Stakeholder engagement is crucial for the success of any innovation project

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Stakeholder engagement is always challenging, mainly in the scope of Innovation Projects, however, it is crucial for successfully delivering project results. According to Kijala et al (2022) "the research on stakeholder engagement has gained increasing attention in the 2000s", and I truly believe that the best is yet to come.

Stakeholder engagement refers to the process of interacting, communicating, and collaborating (Greenwood, 2007) with individuals, groups or organizations that may have an interest or are affected by a particular theme, project, business or activity (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder engagement is important because it helps build relationships, trust, and gain support for the organization's initiatives. This involves identifying relevant stakeholders, understanding their concerns, needs and expectations, and actively involving them in the decision-making process.

The purpose of stakeholder engagement is to ensure that the different views are considered, to promote transparency in the activities, and to appropriately manage the positive and "not-so-positive" impacts of the innovation. It can also help to mitigate conflicts, resolve issues, and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes for all parties involved. The promotion of stakeholder engagement in innovation processes requires flexibility and adaptability. Each innovation project can have unique characteristics, and it is important to adjust stakeholder engagement strategies according to the specific needs of the context, however, there are some common best practices that can be applied.

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There are various strategies and techniques for stakeholder engagement, such as holding meetings, workshops, public consultations, working groups, opinion polls, sharing information and providing opportunities for collecting stakeholder feedback. Regarding the timeframe, seek to involve stakeholders from an early stage by inviting them to contribute with ideas, insights and knowledge (ideation).

Organize workshops, brainstorming sessions, co-creation, testing and validation activities to encourage collaboration and the generation of joint innovative solutions, recognizing and rewarding the stakeholder's valuable participation.

You can ask for feedback and opinions on prototypes and early iterations of the process, this will allow stakeholders to contribute to improving the solution, feel involved, and increase the likelihood of their acceptance and adoption of the innovation.

Make sure that stakeholders clearly understand the purpose of the innovation, the benefits it can bring, and recognize the added value of involving them, demonstrating the ongoing commitment to learning and adapting the innovation based on the feedback received.

However, stakeholder engagement is not an easy task, and there are always a lot of factors that can hinder stakeholder engagement. Recognizing and mitigating these hindrance factors can help overcome difficulties and promote more effective and meaningful stakeholder engagement. These factors can include, for example, the lack of effective communication between parties, lack of confidence from the involved stakeholder, conflicting interests between parties, stakeholder resistance to behavioural change - or to be involved in the initiative -, lack of resources such as time or financing, lack of recognition and appreciation and, of course, cultural and linguistic barriers.

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The CLIMOS project consortium believes that stakeholder engagement will increase the value and the impact of its results. We actively engage with stakeholders through various means to ensure their involvement and input are taken into consideration.

Our approach includes, in the first instance, conducting stakeholder analyses to identify key stakeholders and their interests. In line with the principles of responsible research and innovation (RRI), our partners engage with stakeholders and end users right from the project's inception. We follow an agile approach to capture and respond to stakeholder requirements during system design and platform development. Whenever possible, we provide opportunities for consultations and maintain regular communication to understand where their interests align with our project.

This collaborative process helps us make informed decisions and establish compass points that guide our activities, considering a range of potential future scenarios and taking into account diverse stakeholder perspectives.

In the upcoming months, we will kick off our stakeholder network activities. Stay updated by following us and subscribing to our newsletter to receive firsthand news and updates.

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