources and capabilities to do so. Badewi (2016) suggested that, in some circumstances, speed to market as an enabler for competitive advantage might take precedence over quality. Participant B stated that in market driven organizations, IT PMs were required to develop and implement solutions with very short timelines and under high levels of pressure, stress, and executive level scrutiny. Participant C confirmed that in a market driven organization IT PMs played a subservient role, which created unnecessary tensions with stakeholders because of the “imperious manner, in which they are treated.” Mitchell et al. (1997) described stakeholders who held power as those who imposed their will in the management-stakeholder relationship.

Participant D stated that in a previous technology driven company, collaboration between IT PMs and business stakeholders was better than in market driven companies, because IT PMs were appreciated and perceived by stakeholders to generate “business value through the deployment of technical and innovative solutions.” Participant D added that in company Y, however, IT PMs were perceived by stakeholders as “delivery mechanisms” and treated with less respect resulting in strained relations.

All participants concurred that IT managers had the responsibility to ensure the technical infrastructure remained cost efficient, and achieved this by assessing

each IT project from a holistic perspective to derive synergies between systems, processes, and applications. Participants E and F stated that, as business stakeholders, they did not understand IT objectives; their focus remained on deploying business solutions rather than thinking about the means to do so. Participant E added that for organizations to deploy technology-based business solutions, stakeholders should agree to trade-offs, meaning “no one gets exactly what they want.” Participant F stated that if stakeholders agreed to trade-offs some barriers to implementing effective stakeholder management strategies were removed ensuring that solutions were incrementally brought to market and fine-tuned later.

**Resources and capabilities.** Badewi (2016) asserted that IT projects were at the center of the delivery mechanism for organizations to achieve strategic objectives. Eighty three percent of participants stated that as organizations had finite resources and limited capabilities, IT PMs should have robust yet flexible project management processes in place to cope with volume and complexity. Carvalho et al. (2015) found that stakeholders provided important inputs to IT projects, such as human and financial resources. Participant A stated that the management board (MB) should understand that if they wanted “twenty concurrent IT projects, they should provide sufficient resources to effectively cope with this level of demand.” Sixty seven percent of participants were concerned that some members of the MB underestimated project complexity and therefore rarely allocated sufficient resources unless the CEO had a personal interest in the project. Participant B added that if leaders did not allocate sufficient resources throughout the project lifecycle, this deficiency could have a significant impact on organizational culture as stress to deliver an under resourced project permeated throughout all stakeholders, including the IT PMs.

**Power and fear.** PMI (2013) advocated that IT PMs should analyze stakeholders to understand their level of interest in the project outcome, power within the organization, and ability to influence other stakeholders. Participant B stated he worked in a company where there was a culture of “blame and management by fear,” and consequently the IT PM went into “hiding” when project related issues arose, rather than taking a collaborative approach to resolve the issues together with stakeholders. Participant F stated that for a mature organization to function correctly, leaders should foster a culture of openness among all stakeholders so that project related issues were not hidden or incorrectly addressed through fear of being associated with failure. Participant F concluded that if organizations did not have an open culture issues were discovered far too late with more severe consequences in terms of delays and budget overruns than if they had been earlier raised and effectively addressed.

**Communication and trust.** Chen (2014) identified that the tenets of project stakeholder management was rooted in communication and collaboration; communication referred to multidirectional exchanges by the project management team, and collaboration referred to the development of mutually beneficial relationships to foster win-win situations. All participants stated that stakeholder management was more difficult to cultivate when organizational culture did not foster open and transparent communications. Participant C stated that complications arose when stakeholders did not clearly express their expectations in terms of what they wanted, and, more importantly, what they needed. Participant D added that if stakeholders did not express themselves IT PMs were less motivated to fully engage in dialogue with stakeholders. Participant E stated that a weekly project review

meeting between the IT PM and the line manager was essential to align responses to stakeholders by discussing issues and agreeing on communication plans.

Participant F stated that trust between IT PMs and business stakeholders was a key prerequisite for successful IT projects. Participant F commented that too often trust was missing, which manifested in IT PMs blaming business stakeholders for demanding too many scope changes, and business stakeholders blaming IT PMs for late project deliveries or lack of quality. Participant F explained that the low level of trust destroyed the work environment and suggested that stakeholders could install trust through regular stakeholder alignment meetings where issues could be raised and addressed in a constructive manner. Participant F concluded that individual and team motivation increased when they operated in a trustworthy working environment.

**Attitude.** Participant A stated that leaders set the tone of organizational culture, which determined the tolerance or intolerance to failure. Participant B mentioned that in company X, leaders were intolerant to failure, which probably caused more errors through IT PMs and mid-level stakeholders “hiding” issues in IT projects for fear of exposing errors. Eighty three percent of participants commented that members of the MB were naïve or reluctant to comprehend the complexity of today’s IT environment. Fifty percent of participants had the opinion that stakeholders and IT PMs could absorb the effects of MB naivety if they fostered a culture favorable to trial and error. Participant B mentioned that if the organizational attitude toward failure were favorable, there would be a sense of “if you didn’t fail, you wouldn’t learn.” Participant C stated that in a previous organization there was a favorable attitude toward trial and error where the motto was “if you didn’t try, you

wouldn't progress." Participant C added that with this positive attitude to failure it was easier to deploy effective stakeholder management strategies.

### **Second Theme: Organizational Maturity**

All participants stated that organizational maturity had a strong influence on how stakeholders interacted with IT PMs. Badewi (2016) asserted that when project management and stakeholder benefits management were practiced together, the more tightly coupled an organization became, leading to higher project performance. In other words, Badewi was drawing similar parallels to the notion of project maturity by saying that the longer project management and benefits management were practiced, the higher the level of organizational maturity. Furthermore, the level of organizational maturity can be assessed by the level of adoption of PM best practices (Golini, Kalchschmidt, & Landoni, 2015). Four sub themes emerged during data analysis (a) organizational values, (b) education, (c) process agility versus procedural bureaucracy, and (d) stakeholder behavior.

**Organizational values.** Behavior of the leadership team sets the tone of the organization and influences corporate culture by demonstrating goal oriented and relationship oriented behaviors (Northouse, 2016). Eighty three percent of participants stated that the maturity of a company affected the manner in which IT PMs engaged with stakeholders. Participant A added that organizational maturity engendered positive stakeholder relations because people focused on organizational values and collaborative processes. Participant B commented that organizational maturity was only possible if people were willing to live organizational values espoused by leaders, and that leaders should set a good example. Participant B stated that organizational and personal values were jeopardized if leaders set aggressive

targets and were uncompromising in the pursuit of the targets. Participant F asserted that if leaders were ruthless in their pursuit of success, IT PMs' personal values could be compromised as they would be forced to choose between upholding their personal values or adapting to those imposed upon the organization.

While all participants stated that goal-oriented organizational leaders should focus on customer or end-user needs, they all stated that it was not always the case. Alreemy, Chang, Walters, and Wills (2016) found that one of the key barriers to success of IT projects was that end-users were not involved in projects. Participant C stated that in large organizations there was a difference in attitudes toward organizational values between teams serving mature markets, where the focus was on internal procedures, and teams serving emerging markets, where the focus was on customer or end-user needs. Participant D stated that, too often organizational values such as ensuring high levels of customer satisfaction, were not embedded into IT projects. Consequently, business stakeholders and IT PMs were misaligned on project objectives. Participants E and F resolved the issue by articulating the link between organizational values and projects' objectives in project charters and reiterating values and objectives during key meetings, such as the project executive steering committee. Participant F added that if stakeholders instilled a common understanding of organizational values it was possible to achieve alignment between stakeholders at a conceptual level.

**Education.** Badewi (2016) identified that organizational maturity increased through the institutionalization of project management practices. Participant A stated that it was possible to facilitate the move of an organization toward a mature state by educating people on industry best practices, involving external auditors to evaluate

operational cohesiveness and performance, and conducting benchmarking activities. Participant A added that these measures could be used to assuage the concerns of stakeholders and investors that the organization was operating at an optimal level.

Badewi (2016) identified that IT PMs required appropriate education to recognize and manage stakeholder needs that went beyond traditional iron triangle performance criteria. Participants B and C stated that education was a key element of effective stakeholder management strategies because it provides an excellent platform to enhance a common understanding of project management frameworks. Furthermore, the occasion for stakeholders to be together with IT PMs provides the opportunity to build and reinforce strong working relations. Participant D commented that leaders often cut educational budgets to save costs. Participant D added that these cost savings were “false economies” because the savings in education budgets were small in comparison to the cost of failure in expensive IT projects.

**Process agility versus procedural bureaucracy.** Project management has a positive effect on an organization by contributing to long-term success through the optimization of business processes and systems (Mir & Pinnington, 2014). All participants stated that in mature organizations, project management processes were in place, such as dedicated project sponsors, governing boards, steering committees, and different levels of governance to assure that issues are addressed on time and decisions appropriately taken. Participants B, C, and F commented that although these processes were documented, they were not always “lived” causing a detrimental effect on project outcomes.

All participants noted that project management processes should be flexible and not too bureaucratic. Participant B stated that mature organizations have strong

change management processes in place, whereas participant C stated that in immature organizations, the change management process was poorly documented resulting in uncontrolled changes. Participant C added that in uncontrolled project environments stakeholder relations were poor causing project delays, frustration, and countless managerial escalations to resolve issues. Participant D commented that specialized education, such as projects in controlled environments (PRINCE) were designed to strengthen project management practices and were beneficial to IT PMs and stakeholders to add stability and control within project management environments.

Participant E stated that organizational maturity was a “double-edged sword.” On one hand, key stakeholders were more selective in deciding which IT projects to undertake with only those being developed that were aligned with strategic goals. On the other hand, the organization had installed too many processes, procedures, and committees causing a loss of agility. Participant E added that in extreme cases, IT PMs hid behind these processes and procedures to reject business initiatives or stakeholders’ requests for changes to ongoing IT projects, which created animosity. Participant E commented that stakeholders bypassed bureaucratic procedures if their demands were not treated within an acceptable timeframe, resulting in the use of “power” to force through their requests.

**Stakeholder behavior.** Participant E stated that he had worked in mature organizations and start-ups and found that in both types of organization, challenges were similar in the development of stakeholder management strategies. For example, stakeholders constantly changed their minds for rational and irrational reasons. Walley (2013) confirmed that stakeholders displayed both positive and negative behaviors. Participant E added that changes in stakeholder behavior were a fact of

life and explained that IT PMs should not waste time trying to comprehend why, but remain professional by being constructive and consistent in their interactions with stakeholders. Participant F advised that leaders should hire experienced IT PMs with strong interpersonal and relationship management skills to manage unpredictable stakeholder behaviors.

### **Third Theme: Leadership**

The impact of the project manager and his or her leadership style has been largely ignored in the study of stakeholder management (Kloppenborg & Tesch, 2015). Yet, one of the major factors influencing project success was human capital (Ayub et al., 2015; Bailey & Teklu, 2016). All participants stated that leadership involvement was essential for project success and that ideally projects should be linked to organizational strategy. Three sub themes emerged during data analysis: (1) strategic alignment, (2) leadership behavior, and (3) supportive versus unsupportive leaders.

**Strategic alignment.** Tashman and Raelin (2013) found that stakeholders' objectives were not always aligned with corporate objectives causing difficulties for IT PMs to manage inconsistent and sometimes conflicting points of views. Eighty three percent of participants mentioned that if members of the MB were not aligned on key strategic IT projects, issues in the relationships arose between stakeholders and IT PMs. Participants A, B, and F stated that if key business and technical stakeholders at the leadership level were not aligned on project objectives, an IT PM had an impossible task to employ effective stakeholder management strategies.

Participant D stated that IT PMs faced a major barrier to manage stakeholder relationships when leaders failed to ensure the alignment of project objectives with

business objectives, which are contained in the project's business case. Participant D added that once the leadership team had validated the business case during the project initiation phase business stakeholders largely ignored the document during subsequent project phases. Participant E mentioned that stakeholders and IT PMs had different perceptions on projects' objectives, where business stakeholders focused on product quality and customer value and IT teams focused on project timelines or budget. Participant E added that this discrepancy in perceptions did not negatively affect all projects, but mainly those that had high leadership visibility or had to be implemented on very short timelines. Participant F stated that a misalignment of project objectives hindered organizational efforts to develop effective stakeholder management strategies. Participant F added that when the leadership team spoke with a single voice regarding the importance of an IT project, it created a collaborative environment, removed most of the "emotions and battles" that accompanied IT projects, and led to increased individual and team motivation.

**Leadership behavior.** Participant A stated that organizational leaders were the most important group of stakeholders in IT projects, without whose support the conduct and outcome of IT projects would be jeopardized. Van Os, van Berkel, de Gilder, van Dyck, and Groenewegen (2015) identified that stakeholder relationships improved if leaders showed commitment to the project not only through discourse, but also in their behavior. Participant B commented that the organization had two types of leaders. The first type of leader "shot from the hip" and often imposed unrealistic project objectives in terms of schedule and budget, which destroyed morale. Heinitz, Kerschreiter, May, and Wesche (2014) described this type of leadership style as destructive, where the use of excessive force was exercised. This

style of leadership is not conducive for building stakeholder relationships. Participant B stated however that this type of leader pushed other departments to deliver critical input, for which the IT PM was dependent.

Participant B explained that the second type of leader listened to IT PMs and tried to understand the resources and capabilities required to successfully implement IT projects. This leader attenuated priorities so that the IT PM had the freedom to work on items that really mattered to the business. Aga (2016) referred to this style of leadership as transformational, and found that such leadership style has a positive significant effect on project success. Participant B concluded that while this type of leader fostered a satisfactory work environment, the downside was that project progress was slower, because this type of leader did not push other departments to deliver critical input. Participant C stated that the best type of leader for fostering stakeholder relationships adapted to any given situation by applying the right amount of pressure at the right time. Dang, Fehr, and Yam (2014) found that some leaders possessed the capacity to adapt behavior to become supportive in cases where stakeholders required a human touch, or more directive to overcome ambiguous work settings.

Participant D stated that business stakeholders would often inadequately express their business requirements causing difficulties for IT PMs to understand (a) the rationale for the project or change request, (b) what was required, and (c) how the project was connected to the organization's strategy. Participants D and E stated that some business stakeholders treated IT PMs in a subservient manner to which IT PMs reacted defensively or aggressively. Participant E added that it was possible to mitigate some of the negative effects of this subservient behavior by initiating the

project with an executive steering committee rather than a traditional kick-off meeting. Participant E mentioned that with this solution IT managers were more motivated and could correctly plan the project by discussing and agreeing on important items, such as behavior, strategic alignment, timings, budget, and expected outcomes.

**Supportive versus unsupportive leaders.** All participants stated that for projects to succeed leaders' support was needed at all organizational levels. Participant B added that people at all levels of the organization could influence the outcome of IT projects, for example, managers, software developers, and end-users. Participant C mentioned that stakeholders might display strong social behavior, where stakeholders accepted that at times they would "lead the decision-making process, be subordinate to it, or contribute to it." Davenport (2015) identified that leaders developed effective organizations when they cultivated stakeholders' collaborative and social capabilities. Participant C mentioned that a collective approach increased project success and individual motivation as stakeholders and IT PMs managed projects on a basis of trust and respect irrespective of rank or seniority. Participants D, E, and F stated that leaders should show willingness to understand IT PMs work environment and demonstrate their empathy in recognition of the challenges IT PMs face by posing some key questions during the project initiation phase, such as (a) what can you deliver and how long will it take, (b) what are the limitations, and (c) how can I help?

Eighty three percent of participants stated that an IT project would fail if any member of the MB opposed it. Participant A stated that the level of support or resistance was determined by the MB member being a "friend or enemy" of the

project, and added that it was difficult to ascertain who was supportive or unsupportive due to organizational politics. Participant C stated that it was possible to increase the level of MB support by integrating a list of key IT projects into the strategic plan, which was to be validated by the board of directors (BoD). Participant C added that while it was normal for the BoD to validate the MB's strategic plan, key IT projects were rarely part of this plan. Participant C asserted that effective stakeholder management strategies were only possible if the MB and BoD considered strategic IT projects to be an extricable part of business strategy.

#### **Fourth Theme: Competencies**

Multinational organizations are structured for global operations, meaning they have disparate stakeholder communities, are technically complex, and often comprise of decentralized and virtual teams (Carvalho et al., 2015). IT PMs are therefore challenged to adapt to this new work environment by developing a wider range of technical and analytical skills (Carvalho et al., 2015). In a study into the competencies of IT project managers, Lindgreen et al. (2014) found that IT project managers required a broader set of hard (technical) and soft (emotional) skills to cope with a wider range of stakeholder demands. Similarly, Badewi and Shebab (2016) found that as IT projects often delivered a change in business processes and working practices, IT PMs should possess nontechnical skills to cope with the associated psychological pressure that accompanied organizational change programs. Three sub themes emerged during data analysis: (1) project environment, (2) technical versus softer skills, and (3) finding a common language.

**Project environment.** All participants stated that IT PMs should have technical skills and strong communication and interpersonal skills to deal competently

with the demands of IT projects and interactions with stakeholders. However, 50% of participants stated that stakeholders focused disproportionately on IT PMs' deficiencies to deliver projects to avoid exposing their own lack of technical and nontechnical skills. Participant A stated that often IT PMs would be dismissed following a failed project despite the root cause of the failure coming from elsewhere. Participant B mentioned that a narrow perspective on the causes for project failure was unfair for IT PMs, and that human resources (HR) and leaders should identify the full range of competencies required to successfully manage IT projects by looking at all stakeholders involved in the process. Participant B added that IT PMs' motivation increased when leaders acknowledged that they were not the only people responsible for project success.

Participant C stated that IT PMs planned and executed projects in dynamic environments meaning that stakeholders often requested for changes to be made to the original project scope or design. All participants mentioned that in most organizations there was a formal change request process, although 50% of participants added that impatient stakeholders regularly bypassed the process by demanding IT executives to apply pressure on IT PMs to implement changes. While such stakeholder behavior is not conducive to building positive stakeholder relationships, participant C commented that IT PMs should be open-minded and flexible to accept changes if there were no serious consequences (e.g., budget increases, or schedule delays). Participant D stated that stakeholders who abused the formal change process risked damaging relationships with IT PMs. Participant E stated that business stakeholders always raised change requests, and added that the best course of action was for the IT PM to act consistently and professionally in

processing changes. Participant F concluded that IT PMs should discuss the change process with business stakeholders during regular executive steering committee meetings to avoid the situation becoming untenable.

All of the participants mentioned that IT PMs should understand how the organization works and added that this was not always the case, especially if IT PMs had been hired on a temporary basis from an external agency. Participant D added that IT PMs who did not understand organizational dynamics would be disadvantaged, because the more complex and expensive the project was, the more important organizational knowledge was required to understand with whom to engage. Participant E stated that IT PMs should be sensitive to political aspects within an organization to avoid upsetting stakeholders who held power and influence. Santana (2012) suggested that project managers should perceive stakeholders as having a legitimate claim and as such behave in a legitimate way. Participant F asserted that if IT PMs mastered organizational dynamics, especially with members of the MB, IT PMs gained credibility and support, resulting in improved stakeholder relationships throughout the organization.

**Technical versus softer skills.** All participants confirmed that IT PMs possessed the requisite technical skills to successfully deliver IT projects, but lacked interpersonal and communication skills. Lindgreen et al. (2014) found that IT PMs required a broader set of hard (technical) and soft (emotional) skills to cope with a wider range of stakeholder demands. Participant B added that in most IT projects business stakeholders and IT PM teams relied on project status meetings to communicate, discuss progress, and resolve issues. Participant C mentioned that stakeholder management strategies often failed when stakeholders used only formal

communication channels, whereas informal communications were essential to discuss and resolve potential issues before they became problems. Participant D stated that if stakeholder relations were poor, formal communication channels became forums for managerial escalation, which was inefficient and frustrating for everyone involved in the project.

All of the participants stated that communication skills were very poor with 60% of participants stating that poor communication between stakeholders was the major cause for an IT project's failure. Participant B recommended for organizations to focus on improving stakeholders' communication skills to enhance interaction among those involved in projects. Participant C stated that while proficient communication skills were a key competence, honesty and respect were prerequisites to facilitate "trustworthy" communications. Participant D stated that stakeholders and IT PMs were more committed and gave greater effort to projects when they worked in an amicable environment which fostered open and trustworthy communications.

**Finding a common language.** The initial activity of the IT PM is to manage the process of collecting business requirements from stakeholders and working with technical teams to translate these into technical specifications (PMI, 2013). Participant A stated that the challenge for IT PMs was to create a document that contains sufficient technical detail for the business analyst to design technical specifications, yet uses a language that could be understood by business stakeholders. Therefore, IT PMs are required to use the same business language as stakeholders to facilitate understanding, especially during the early stages of the project lifecycle.

Participant B stated that IT PMs should possess good technical skills to assimilate and comprehend stakeholders' expectations, grasp complexity, and identify

any associated risks. Participant C stated that leaders faced issues to find IT PMs with requisite competencies, such as technical knowledge, business acumen, and interpersonal skills. Participant D raised the point that if IT PMs focused on project management frameworks and procedures, business stakeholders would not understand their rationale and, consequently, be worried. Participant D added that IT PMs needed to have multiple skills to develop effective stakeholder management strategies and orchestrate the whole project management process with project management frameworks and processes playing a key role in achieving positive outcomes.

#### **Fifth Theme: Post-implementation Reviews**

IT PMs face challenges to formulate and appraise project success criteria because stakeholders often disagreed on what constituted success (Badewi, 2016). PMI (2013) stated that project success criteria should include both project and product aspects to provide a holistic representation of project performance. Albrecht and Spang (2014) found that success criteria were difficult to measure objectively because of the broad range of stakeholder demands, which included cost reduction, organizational change, and improvement in operational performance. Contrary to most academic literature on project performance, which focused on the importance of measuring indicators, all participants stated that IT PMs and stakeholders neglected to measure project performance for reasons, such as, lack of time, unwilling to spend time on past events, too many concurrent projects, and lack of leadership willingness to learn from past projects. Five sub themes emerged during data analysis: (1) stakeholder commitment, (2) learning culture, (3) leadership commitment, (4) stakeholder interests, and (5) project versus product performance.

**Stakeholder commitment.** The commitment of stakeholders is required to increase the likelihood of project success (PMI, 2013). Chih and Zwikael (2015) found that the commitment of stakeholders was the most significant success criteria, especially in large IT projects, where inherently long deployment times necessitated that stakeholders were required to be committed for long periods. Eighty three percent of participants viewed post-implementation reviews as a part of IT project management best practice. Participant C added that the value generated by post-implementation reviews was dependent on stakeholders' willingness and commitment to critically reflect on the project management processes throughout the lifecycle. Participant D mentioned that improvement in project success rates could only be achieved if post-implementation reviews were systematically conducted, which was possible if key stakeholders actively participated and committed to leading improvement actions. Participant D added that when stakeholders participated in post-implementation reviews project stakeholders achieved a common understanding of how the project management process should be conducted.

**Learning culture.** Participant E stated that business stakeholders and IT PMs often did not conduct post-implementation reviews because (a) teams were glad to finish the project, (b) IT PMs were forced to start another project early to absorb the high project volumes, (c) business stakeholders avoided critical observations, and (d) there was a notion of "tried it in the past and it did not work." Participant F stated that leaders had a role to play in creating a learning culture and that they should insist on post-implementation reviews for all projects. Participant F added that leaders could set the example by occasionally chairing the post-implementation reviews

instead of IT executives, which would cultivate a change in attitude from “tried it in the past” to “how to make it work for the future.”

Participant A stated that IT PMs were reticent to convey the truth during any reflection of project performance, especially when there was a breakdown of trust between stakeholders. Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that leaders who established strong stakeholder relationships benefitted from increased sharing of knowledge and obtained higher levels of individual motivation. Participant B mentioned that IT PMs disliked delivering performance related information if they believed they would be “shot down” when issues were found in projects. Participant B added that if stakeholders’ behavior was too aggressive, IT PMs used cautious or creative language to communicate project status to “avoid telling an untruth, but avoid being absolutely clear on what took place.” Participant B concluded that it was a vicious circle in which the more IT PMs were “shot down” the more reticent they became to impart the truth.

**Leadership commitment.** In an immature organization, the leaders lacked rigor and discipline to conduct project reviews. Participant B stated that post-implementation reviews rarely took place and therefore it was impossible to discern if targets set in the business case had been achieved. Participant B added that he could not understand leaders’ attitudes for not wanting to understand the factors behind successful or unsuccessful projects, as without the successful implementation of projects the organization would fail to be competitive. Successful projects enable the implementation of organizational strategies, and therefore make an important contribution to organizational performance (Chih & Zwikael, 2015). Participant C stated that IT PMs always created project closure reports, which were distributed

internally, but business stakeholders would often ignore them as it would have been “politically inappropriate” to evaluate and expose failings. While this finding does not contradict Donald and Preston’s (1995) instrumental aspect of stakeholder theory, it does however provide insight that stakeholders avoided measuring IT project outcomes for fear of exposing weaknesses in the process, or identifying failure in the project result.

**Stakeholder interests.** Participant B stated that stakeholders rarely wanted to be involved in post-implementation reviews and only requested details when issues were raised during project closure. Participant C stated that stakeholders and project managers often neglected post-implementation reviews, and had the impression that once a project had been delivered all actors and stakeholders forgot about it and moved on to the next project. Participant D contended that post-implementation reviews were an opportunity for the IT PM team and key stakeholders to “reflect on the past to improve in the future” by discussing and sharing experiences, issues, and project performance.

Participant E stated that some people were afraid of using data to measure performance, as they perceived this as a personal assessment instead of taking it as an opportunity to do better the next time. Participant F stated that in 90% of IT projects no post-mortem of IT projects was conducted, and that it was “wishful thinking” to talk about KPIs to measure success of the project. Participant F added that if the project was implemented correctly, stakeholders would not consider a project’s details, however, if problems occurred then the “blame game” started with stakeholders showing interest and spending time discussing the issues and investigating why they occurred.

**Project versus product performance.** Eighty three percent of participants stated that there were two types of post-implementation reviews; one for the project and one for the product. Participant B stated that organizations should focus more on measuring product success than project success, as measurement indicators were more tangible and relevant for organizational success. Haverila and Fehr (2016) identified that customers' satisfaction in products was vital for an organization's success. Participant B added that measuring product performance required stakeholders and IT PMs to consider criteria, such as return on investment (ROI), market uptake, and customer satisfaction. Rashvand and Majid (2014) identified that an organization's ability to align project outcomes with customers' and clients' expectations was essential in measuring project success. Participant D mentioned that organizations could measure product success by establishing business intelligence reporting processes and systems, and including these measurements as an integral part of the project. Participant F did not distinguish between project and product performance measurement and stated that for organizations to be competitive, leaders should ensure that both aspects are correctly measured and continuously assessed to improve organizational performance.

At project closure, IT PMs transferred developed products to the operations team that were responsible for maintaining the product during in-life operations (PMI, 2013). Participant C stated that the operations team was a key stakeholder in IT project management. Participant C asserted that a serious issue was that often IT PMs quickly turned to their next project, and started a second project before the operations team had fully integrated the first product. Participant D added that once a project had been completed business stakeholders continued to request changes to be made to

optimize the product. Participant D added that too often the operations teams would identify issues with the delivered software and as the IT PM had moved onto the next project, it was difficult to find a person to take ownership of coordinating corrective actions. Participant E stated that ideally IT PMs should remain with the project for a limited period to support operations with the transition because IT PMs held much knowledge of the product or service. Participant E added that IT PMs provided continuity in terms of communication between operations and business stakeholders because the relationship had been established throughout the project. Participant F stated that company Y resolved this deficiency by introducing a three-week transition period, during which the IT PM retained responsibility for the project until all project related issues had been captured, logged, and rectified.

### **Ties to Conceptual Framework**

Stakeholder theory was the conceptual framework for this study. Donaldson and Preston (1995) identified that stakeholder theory was a set of theories, which encompassed three aspects (a) descriptive, which described the collaborative and competitive interests of groups; (b) instrumental, which linked stakeholder management practice to company performance; and (c) normative, which described company behavior toward stakeholders. The main themes generated from the interviews were congruent with Donaldson and Preston's model that stakeholder theory embodied several facets. However, where Donaldson and Preston viewed the normative aspect at the core of the model with instrumental and descriptive aspects on the periphery, the findings of this study depict a different picture where descriptive aspects are more common, and instrumental aspects rarely experienced; demonstrated by stakeholders' negligence of post-implementation reviews.

Freeman (1984), who drew on organizational theory, systems theory, corporate social responsibility, and corporate strategy to develop stakeholder theory, argued that organizations should consider the interests of stakeholders when making strategic decisions. Freeman perceived stakeholders as single, independent actors. Yet, Aaltonen and Kujala (2016) argued that stakeholders sat within a broad stakeholder landscape with interdependent relationships, which created challenges for IT PMs to determine which stakeholders should receive the greatest or least attention. The findings of this study support Aaltonen and Kujala's perspective on a stakeholder landscape, and demonstrate that IT PMs have difficulties to manage stakeholders due to (a) staff turnover, (b) business stakeholders changing responsibilities, (c) complexity in distributed organizations, (d) leadership styles, and (e) organizational culture. Furthermore, 83% of participants mentioned that if key business and technical stakeholders at the leadership level were unable to align on project objectives, IT PMs had an impossible task to employ effective stakeholder management strategies.

The stakeholder landscape is complex. Mainardes et al. (2012) identified that stakeholders interacted within an organizational network, construed as a set of relationships, explicit or implicit, across both the external and internal environments. The findings of this study illustrate the importance of leaders integrating IT strategic projects into the business strategy to enable stakeholder theory to be applied in the creation of effective stakeholder management strategies. All participants suggested that leaders had the responsibility to cascade organizational strategy throughout the organization in a consistent, transparent, and respectful manner. Hörisch et al. (2014)

found that for leaders to create value for the organization, they should apply stakeholder theory with consideration for stakeholders' mutual interests.

### **Ties to Existing Literature on Business Practice**

The findings from this study tie to literature published on stakeholder management strategies in IT projects through the main themes of (a) organizational culture, (b) organizational maturity, (c) leadership, (d) competencies, and (e) post-implementation reviews. The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of leaders articulating business strategies, which integrate key strategic IT projects. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that if the leadership team were aligned on strategic IT projects' objectives, stakeholders would identify with the projects' rationale and therefore commit themselves to working with IT PMs to successfully manage IT projects.

Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that IT PMs increased an organization's economic value through integrating their knowledge, support, skills, and experience into their IT projects. The findings of this study demonstrate that IT PMs should have the requisite skills to employ effective stakeholder management strategies. However, findings also demonstrate that organizations are incorrect to focus purely on IT PMs' competencies, because all stakeholders have an influence on IT project outcomes by delivering key inputs (e.g., resources, finances, product related knowledge and information, and support). Lindgreen et al. (2014) found that IT PMs require a broader set of hard (technical) and soft (emotional) skills to cope with a wider range of stakeholder demands. The findings of this study confirm that, in most cases, IT PMs have the requisite technical skills, but lack softer skills to effectively manage stakeholder relationships. Chen (2014) identified that project stakeholder

management was rooted in communication and collaboration: where communication referred to multidirectional exchanges by the project management team, and collaboration referred to the development of mutually beneficial relationships to foster win-win situations. Sixty seven percent of participants commented that IT PMs were constrained in the employment of softer skills, where organizational deficiencies and immaturity stifled interactions between stakeholders. Moreover, findings show that organizations are poor in the recruitment of competent IT PMs due to an underestimation of the importance of softer skills, such as the proficiency to collaborate and communicate.

The impact of organizational maturity on the employment of stakeholder management strategies was poorly covered in the literature. The findings of this study however highlight the influence organizational maturity has on IT project outcomes. For example, all participants mentioned organizational maturity could have a positive and, or, a negative effect on the conduct of IT projects. All participants mentioned that in most organizations a formal change management process was in place, but the level of process maturity determined how successful the process was practiced. For example, 67% of participants stated that most change management processes were bypassed by stakeholders who forced changes to project scope by applying pressure on IT executives. Consequently, IT PMs felt disempowered to respect business processes, on which their performance was measured, which contrived to cause tension between, and mistrust of, stakeholders. Gao and Slawinski (2015) asserted that organizations should possess the capability for tension management to effectively management stakeholder relationships.

Davenport (2015) found that leaders developed effective organizations when they cultivated stakeholders' collaborative and social capabilities. This study's findings are consistent with Davenport. Furthermore, this study's findings demonstrate that while leaders recognize the benefits of close collaborative working, the realization of these benefits was only possible if leaders instilled a culture of transparency and trust.

### **Application to Professional Practice**

Stakeholders play an important role in IT projects with their ability to influence IT project outcomes (Badewi, 2016; Beringer et al., 2013; Kloppenborg et al., 2014). IT PMs increase an organization's economic value by understanding stakeholders' interests and integrating their knowledge, support, skills, and experience into their IT projects (Doh & Quigley, 2014). One major issue is historically, IT projects have high failure rates with scholars asserting that ineffective stakeholder management strategies were a major factor for project failure (Badewi, 2016). This study may be significant to business practice because the findings could potentially provide CIOs and IT directors with new knowledge to improve project success rates, leading to increased speed and quality in the deployment of business-critical systems, and enhanced organizational effectiveness to satisfy stakeholders.

The findings in this study highlight that effective stakeholder management strategies were difficult to deploy when organizational culture was not conducive to open and transparent communications (as depicted in the first theme). Moreover, the study showed that a low level of trust between stakeholders destroys the work environment and individual and team motivation; a situation which could be improved through (a) regular stakeholder alignment meetings, (b) working with

common project objectives, (c) installing a learning culture, and (d) leaders providing sufficient resources. Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that organizations with the capacity to acquire and distribute knowledge through close stakeholder interactions were better positioned to create a culture of trust, social responsibility, and sustainability.

Badewi (2016) identified that organizations benefitted from the institutionalization of project management practices by helping to increase the level of organizational maturity. Eighty three percent of participants stated that organizational maturity impacted the employment of effective stakeholder management strategies. This study provided important knowledge to improve business practice through three main findings related to organizational maturity (as depicted in the second theme). First, that misalignment in stakeholders' perspectives could be resolved if IT PMs demonstrated the link between IT projects' objectives and business strategic objectives. Second, education, which is essential for successful IT project outcomes, could be jointly conducted with IT PMs and key stakeholders to foster a common understanding of project management frameworks. Moreover, joint education provides a platform upon which stakeholders could build positive relations with IT PMs, and improve motivation levels among all project actors. Third, stakeholders and IT PMs could collaborate on facilitating the move of an organization toward a mature state by (a) educating people on IT project management industry best practices, (b) involving external auditors to evaluate operational cohesiveness and performance, and (c) conducting benchmarking activities. Moreover, IT PMs could use these measures to assuage the concerns of stakeholders and investors that the organization was operating at an optimal level.

Stakeholder management strategies are critical to the success of IT projects (Mir & Pinnington, 2014), where poorly implemented stakeholder management strategies have an adverse effect on stakeholder satisfaction (Carvalho & Junior, 2015). IT PMs influence positive project outcomes through understanding stakeholders' needs and employing effective stakeholder management strategies (PMI, 2013). The findings of this study highlight the importance for leaders to articulate a business strategy that integrates a list of key strategic IT projects (as depicted in the third theme). If leaders create an inextricable link between business strategy and IT strategic projects, stakeholders could align with IT PMs by discussing and agreeing on important items, such as behavior, strategic alignment, timings, budget, and expected outcomes. Furthermore, leaders could benefit by having organizational alignment through (a) reduced volume of IT projects, (b) enhanced product quality and reliability with reduced IT incidents and problems, (c) reduced tension between stakeholders and IT PMs, and (d) increased speed to market for new technologies.

Organizations are increasingly involved in globalized projects and consequently require leaders who can manage virtual project teams (Barnwell et al., 2014). Furthermore, performance within virtual teams can be increased through effective leadership (Iorio & Taylor, 2015). The findings of this study show that IT PMs possess the requisite technical skills to cope with this global operating environment, but lack communication and interpersonal skills to competently deal with the demands of IT projects and interactions with stakeholders (as depicted in the fourth theme). Participants of this study highlighted the trend for organizations to hire temporary staff to manage IT projects. While this approach provided

organizations with a mechanism to dynamically manage resources, this study's findings show that temporary resources were inappropriate due to their lack of organizational knowledge, sensitivity to political aspects, and established relationships with key stakeholders. Furthermore, an organization loses important knowledge if temporary IT PMs depart immediately after project closure, and operations teams lose continuity.

The findings in this study demonstrate that leaders, stakeholders, and IT PMs neglect post-implementation reviews (as depicted in the fifth theme). Consequently, an organization's capability to learn from past experiences is greatly reduced. This study's findings demonstrate that the main reasons for stakeholders' inhibitions to conduct post-implementation reviews were (a) lack of time, (b) unwillingness to spend time on past events, (c) too many concurrent projects, and (d) lack of leadership willingness to learn from past projects. Albrecht and Spang (2014) found that success criteria were difficult to measure objectively because of the broad range of stakeholder demands, which included cost reduction, organizational change, and improvement in operational performance. This study's findings highlight that further research is required to fully explore the reasons for negligence of post-implementation reviews and identify the impact on organizational performance.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The potential of this study for contributing to social change through the employment of effective stakeholder management strategies includes direct benefits to an organization and indirect benefits to the community. An example of an indirect benefit to the community is that organizations with improved profitability should be in a better position to provide additional employment opportunities for the local

community. Three further potential implications for social change could materialize from organizations employing effective stakeholder management strategies. First, the work environment could foster employee respect, transparency, openness, and mutual understanding, which could generate increased individual and team motivation. Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that organizations benefitted from establishing strong relationships with stakeholders by encouraging knowledge sharing, which led to higher levels of individual motivation.

Second, leaders would achieve a better alignment of project management practices across the organization that fostered collaborative working, improved management across cultural boundaries, and enhanced understanding and respect for different nationalities. Effective stakeholder management leads to an improvement in managing across cultural boundaries (Miska et al., 2013). Furthermore, Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that organizations with the capacity to acquire and distribute knowledge through interacting closely with stakeholders were better positioned to create a culture of social responsibility and sustainability.

Third, effective stakeholder management strategies cultivate a change in organizational culture pertaining to ethical and social skills. Dang et al. (2014) found that some leaders possessed the capacity to adapt behavior to become supportive in cases where stakeholders required a human touch, or more directive to overcome ambiguous work settings. Leaders could contribute to enhancing the work environment by cultivating collaborative working and generating a culture of mutual trust. Davenport (2015) found that leaders could develop effective organizations when they cultivated stakeholders' collaborative and social capabilities.

### **Recommendations for Action**

IT projects play a key role in the development of sustainable business practices (Silvius & Schipper, 2014). Leaders recognize the importance of addressing stakeholders' needs yet surprisingly lack effective strategies for managing stakeholders (Mir & Pinnington, 2014; Mishra & Mishra, 2013). Heravi et al. (2014) found that projects without committed stakeholders were more likely to fail, resulting in unpredictable consequences for the organization. The findings of this study highlight the need for leaders to pay more attention to the creation, elaboration, and communication of stakeholder management strategies to create and cultivate a new organizational approach to the management of its stakeholders in IT projects.

Recommended actions that could lead to effective stakeholder management strategies include:

- Leaders should integrate a list of key IT projects into organizational strategy.
- IT executives should communicate the rationale behind IT projects and demonstrate their alignment with business strategy.
- The leadership team should be fully aligned on IT projects' objectives and communicate these within their respective teams.
- During the project initiation phase, an executive steering committee should be convened to agree on the projects' objectives, resources, budget, performance metrics, and to communicate the expected behavior.
- The executive steering committee should ensure that post-implementation reviews are conducted for every project.

- The executive steering committee should ensure that continuity is maintained during the transition period from the project to the operations teams.
- IT executives should ensure that IT PMs have the requisite technical, interpersonal, and social skills to manage projects and their inherent stakeholders.

Multinational organizations are structured for global operations, meaning they have disparate stakeholder communities, are technically complex, and often comprise of decentralized and virtual teams (Carvalho et al., 2015). Consequently, there are several stakeholders who could benefit from effective stakeholder management strategies. First, the leadership team should benefit through increased profitability because only strategically aligned IT projects would be validated, resulting in a reduction in the number of projects and their associated costs. Leaders and organizational staff could see the improvement through standard reporting of financial results.

Second, business managers and IT PMs should benefit through obtaining a common understanding of projects' objectives. Leaders could disseminate projects' objectives using town hall meetings, internal intranet, management meetings, newsletters, and broadcast emails to ensure that all organizational staff and external stakeholders receive the same message. Third, business stakeholders and IT PMs could acquire a common understanding of project management frameworks, which would foster a collaborative working environment. Stakeholders and IT PMs could attend joint education programs and use these as a platform to foster good stakeholder relations. Fourth, project governance could be reinforced through leaders taking

responsibility to conduct executive steering committees, which would cultivate stronger relations between senior management and staff, and foster trust and transparency. Meetings should be physical, or members could attend via teleconference systems, with the IT PM recording decisions and actions in the meeting protocol.

Fifth, external suppliers should be able to better align with an organization that is working on a common project management process. Suppliers should be considered as part of the organizational ecosystem and therefore communication with them should be through physical meetings, and messages communicated through newsletters and emails. Finally, operations teams should be able to accept a project into the live environment with less errors due to the continuity provided by IT PMs and project stakeholders who assure a successful transition period. The transition period should be in a single location to expedite communications between stakeholders should problems arise and require rectification. Additionally, this study could be beneficial to project management institutions that constantly strive to improve project and stakeholder management practices.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of this study corroborate the importance for leaders to articulate effective stakeholder management strategies, which, according to Doh and Quigley (2014) organizations lack causing detrimental effects on organizational performance. While this study has attempted to uncover measures for leaders and IT executives to develop effective stakeholder management strategies, there is an opportunity for further exploration. For example, IT executives were invited to participate in the study as they were the main actors in developing and implementing IT strategy and

were the closest to the organization's leadership team. In the case of CIOs, they were part of the leadership team. For future research, IT PMs and business stakeholders could be invited to participate in a similar study to elaborate on working practices and explain how business strategy cascades into operational processes in the execution of that strategy.

Two potential limitations were identified for this study. First, interview participants might lack sufficient insight into stakeholders' interests, needs, and expectations. This potential limitation did not materialize as the selection criteria for the interview participants ensured that the participants possessed the requisite knowledge and experience to provide a detailed and holistic insight into the effectiveness of stakeholder management strategies. Second, senior IT executives might display a disproportionate proficiency between the political, strategic, operational, and tactical aspects of IT projects. This potential limitation did not materialize as the selection criteria for interview participants ensured that the participants had at least 10 years experience in IT project management to cover operational and tactical levels, and their current executive appointments provided coverage for political and strategic perspectives.

An additional limitation of this study was the sample size of six IT executives. Future research could either extend the number of IT executives in the sample size or extend the study to include IT managers, IT PMs, and business stakeholders. Although insight was gained from two different companies, these were large multinational companies. Consequently, future research could explore stakeholder management strategies in small or medium sized companies. Furthermore, both

companies were in Switzerland and therefore future research could be conducted in other countries to counter any cultural or geographical peculiarities.

The findings of this study represent interview participants' responses during the initial interview and member check meeting, which could include some subjectivity. Consequently, researchers and practitioners should view the results of this study as the interpretations of participants' perceptions of their lived experiences. Researcher interaction bias could have a detrimental effect on the research process, and measures should be taken to minimize its occurrence (Cronin, 2014). I followed Miyazaki and Taylor's (2007) recommendation of employing several preventative measures, such as selecting unfamiliar interview participants, selecting the correct sample strategy, and remaining emotionally detached from the subject. I embraced these measures during the research process to avoid bias and achieve an impartial and objective assessment of the data.

### **Reflections**

Walden University offers students the opportunity to develop academically, enhance critical thinking skills, and understand the tenets of social change. I found that this DBA program went beyond the published syllabus in that the process beginning with the DDBA modules and extending through to the final CAO validation was a period of personal development and self-reflection on my own personality, values, and desires. This DBA process was a humbling experience and I am extremely grateful for the meticulous manner, in which the Chair, SCM, and URR examined and commented on my work. I am also very grateful for sharing this experience with other students who were going through the same humbling experience, where we could lean on each other for moral support. I am honored to

have taken this DBA journey with the competent Walden University staff that clearly embraces the social change thematic. I have also been blessed by having Dr. Susan Fan as my Chair and mentor who has helped me to open my eyes to new social dimensions. This DBA program has given me the most valuable platform to reassess my values, and as a consequence, I have already made important changes to improve my personal and professional environment.

I entered into the DBA program having held two CIO positions in commercial companies following 20 years as an Officer in the British Army. During this time, I encountered stakeholders in all guises; yet felt that I never understood what influenced their behavior. For this reason, I chose the subject of stakeholder management strategies to gain a deeper understanding from academic and practitioner perspectives. The mandatory DDBA modules were a great aid to prepare for the study by learning the processes, developing critical thinking skills, and understanding the expected researcher behavior. Moreover, these modules provided a buffer between my personal opinions and the subject of stakeholder management strategies to facilitate removing preconceived ideas, and adopting a neutral position throughout the study process.

I chose a qualitative research as opposed to quantitative research to gain a deeper understanding of stakeholders despite my background in business and military intelligence, in which I used many quantitative techniques. The semistructured interviews with senior IT executives were valuable in a sense that I could appropriate participants' experience and knowledge in a formal yet relaxed setting. I found that interview participants appreciated the discussions as they provided an opportunity for

the IT executives to reflect on their stakeholder management strategies and how they influenced positive or negative IT project outcomes.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

The purpose of this multiple qualitative case study was to explore strategies CIOs and IT directors used for managing IT project stakeholders. The rationale for undertaking this study stemmed from the literature on project and stakeholder management which pointed toward a major issue that, historically, IT projects have high failure rates, with scholars asserting that inadequate stakeholder management strategies were a major factor for project failure (Badewi, 2016). The findings from this study tie to literature published on stakeholder management through the main themes of (a) organizational culture, (b) organizational maturity, (c) leadership, (d) competencies, and (e) post-implementation reviews. The findings demonstrate the importance of leaders articulating organizational strategies in which there is alignment between strategic objectives and those contained within IT projects. Ultimately, if leaders were not aligned on strategic and IT projects' objectives, IT executives would find it very difficult to develop effective stakeholder management strategies.

Aaltonen and Kujala (2016) commented that stakeholders sat within a broad stakeholder landscape with interdependent relationships, which created challenges for IT PMs to determine which stakeholders should receive the greatest or least attention. The findings of this study support Aaltonen and Kujala's perspective on a stakeholder landscape, and demonstrate that IT PMs have difficulties to manage stakeholders due to (a) staff turnover, (b) business stakeholders changing responsibilities, (c) complexity in distributed organizations, (d) leadership styles, and (e) organizational

culture. Moreover, the study's findings show that a low level of trust between stakeholders destroys the work environment; a situation which could be improved through (a) regular stakeholder alignment meetings, (b) working with common project objectives, (c) installing a learning culture, and (d) leaders providing sufficient resources. Doh and Quigley (2014) identified that organizations with the capacity to acquire and distribute knowledge through close stakeholder interactions were better positioned to create a culture of trust, social responsibility, and sustainability. Finally, the findings of this study are consistent with Serrador and Turner (2015) who demonstrated that IT PMs should identify and manage stakeholders' expectations that go beyond the traditional iron triangle to maximize IT project success.

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## Appendix A: National Institutes of Health (NIH) Ethics Training Certificate



## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

| What I will do  | What I will say – script  |
|---|---|
| Introduce the interview and set the stage   | <p>First, let me thank you for participating in my doctoral study.</p> <p>You were invited to take part in this study because you are a senior IT executive who has (a) a minimum of 10 years IT experience, (b) extensive knowledge of the IT project lifecycle, (c) profit and loss (P&amp;L) responsibility, (d) English fluency, and (e) successfully implemented stakeholder management strategies.</p> <p>The interview is scheduled to last 30-40 minutes. During this time, I will ask you several questions, which aim to identify and explore the stakeholder management strategies, which have been implemented within your organization.</p> <p>For the administration of this interview, I would like to digitally record our conversation. Do you agree with this method? As a reminder to the informed consent form, which you signed, I will be the sole person who has access to the recording, which will be destroyed 5 years after I have completed the study.</p> <p>At this juncture, do you have any questions? If not, may I propose that we start the interview?</p> |
| A reminder to the research purpose and research question  | <p><b>Research Purpose:</b> To explore strategies CIOs and IT directors use for managing IT project stakeholders?</p> <p><b>Research Question:</b> The overarching question for this study is: What strategies do CIOs and IT directors use for managing IT project stakeholders?</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch for non-verbal queues</li> <li>• Paraphrase as needed</li> <li>• Ask follow-up probing questions to get greater</li> </ul> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What barriers did you encounter in implementing your strategies for managing IT project stakeholders?</li> <li>2. How did you address barriers, if any, in implementing your strategies for managing IT project stakeholders?</li> <li>3. How did your stakeholders' IT projects expectations change during the project?</li> </ol>   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| insight   | 4. How did you assess the success of your strategies for managing IT project stakeholders?  |
|   | 5. How did you monitor and track the progress of your projects?   |
|   | 6. How did you report project status to your stakeholders?  |
|   | 7. How were you involved in the post-implementation review of IT projects?  |
|   | 8. What additional information would you like to provide related to managing IT project stakeholders?   |
| Wrap up interview thanking participant  | <p>Thank you very much for your time today.</p> <p>Your insights were valuable to understand how you and your organization implemented effective stakeholder management strategies in IT projects.</p>  |
| Schedule follow-up member checking interview  | For the next step, I will synthesize our discussion and, with your permission, organize a follow up interview with your assistant to verify if my interpretations of the data were accurately recorded.   |
| <b>Follow-up Member Checking Interview</b>  |   |
| Introduce follow-up interview and set the stage   | <p>Thank you very much for giving me more of your valuable time.</p> <p>As I mentioned, the purpose of this interview is to make sure I recorded the correct meaning of what was said. This interview should not last any longer than 20 minutes. Do you have any questions? If not, may I propose that we start the interview?</p> |
| Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question   | 1. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed  |
| Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found— note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval. | 2. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed  |
|   | 3. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed  |
| Walk through each question,   | 4. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| read the interpretation and ask: Did I miss anything? Or, What would you like to add anything? | needed   |
|  | 5. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed |
|  | 6. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed |
|  | 7. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed |
|  | 8. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation— perhaps one paragraph or as needed |