Gordon Institute of Business Science
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**The Key Drivers Of Stakeholder Management And Their Influence On Strategic Implementation In Africa**

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*I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research*.

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## Abstract

The stakeholder management discipline applies to multiple professions and is critical in the strategic management process of any organisation regardless of the industry or the environment within which the company operates. Over the years, research on stakeholder management has focused on its application in institutionally stable markets like developed economies. Existing literature suggests that stakeholder management is essential in implementing strategy, which translates to value creation and competitive advantage for the organisation. However, there is a need for studies that empirically examine how stakeholder management and its drivers are integrated into the company's process to influence strategy and enable decision-making when implementing strategic objectives in highly volatile, turbulent, and contextually complex environments like Sub-Saharan Africa.

This qualitative study explored strategic and senior managers' perspectives on the drivers of stakeholder management and the influence stakeholder management has on strategy implementation in Africa. The findings highlighted the importance of doing a situational and environmental analysis to identify important stakeholders, categorise them based on their salience, and build relationships with them to enable engagement. It is critically important to consider the cultural forces and unstable institutional, legal, and regulatory landscape that govern the African market before initiating strategy formulation. The findings were synthesised into a conceptual framework encompassing the key drivers of stakeholder management, the challenges faced when managing stakeholders in the strategy implementation process, and the mediating factors that shape the strategic outcome and the ability of the company to create value for its stakeholders. The research contributes to the existing stakeholder management literature by extending the knowledge on stakeholder management in the context of Africa and providing recommendations to managers, future scholars, and policymakers in Africa.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder, Stakeholder Management, Strategy Implementation, Emerging Markets, Sub-Saharan Africa

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## Acronyms and meaning

| Acronyms | Meaning |
|---|---|
| AI | Artificial Intelligence |
| CSR | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| EMM | Emerging Markets Multinationals |
| ESG | Environmental Social and Corporate Governance |
| EU | Europe(an) |
| FMCG | Fast Moving Consumer Goods |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicators |
| MNE | Multinational Enterprises |
| PSM | Project Stakeholder Management |
| SI | Strategy Implementation |
| SM | Stakeholder Management |
| SME | Small Medium Enterprises |
| SOP | Standard Operating Procedures |
| SSA | Sub-Saharan Africa |
| TA | Thematic Analysis |
| UIC | Unique Identifier Code |

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the study

Stakeholder Management (SM) is rooted in Edward Freeman's stakeholder theory, initially formalised in 1984. The renowned scholar formalised the stakeholder theory and popularised it by changing the narrative from profit maximisation for shareholders to creating value for all stakeholders as the critical condition for the firm to remain successful and competitive (Post *et al.,* 2002). Over the last two decades, the discussion around stakeholders' and shareholders' interests being competitive has shifted towards a more widespread view of both being mutually beneficial and important for the firm's survival (Berman *et al*., 1999). Furthermore, Berman *et al*. argue that *"firms have a stake in the behaviour of their stakeholders; and if good management of the firm includes a good relationship with their stakeholders, then stakeholder management has clear instrumental value for the firms*" (Berman *et al*., 1999, p4*).*

The Stakeholder Management (SM) theory has evolved as a managerial concept since Freeman's theory around the importance of firms adopting a managerial approach to effectively develop and sustain stakeholder relationships (Freeman, 1999). Freeman focused his work on the relationship between stakeholders and the firm, but he also delved deeper into incorporating the role of stakeholder management in the company's strategic management process and its value creation process (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019). Since then, many scholars have focused on the relationships between companies and stakeholders and the drivers and factors that influence these relationships.

In their systematic literature review on stakeholder management, Pedrini and Ferri made multiple observations, including the fact that the literature development on stakeholder management is still at an early stage with implications in both the academic and managerial contexts and that "*previous works have focused on large companies whereas small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) have been scarcely considered*" (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019, p55). In addition, the scarcity of research on SM within the context of emerging markets, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, has been disconcerting, more so due to the increasing presence of SMEs and Multi-National Enterprises (MNEs) in the region.

Firms exist because there is a need to be met, specifically for the external stakeholders. However, internal stakeholders are critical for a firm's ability to meet the needs of their customers, making both internal and external stakeholders pivotal to the success and sustainability of the firm. The importance of stakeholders to the success of the firm underlines SM and its role in the ability of the firm to identify, build and manage relationships with all their stakeholders, meet their expectations and create value for the organisation (Habisch *et al*., 2011).

To ensure a successful firm-stakeholders relationship, it is crucial to understand what drives stakeholder management and how these drivers can be effectively integrated into a firm's strategy and operations to meet stakeholders' expectations both internally and externally. To meet the expectations of its primary stakeholders, usually its customers, and create value, the firm leverages its internal and external stakeholders to develop and implement its strategy.

The concept of stakeholder management and its impact on strategy development and implementation has been the focus of many studies, with the current literature still evolving in corporate strategy. Companies' competitiveness and probability of survival hugely depend on the company's ability to create value while remaining sustainable, all of which depend on the effectiveness of the company's strategic implementation process. The need to remain sustainable and create value for stakeholders increases pressure on companies to design their strategies, factoring in stakeholders' perceptions of the company. Increasingly, stakeholders' perception, which is determined to be a key driver of stakeholder engagement and management, is influenced by an organisation's environmental, social, and governance. Rodriguez-Melo and Afshin Mansouri (2011) argued that companies who consider, integrate, and successfully engage and manage various categories of stakeholders can obtain and maintain their competitive advantage through effective strategic implementation.

The author completed this study to build on the current literature on stakeholder management and strategy implementation. The author anchored the study on generic stakeholder management frameworks proposed by Bal *et al.* (2013) and Rankinen *et al*. (2022), in addition to Pedrini and Ferri's (2019) invitation for further research. These frameworks identified some drivers of SM, which the author used as a benchmark for the structure of the study and an anchor for the study's theoretical framework. Consequently, this study generated insights into the critical drivers of SM and how they influence Strategy Implementation (SI).by identifying Africa as a complex stakeholder management setting and identifying strategic managers with SM and SI experience as the purposeful sample. The author then interviewed these managers, and the insights gathered were analysed and aggregated to identify new drivers and other mediating factors, which the author used to suggest a comprehensive framework encompassing critical drivers and mediating factors of SM and SI in Africa.

### 1.1.1 Strategy as a concept

The Cambridge Dictionary defines *strategy* as "*the act of planning how to achieve something*" (Dictionary, 2023"). Strategy originates from the military, where the commander-in-chief uses unique methods to direct military movements. However, in the context of business as opposed to the military, strategy is much more complex than directing large movements, as it entails navigating multiple concepts, including competitive advantage, availability of resources, the organisation's capabilities, a complex management process, and finding a way to integrate them to provide a direction for the organisation effectively.

There is a multitude of definitions from scholars in the field of business, with Porter (1996) defining strategy plainly as "*the essence of strategy is choosing to perform activities differently than rivals do*" (Porter, 1996, p44). Porter goes on to say that strategy is about deliberately choosing a different path and different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value, thus ensuring its competitive advantage if the value and uniqueness of its offerings are preserved. Since strategy's inception as an academic and business concept, the definition has evolved over the last forty years.

In today's uncertain and rapidly changing environment, strategy is about making decisions on a few parameters which inform the strategic position the organisation will have in the industry in which it operates (Markides, 2004). Making different choices from other companies within the industry and leveraging resources and competencies to meet the market's needs can help organisations successfully develop and implement strategies to obtain and maintain their strategic advantage.

Because of the uncertainty that comes with choosing and making decisions, it is the responsibility of the organisational leaders to structure the organisational strategies and to implement boundaries within which various functions of the organisations will have the autonomy to make implementation choices and operational decisions. Even after half a century of research, strategy is still being researched due to the exponential rate of globalisation, industrialisation, and internationalisation of businesses.

#### a) Strategy in emerging economies

With global deregulation, the internalisation of multiple MNEs and global companies has increased. Increasingly, emerging markets have rapidly growing economies due to widespread liberalisation, globalisation and the adoption of internationally recognised standards and policies. Hoskisson *et al*. (2000) define Emerging Economies as "*low-income, rapid-growth countries using economic liberalisation as their primary growth engine. They fall into two groups: developing countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and* *the Middle East and transition economies in the former Soviet Union and China*" (Hoskisson *et al*., 2000, p1).

Strong cultural and societal influences, in addition to rapid economic growth, albeit with limited resources and operating within weak governmental and regulatory frameworks, which are better managed in developed economies, mainly characterise emerging economies. In Africa, these forces are much more impactful on strategy due to deeply rooted cultural beliefs, rogue governmental institutions, and social disparities, which greatly influence stakeholders' behaviours externally and internally.

### 1.1.2 Stakeholder Management

According to Freeman (1984), who publicised the stakeholder theory, a stakeholder is any person, group of people or another organisation that can affect or be affected by an organisation's actions, activities and objectives. There have been multiple definitions of SM since the theory's inception, with present literature defining SM as a managerial process through which an organisation systematically and reiteratively identifies, establishes and integrates stakeholders' relationships into the organisation's core business activities. (Habisch *et al*., 2011). It is essential to point out that the interests and expectations of stakeholders can be multifaceted and divergent from those of the organisations, making the stakeholder engagement process critical as it relates to effectively engaging based on the needs and expectations of relevant stakeholders.

The stakeholders' role in an organisation's strategic management process is no longer disputable, and the onus is on the organisation to decide "when" instead of "if" to integrate stakeholders in their processes and activities. Effective stakeholder management entails identifying and noting stakeholders' interests, expectations, and concerns and how they relate to the organisations' activities and objectives. As noted by De Lorca & García-Diez (2004), with the shift of focus from shareholders profits to value-creation for stakeholders as a measure of performance and sustainability, now more than ever, it is essential for organisations to include stakeholders, voluntary and involuntary, in the end-to-end strategic management of the organisation.

In essence, SM is the continuous and systematic process through which a firm establishes positive and constructive relationships with its stakeholders to integrate their expectations into business strategy and activity.

### 1.1.3 Strategy Implementation

A firm's performance depends significantly on the success of its strategy implementation, as even a well-formulated strategy only translates into achieving goals if it is well implemented (Hitt *et al*., 2016a). The current literature has multiple definitions from different scholars, with Yang *et al*. (2010) defining strategy as a complex process comprised of various activities managers and employees within an organisation do iteratively to turn strategic plans into achieved goals and objectives. Formulating strategy is a more straightforward process than implementing strategy, as it is the mandate of an organisation's leadership and management team. However, implementing strategy requires integrating multiple teams, processes, and internal and external stakeholders, making it a dynamic and complex process requiring the right capabilities, skills, and monitoring to ensure success.

**a) Strategy Implementation in emerging / developing economies.**

Planning is a critical step in any organisational process. It enables the identification and outline of key elements needed to execute organisational activities, including the processes, resources, people, and milestones. According to structures

strategic planning is a process by which an organisation assesses stakeholders' expectations. He further states that planning involves:

- Actively analysing the environment
- Identifying socioeconomic and political issues and their projected impact on strategic execution and
- Developing appropriate responses to identify and manage stakeholders needed in the strategic processes.

Planning is thought by many to be an informal yet necessary process; however, Andersen (2000) argues that planning is a systematic and comprehensive approach that enables managers to determine a strategic path and all the intricacies of the strategic management process iteratively and analytically. Planning is critical as it helps decide the viability of activities, processes, and projects based on the organisation's capabilities and resources.

According to Sirmon *et al*. (2007), managers within the organisation must actively and effectively manage the organisation's resource portfolio. Effective resource management entails acquiring quality resources to ensure that the organisation's resources can be combined to develop capabilities that the company and its managers will need to implement the strategy.

Grant (2021) argues that successful strategy implementation resulting from the effective use and optimisation of the company's resources and capabilities can lead to competitive advantage. Grant further states that analysing resources and capabilities is as significant as the environmental analysis when formulating strategy. Figure 3 below illustrates the link between environmental and internal resource and capabilities analysis when planning strategy.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Organisations must constantly adapt to the changes in the environment in which they operate. The environment is an open system where multiple organisations compete for an advantage. The unpredictability and speed of environmental change constantly increase due to various disruptions, evolving environmental trends, and globalisation. According to (O'Neill, 2009), the ever-changing environment leads to fierce competition, thus forcing organisations of all sizes to adapt their strategies and improve their offerings to meet customers and stakeholders' expectations. To meet its stakeholders' expectations, it is crucial for the organisation first to be able to identify and map its stakeholders, then develop and implement its strategy with the stakeholders and the environment in mind.

According to the current literature, various drivers affect the effectiveness of stakeholder management. However, we need a broad understanding of what these drivers are and how these drivers impact the SM process both at a strategic level and within the African context when implementing strategy. While Bal *et al*. *(2013),* Rankinen *et al*. (2022) and other scholars have developed generic SM frameworks in the context of project management, it is vital to delve deeper into the drivers of SM in a larger context, in this instance, organisational strategy and the strategic management process.

When organisations develop strategies to gain competitive advantage by creating value for their stakeholders, whether the strategic goals are met depends on the effectiveness of the organisation's strategic management and stakeholder management processes. According to Mitchell (2021), the success of strategy implementation can be impeded by various issues, including stakeholders' cooperation, collaboration, and their support and involvement in implementing strategic changes. The stage at which organisations involve stakeholders and the degree of their involvement in the strategy formulation and implementation process are critical to the strategic management process. Therefore, managers must acknowledge stakeholders' critical roles, thus emphasizing the importance of integrating SM into the organisation's overarching strategic management process.

As mentioned by Rankinen *et al*. (2022) and Pedrini and Ferri (2019), there is a need to explore further what factors affect stakeholder management and how these drivers impact strategy implementation and value creation. The author intends to extend the knowledge by interrogating the current literature in the context of Africa by applying the SM frameworks Bal *et al*. (2013) and Rankinen *et al*. (2022) to strategic implementation in Africa during the study.

## 1.3 Purpose statement

This qualitative exploratory research aimed to investigate the key drivers of stakeholder management and how these drivers influence the strategic implementation process in Africa. Multiple studies have investigated the role and drivers of SM in the implementation of projects, but Freeman (1999) broadened the scope of his work to focus on the organisation's overarching strategic management approach. This research study was completed to gain further insights into the drivers of SM and to build upon the existing body of knowledge by expanding on the identified theoretical SM frameworks. In addition, the research aimed to understand how the identified drivers influence the success of strategy implementation in Africa. The author deemed it essential to scope the project within the boundary of Africa to understand better the dynamics of strategic and stakeholder management within the region.

Therefore, the key objectives of this study were:

1. To identify the key drivers of stakeholder management.
2. To examine how stakeholder management influences the success of strategy implementation in Africa.
3. To delve deeper into the challenges organisations face when managing stakeholders during strategy implementation in Africa.

## 1.4 Research Question and Objectives

The study aimed to answer descriptive and exploratory questions seeking to answer the 'what' and the 'how' (White, 2017) of stakeholder management and strategy implementation. Multiple scholars have found that asking 'what' and 'how' questions apply to exploratory qualitative studies investigating various constructs and their relationships.

### 1.4.1 Primary Research Question

How does stakeholder management influence strategy implementation in the African context?

### 1.4.2 Sub-Questions

a. What are the key drivers of stakeholder management in the African context?
b. What are the challenges faced when managing stakeholders while implementing strategy in Africa?
c. What are the challenges faced when implementing strategy in Africa?

## 1.5 Contribution of the research

This research is set within the boundaries of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The researcher chose SSA as the scope due to the region's current sparsity of business management research. As an emerging market, SSA has very distinguished dynamics and institutional differences compared to other regions, namely developed countries, on which most of the current literature is based. However, over recent decades, Africa has made great strides in its development efforts due to globalisation, which has resulted in the internalisation of multiple MNEs in the region, thereby increasing competitiveness, complexity, and the need for effective strategies. The contribution of this research is twofold: theoretical and practical.

### 1.5.1 Theoretical contribution of the research

As complexity and competitiveness heighten, the importance of understanding stakeholder management, the stakeholder environment, and effectively managing stakeholders concurrently increases, all of which can significantly impact the level of success of strategic implementation and sustainability of a company (Rankinen *et al*., 2022). The interests of all stakeholders are of intrinsic value to the organisation, and all stakeholders deserve consideration and integration into corporate strategy activities. This indicates the criticality and relevance of the effectiveness of the stakeholders' management process and its embeddedness in corporate activities.

Past and current literature focuses on the theoretical relevance of stakeholders' engagement. At the same time, several studies conducted in multiple industries documented findings that indicate that systemic integration of stakeholder management in the organisation resulted in effective strategy implementation and value creation, better performance, and sustainability. However, understanding the key drivers of effective stakeholder management and how stakeholder management can be used as a managerial tool to support effective strategy implementation remains a gap in the current literature (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019). According to Hristov *et al*. (2022), there is a direct correlation between stakeholders' management and a firm's ability to create value by effectively implementing their strategies.

Theoretically, this study extends the knowledge in the literature on SM and SI by further developing the generic stakeholder management frameworks by Rankinen *et al*. (2022) and Bal *et al. (2013)*. Using the SM frameworks, the author was able to investigate their applicability in a broader context, thus enabling the uncovering of further drivers of SM, not only to its application in the management of relationships within the organisation but also to the challenges and drivers of SM in the context of strategy implementation. The author focused on the less interrogated influence of the specific drivers of SM on strategy implementation in a context characterised by strong cultural, volatile, resource-deprived, weak institutional environments and economies. The mechanisms of stakeholder management and strategy implementation in developed countries significantly differ from those of emerging markets like SSA governed by a complex political and regulatory landscape.

By contributing to the body of knowledge, this research may encourage other scholars and researchers to research the nuances of SM further in the field of strategy implementation in Africa.

### 1.5.2 Practical contribution of the research: The Business Relevance

By adopting the triple-bottom-line to measure organisational performance, business executives have developed an interest in incorporating the non-shareholder stakeholders' interests and perspectives in the broader corporate strategy formulation, implementation, and monitoring process. According to Springman (2011), companies focusing on stakeholders' interests ahead of shareholders create better value because of greater stakeholder engagement and involvement. He further states that when a business operates with its stakeholders as part of an ecosystem, everyone participates and shares in implementing business activities and the value-creation process.

Value-creation is correlated to business performance, as stated by PwC. The (PwC, 2019) article also states that organisations that engage with stakeholders and whose perceptions are integrated into strategy formulation have better insight into areas where their organisation can create more value. Additionally, Sedmark (2021), an SME strategy management consulting firm, states that stakeholder management is critical in strategic planning and implementation. Sedmak explains that when key stakeholders understand the company's strategic direction and buy into it, they can play a significant advocacy role and help the organisation achieve its strategic mandate.

Therefore, from a practical perspective, the study is essential for organisational managers involved in stakeholder management when implementing strategy. It may help them understand the nuances of stakeholder management and strategy implementation in volatile, cultural, and highly politically governed markets with limited resources. It also helps them better contextualise the various drivers and how they individually influence the behaviours and engagement of stakeholders during the strategy management process.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter interrogates the current literature on stakeholder and strategic management theories, emphasising the theoretical frameworks underpinning and informing the research objectives and scope. The theoretical frameworks consider emerging and developed markets from an existing literature perspective to structure the study, which aims to dig deeper into the applicability of these theories in the context of SSA. The stakeholder theory is prominent in managerial and academic contexts. Despite its increasing use, limited studies have focused on SSA as an area of focalised research for discovering facets of the embeddedness and operationalisation of SM and SI in corporate activities within the region. Since introducing the stakeholder concept, the definition has evolved and increasingly moved towards influencing the relationship between stakeholders and the company (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019).

Although the stakeholder theory has been an area of research since the mid-nineties, stakeholder management as a concept became prominent in early 2000, when practitioners and academics started accepting the importance of SM as a managerial tool to navigate the increasing complexities of the business environment, resulting from global phenomena like globalisation, internationalisation, industrial revolution and economic developments (Xue *et al.*, 2020). Organisations became cognisant of the need to refine their approach to managing stakeholders and its integration into everyday strategic and operational activities.

Strategic management is an integral part of an organisation's activities. It entails scanning the environment to identify opportunities and formulating and implementing strategies to create value for its stakeholders and competitive advantage (Porter, 1981). The ever-changing global economy requires organisations to continuously assess their strategic objectives and actions to ensure a competitive and superior fit in their environment. The strategic process of an organisation is heavily dependent on the environment in which it operates, thus making it important for companies to adhere to the laws and regulations set by competent authorities like industry associations and government institutions (Pearce & Robinson, 2003). The awareness characterising modern society has forced organisations to include external stakeholders' perspectives in their strategic management processes, forcing them to formulate and implement appropriate and beneficial strategies for stakeholders.

In addition, with the rise of access to information and knowledge, non-influential parties have obstructive power and can impede the implementation of any strategy. For example, employees expect to be treated with dignity, customers expect the organisation to meet their needs by providing quality services, shareholders require a return on their investment, and the community expects organisations to invest in the communities and add value to local people while conducting themselves in a manner that sustains the environment (Chepkoech & Waiganjo, 2015). Therefore, it is critical 1for organisations to integrate stakeholders and engage in good stakeholder management practices when executing strategy for organisational growth. In essence, involving stakeholders in strategic processes enhances their buy-in and support and reduces their resistance and opposition to strategic changes, thus facilitating strategy implementation.

This chapter will highlight the evidence from the literature that significant work has been done in advancing knowledge on SM and SI despite the current need and opportunities for additional research to unlock new layers and broader perspectives into effective SM, specifically within the strategic management context. Stakeholder management and the role it plays in corporate strategy and a firm's value creation has been the focus of multiple theoretical studies in the last decades; however, a gap in the literature exists on the key drivers of stakeholder management and how it influences the effectiveness of strategy implementation and value creation in Africa.

The following sections of this chapter will provide a more in-depth look at the factors that drive stakeholder management and how these drivers' distinct characteristics influence the ability of managers to effectively manage their stakeholders when implementing strategy in complex and volatile settings. In addition, the relationship between SM and SI, which is the focus of this study, is investigated using the current literature and academic triangulation to highlight critical insights used to discuss the study's findings.

Figure X below depicts the literature review roadmap, providing an overview of the structure of the key constructs, concepts and variables of stakeholder management and strategy implementation that underpins the research. This roadmap allows the reader to grasp the summary of what chapter two entails and envisage the theoretical development of the rest of the paper.


**Figure 1**: The Literature Review Roadmap
**Source**: Developed by Author

## 2.2 Stakeholder Management

Stakeholder Management was developed from the stakeholder theory as formalised by Dr Edward Freeman in 1984, which underpinned the importance of having a managerial approach which aims to establish not only stakeholder relationships but a sustainable network of relationships that supports an organisation's survival (Freeman, 1999). Since then, over the last two decades, many scholars, including Freeman, further developed the SM theory, which was eventually put forward as a framework for identifying various categories of stakeholders, their needs and how to manage the relationships between the various categories of stakeholders to meet the objectives set out by the organisation (Freeman, 2010).

To better understand the concept of SM, it is essential to understand its definition according to the literature. Stakeholder Management is the process through which a firm considers the rights and expectations of its stakeholders and systematically integrates these expectations into the organisational and managerial processes of the business to ensure that the impact of the actions and decisions of the firm on the stakeholders is considered during strategic management (Atkin & Skitmore, 2008; Fassin,2012). Although the stakeholders' rights, needs, interests, and expectations cannot have the same level of consideration, the firm's business ethics component requires management to focus on the fair treatment of its stakeholders, especially its primary stakeholders.

Researchers in the field of SM have developed multiple frameworks to handle the different demands, expectations, and interests of internal and external stakeholders. Hence, with the evolvement of the SM theory and its increasing influence, value creation has evolved from shareholder value in the short term towards a process of value creation for all internal and external stakeholders, including long-term value creation for shareholders. Before delving deeper into the SM theory, the following section defines and elaborates on the various stakeholders identified by previous scholars.

### 2.2.1 Stakeholder Definition

The literature on SM defines stakeholders as persons or groups internal or external to the organisation who have legitimate interests and can impact or be impacted by the activities and various aspects of the organisation. Stakeholders are commonly categorised by their level of interest, power, influence, and importance; however, according to Donaldson & Preston (1995), managers within an organisation must pay "*simultaneous attention to the legitimate interests of all appropriate stakeholders*" (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p67).

There is a multitude of definitions of stakeholders. However, the most used is that of Freeman, who defined stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the organisation's activities. (Freeman, 1984). It is vital for companies to align their interests with those of stakeholders and to navigate towards equilibrium between the organisation, the stakeholders, the industry, and the environment because competing interests can result in conflict, which can impede SM and the strategic management process.

Organisations need to differentiate between primary and secondary stakeholders. According to Clarkson (1995), primary stakeholders are those on whom the organisation depends for continued participation to ensure the ongoing survival of the company. According to the literature, the primary stakeholders are employees, shareholders, customers, and suppliers (Clarkson, 1995; Freeman, 1999; Benn *et al*., 2016). Therefore, without its primary stakeholders, the business will meet its untimely end because "*the organisation and primary shareholders are highly dependent on each other*" (Benn *et al*., 2016, p2). Clarkson further defined secondary stakeholders as those who are not essential to the company's survival and are not necessarily involved in the organisation's activities; however, they can affect the organisation's operations. These include the competition, associations within the industry, media, the government, and communities. Table 1 below is a representation of groups of stakeholders as commonly identified in the literature.

**Table 1:List of popular internal and external stakeholders**

| Internal | External |
|---|---|
| Employees | Government |
| Investor | Competitors |
| Shareholders | Regulators |
| Suppliers | Community |
| Customers | Media |
| Partners | Environmental groups |
| Consumers | Political groups |
| | Civil Society |

**Sources:** Adapted from Clarkson (1995); Freeman (1999); Fassin (2012)

Stakeholders are important and critical determinants of the implementation success of organisation activities, and this importance has led to the recognition of the necessity of a more structured approach to managing stakeholders (Amadi *et al*., 2019a). The current literature has a preponderance of research in the field of stakeholder management, some of which is reviewed, discussed, and analysed in the next section of this paper.

### 2.2.2 Drivers of Stakeholder Management

As explained in the previous section, primary stakeholders are critical to the organisation's survival and secondary stakeholders, who can affect or influence the organisation's operations, do not possess disruptive power. Although literature differentiates groups of stakeholders in terms of meaningful disruptive power in an organisation's activities from a practical perspective, the reality is different from the academic perspective. For the development of the theory on stakeholder management, it is important to include both groups of stakeholders and thoroughly consider how they shape the SM process.

This section of the literature review will elaborate on stakeholder management activities and key drivers of stakeholder management. When used and understood effectively, the SM theory and its derived frameworks can enable and enhance an organisation's managerial, strategic, and operational decision-making capabilities to meet stakeholders' expectations, thus creating value. The preponderance of generic SM frameworks suggests plenty of evidence in the literature on the intricacies of managing stakeholders in a strategic setting. A generic framework proposed by (Rankinen *et al*., 2022), as illustrated in Figure 1, *identifies Planning, Stakeholder identification, stakeholder analysis and prioritization, stakeholder integration* and *stakeholder engagement* as important drivers of SM.

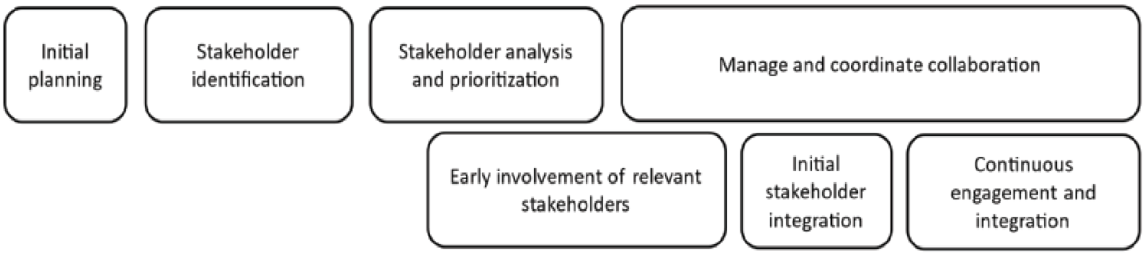


**Figure 2**: Generic stakeholder management framework

**Source**: Rankinen *et al*., 2022, Stakeholder management in PED projects: challenges and management model

As mentioned earlier, literature has a preponderance of frameworks on stakeholder management, some very generic and some a bit more developed. In addition to the generic framework suggested by Rankinen *et al*., the researcher identified a second stakeholder management framework, more comprehensive than the former, proposed by Bal *et al.* (2013), which provides a little more depth on some drivers of SM, as illustrated in figure 2 below.

Bal *et al*. identified five drivers critical to the SM process, which include identifying key stakeholders and significant issues; analysing and planning; strengthening engagement capacities; designing the process and engaging; and taking action, reviewing, and reporting. To provide more depth to the SM process, Bal *et al*. (2013) included three accompanying processes to the five drivers: thinking and planning, preparing and engaging, and responding and measuring to provide more depth to the SM process.

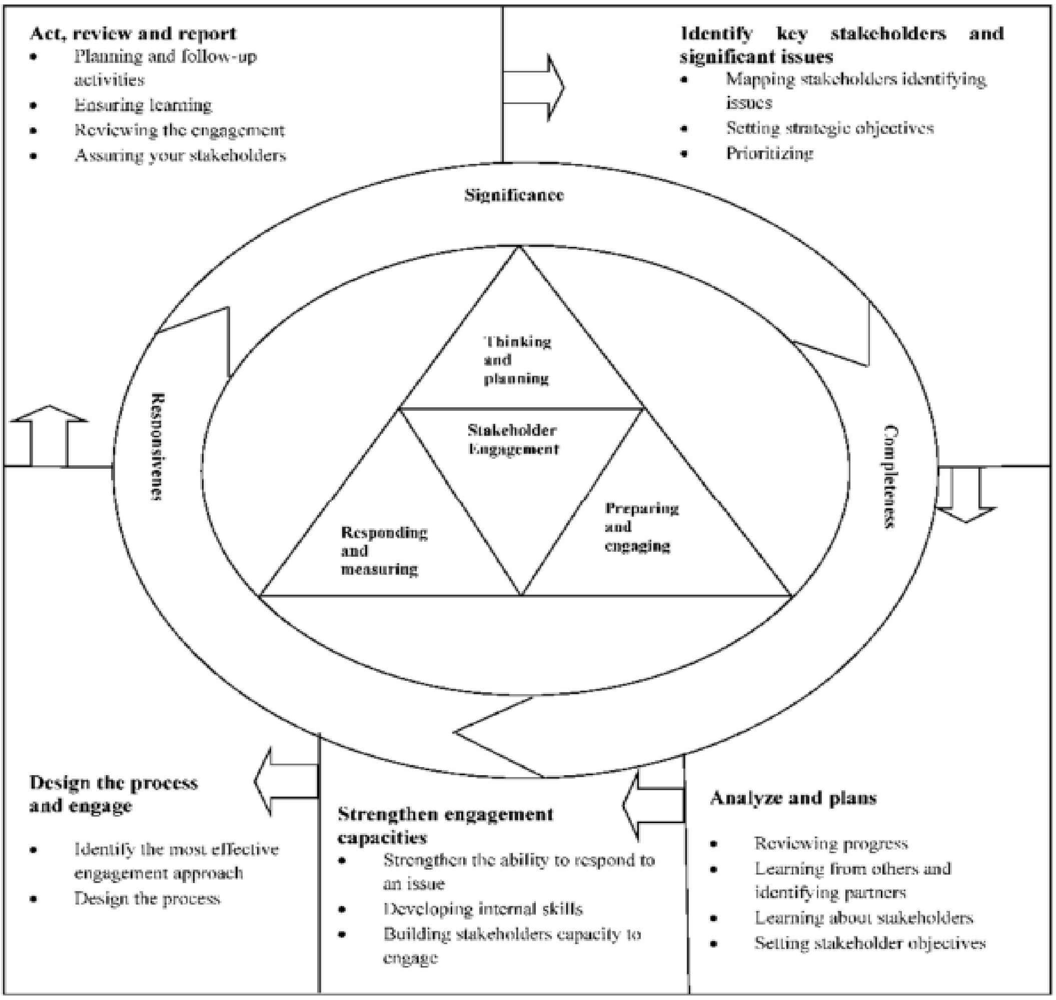


***Figure 3****: A process model of project stakeholder management*
**Source**: Stakeholder engagement: Achieving sustainability in the construction sector (Bal *et al., 2013)*

The two frameworks identified above have striking similarities and commonalities in drivers included. Although both scholars have developed the frameworks in the context of research in the field of projects, these frameworks were used as an anchor in this study to investigate what the drivers of SM are in a broader context. During the literature review, other drivers not included in the above frameworks were identified as critical by other researchers in the process of SM and are elaborated on in detail in the following sections of this paper.

**The stakeholder management planning process.**

The planning of any process is just as important as its implementation. As the adage says, 'failing to plan is planning to fail'. As in any other process, it is essential to actively plan how managers within an organisation would manage their stakeholders. Stakeholder management planning can be defined as an interpretative and iterative management strategy undertaken by an organisation to establish interactive collective reasoning between the organisation and its stakeholders to define an approach aimed at effectively engaging with stakeholders throughout the lifecycle of the relationship and strategic management process (Murtagh *et al*., 2008). Interactive collective reasoning entails a dialogue between two groups, indicating planning should be done as much as possible with the inclusion of the stakeholders in the planning process.

Stakeholder planning has been identified as one of five processes in the continuous stakeholder management cycle (Bal *et al.,* 2013). According to Bal *et al*., the process of planning stakeholder management is an iterative process that entails continuously identifying, assessing, and planning stakeholder activities, including stakeholder relationships, throughout any project or strategic lifecycle. Therefore, it is critical to integrate systematic, critical, and sustainable thinking into the planning of stakeholder management activities (Silvius & Schipper, 2019). From a systematic perspective, any actions and external factors that could affect the execution of the SM process should be included in the stakeholder management plan, then later monitored, and controlled to ensure a successful stakeholder management process.

**Identifying stakeholders**

Various stakeholder categories have been identified in the literature and classified based on their position: internal or external stakeholders, level of power, and level of influence, all of whom have vested interests in the organisation. Before stakeholders can be classified and prioritised, stakeholders or stakeholder groups need to be identified (Rawlins, 2006). Stakeholders' influence and stake in an organisation can change at any given time, thus making the process of stakeholder identification a repetitive one during the strategic cycle.

The implementation of strategic activities happens within a specific timeframe. According to Achterkamp and Vos (2007), identifying stakeholders is the first step to stakeholder analysis and prioritisation, a crucial factor for projects and strategic initiative implementation. When caution is not exercised during stakeholder identification, the wrong stakeholders can be selected and integrated into the strategic process, making it most likely to fail when implemented. Successful stakeholder management requires identifying the stakeholders' interests and intrinsic value (Donaldson & Preston, 1995) and documenting all relevant information about the stakeholders and how the dynamic interrelationships among stakeholders and their interests can influence the outcome of the process.

**Prioritising stakeholders**

Most organisations strive to optimise their resources; resource allocation and optimisation are critical aspects of strategy implementation. More often than not, organisations face challenges due to limited resources, which requires directing more resources and efforts towards some categories of stakeholders over others. Trying to manage all stakeholders equally can be a daunting task, thus making it critical for managers to use a stakeholder assessment matrix together with saliency attributes to support their stakeholder prioritisation efforts according to stakeholders' power, legitimacy, urgency, and their resulting impact (Aapaoja & Haapasalo, 2014).

The combination of stakeholders' saliency and attributes enables a more comprehensive and accurate managerial assessment and strategic decision-making when allocating resources where they are most needed and valuable. As argued by Wood *et al*. (2018), if stakeholders' saliency is not correctly assessed, "*managers can cause indelible harms to unidentified claimants; they can squander resources on identified stakeholders who have legitimacy or power but little claim, or on those who have a claim but neither legitimacy nor power*" (Wood *et al*., 2018, p197). When stakeholders are prioritised, allocating resources effectively and integrating them into various steps of the organisation's strategic management process becomes more accessible.

**Stakeholder Integration**

Generally, the success of strategy implementation largely depends on the stakeholders' ability to work together effectively (Baiden *et al.,* 2006). A group of stakeholders must share similar attributes and interests to work together effectively, thus indicating the importance of commonality in this context. Successfully working together requires high collaboration by all stakeholders and all functions across the organisation. According to Hietajarvi *et al*. (2017), stakeholder integration aims to facilitate this collaboration by strategically aligning cross-functional objectives and linking various functions and groups of stakeholders to work collaboratively towards common goals.

In their study on stakeholder management's role in organisations' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, Adomako and Tran (2022) used data from 228 firms and found that stakeholder integration positively influences a firm's commitment. Adomako and Tran's findings support the argument in the previous section that the effectiveness of a firm's strategies and their execution is influenced by the rigour involved in prioritising stakeholders and focusing efforts and resources on stakeholders with solid influence. Effective stakeholder integration into a firm's strategic management initiatives and processes is critical for effective engagement and management of stakeholders throughout the strategic cycle.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement is now a widely used construct and a critical driver of stakeholder management. Stakeholder engagement has been widely researched by previous scholars, many of whom have suggested different definitions and frameworks for stakeholder engagement. Greenwood defined stakeholder engagement as "*the practices that the organization undertakes to involve stakeholders positively in organizational activities*" (Greenwood, 2007, p317). Many scholars in stakeholder engagement research have widely used this definition. However, some clarification is still needed in the literature, as many scholars refer to stakeholder engagement as stakeholder management.

As the literature identifies, multiple factors impact stakeholder engagement, including *stakeholder perception, sustainable development, cultural context, organisational drivers,* and *digital transformation*. This list is non-exhaustive and only grouped under stakeholder engagement for this research, as literature identified them as drivers of SM to a more significant extent. However, cultural context and digital transformation have also been argued to be critical drivers of strategy implementation in different contexts.

**a. Stakeholder Perception**

Another factor influencing stakeholder engagement is the stakeholder's perception of the organisation. "*Stakeholder Perception is defined as the degree of concern for a company's corporate strategy*" (Hristov *et al*., 2022, p1). Stakeholder perception is a driver of the Stakeholder Perception Score (SPS), a framework proposed by Hristov and Appolloni (2021). It measures the importance stakeholders attach to specific organisational dimensions. SPS has been recently introduced in the literature to enable the theoretical and practical development of critical drivers of stakeholders' engagement and the integration of stakeholder perception into organisations' corporate strategy.

According to Manjengwa *et al.* (2023), stakeholders' perception of a company and their decision on whether to engage with it is influenced by multiple factors, including the company's ESG agenda, the organisation's ability to create value, reputation, credibility, and corporate image. Multiple scholars have identified these drivers as critical drivers of perception and the SM process overarchingly. Manjengwa *et al*. also argued that stakeholder perception is critical because it influences a stakeholder's perceived value of engaging with a company.

By monitoring Stakeholder perception, companies can implement and manage their strategies based on expected organisational performance outcomes. Increasingly, stakeholders' perception is influenced by organisational ESG scorecard and activities.

**b. Sustainable Development**

In recent years, there has been a growing demand from lawmakers, regulatory bodies, and stakeholders for organisations to integrate sustainable development into their strategies, failing which, their ability to remain competitive and positively perceived by their stakeholders would be hampered (Amankwah-Amoah *et al*., 2018). This theory can be supported by recent events, where companies whose operations negatively affect the environment had their reputation and image tarnished, resulting in strategic partners severing ties with them, impacting their operations and performance. Although Hristov and Appolloni (2021) argued that sustainable development is the critical dimension of stakeholder perception, the literature suggests that the importance of sustainable development varies based on industries and stakeholders.

Companies that engage in environmental collaboration are better perceived by their stakeholders, which eventually fosters stakeholder engagement and creates value (Adomako,2020). In an era where environmental and social strategies influence stakeholders' decision-making on whether to engage with companies, sustainable development has been identified and theorised as a critical dimension for stakeholder engagement. The business environment is increasingly competitive, and many organisations implement sustainability strategies to expand their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) footprint, mainly to address the compelling pressure by stakeholders to adopt environmentally responsible practices while creating value for their stakeholders and maximising the firm's profitability (Adomako & Tran, 2022).

**c. Cultural Context**

Literature collectively defines organisational culture as the set of values, attitudes, and beliefs inherent in an organisation that is shaped by the organisation's leaders and adopted by the employees. According to MacIntosh and Doherty (2008), organisational culture is a crucial driver of strategy implementation internally. However, recent literature suggests that culture is now a key determinant of how an organisation is perceived in the marketplace by its clients and external stakeholders, all contributing to stakeholders' willingness to engage with an organisation.

There is a strong correlation between the type of organisational culture and the stakeholders' ability to engage and enable value creation (Reino *et al*., 2020). Thus, companies with a dominant autocratic leadership style perform less. This argument can be supported by (McCardle *et al*., 2019), who argue that culture greatly influences strategic alignment as it influences managerial abilities to align strategic intent, dynamic capabilities, and competitive priorities to achieve organisational strategic implementation and goals.

**d. Organizational Drivers**

In their research on stakeholder perception, Hristov and Appolloni (2021) identified two main organisational drivers: Efficiency and Productivity.

They note that the higher the efficiency and productivity of the organisation, the higher the likelihood of stakeholders remaining loyal and supportive towards the organisation, thus enabling the sustainability and longevity of the stakeholder's engagement and business relationship. One way stakeholders assess organisational efficiency is through the effectiveness of relationships with their stakeholders; "*organisations who have a consistent approach in dealing with their stakeholders is perceived as more effective*" (Balser & Clusky, 2005, p16).

The literature identifies a second construct of organisational efficiency perceived by stakeholders as the level of organisational transparency. There is a collective assumption that transparency increases accountability in firms and their engaged stakeholders, thereby increasing efficiency and organisational outcomes (Schnakenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). The theory of transparency on stakeholder perception, value creation and performance has been tested in multiple settings; according to Oino (2019), disclosure and transparency positively affect stakeholders' perception, thereby improving stakeholder engagement.

In practical terms, from stakeholders' perspective on efficiency and transparency in the context of corporate strategy and value creation, transparency influences trust, thus improving relationships between organisations and stakeholders, especially at a strategic level, leading to sustained stakeholder engagement and performance. Companies that practice transparency are trustworthy and better perceived by stakeholders.

**e. Digital Transformation**

In an era of digitalisation and the fourth Industrial Revolution, organisations must rethink their strategies to integrate the digitalisation of many processes, systems, and operations. Looking back at the impact of COVID-19 on organisations, companies had to integrate various technologies into their operations to continue collaborations with their internal and external stakeholders. Companies that needed to be more agile to adapt to the 'new way of working' suffered a massive loss due to reduced stakeholder engagement. Companies that engage partners and stakeholders in their digital transformation strategies are positively perceived by their stakeholders; this leads to new collaborations, thereby affecting the company's value-creation through increased stakeholder engagement.

Furthermore, Crescenzi and Gagliardi (2018) argue that companies seeking external knowledge and actively engaging with external stakeholders strategically have favourable perceptions and outcomes in the industry and better competitive advantage. Looking at all the arguments on digital transformation's impact on stakeholder perception, there is much value in companies disclosing their digital transformation strategies; this will increase the companies' likelihood of being perceived as innovators by their stakeholders and generate new ventures.

**Leadership and Decision-making**

Earlier, we elaborated on culture being an integral factor of a healthy organisation and an important driver of stakeholder management when implementing strategy. However, culture is driven by many organisational factors, including values, beliefs, and leadership. Leadership plays a vital role in driving the outcomes organisations are set to achieve. Globalisation has resulted in the internationalisation of businesses with far-reaching implications on organisational processes like stakeholder management, leadership, and managerial processes, including interactions, exerted influence and shared goals between companies and their stakeholders (Voegtlin *et al.,* 2011).

Organisations rely on stakeholders to execute their strategic plans, which requires navigating complex internal and external environments and challenges throughout the strategic process. To address challenges faced during strategic changes involving stakeholders, it is crucial to consider a stakeholder perspective of leadership and the role responsible leadership plays in driving relationships between leaders and stakeholders (Pless, 2007). This is particularly important in Africa, where a strong command of responsible leadership is necessary to make the right decisions regarding the people needed, manage stakeholders, and translate strategic plans into actionable activities needed to drive strategic implementation in a complex setting.

**Level of expertise of managers**

In an organisational setting, the capabilities and competencies of the organisation are highly dependent on the individual skills and competencies of the managers within the organisation. The project manager's competencies become extremely important because strategic objectives must be translated into actionable projects. The managers' competencies, including knowledge, skills, and abilities, are critical for leading the project regardless of size and complexity (Bhatt & Sable, 2022). Stakeholder managers must possess decision-making, team management, commitment conflict management, problem-solving and leadership competencies. Due to the diversity of stakeholders that managers must engage with, managers should have diverse competencies to support the strategic management effort.

### Stakeholder Centricity

Stakeholder centricity can be defined as the discipline of listening to stakeholders and identifying their needs and interests to consider their satisfaction better and develop strategies to partner with them. In essence, it represents a holistic approach to stakeholder engagement. According to Gummesson, "*balanced centricity in which stakeholder interests are considered within a network frame*" (Gummersson, 2008, p315) is critical for stakeholder management. Gummesson further argues that, despite the benefit stakeholder centricity has, it has never been genuinely implemented because it is impossible to give all stakeholders the same priority and level of attention.

However, from a value perspective, stakeholder centricity is essential in ensuring the organisation strives to give stakeholders, especially customers, value for money. This is even more applicable in the pharmaceutical industry, as argued by Du Plessis *et al*. (2017), who stated that "*patient centricity involves listening to and partnering with the patient, and understanding the patient perspective, rather than simply inserting patient views into the established process*" (Du Plessis *et al.,* 2017, p461). This logic is applicable in industries and is central to successful SM and SI.

### Relationship Building

Stakeholder relationships are the connections between organisations and groups of people with a direct interest or influence in the organisation's activities. The interdependent relationships among stakeholders are the basis of their continuous participation with companies and the basis on which customer relations that drive financial performance are shaped (Kaplan *et al*., 1996). Building and managing relationships with stakeholders can create a competitive advantage for the organisation as it can constitute intangible and socially complex resources that competitors may need help to acquire or duplicate.

Relationship building due to interactions between firms and stakeholders can result in relational value, making them invaluable as they are not easily duplicated as the value resulting from transactional interactions (Hillman & Keim, 2001). In addition, Hillman and Keim argue that relationships require investments, trust, moral compass, and fair dealing by all the parties involved. Therefore, reputation and alignment are critical for sustained engagement.

**Stakeholder Communication**

As highlighted in the previous section, the ability of an organisation to survive and be sustainable depends on its ability to create relational value by developing and maintaining professional relationships with its stakeholders. To achieve that, the organisation needs to have effective communication strategies, which are tailored based on specific stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder communication, according to Turkulainen *et al.* (2015), is the art of exchanging information and knowledge to generate action, a change or common understanding and alignment between members who share a common objective. They further stated that communication plays a fundamental role in stakeholder management due to its impact on stakeholder engagement and that various communication needs for different aspects of the project based on the context should be planned accordingly. Communication's correlation to engagement is evident since it is the foundation of any alignment, relationship, collaboration, and human-to-human interactions.

**Culture and communication**

Communication methods are highly dependent on the type of culture, in both the national and organisational cultural context, and organisations need to pay considerable attention to the type of culture the organisation is operating in when developing communication strategies (Prajogo & McDermott, 2005). Some cultures may require one communication style over the other based on the values, beliefs and overarching norms within the context. If communication is not tailored to the cultural context, stakeholders with communication preferences in that context will not be able to engage effectively.

**Proactive communication**

When does communication matter? It is common for organisations to adopt a reactive communication strategy when dealing with stakeholders, especially external stakeholders, sometimes due to confidentiality and need-to-know basis. Bushuyev and Shkuro (2019) contradict that approach and argue that adopting a proactive communication approach helps to better stakeholder management and engagement. Being proactive in communicating entails keeping in touch with stakeholders even when the need for it is not apparent, checking in informally, which provides the opportunity to know when things are going well and address them before they become a bottleneck.

**Communication channels**

Communication channels are vehicles through which information is disseminated and shared with external stakeholders. According to Chinyio and Olomolaiye (2009), the most popular channels are newsletters, the company's intranet, emails, and direct communications, including meetings. Multiple channels can pose a challenge as managers must constantly change their channels to share information to suit their audience. For example, the same information shared using a presentation during a team meeting must be tailored and changed to maybe a newsletter for a different audience.

Communication channels "*contribute to the thinking about an issue so that everyone involved gains a greater understanding of the issue in its subtlety, richness and complexity*" (Chinyio & Olomolaiye, 2009b, p183). Some issues emerging from activities can be discussed more appropriately using one channel over another. For example, challenges arising from resource misallocation may not be discussed in a group meeting but with people managing the resources. In addition, channels used for conflict management and issues emerging from different views and perspectives should be established prior to commencing a project or strategic change.

### 2.2.3 Stakeholder Management Summary and invitation for further research

As discussed in the review of the literature on SM, a stream of past and current literature focuses on the theoretical relevance of stakeholders' engagement, while several studies conducted in multiple industries documented findings that serve as evidence that systemic integration of stakeholder management in the organisation resulted in effective strategy implementation and value creation, better performance, and sustainability. However, understanding what the key drivers of effective stakeholder management are; and how stakeholder management can be used as a managerial tool to support effective strategy implementation remains a gap in the current literature (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019). According to Hristov *et al*. (2022), there is a direct correlation between stakeholders' engagement and a firms' ability to create value by effectively implementing their strategies.

The literature also highlighted the availability of generic frameworks by Rankinen *et al*., (2022) and Bal *et al., (2013)*. Using the SM frameworks to test its applicability in different context could further develop the theory on SM. These frameworks and the invitation from Pedrini and Ferri (2019) highlight the need for further research and thus constitute the basis for the research questions this study aims to answer. The author focused on the less interrogated influence of the specific drivers of SM on strategy implementation in a context rather characterised by strong cultural, volatile, resource-deprived, weak institutional environments and economies, emerging markets. The mechanisms of stakeholder management and strategy implementation in developed countries are extremely different to what is currently experienced in developing countries governed by complex political and regulatory landscape.

## 2.3 Strategy Implementation

### 2.3.1 Emerging Markets

Globalisation has led to multiple emerging economies with high economic growth becoming key players on the global scale. Many emerging markets show rapid economic growth, even higher than the global average (Grosse & Meyer, 2019). This phenomenon has led to increased research on emerging economies, aiming to understand the contextual factors that make emerging markets different from developed economies. With that, the current literature has many definitions of emerging economies.

Emerging markets are markets with low to middle economy yet high economic growth potential, which are often characterised by low efficiency and transparency, strong social traditions, weak institutional frameworks and risk and uncertainty due to the high volatility of their economic, political, and institutional variables (Grosse & Meyer, 2019). With emerging markets' high potential for growth, established international companies are increasingly integrating these markets with the intention of expanding their footprint. During the internationalisation of their operations in these volatile markets, managers often face the challenges of effectively predicting various macro parameters and making sound strategic decisions.

It is important to acknowledge the existence of distinctive and contextual similarities and differences between countries in the emerging market category. For example, countries like Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Vietnam, Argentina, Mexico, Thailand, South America, Western Europe, and other African countries like Nigeria are all emerging economies. Although all these countries have similarities like high economic growth rates and high levels of social inequality, African markets have a high rate of poverty, poor infrastructure, and failing institutions compared to other emerging markets (Khanna & Palepu, 2010). All these contextual similarities and differences make further research in the field of management sciences and business in the context of Africa more relevant (Teagarden *et al.*, 2018) and necessary than ever before. One observation from the current literature is the availability of multiple articles and research on multiple emerging markets like Asia and Western Europe, but more significant strides have yet to be observed in

African research.

### 2.3.2 Strategy in Emerging Economies

With global deregulation, the internalisation of multiple MNEs and global companies has increased. Increasingly, emerging markets have rapidly growing economies due to widespread liberalisation, globalisation and the adoption of internationally recognised standards and policies. Hoskisson *et al.* (2000) define Emerging Economies as "*low-income, rapid-growth countries using economic liberalization as their primary growth engine. They fall into two groups: developing countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East and transition economies in the former Soviet Union and China*" (Hoskisson *et al*., 2000, p1).

According to Onaji-Benson (2019a), although the field of international business has witnessed an expansion in business research with an increase in focus on emerging economies in the last decade, the management research from the African context is scanty despite the argued need by Barnard *et al*. (2017) to understand African MNEs better. This is consistent with Hennart's (2012b) argument that with the rising number of Emerging Markets Multinationals (EMMs) who are increasingly investing abroad and in competition with established MNEs, the international business literature requires new theories to better explain this phenomenon instead of using existing theoretical frameworks which are have been developed in the context of established MNEs.

Emerging economies are primarily resource-constrained and governed by strong governmental, cultural, and societal influences better managed in developed economies. In Africa, these forces are much more impactful on strategy due to deeply rooted cultural beliefs, rogue governmental institutions, and social disparities, which greatly influence stakeholders' behaviours externally and internally. This makes the Resource-Based Theory (RBT) and Institutional Theory (IT) very relevant to the strategic management process within Africa.

### 2.3.3 Drivers of strategy implementation

The literature identifies multiple factors that have a direct influence on strategy implementation. These drivers can be inherent to the organisation or an outcome of the macro-environment on which the organisation has little to no control. When planning strategy implementation, an overarching analysis of internal and external environments is critical as early in the strategic management process as possible. Conducting an early analysis will ensure these drivers are identified and analysed in terms of their potential impact on strategy implementation.

#### 2.3.3.1 The effectiveness of the strategic planning process

Planning is a critical step in any organisational process. It enables the identification and outline of key elements needed to execute organisational activities, including the processes, resources, people, and milestones. According to Galbreath (2010), strategic planning is a process by which an organisation assesses stakeholders' expectations. He further states that planning involves:

- Actively analysing the environment
- Identifying socioeconomic and political issues and their projected impact on strategic execution and
- Developing appropriate responses to identify and manage stakeholders needed in the strategic processes.

Planning is thought by many to be an informal yet necessary process; however, Andersen (2000) argues that planning is a systematic and comprehensive approach that enables managers to determine a strategic path and all the intricacies of the strategic management process iteratively and analytically. Planning is critical as it helps decide the viability of activities, processes, and projects based on the organisation's capabilities and resources.

#### 2.3.3.2 The External Environment

In the process of formulating a strategy and its implementation, organisations must consider the external environment and the macro factors, including the political-legislative factors, socioeconomic factors, technological factors, the industry, the stakeholders within the external environment and the micro-environmental factors (Voiculeţ *et al.,* 2010).

Organisations and the external environment exert pressure and influence on each other through relationships, product and service offerings, trends, and market information. The external environment is host to multiple environmental opportunities and threats, which, when effectively analysed, can impact the competitive positioning and advantage of the organisation.

Therefore, organisations must ensure a high level of awareness and sensitivity to stimuli and continuously adapt their strategies to meet the changes in the environment due to turbulence caused by technological changes and economic, political, and legislative factors. Organisations must conduct a thorough external environmental analysis to enact these changes, adapt to the volatile external environment (Waruwu *et al*., 2016) and leverage their relationships and stakeholders.

The external environmental analysis is a process through which organisations scan, identify, monitor, evaluate and assess the political, social, economic, technological, and industrial factors within the environment that can impact their organisation at a strategic level and help shape the future of the organisation (Wheelen *et al*., 2012). Before planning SM and SI, situational and external environmental analysis is unavoidable for identifying the most powerful and influential stakeholders, the opportunities and the threats within the environment and the industry. By identifying these influential stakeholders, organisations can better shape their engagement and implementation strategies to factor in all the external stakeholders, including the government, competitors, customers, suppliers, local partnerships, and regulators at the forefront of the industry and the government institutions.

Managing powerful and influential stakeholders requires critical thinking and considering multiple factors out of the organisation's control. This process is more cumbersome than the management of internal stakeholders who are indeed vested in the success of the organisation's activities. According to Amadi *et al.* (2019b), there are multiple frameworks and strategies useful in the management of public (external) stakeholders, including the Project Stakeholder Management (PSM) strategy and the use of trade-offs and negotiations for engaging stakeholders (Chinyio & Akintoye, 2008). The use of trade-offs and negotiation is instrumental in managing stakeholders in developing countries where the opposition and influence of the government and public administration are prevalent from operational and regulatory perspectives.

Companies must establish public relations and define public engagement strategies to balance the open system between the organisation and the environment. Harris (2016) argues that organisations must ensure adequate public relations strategies for public and external stakeholders' engagement to successfully manage the intertwined relationships between the organisation and the public.

Public relations managers are tasked with building sustainable relationships with key players in the government and industries to ensure that the organisation's strategic objectives are promoted and highlighted in the external space (Richardson & Hinton, 2015). Relationship building is critical in ensuring the interconnectedness of the organisation with its external environment, especially in terms of turbulent changes and risk and reputational management at a strategic level. Public relations and stakeholder management are the gateway to representing an organisation externally and ensuring buy-in and support from key players and policymakers.

#### 2.3.3.3 Resourcing for Strategy Implementation

The current literature establishes that resources and their availability are critical for the success of both SM and SI in every context. Resources like skills and capabilities, including consultancy skills for strategy formulation, technology, and financial resources for strategy implementation, have been highlighted as paramount. The Resource Based Theory (RBT) is a management theory which stipulates that in "*strategic management, the fundamental sources and drivers of a firm's competitive advantage and superior performance are mainly associated with the attributes of their resources and capabilities, which are both valuable and costly-to-copy*" (Rose *et al.,* 2012, p152). RBT reinforces the importance of resources, including skills and capabilities, in implementing the strategy necessary to achieve a superior strategic positioning compared to competitors.

Resource management is the process by which organisations assess and optimise their internal resources and capabilities to decide best how they can be leveraged during the planning and execution of their strategies. The organisational resources must be considered from the conceptualisation phase of any strategy; managers must critically examine tangible and intangible assets and capabilities the organisation has at its disposal when planning its strategic processes. According to Sirmon *et al*. (2007), managers within the organisation must actively and effectively manage the organisation's resource portfolio. Effective resource management entails acquiring quality resources to ensure that the organisation's resources can be combined to develop capabilities that the company and its managers will need to implement the strategy.

Grant (2021) argues that successful strategy implementation resulting from the effective use and optimisation of the company's resources and capabilities can lead to competitive advantage. Grant further states that analysing resources and capabilities is as significant as the environmental analysis when formulating strategy. Figure 3 below illustrates the link between environmental and internal resource and capabilities analysis when planning strategy.

What is the link between resources and capabilities? According to Hitt *et al*. (2016b), the organisation creates the capabilities to implement strategies when acquiring, managing, and integrating quality resources. The process of acquiring and managing resources to develop capabilities must be adaptable and change with the strategy when external factors in the environment which shape the strategy change.

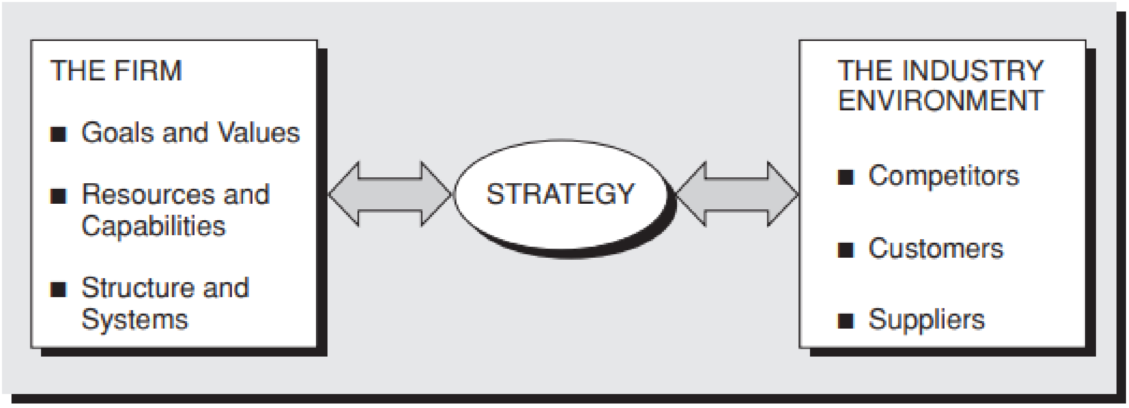


**Figure 4**: Link between Resources, the environment and strategy

**Source**: The relationship between organisational resources, capabilities, systems, and competitive advantage (Grant, 2021)

Strategy implementation can only be successful if the professional skills necessary are available and the stakeholders involved in the implementation possess the required abilities. These can include problem-solving, technical, leadership, and professional skills, including interpersonal and communication skills (Al Darmaki, 2016). Additionally, Al Darmaki also found that the lack of professional skills is one of the biggest challenges to strategy implementation because interpersonal skills enable the ability to work and interact with people. In contrast, communication skills facilitate engagement and collaboration.

Other essential skills instrumental in strategy are managerial skills and the strategic perspective skill, which sets top management apart from middle managers (Zenger & Folkman, 2014). During strategic management, a strategic perspective enables the incumbent to adopt a strategic instead of a managerial view of the situation, thereby approaching it with the appropriate perspective when implementing.

#### 2.3.3.4 Systems and Stakeholder Integration for Strategy Implementation

In the previous sections, we have examined the role of various drivers of SM and organisational factors in the implementation of the strategy. It has been argued that many strategies fail not because they are wrong but because all the critical elements, including the organisational culture, people with adequate skills, and systems needed for successful implementation, are either lacking or not systematically used. "*Organisational processes are the systems the firm has put in place to transform resources into better customer value. These systems are designed to make task performance more efficient and are difficult to* *change, especially when embedded into organizational culture*" (Afuah, 2003, p20). Organisations must build the proper structure and systems to implement their strategies effectively.

The implementation process of any strategy or project can only start once stakeholders have been identified, analysed and prioritised, as elaborated in the previous sections. After identifying stakeholders, managers can decide on each stakeholder's involvement and integration technique based on their saliency. According to Luyet *et al*. (2012), the early involvement of stakeholders and the alignment on clear rules is critical for stakeholders' successful integration and participatory process when implementing strategy.

However, strategy managers are responsible for understanding and deciding on each stakeholder group's integration and participatory processes and communicating this with stakeholders to ensure constant motivation and active participation. The integration techniques and the decision to involve stakeholders early or later in the implementation process must be communicated. If not done, stakeholders may feel excluded from the process, leading to mistrust and consequences on the implementation process.

#### 2.3.3.5 Partnerships with Stakeholders for The Implementation of Strategy

The concept of stakeholder partnerships has seen an increase in academic research and has become a popular approach to strategy formulation and implementation; increasingly, organisations form partnerships with external organisations to support their strategic management processes. Partnerships are representatives from two or more interested groups who share common objectives and a goal to address a specific need while simultaneously and periodically achieving individual objectives and rewards as part of the collaboration (Leach *et al*.,2002).

Strategic and operational partnerships are critical for any organisational success because no private organisation has the in-house expertise, skills, and capabilities to fund, design, plan, build and execute their strategies; thus, entering partnership arrangements combines the strengths, including knowledge, assets, resources, and technical expertise of the parties involved (Amadi *et al.,* 2018) and share the challenges between the parties. According to Holman (2013), "*Partnerships, then, are said to provide an avenue for collaborative capacity to be developed, allowing strategic aims and knowledge to be shared across agencies and amongst stakeholders*" (Holman, 2013a, p4). Forging partnerships enables a coordinated approach to problem-solving.

When organisations enter partnerships with stakeholders, both parties need clarity on the time and efforts needed to co-create multi-stakeholder strategies, mutual objectives, mutual expectations, and the risks and opportunities that exist to sustain the partnership. Partnerships require clarity on objectives, how those objectives fit into the overall matrix of all the partner organisations or individuals, and for the relationship building between both parties to be done intentionally and adequately.

Strategic managers must be skilled and have the "*ability to manage multiple partnerships within both horizontal and vertical systems so that these collaboratives are integrated and focused on problem-solving*" (Holman, 2013b, p3). Managing partnerships effectively increases the continued buy-in from stakeholders so that synergies identified during the conceptualisation of the partnerships are delivered, and partnerships remain sustainable in the long run instead of short-lived collaborations.

Due to the importance and criticality of successful partnerships, organisations must ensure that adequate resources are available and KPIs are clearly defined to ensure and monitor the progress of the implementation. Partnership governance must be defined to avoid issues, problems and challenges associated with collaborative work and ensure accountability and participation from both parties as agreed upon from the onset of the partnership.

### 2.3.4 Stakeholder Management during Strategy Implementation

Strategy Implementation is critical to the achievement of organisational goals; as defined by David Mitchell, a renowned scholar in the field of strategic implementation, it "*refers to the temporary set of activities associated with embedding and integrating a strategic initiative into organizational practices, processes, and* systems" (Mitchell, 2022, p3). The strategy management cycle is a continuous iteration of the three main strategic management processes, which include strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation, with stakeholders playing a critical role in the strategy implementation process. Achieving strategic goals requires strategic managers to effectively use stakeholder management practices to sustain the engagement and satisfaction of key stakeholders while ensuring grievances by the less influential stakeholders remain managed.

Effective strategy implementation begins during the strategy formulation stage. When stakeholders are identified and prioritised early enough, critical stakeholders can be identified and integrated into the strategy formulation to create buy-in, thus ensuring that any possible barriers to successful implementation are dealt with in the phases of the strategy management cycle (Adewale & Esther, 2012). Strategy formulation entails identifying multiple interdependencies and synergies and leveraging them. Organisations rely on these interdependencies with external organisations and the environment in which they operate to implement their strategies and achieve their goals.

To that end, a flow of resources between organisations and their stakeholders is inevitable. Moldavanova and Goerdel (2018) argue that firms who have developed abilities to effectively leverage these interdependencies to obtain resources they need from the environment in which they operate have a better chance of survival and performance than firms who cannot.

The ability of an organisation to successfully implement strategies usually depends on the robustness and efficiency of the organisation's systems and processes, primarily owned, and managed by organizational managers. Both executive and non-executive organisational managers should be able to mobilise and cultivate stakeholder support and manage disagreements and grievances that could derail strategy implementation. Gomes and Bernan (2021) confirmed that the effectiveness of strategy implementation is correlated to stakeholders' level of support, which is consistent with the argument by Peng and Pleggenkuhle-Miles (2009) that, the ability of organisations to implement its strategy, programmes and operational activities effectively is mainly dependent on the nature of the relationship the organisation has with its stakeholders.

The literature review leads to a conclusion, albeit needing empirical evidence, that drivers and dimensions that affect the degree to which a stakeholder positively perceives an organisation and is willing to engage with it are mainly dependent on the organisation itself. In addition, effective stakeholder management practices embedded and integrated into the organisation's culture, operations and practices can foster effective strategic implementation and success; this can be achieved by developing a strategic coalition of stakeholders.

### 2.3.5 Challenges and Barriers to Stakeholder Management during Strategy Implementation

Some factors identified in the current literature as barriers to the stakeholder management process are discussed in this sub-section.

#### a) Misalignment

A study by Baker and Singh (2019) identified key challenges when managing stakeholders, amongst which misalignment in expectations. A significant discrepancy between people's expectations and how strategy gets implemented can lead to distrust, conflicts, blame, and frustration in managing strategic processes. Baker and Singh (2019) further stated that early engagement and integration of stakeholders in the strategic cycle after conducting a stakeholder analysis at the outset could ensure alignment. Should the integration process be done later, it could delay project implementation when grievances that result from the lack of alignment are witnessed when the implementation process is at an advanced stage.

Misalignment is often a result of lack of communication between stakeholders, inaccurate mapping from the onset of the planning phase and ambiguity in the strategic objectives. When stakeholders often have specific expectations not disclosed or considered during the organisation's strategic process, the resulting misalignment leads to implementation issues that can significantly derail progress.

**b) Cultural Barriers**

Culture has been identified as a critical barrier to stakeholder management within the African context, with literature highlighting the interlinkage of both organisational and country cultures, creating a cause-effect relationship between both types of culture. Countries with cultures heavily affected by poverty and inadequate financial resources limit the ability of government and other stakeholders to engage fully (Chunga *et al*., 2023). Employees and other local stakeholders' organisations rely on to executive activities sometimes engage in secondary activities to generate additional income; thus, having divided attention and a low level of engagement on organisational activities. Sometimes, getting hold of such employees when it is needed at a crucial change of a process can be challenging, and could result in delays during the implementation. This phenomenon is common in developing countries in SSA, where it is common to experience employees moonlighting to overcome income deficits.

**c) Silos and Cliques**

Silos and cliques' formation can be defined as defined by the tendency of groups to form within a more extensive group as a result of feeling unconnected, marginalised, or uninformed by others. Silos and clique are a phenomenon noticed in organisations which can be a challenge when managers thrive to bring multiple people to coalesce toward a common objective.

Previous research into organisational culture has highlighted that various stakeholders often work in silos. Halfmann *et al.* (2018) noted a difference in Silos formation in both the European and African contexts when working in Innovation, stating that the EU faced silos issues during the formulation process, while in the African context, Silos were created during the implementation process, resulting in the difficulties sustaining and managing Innovation. Halfmann *et al*. further argued that using systematic early dialogue between all the stakeholders is critical to overcoming SM barriers, including challenges due to silos.

Angelstam *et al*. (2017) perspective on barriers to SM when implementing strategies in Africa is the usual creation of Sectoral silos, which can pose severe challenges for the SM processes like the lack of informed decision making, and the duplication of efforts in communicating with different groups formed because of silos. A lack of informed decision-making can happen when groups of people do not communicate and work together, especially when each has a different vision of how things should be done and implemented. Fostering partnerships between stakeholders is effective in the reduction of inefficiencies and the creation of accountabilities, thereby promoting a culture of working together instead of working in silos when working towards a common objective.

**d) Technology and Communication challenges**

Resource constraints, including limited finance, shortage of skills for the workforce, and the lack of technology and communication tools are encumbering organisation-stakeholder relationships and strategy implementation (Eresia-Eke & Soriakumar, 2021; Saizarbitoria, 2011). When an organisation has limited financial resources, finding cheaper or cost-effective solutions to implementation becomes unavoidable, which may result in sub-standard delivery of outcomes. Limited financial resources in local organisations can result from a struggling economy and budget cuts and other measures organisations take to ensure the company remains afloat. When organisations do not have enough resources, they are unable to invest in the right technologies needed to communicate with remote stakeholders when implementing strategy.

In some emerging markets with minimal technological advancement, international organisations who have the resources and can procure the right technology may still face implementation challenges because stakeholders in those markets do not have the required literacy level to use the collaborative tools. Training must be conducted to improve the skills of the local, which requires additional resources from the organisation.

Language barriers because of cultural differences is very dominant during the implementation of strategy in multinational settings. It can be challenging for remote teams to communicate with each other, and that can result in misinformation, or the misinterpretation of the information being communicated.

In their study on factors inhibiting stakeholders' management in Nigeria, Oyeyipo *et al*.

(2019) identified multiple barriers to SM, which are applicable not only in the Nigerian market but in multiple other countries with SSA. Some of the barriers identified included Ineffective communication, inaccurate identification of stakeholders, change in and misunderstanding of stakeholders' interests and lack of adequate skills by leaders.

**e) Geographical barriers**

In addition to language, technology, and communication challenges, companies also face barriers due to the geographical dispersion of stakeholders.

One of the barriers in SM and SI is the challenge posed by the geographical dispersion of stakeholders. Physical distance introduces multiple barriers to SM (Damian & Zowghi, 2002), including communication challenges and reliance on electronic communication tools and challenges because of time zones. Electronic communication during SM can sometimes be challenging when no rapport exists due to the lack of face-to-face interaction, and stakeholders must collaborate with individuals they have never met. The human-to-human connection fostered by face-to-face interaction is non-existent and can be challenging for stakeholders who strive to build rapport building and establish relationships. Organisations should hold face-to-face meetings regularly to break geographical barriers so stakeholders can meet each other.

Geographical challenges also occur because of cultural diversity. "*Differences in stakeholders' language and national culture affect global collaboration. Equally important is the impact of differences in organizational and functional culture. Not only did remote sites develop their own organizational culture, but also the distance widened the gap between the different functional departments of the organization*" (Damian & Zowghi, 2002, P4). Customers' language is essential in stakeholder management and strategy implementation for multinational and international companies with footprints across multiple continents. The ability to communicate in local languages is a critical factor that directly impacts the effectiveness of multiple stakeholder management processes, including requirements evocation, translation of strategic plans into understandable activities in different languages, and the interaction between stakeholders who are from different countries and having to work together temporarily on projects.

Also, different time-zones makes it sometimes impossible and challenging to reach out to stakeholders when immediate contact is required as part of crisis management or urgency associated with certain organisational activities. MNEs with a large global footprint are often required to work with stakeholders based in countries with a high time interval and are required to make impossible choices and personal compromise to ensure operational continuity and execution.

#### f) Limited resources

Limited resources can result in employees working extensively and taking on too many responsibilities, resulting in grievances, unhappiness, and frustration (Eresia-Eke & Soriakumar, 2021). These employees may avoid engaging in further activities necessary to implement strategic initiatives. Managing unhappy and overstretched employees can become very challenging, which is familiar in resource-constrained settings.

In addition to employee fatigue, challenges like lack of technology and collaboration tools emerge when organisations do not have appropriate resources. Earlier, moonlighting was identified as a cultural barrier; however, some stakeholders can also be forced to engage in moonlighting because of low remuneration, due to budget cuts and the organisation's limited financial resources.

#### g) Corruption

Chunga *et al*. (2023) and Saizarbitoria (2011) identified high levels of corruption and poor regulatory enforcement as barriers to stakeholder engagement at a strategic level. In Africa, engaging with stakeholders may require engaging in unethical behaviours, which can be a problem and a barrier to SM. Weak regulatory frameworks resulting in unharmonized policies can be challenging for companies operating in multiple countries within the SSA region as different countries adopt their policies. "*Although it is not exclusive to Africa, corruption appears to be one of the main barriers to business development, sound governance and substantial implementation of standards in African countries. This acute problem can destroy trust between companies and external stakeholders*" (Saizarbitoria 2011, p71).

Unstable politics, lack of governance and social inequalities are drivers of corruption. The rising income gap, cost of living and widening social gaps force people into unethical practices to raise more money to afford a particular lifestyle.

## 2.4 Chapter summary

The literature review disclosed the depth and breadth of research conducted in SM and SI, including the various perspectives on what drives stakeholder management in different contexts. The multitude of drivers highlighted in the literature review indicates that the process of managing stakeholders requires managers to use system thinking to plan engagement, communication, and implementation, factoring in the contextual differences of some drivers. For example, culture is considered a driver of both SM and SI; however, culture's impact is different when managing stakeholders and when implementing strategy.

The stakeholder and Resource-based Theories provided overarching theoretical support for SM and SI. However, one finding of the literature's analysis and interrogation shows some nuances between both constructs. These nuances were explored in more depth when compared to the research findings in chapter six of this paper. Integrating SM and SI, literature revealed that no process comes without its challenges; the challenges identified when managing stakeholders during strategy implementation provide more context into integrating both constructs.

The gaps in the literature identified by Pedrini and Ferri (2019) provided the opportunity for this research; the invitation to research and the discussed frameworks were the basis for developing the research questions discussed in chapter three.

# CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the literature on SM and SI in great depth. This chapter will elaborate on the need for the research and the research questions the researcher aimed to answer as an invitation by Pedrini and Ferri (2019), discussed in the previous chapter. To structure the study aims and design, the researcher first had to identify a set of questions critically and carefully, which, when answered, contributed to closing the identified gap in the literature.

## 3.2 The problem statement

Sub-Saharan Africa is known for its high flux and complexities, where the socio-political and economic landscape is highly volatile and uncertain. Despite the region's instability, it is home to multiple MNEs and International enterprises that engage in business operations, collaborating with local organisations and stakeholders to implement their strategies and advance their strategic goals. As the region transitions from a previously "underdeveloped" region to a developing region, many international companies are increasingly interested in expanding their operations in emerging African economies. Multiple MNEs now have offices in local African markets, where they have strategic objectives to achieve and must confer with a network of stakeholders from governmental institutions and other private sector organisations to achieve their objectives.

In addition to MNEs, SMEs based in various countries in SSA also have expansion plans into other African countries. They could benefit from an established stakeholder management framework that can be used as guidance for leveraging internal and external stakeholders who can support the implementation of their strategic activities. The reliance on researched frameworks is instrumental for managers to engage stakeholders better and navigate complex and emerging markets like SSA.

However, as seen in the previous chapter, the stakeholder theory, specifically stakeholder management, has been intensively researched by multiple scholars in the context of developed countries. Some scholars have proposed conceptual frameworks for stakeholder management. However, the generic nature of these proposed frameworks does not provide a comprehensive overview of the critical drivers of stakeholder management and how each of these drivers influences the overarching SM process.

A stakeholder management systematic literature review of multiple databases and over

2457 articles and 33 key journals conducted by Pedrini and Ferri (2019) identified multiple gaps in the current literature on SM. This systematic review has shown many research opportunities to develop the SM theory further. Even though the literature development on SM is still at an early stage (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019), the current literature needs more research on SM in the context of SSA despite the region being identified as one with growing interests in the academia and corporate contexts.

Two areas of potential investigation identified by Pedrini and Ferri are 1) to further the understanding of the importance of SM as a managerial tool to support strategy development and implementation to create value and 2) to identify what advantages and barriers multinational companies may encounter when having to operationalise stakeholder management in different institutional contexts. The invitation for further research in the identified areas by Pedrini and Ferri (2019) and the observation of limited research in the current literature on SM in the context of SSA by the researcher's independent review have been the anchors for this research study.

As explained in the previous section, this research topic has practical and theoretical relevance, and it will help organisations better understand the critical drivers of SM in their context and boost the performance of their strategic management processes. The study aims to determine the influence that the key drivers of SM and stakeholder management as a process have on strategy implementation in SSA. To determine that, the researcher asked the following question.

## 3.3 Main Research Question

The review of the current literature and the identified gap in the knowledge has led the researcher to investigate the relationship between the two critical managerial processes: stakeholder management and strategy implementation. The researcher then came up with the research question to contribute to the theory and reduce the gap in the literature. The main question for this research is:

**How does stakeholder management influence strategy implementation in the African context?**

While the overarching objective is to establish the influence of SM on strategy implementation, the researcher aimed first to understand the key drivers of stakeholder management and the role these drivers play in the stakeholder management process. The second part of the question is then to understand the influence and importance Stakeholder management has on strategy implementation in SSA. The below sub-questions were developed to answer the main question better.

## 3.4 Research Sub-Questions:

**Sub-Question 1: What are the key drivers of stakeholder management, and how do these drivers influence SM in the African context?**

This question aims to identify the drivers of stakeholder management in the African region, what each driver entails and its importance in the SM process. This question will also help rank the identified drivers to assess the participants' perspectives on what driver is most important when managing stakeholders in SSA.

**Sub-Question 2: How do these drivers influence stakeholder management and strategy implementation in Africa?**

Sub-question two aims to understand how each driver influences the SM process and its impact on the strategic implementation process. By understanding how each driver influences SM and SI, managers can clearly understand how to manage each driver individually and as part of the SM system.

**Sub-Question 3: What challenges are faced when managing stakeholders and implementing strategy in Africa?**

The researcher found it essential to develop a sub-question that addresses the understanding of challenges faced in the process of SM and SI in the context of the identified drivers, as illustrated in Figure 4. Drivers can become barriers or pose challenges depending on the context and situation, so it is critical to identify challenges to SM in the context of strategy implementation.

To conduct the study to answer the identified questions, the researcher used an explorative qualitative approach during which a sample population was identified, and their insights were gathered and analysed. The next chapter explains the data collection process and methodology used to conduct the study and answer the research questions.

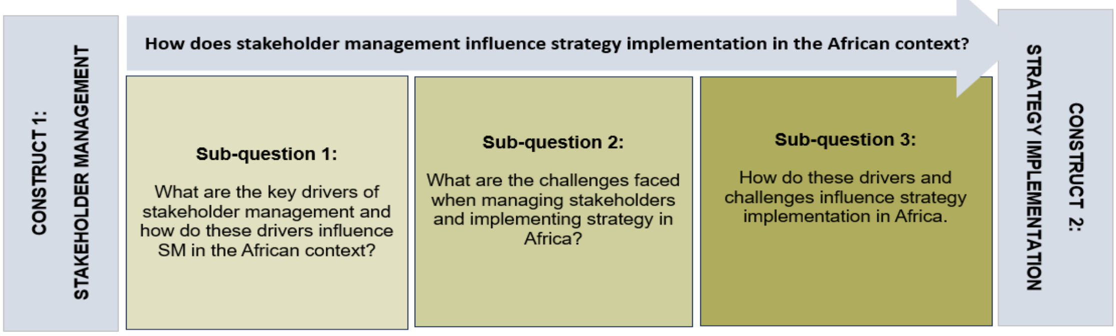


**Figure 5**: The relationship between the study constructs and research questions
**Source:** Developed by Author

# CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 4.1 Introduction

The third chapter of this paper articulates the research objective to understand the influence of stakeholder management and its drivers on the strategy implementation process in SSA. By itself, the objective can appear to be broad; hence, the researcher divided it into three parts: identify the drivers of stakeholder management, understand how each driver influences the SM process, and the impact SM has on the strategic implementation process and understand the challenges in the process of stakeholder management and the process of implementing strategy in Africa.

This chapter provides an overview and justifies the research method employed to answer the questions in chapter three. It explains the research philosophy, the design used, the population and sample selected, the unit analysis, the data analysis and the research quality and rigour. The ethical considerations, including the ethical approval for the study and the validity and reliability of the research, have been elaborated in this chapter.

## 4.2 Research philosophy

According to Creswell and Poth (2016), a research philosophy refers to the beliefs and philosophical assumptions that inform how the researcher collects, analyses, and uses data related to the phenomenon being studied based on the researcher's experience. The researcher employed an interpretivism philosophy due to the nature of the study, which required an interpretive effort by the researcher to gather a range of in-depth perspectives from participants to build a detailed picture of the constructs being studied based on how it is understood by those who have personal experience of it (Bunniss & Kelly, 2010). The epistemological assumptions that the researcher sought to understand about how the key drivers of stakeholder management influence strategy implementation were the basis of this research.

The interpretivism approach guided the research process to grasp the subjective meanings of the influence of key drivers of SM in strategy implementation. According to Bell *et al.* (2019), interpretivism is best suited for research that is "*concerned with the 'how' and the why' of social action, including the processes whereby things happen*" (Bell *et al*., 2019, p15). Bell *et al.* (2019) also stated that research investigating a causal explanation must refer to the interpretive understanding of social action. Studies aimed at understanding the subjective meanings of persons, like stakeholders, where abstraction is not certain, are interpretative (Goldkuhl, 2012) and thus essential in the interpretive paradigm. Therefore, this research was based on a qualitative research methodology, where the relationship between the two variables was deducted from words instead of numbers (Bell *et al.,* 2019). Because of the explorative nature of the study, the research process provided a deeper understanding of the nuances in the SM field within the context of strategy management in Africa.

## 4.3 Research Design

Academic research aims to either develop a theory, add to the knowledge area, address a gap in the literature, or use available information to test the hypothesis and interpret the conclusion. According to Saunders *et al.* (2015), theory development can use different approaches, including a deductive or inductive approach. Deductive research uses information from pre-existing theories to guide data analysis. In contrast, inductive research uses research questions to collect data, which is then analysed to make generalisations from the generated observations and build theories. Based on the nature of the research, which sought to understand the concept of SM and SI based on observations from generated data, this study used an inductive approach, during which specific questions were used to gather data for analysis.

The research was conducted using an explorative qualitative design based on an interpretivism philosophy where a combination of structured interviews was used to identify the key drivers of stakeholder management and their influence on strategy implementation. This design was considered suitable for this research as it allowed for qualitative interviews and the collection and analysis of texts (Bell *et al.,* 2019), which answered the research question. The research was conducted using structured interviews over Microsoft Teams, mainly comprised of open-ended questions beginning with "what" and "how" to satisfy the need for detailed explanations from managers' perspectives. Upon receiving the initial answers provided, follow-up questions were asked by the researcher, who sought greater clarity and deeper explanations to reveal "*rich as quality and thick as quantity*" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409) data. Thick data being a lot of data shared and rich data being multi-layers and detailed data. The research process took place over four months, from August 2023 to November 2023.

## 4.4 Unit of Analysis

Qualitative research requires the selection of a unit of analysis. According to (Bell *et al.,* 2019), the unit of analysis can be an individual, an organisation, a group, or a data series. To better understand the topic being researched, the unit of analysis for this research was the perception of individuals who currently work or have worked in stakeholder management and strategy implementation across multiple industries and companies in SSA.

## 4.5 Population sample and sampling Selection

The sampling method that was utilised in this research is purposive sampling to strategically select participants who met specific criteria instead of randomly selecting participants. The participants were selected based on their relevance to the research question being posed in this study (Bell *et al.,* 2019). The sampling strategy and the selection of participants should be according to the philosophy and design of the research study and its overarching aims (Punch, 2000). In qualitative research, "*a more flexible sampling method is ideal as it enables the purposeful selection of participants with the aim of increasing the depth as opposed to the breath of understanding by selecting respondents that are more likely to yield appropriate and useful information*" (Campbell *et al*., 2020, p654).

In his systematic review of research paradigms, Rahi (2017) provided a broad overview of the sampling method and the process of identifying a sampling frame from the target population to select the actual units for the study. Rahi (2017) defined the target population as the category of individuals the study seeks to understand, and he defined the sampling frame as the frame within which the target population can be accessed to select the actual units referred to as the sample. The target population for this study were strategic and senior managers with SM and SI experience within the SSA region. The sampling frame was established by actively identifying managers in the researcher network with SM and SI experience within the African context and listing their names, contact information and current industries, as illustrated in Figure 5. The final sample for the study was then identified following this elaborative process suggested by Rahi (2017).

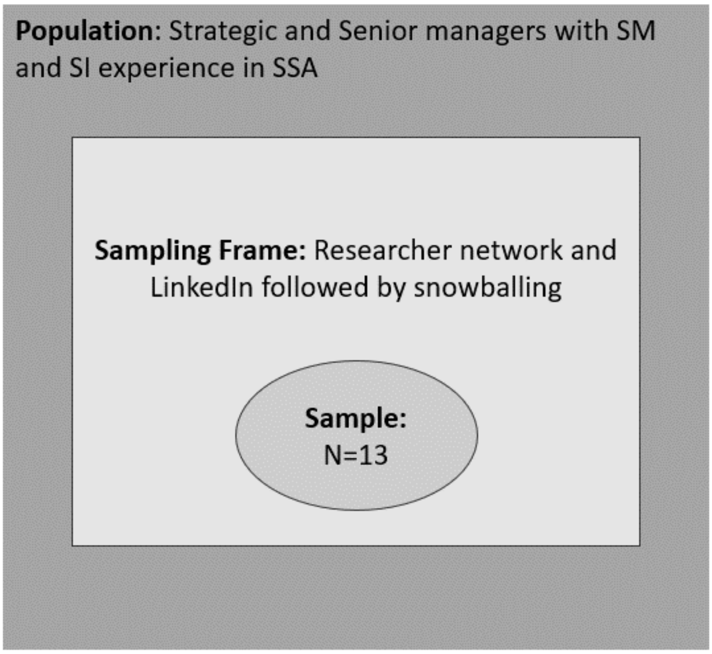


**Figure 6**: The Sampling process for the study adapted from Rahi 2017

The researcher adopted the purposive strategy based on the assumption that the specific population selected held different and important views in alignment with the study's objectives and could provide complementing insights on the topic being researched and needed to be included in the final sample. The flexibility of the purposeful sampling method allowed for emergence and course correction, unlike other methods that do not allow for alteration or agility when needed.

The purposive sampling strategy adopted by the researcher was a dual approach. The initial approach was a priori purposive sampling method followed by a snowball approach (Bell *et al.*, 2019). The dual sampling approach entailed selecting an initial group of 8 participants in various industries from the author's network and LinkedIn platform at the outset of the research. Some initial participants who met the criteria then referred additional participants to the researcher through snowballing. To ensure consistency and accuracy, the researcher only selected a few referred participants who met the sampling criteria and discarded other recommendations until the desired Number of participants was reached.

At the end of the sampling process, the researcher therefore established a sample of 13 strategic managers within SSA with multi-industry experience for the study to gather data and study their perspectives based on past experiences in the field of SM and SI. The researcher chose SSA as the scope for the study due to its richness in the target population and the opportunities for research in management studies. The 13 participants were selected from multiple industries and different company sizes. They were required to have at least five years of managerial experience with extensive stakeholder management or strategic implementation experience in Africa. The above criteria ensured the richness and diversity of multiple perspectives and insights from the data gathered and an opportunity for an appropriate level of data triangulation.

To ensure the transferability of this qualitative study, the sample size N=13 was considered based on the recommendation of multiple scholars. (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Guest *et al*., 2020) suggested and argued that 12 to 16 participants are enough to reach data and thematic saturation, thus supporting empirical accuracy during qualitative research.

## 4.6 Description and suitability of the sample

The researcher purposefully selected a sample with fitting criteria to not only provide depth of knowledge across multiple industries of varying sizes and scope, most of which were SMEs and MNEs, privately owned and publicly listed in Africa, but a sample with a wide range of positions, perspectives from past experiences stemmed from daily interactions with stakeholders. To ensure the richness of the data collected and insights gathered, the selected sample was required to have a minimum of five years of managerial experience, managing stakeholders and driving the implementation of strategy in emerging markets, most importantly SSA, which the researcher identified as prerequisites for their participation in the research.

To this end, the 13 participants hold current or most recent positions managing SI and stakeholders across multiple industries, including trade and investments, health sciences, engineering, oil and gas, pharmaceutical, Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), Mining, and Consulting. The sample consisted of three managers from small companies and ten from medium to large companies. To ensure confidentiality, all participants were allocated a Unique Identifier Code (UIC) and their personal information and the organisations they work for are excluded from this report.

### 4.6.1 Research participants' descriptive characteristics

Table 1 below summarises the descriptive characteristics of the participants. In this section, the researcher aimed to provide context into the purposeful sample's diversity, demonstrating inclusion and diversity of perspectives.

**Table 2:** Research participants' descriptive characteristics

| UIC | Gender | Highest Degree | Position | Industry experiences | Current Industry | Organisation size | Type of organisation | Personal SSA Geographical Experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MRP8 | M | Masters | Director Strategy and Business Development | Consulting<br>Lifesciences<br>Insurance<br>Oil and Gas<br>Healthcare | Investment | Medium (SME) | An international privately-owned investment and business development firm that specialises in healthcare investment and access in Africa | Over 15 countries in SSA |
| MRP1 | M | Masters | Global Head Shared Services | Services<br>Government<br>FCMG<br>Banking<br>Pharmaceutical<br>Mining | Mining | Large (MNE) | A global and publicly listed mining company with operations in Africa and other continents | 14 Countries in SSA |
| MRP3 | M | Doctorate | Associate Director | Services<br>Transport<br>Lifesciences<br>Manufacturing<br>Pharmaceutical | Pharmaceutical | Large (MNE) | A global privately and publicly listed pharmaceutical industry with a broad SSA geographical footprint | Ghana<br>Angola<br>Tanzania<br>Kenya<br>Ethiopia |
| MRP4 | M | Masters | Regional (SSA) Head Sales and Operations | FMCG<br>Retail<br>FCMG<br>Textile<br>Agriculture<br>Oil and Gas | Oil and Gas | Large (MNE) | A multi-continental, publicly-listed arbitrary chemical company supply oil and gas to almost every country in Southern and Eastern Africa | Over 12 Countries in SSA |
| MRP2 | M | Masters | General Manager Merger and Acquisitions | Investment<br>Consulting<br>Banking<br>Audit | Consulting Services | Large | A global privately owned consulting firm providing an extensive range of services including M&A, Audit, Advisory to African corporate companies | 7 countries in SSA |
| MRP12 | M | Masters | CEO and Head Strategy | Government<br>Servicing<br>Information Technology | Information Technology | Medium (SME) | A privately owned Information technology and electrical company providing smart metering solutions to various governments / countries in Africa | Namibia<br>Botswana<br>South Africa<br>Nigeria<br>Cameroon<br>Zambia |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MRP5 | F | Masters | Group Head Communications and CSR | FCMG<br>Oil and Gas | Oil and Gas | Large (MNE) | A publicly listed oil and gas company refinery company with an extensive footprint in SSA | South Africa<br>Nigeria<br>Ghana |
| MRP7 | M | Doctorate | Regional Manager Regulatory Affairs | Laboratory Services<br>Government<br>Healthcare | Regulatory | Large | A large Healthcare regulatory and medical compliance company with an extensive footprint in SSA | Senegal<br>Ivory Coast<br>Cameroon<br>Ghana<br>Nigeria<br>South Africa |
| MRP9 | F | Masters | Head of Francophone West Africa Cluster | Information Technology<br>Manufacturing<br>FCMG<br>Pharmaceutical | FCMG | Large | A global privately owned FCMG company manufacturing and supply consumer goods in SSA, Europe, Asia and America | Ivory Coast<br>Ghana<br>Nigeria<br>Senegal<br>Cameroon<br>Congo |
| MRP10 | M | Masters | Head of Strategic Partnerships and Public Affairs | Management Consulting<br>Government<br>Healthcare | Healthcare | Large | A Privately owned healthcare company with focus on advocacy, manufacturing and distribution of drugs | Across SSA |
| MRP11 | F | Bachelor’s degree | Manager Human Resources | Government<br>Tax and Audit<br>Lifesciences | Lifesciences | Medium | A medium privately owned company with footprint in Europe, Southern and West Africa | South Africa<br>East Africa<br>Senegal |
| MRP6 | F | Masters | Director of program and projects | Fashion<br>Tyres<br>Tobacco<br>Pharma<br>Research | Research | Large | A large privately owned Research company specialising in the management of neglected tropical and communicable diseases | Tanzania<br>Madagascar<br>Gabon<br>South Africa<br>Central African Republic<br>Nigeria |
| MRP13 | M | Masters | Head of digital transformation and corporate solutions SSA | Manufacturing<br>Health sciences<br>Banking | Information Technology | Large | A privately owned company specialising in the installation of digital processes and digital transformation consultation in Southern and Western Africa | Southern, Eastern and Western Africa |

## 4.7 The Data Collection Tool (Research Instrument).

In qualitative research, data collection can be done using techniques like focus groups, case studies and qualitative surveys (Bell *et al*., 2019). Given an interpretivism philosophy and the goal to establish a causal relationship through descriptive statements and explanations from lived experiences, the researcher chose interviews as the research instrument for the study. During the interviews, the researcher attempted to understand the topic from the participants' views, experiences, and perspectives. According to Bell, the type of interview depends on the nature of the research. For this interpretative and explorative research, semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data.

While structured interviews use a limited and rigid set of questions, semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to delve deeper into unlocking many layers of the answer by allowing new questions to be brought forward during the interview as a follow-up to what the participants previously said (Ruslin *et al*., 2022). In essence, the interviewer does not fully control the interview. In addition, in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a series of general questions and can vary the sequence (Bell *et al*., 2019), and the interviews have no rigid structure (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017), making it easy for the interviewer to ask more enhanced questions to generate richer perspectives.

The interview guide used for the interviews was included in the list of appendices as Appendix C. The process through which the researcher collected and analysed the data gathered is explained in the next section of this paper.

## 4.8 Data Collection Process

The researcher aimed to have a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives on managing stakeholders during strategy implementation in Africa, what drives SM's effectiveness, and the role each driver plays in the strategic management process. To that end, the researcher gathered multiple perspectives through a collaborative storytelling experience with participants. The storytelling and dialogue setting fostered an atmosphere for developing insightful explanations and reflective thoughts (Gemignani, 2014) on the constructs of SM being discussed.

To ensure a smooth and successful process, the researcher used open-ended questions during semi-structured interviews to enable the participants to collect their thoughts and coherently articulate their perspectives on the questions asked. When needed and intermittently, the researcher engaged in the dialogue, and by asking follow-up questions, the participants had the opportunity to provide deeper explanations and clarity. According to Bold (2022), using a narrative approach is the most efficient method to explore further, gain meaningful perspectives and critically appraise emerging ideas during qualitative research.

As previously stated, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with senior and executive managers with more than five years of stakeholder managerial and strategic implementation experience to execute the research. Before the interviews, a background of the research topic was shared with the identified sample of eight participants. Then, the initial sample later referred seven additional participants through snowballing. Upon receiving approval from the referred participants, contact was made to explain the merit of the research, the interview method, and the required consent through pre-qualifying discussions, leveraging on the existing relationship and trust the referrals had in the initial participants.

Pre-qualifying discussions were done for a maximum of 15 minutes with each participant to answer questions in preparation for the interview and to provide further clarification on the countries of experience of the participants, the scope, intent and interview process, the need to record the interview for research credibility and clarify some reservations about confidentiality that were brought up. After alignment discussions, the researcher sent the consent form via email to the participants to request their signature as approval to move forward with the interview. An example of the email with the consent form is attached to the list of appendices.

Once the executed consent form with all relevant details of the participants and the required signatures were received, interviews were scheduled between the first week of September and the first week of November 2023. To ensure quality, credibility, validity, and rigour, 2 out of the initial 15 participants identified as not meeting all the criteria after consent was granted were thanked for their willingness to participate and removed from the research process. The interviews mainly comprised open-ended questions to gather as many insights as possible and were recorded using Microsoft Teams.

The data collection process comprised a series of 13 interviews held electronically through Microsoft Teams due to the geographical dispersion of participants. The interviews were pre-booked for 60 minutes each. However, the diligence and length of responses for each question determined the final duration of each interview, with the shortest lasting 38 minutes and the longest 107 minutes. The researcher used the recording and transcription functionality of Microsoft Teams to record the interviews. Recording and transcribing qualitative interviews is a critical step in the research process, as it not only ensures the accuracy of what is said without premature interpretation but also removes the need for plenty of effort triangulating the data (Barnes, 2015).

Microsoft Teams also provided the advantage of having the recording function, which the researcher used, as the recordings were needed for the researcher to refer to them during the data analysis process. The researcher purposefully asked for participant feedback on the questions and their experience in the interview process. The researcher also read the transcript immediately after every interview to grasp concepts and insights from the answers provided. The researcher used the participants' feedback and insights from the transcripts to prepare for the subsequent interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The transcripts downloaded from Microsoft Teams were consolidated and cleaned up by removing time stamps and one-word sentences. The transcripts were scanned for confidential information that the participants may have shared inadvertently and removed from the data, some of which were redacted for this paper. The cleaned transcripts were then uploaded to Atlas.*ti* Software for the data analysis process explained in the next section.

### 4.9 The Data Analysis Process

The downloaded transcriptions were prepared for thematic analysis using an adapted and conversed version of Lester *et al*. (2020) seven-phase analysis process, as illustrated in Figure 6 below. This thematic analysis process is primarily suitable for qualitative data analysis as it is a flexible, non-linear process comprising seven phases that overlap and enable the researcher to revisit various phases iteratively and make necessary changes. The seven-phase analysis ensures completeness and accuracy when developing descriptive assertions of views by the researcher, as well as the researcher's comprehension of the insights from the data, which will be used to answer the research questions (Lester *et al*., 2020).

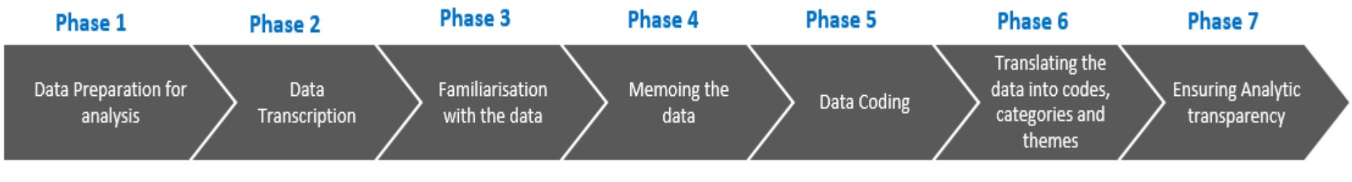


**Figure 7:** Seven Phases: Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data
**Source**: Adapted from (Lester *et al*., 2020)

The above seven phases of the thematic analysis process are mainly used when the data recording is done separately from the transcription, usually when two separate equipment are used in the recording and transcribing process. For this study, the researcher used Microsoft Teams, as mentioned in the section above, which simultaneously recorded and transcribed the data, thereby combining phases one and two. The resulting six-phase process is an adaptation of Lester *et al*.'s (2020) seven-phase process, as illustrated in Figure 7 below.

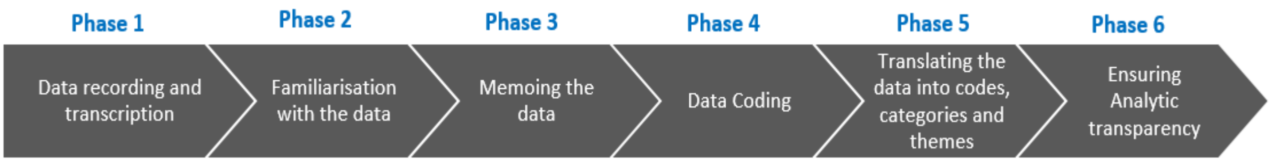


**Figure 8**: Six Phases Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data
**Source**: Adapted from (Lester *et al., 2020) and modified to suit the process of this data analysis*

### Phase 1: Data recording and transcription for analysis

The researcher downloaded the video recordings and automatic transcriptions from Microsoft Teams during this phase (Figure 8). The tool's dual recording and transcription functionality aided the process, resulting in time management by combining two processes into one. Microsoft Teams also facilitated the data management, as it is backed up to a cloud and easily accessible if needed.

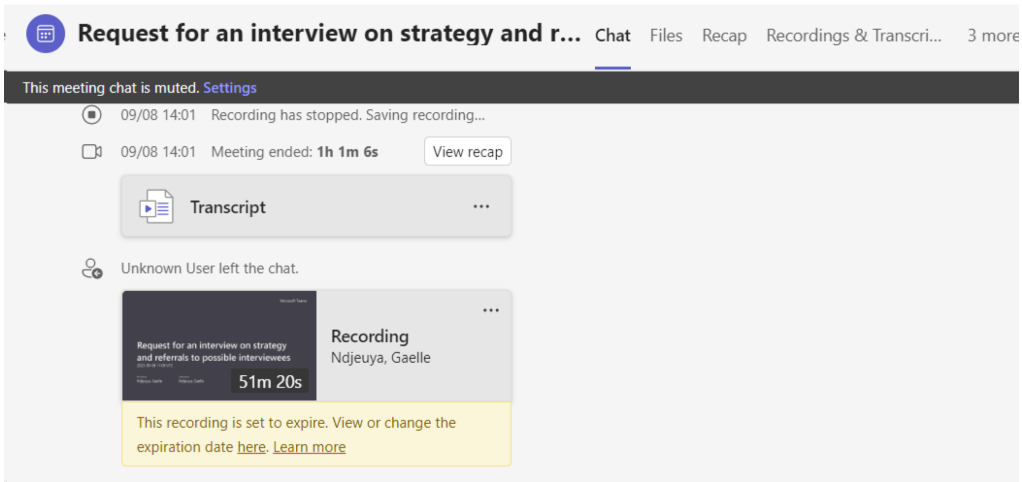


**Figure 9**: Illustration of Microsoft Teams Video Recording and Transcription
**Source**: Illustrated by Author

**Phase 2: Familiarisation with the data**

The downloaded transcriptions were renamed for ease of reference and stored in an analysis folder. The researcher then read all the transcriptions to assimilate the information from the interviews. While reading the transcriptions and replaying the videos, the researcher corrected the identified errors to ensure coherence in the text. Familiarisation with the data was an important step, as it increased the accuracy of the transcription, which was helpful in the coding process.

**Phase 3: Memoing the data**

The memoing process during qualitative research is instrumental as it enhances data exploration and concept development by enabling the researcher to identify valuable terms, phrases and insights that explain the research phenomena in the study context and the questions being answered (Birks *et al*., 2008). During the memoing, the researcher used the highlighting, commenting, and note-making functionality in Microsoft Word to highlight important text and jot down personal reflections on the participants' sayings and quotations.

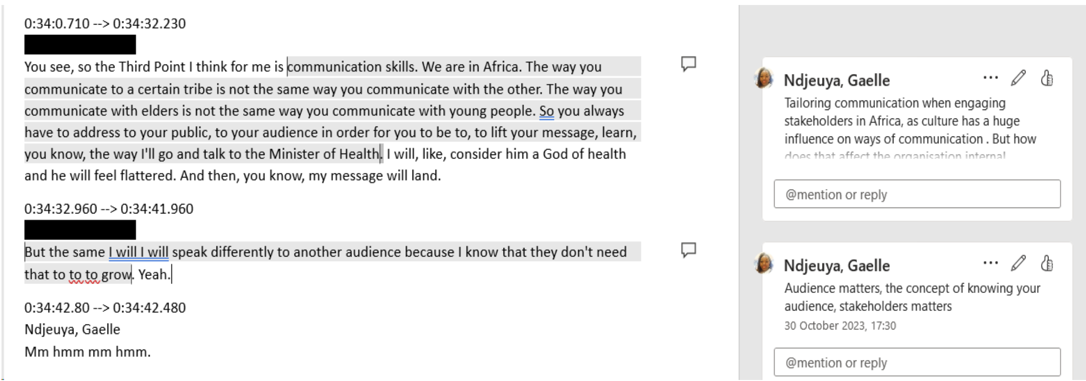


**Figure 10**: Illustration of the memoing process
**Source:** Illustrated by Author

**Phase 4: Data coding**

Saldana (2021) defines a code in qualitative inquiry as "*a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data*". (Saldana, 2021, p5). During the thematic analysis of qualitative data from multiple interviews, the author conducted iterative coding in multiple phases to identify codes from the raw data and code groups from the codes. The data coding step resulted in 342 code groups.

**Phase 5: Translating the data into codes, categories, and themes.**

The data analysis approach suitable for this type of explorative study is called Thematic Analysis (TA), developed by Braun and Clark (2019) to analyse data to develop themes. The collected data consolidated into transcripts were uploaded onto a data analysis software called Atlas.ti commonly used in qualitative data analysis.

The software analysis tool Atlas.ti was instrumental in generating codes from the data through pattern recognition powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI). During phase five of the data analysis process, the researcher grouped codes based on their meaning and similarity and clustered them to develop categories. To effectively categorise the code groups, the researcher made sense of what quotations were attached to specific codes and what questions were being answered that resulted in the specified codes. Sense-making of the quotation ensured accuracy in the grouping and categorising processes instead of random grouping. This process was done using a multiple-step process, which enabled the researcher to be familiar with the codes and the categories.

As Saldana (2021) noted, coding is an iterative process as most researchers do not get coding right the first time, as the researcher needs to reflect deeply on the emerging patterns and their meanings. Because of that, the researcher engaged in an initial coding process using Atlas.ti, which generated the codes as explained above. The researcher then did a manual recoding process to make sense of the AI codes; the recoding process resulted in some changes and regrouping because the researcher exercised some judgement based on the context of the question, the quotations generated, and the general context of the research sub-questions asked.

The researcher identified multiple code groups with similar meanings but different contextual leaps during the recording process. The researcher then proceeded to cluster sub-groups with the same contextual leap into sub-categories. Clustering the codes was essential to ensure the researcher understood the difference in code groups, which look familiar but mean different things under the same context. The recoding process resulted in 40 categories and 24 sub-categories. The researchers then proceeded to compare and arrange the categories in a systematic order to consolidate a more profound meaning and explanation, keeping in mind the research focus, the context of the study and the key constructs. By arranging categories, ten themes emerged to provide meaning across the data set (Lester *et al.,* 2020; Roberts *et al*., 2019). The coding process is illustrated in Figure 10. The findings and themes will be discussed in the next chapter and form the basis of the data triangulation.

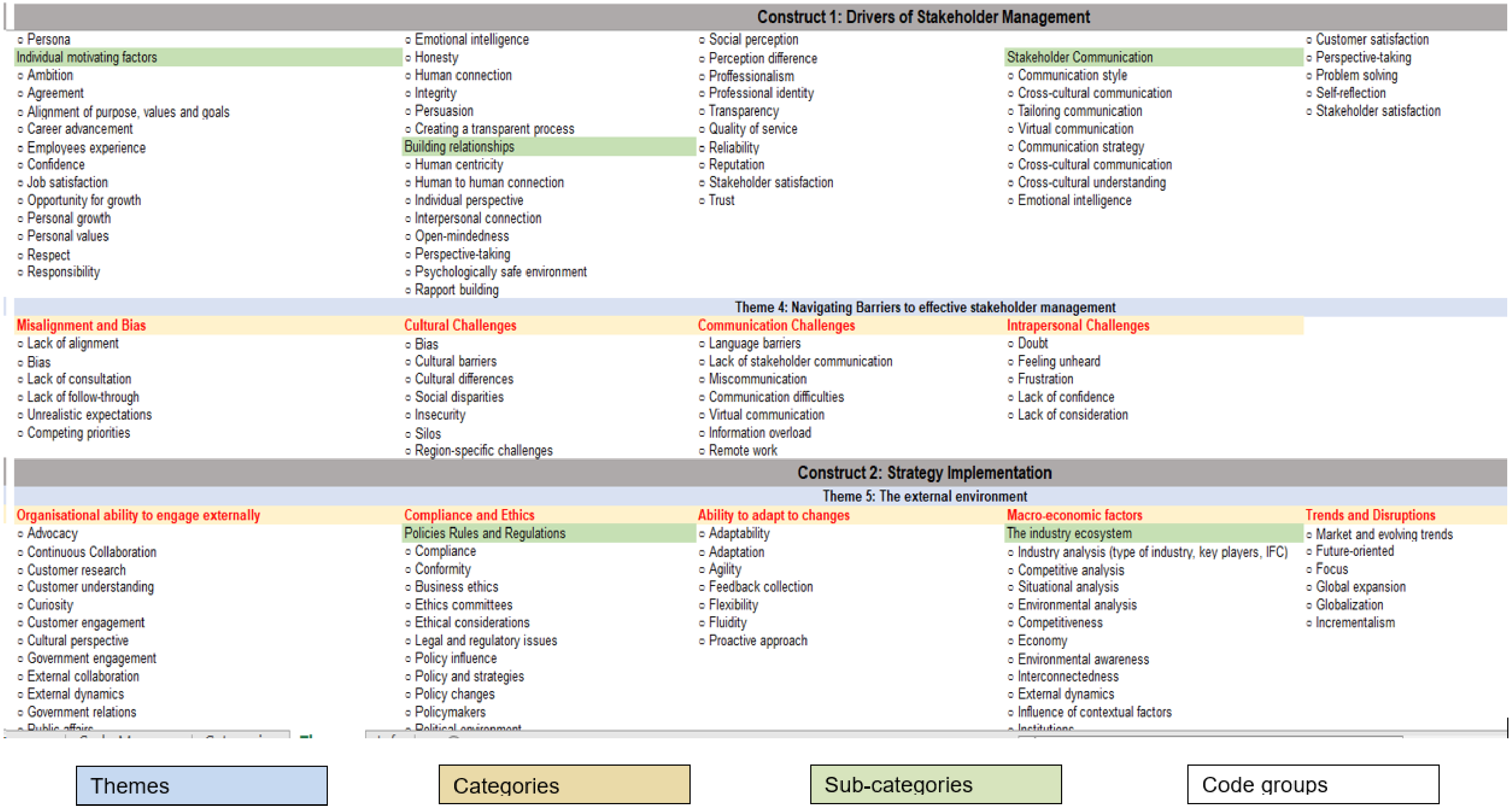


**Figure 11:** An illustration of phase 5 Translating data to codes, categories, and themes

**Source**: Illustrated by Author

Summary of the phase 5 - translation data into codes, categories, and themes

The researcher followed a triple approach to data coding, including memoing, thematic analysis using the Atlas.ti software, and the manual recoding on Excel to ensure rigour and accuracy.

Memoing ensured that the researcher made notes while exploring the data. The researcher also used Microsoft Excel to conduct a manual coding process supported by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) in qualitative research coding. Using Excel greatly supported the categorisation of codes and a clear overview of themes. It provided flexibility in moving codes around to increase the researcher's familiarity with the data and enable the researcher to make better sense of the categories identified.

The triple analysis approach of combining the thematic analysis, excel manual coding, and the memoing process ensured the researcher had a methodological systematisation of the data and could make sense of and better understand the developed themes and integrated perspectives generated.

The researcher observed that software was used to exclude potential biases and preconceptions and only used memoing to complement the coding process. Another advantage of using Atlas.ti was the opportunity for the researcher to use the generated codes to illustrate the thematic saturation point as interviews progressed towards 12 participants, as argued by (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Guest *et al*., 2020). The thematic analysis process resulted in the creation of ten themes discussed in chapter five of this paper.

**Phase 6: Ensuring Analytic Transparency**

Transparency is essential in the thematic analysis of qualitative data as it enables the reader to understand the steps taken by the researcher in translating the raw data from interviews into the themes and categories presented as findings, which are used as academic arguments in the discussion chapter. By elaborating the entire process using phases and snapshots as evidence of the work done, the researcher showed transparency in the analysis process.

## 4.10 Data saturation

Data saturation is the point at which no new codes emerge from the data during the coding process, and the researcher is deemed to have collected enough insights to replicate the study in a different context (Guest *et al*., 2006; Fusch & Ness, 2015). The Number of codes generated for each interview was tracked progressively to create a saturation curve for the research findings. The data from the interview transcripts generated 342 codes for 13 interviews. The codes were then analysed and clustered into categories and themes, as elaborated in the previous sections of this chapter.

Table 3 below represents the cumulative Number of codes and the new Number of codes generated after each interview.

| **Participant #** | **R1** | **R2** | **R3** | **R4** | **R5** | **R6** | **R7** | **R8** | **R9** | **R10** | **R11** | **R12** | **R13** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cumulative # of codes** | 76 | 127 | 157 | 193 | 228 | 258 | 281 | 299 | 317 | 331 | 337 | 341 | 342 |
| **# of new codes** | 76 | 51 | 30 | 36 | 35 | 30 | 23 | 18 | 18 | 14 | 6 | 4 | 1 |

**Table 3**: Cumulative codes and Number of new codes generated.

Figure 11 below illustrates the saturation curve from the research findings, which depicts that no new codes were collected by interview 13. The trend line on the graph below indicates a positive decline, showing that the number of new codes generated reduced as the researcher progressed during the coding process.

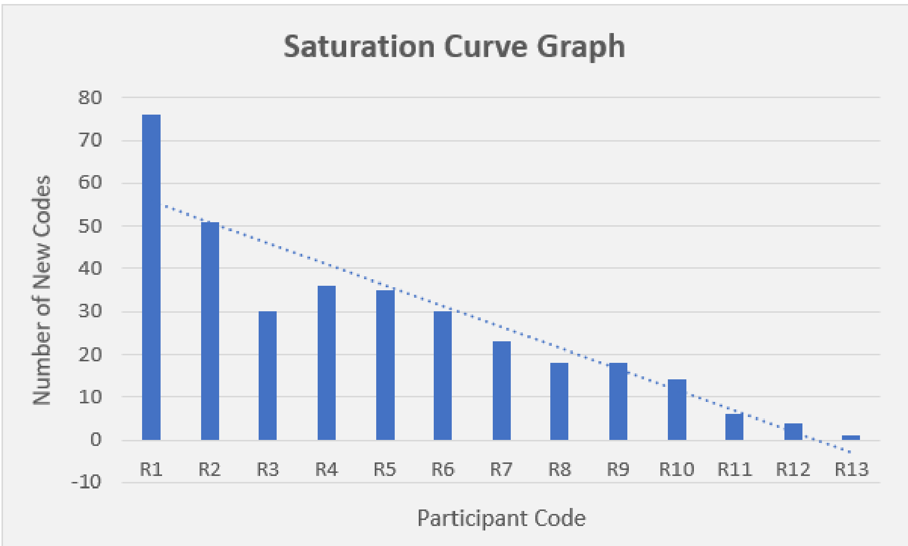


***Figure 12***: Data saturation curve
***Source:*** Graphically represented by Author

## 4.11 Research Quality and Rigour

As a measure of quality, rigour in qualitative research is demonstrated by the ability of the researcher to establish a relationship between knowledge from the literature and practice from the participants (Roberts *et al*., 2019). To achieve this, the researcher aimed to provide a comprehensive description of the methods used during the research. In addition, this explanation and detailed descriptions of findings and the data triangulation will also help readers, future researchers, and practitioners feel confident that the findings and claims made by the researcher in this paper are transferable.

One of the research objectives is to establish the relationship between stakeholder management and strategic implementation through the interpretation of perceptions; it is important to establish the trustworthiness of the research by providing detailed descriptions of the findings from the data analysis to ensure triangulation with the literature. As a measure of quality in qualitative research, rigour is often determined by the research's degree of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bell *et al.,* 2019).

The researcher selected participants from diverse geographies and industries to ensure the credibility of the research because of the multiple possible perceptions used in the triangulation of data. Cross-checking findings from each interview and comparing them with insights from the literature resulted in greater confidence in the findings. By using a theoretical framework to underpin the qualitative research, the researcher established a consonance between the interviewees' perceptions, the aim of the research and the scope of the topic being studied (Wood *et al.,* 2020), thus contributing to the credibility of the research.

The purposeful sample for this research was selected to represent a specific target population of managers sharing the same criteria, including knowledge and experience in stakeholder management and strategic implementation. Rankinen *et al*. developed their framework from strategic projects in Finland, and Bal *et al*. developed their framework from studies conducted in construction projects. The two frameworks were qualitatively tested in the African context during this study. The researcher aimed to use the findings from the research to provide future researchers with a more comprehensive framework for stakeholder management, which they can use to make a sound judgement about transferring these findings and applying them in other geographies or specific industries, thus ensuring transferability of the study.

Only participants who met the selection criteria were included in the research process and data collection to ensure rigour in the sampling population. To reiterate, the proposed sample for this research was a population of 13 senior executive managers who engage in strategic and operational stakeholder management across multiple industries. To reduce contribution bias and enrich the data collected with diverse perspectives from different and aggregated managerial experiences, the researcher purposely only selected participants on the basis that they are able and likely to contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of stakeholder management and strategy implementation.

## 4.12 Ethical Considerations

The researcher only proceeded with the data collection following the ethical clearance approval from the awarding institution to ensure compliance with the university's ethical guidelines. The researcher was committed to rigorous ethical standards, which entailed protecting the identity of all participants, protecting the rights and privacy of all the interviewees, and ensuring the data collection, analysis and reporting process was conducted with the utmost integrity and honesty. The researcher also ensures that all participants' identities are confidential and not disclosed to any third party. The data collected was codified before being reported and stored without identifiers.

The researcher committed to adhering to the institution's requirement to store the data collected for ten years to contribute to any academic audit that may happen in the future or if required by future researchers. To ensure that ethical principles were followed, the researcher ensured signed consent forms were sent to all the participants, clearly explaining the research objectives and purpose. The consent form is included in the list of appendices as Appendix B.

In addition, the researcher also took time to explain to the participants that their participation was voluntary and that they reserved the right to withdraw from the interview process at any time without facing any consequences. The researcher also confirmed to the participants that the information they provided was for the sole purpose of the research and would not be shared for any purpose other than the study.

## 4.13 Research Design Limitations

Like any other academic process, the research design has some limitations. These limitations included:

1. The nature of the research reduces the possibility of interviewing many participants. Although the aim was to interview 16 participants to reach saturation, the sample size for this qualitative research was 13, which is still relatively small compared to other research types, making the qualitative research findings difficult to generalise.

2. Another limitation is the researcher's lack of experience in theoretical and semi-structured interviews and the limitations imposed by the research's geographical scope and the participants' location.

3. The study was conducted in the SSA region, which made the scope too broad.

4. The absence of an established professional relationship with referred participants made it difficult to relax during the interview. That posed a challenge when the researcher asked follow-up questions to dig deeper for better understanding.

# CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA AND FINDINGS

## 5.1 Introduction

The data, insightful perspectives and insights collected from managers with extensive experience in SM and SI during the interviews as part of this qualitative research are presented in this chapter. As elaborated in chapters two and three, the literature review process highlighted a gap in the scope of emerging markets, notably Africa, as an area of research for SM and SI. To this end, the researcher found great value and significance in collecting data and gathering perspectives from interviewing managers with SM and SI in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This chapter will thus focus on the outcome of the interviews conducted by providing in detail the findings from the analysis of the collected data. The researcher also provides a description of the sample, their suitability, and a summary of the characteristics of the sample interviewed. The findings presented in this chapter include the code groups, categories and themes that emerged from the data. The themes identified in this chapter were then aggregated under the main constructs of this research as outlined in the literature review chapter.

## 5.2 Presentation of findings

In the previous section, the researcher described the thematic analysis process used to conduct the content analysis. This pattern recognition technique enables the researcher to identify codes and categories that emerge from the data and clustered into themes (Roberts *et al*., 2019). As introduced in the previous section, the analysis resulted in 342 codes, 40 categories, 24 sub-categories and 10 themes, which the researcher discusses in this chapter. Table 3 below provides an overview of the constructs, themes and categories that are further elaborated in the next section.

As detailed in Chapter Three, the objectives of the main research question were to investigate the role of key drivers of stakeholder management in the strategy implementation in SSA. To achieve that, the researcher structured the interview in three parts:

1. First, to understand the key drivers of stakeholder management in the African context.
2. Second, to understand what challenges participants faced when managing

stakeholders while implementing strategy in Africa.

3. Third, the role and influence of SM on the process of strategy implementation

The researcher presented the study according to the key constructs identified in the literature review: Stakeholder Management (SM), Strategy implementation (SI) in Africa, and the influence and importance of SI in Africa. The researcher identified many codes and categories that applied to more than one theme during the coding process. As a result, the researcher deemed it more practical to present the findings according to themes instead of research questions.

**Table 4:** Study results presented as constructs, themes, and categories.

| Constructs | Themes | Categories |
|---|---|---|
| 1. **Key Drivers of Stakeholder Management** | **Theme 1: The internal environment** | 1. Organisational Factors<br>- Organisational culture<br>- Organisational Objectives<br>- Organisational DNA<br>2. Leadership and decision-making<br>3. Organisational strategies<br>4. Areas of operations |
| | **Theme 2: Stakeholder mapping** | 5. Identifying stakeholders<br>- Situational analysis<br>- Know your stakeholders.<br>6. Analysing and prioritising stakeholders<br>7. Integrating stakeholders for effective management |
| | **Theme 3: Stakeholder engagement** | 8. Motivating factors for stakeholders to engage.<br>- Intrapersonal skills<br>- Individual drivers<br>9. Building trust, buy-in and relationships.<br>- Fostering buy-in<br>- Building relationships<br>10. Perception<br>- External trust and reputation<br>11. Communication<br>- Business communication<br>- Stakeholder communication<br>12. Monitoring stakeholder engagement |
| | **Theme 4: Barriers to effective stakeholder management** | 13. Misalignment and bias<br>14. Cultural challenges<br>15. Communication challenges<br>16. Intrapersonal challenges |
| 2. **Strategy Implementation** | **Theme 5: The external environment** | 17. Organisation ability to engage externally.<br>18. Compliance and ethics<br>- Policies, Rules and Regulations |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | - Ethical considerations<br>19. Ability to adapt to change.<br>20. Macro-economic factors<br>- The ecosystem<br>- The industry<br>- The socio-political influence<br>21. Trends and disruptions |
| | **Theme 6: Resourcing for strategy implementation** | 22. Formulating strategy<br>- Consulting as a driver of strategy<br>- Mapping out objectives<br>23. Skills and Capabilities<br>- Management skills<br>- Instructional skills<br>- Formal and informal learning<br>24. Technology and infrastructure<br>25. Resource deployment a programmatic approach |
| | **Theme 7: Enabling systems and processes** | 26. Data, information and knowledge<br>27. Business management processes<br>28. Monitoring and evaluation<br>29. Business processes and systems<br>30. Early stakeholder integration |
| | **Theme 8: Challenges to strategy implementation** | 31. Execution challenges<br>32. Geographical Barriers<br>33. Cultural challenges<br>34. Intrapersonal challenges<br>35. Resources availability<br>36. Communication challenges |
| **3. The synthesis of Stakeholder management and strategy implementation** | **Theme 9: Partnerships and sustainability** | 37. The role of partnerships<br>38. Sustainability of operations<br>39. Outcome of successful implementation<br>40. Monitoring and evaluation |
| | **Theme 10: Critical drivers of SM for strategy implementation in Africa** | 41. Value creation for stakeholders and the organisation |

## 5.3 Results description by themes and construct.

### 5.3.1 Construct 1: Key Drivers Stakeholder Management

**Theme 1: The internal environment**

The internal environment encompasses all the inherent and extrinsic organisational factors that may influence an organisation or individual within an organisation's ability to manage stakeholders, according to the participants. Following some discussions around how the organisation's internal environment affects the ability to manage stakeholders, some participants stressed the importance of having the right environment as it is conducive to effective internal stakeholder management and applies to managing external stakeholders.

*"You need to create the right environment for agreeing on how to move forward and how to implement, and that includes creating a transparent process where people feel included with an opportunity to speak their minds. It is a psychologically safe environment, so people should not be afraid. It should be a situation where everybody feels comfortable to express their concerns and feels comfortable that they have been heard. Moreover, ultimately, when decisions are made, everyone, all the stakeholders, must feel consulted, adequately consulted" (MRP2).*

**a) The role of organisational culture and structure**

Following some reflections on what aspects of the internal environment are critical to effective stakeholder management in Africa as opposed to EU countries, most participants mentioned that an inclusive culture sustains collaboration and engagement. As noted by the participants, the right culture helps one align with stakeholders better as it promotes a psychologically safe environment where stakeholders can articulate whatever they feel is important to be said; leaders and managers can also communicate and get buy-in on the purpose, vision, and aspirations of the organisation. Some participants highlighted the importance of leveraging the tool of psychological safety to set up the right collaboration system within the organisation. For effective collaboration, transparency should be engrained within the organisation's culture.

*"Setting up the right collaboration system, using communication and the tool of psychological safety requires transparency. You cannot have people wondering when you are engaging them and when you are not, and what your agenda might be" (MRP2).*

Most participants emphasised that one of the biggest mistakes stakeholder managers make when working in African markets is to try and adapt what works in foreign organisational cultures to the African context. In Africa, organisational culture is critical to how a company operates and how stakeholders g*et al*ong; managers must be conscious of the environment within which they operate. In the case of MNEs and international corporations, the organisational culture will significantly differ based on the country, so the culture in a European branch will be different from the African branch even though it is the same company. Therefore, exercising cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity within the organisation is critical in managing stakeholders in various contexts.

While the internal environment plays a huge role in managing internal stakeholders, the organisation's structure influences how stakeholder managers manage relationships and ease of information flow. MRP8 noted that stakeholder management tends to be centralised in an organisation with a centralised structure, which can challenge navigating the nuances between the environment, positions and the partnerships formed within the organisation. In contrast, all that entails managing stakeholders is done more seamlessly in a decentralised structure. Within the context of managing stakeholders when implementing strategy in Africa, it is vital to establish whether the organisation is structured so that stakeholders can be effectively managed, and the right resources are allocated to ensure the internal environment supports the implementation of the strategy.

**b) Leadership and decision-making**

Management and leadership styles are part of what shapes the organisational culture and the work environment. Certain contexts call for specific leadership and management styles within the organisations. Although leadership and decision-making were not critical drivers from the perspective of most participants, a few participants shared that strategic leadership is important when managing stakeholders.

> *"You need to have the right leader that understands the strategy and converges that into how it should be implemented so it starts with the required strategic leadership"(MRP4).*

MRP4's explanation for this is anchored in the fact that leadership provides a mandate to drive strategy, without which efforts by managers to select the right people with specific attributes to drive implementation are impeded.

A few participants also noted that stakeholder management tends to be centralised in a culture where leadership and decision-making are centralised. This can pose a challenge as stakeholders are more inclined to listen and adhere to what the leaders say. Few participants shared that Centralised leadership can affect communication, information flow and engagement in organisations where decision-making is centralised. Centralised decision-making is common in African cultures where collaboration dramatically depends on a coordinated effort between leadership and employees.

**Theme 2: Stakeholder mapping**

**a) Planning the stakeholder management process**

Because of the impact of the primary environment and macro and micro factors, including culture, regulatory and political instability, and the complexity in emerging economies, including Africa, stakeholder management requires rigorous and careful planning. Insights gathered from the participants indicate that planning is an iterative process; however, it is the first step in establishing alignment, needs and identifying stakeholders. MRP3 noted that clearly establishing and communicating the organisation's overarching goals and objectives is always a motivation for stakeholders to engage, thus making the management of stakeholders easier. In addition, MRP10 noted that understanding the company strategy and having the company connected to organisational goals and objectives is critical in the planning process. Aligned with MRP3's and MRP10's perspectives, MRP2 highlighted the need for transparency in the planning and alignment processes.

> *"But the job here is to have a transparent process, so to have alignment, know your customers, what they need, you need to be transparent about the bigger objectives and goals of the relationship"(MRP2).*

Some participants also spoke of the importance of creating a psychologically safe environment, as explained in theme 1, by emphasising that stakeholders will be more open to stating their position in the context and the situation once everyone feels safe. The stakeholders will be more inclined to reach an alignment sooner rather than later, thus making the mutual engagement and stakeholder management process easier. MRP3 alluded to alignment as a 'need', while MRP5 spoke of the strong correlation between alignment and the identification of mutual interests, stating:

*"Mutual interest is another important thing because you know where the organisation meets the stakeholder; so, It is one thing for you as an organisation to go to the stakeholder and say, this is what we want to do, this is what we want to achieve, but you are losing the stakeholders, so you have got to find that mutual interest to kind of hook that stakeholder even to want to listen to you and engage further"(MRP5).*

Thus, there is a need to get everybody to coalesce around a broad objective and the main objectives that are important for planning the overarching SM process. Some stakeholders may need to be appealed to in different ways to get their alignment based on intrapersonal factors, including cultural beliefs, which are important in Africa. So, internal managers need to understand those factors and plan engagement around that, exercising emotional intelligence.

### b) Identifying and Understanding Stakeholders

All the participants specified the importance of identifying stakeholders after planning the engagement process. Although the planning needs to happen throughout the SM cycle because stakeholders can change, the essence of it remains the same.

*"Obviously, you identify your stakeholders right from the beginning"(MRP11).*

How early and how well managers proceed to identify stakeholders is critical to any process.

*"Because if you do a bad job at identification, then everything you are doing wastes time. Forget it; the SM process will be flawed if you identify them wrongly"(MRP8).*

Given the complexities of the African environment and the non-standardisation of how things are done, it is equally important to understand specifics and requirements around all identified stakeholders. When asked about the most critical driver of SM, some participants alluded to understanding their stakeholders. The participants alluded that understanding entails digging deeper into the stakeholder's position and objectives and understanding specifics to align and segment the stakeholders better.

*"I start with understanding who I have got. And then, I would seek to align them. You have to segment stakeholders in terms of who they are, their level, how much information they need, and who is on your side or not on your side. Maybe one other thing to add here is that a lot of people will manage stakeholders individually, and you know, if you are going to present something to your stakeholders, it is often a good idea just to canvas the opinion of each stakeholder individually ahead of the time and get their approval personally"(MRP2).*

Most participants alluded to identifying the needs of various groups of stakeholders prior to engaging with them. However, insights from a few participants highlighted the criticality of understanding interests, needs and challenges that stakeholders may have as individuals.

> *"Probably the most important thing is to uncover and appeal to the specific interest of each stakeholder to understand, to try, and you know there is a saying that Steven Covey came up seek first to understand and then to be understood. And I think that is a significant part of stakeholder management, and I am thinking especially of a smaller number of stakeholders. However, you can still understand the different groupings of customers" (MRP2).*

A notable challenge many managers in Africa face is building relationships with stakeholders, mainly due to the inability to find common ground. Many participants shared the perspective that, local stakeholders believe that MNEs and international enterprises branching and integrating African markets have unlimited resources. Sometimes, even when understanding stakeholders' needs, interests, and individual challenges, managers need help to meet those needs as interactions are guided by very defined available resources.

Local stakeholders sometimes have unrealistic expectations, and if no guarantee of satisfaction is provided from the onset of discussions, engagement and management become challenging, as explained by most participants. This is where situational analysis becomes very important in adapting to different situations and making the right decisions because, ultimately, organisations must find a way to give their stakeholders solutions or services that best fit their requirements.

#### c) Analysing and prioritising the stakeholders

Too often, the importance of situational analysis came up during the interviews. The commonality was apparent when most participants alluded to how critical the situation is and how it varies significantly from market to market within Africa. The participants further noted how some factors may have a more significant impact than others on the firms' or managers' ability to manage stakeholders and implement strategy, even if it is the same organisation.

Few participants alluded to the government as a critical stakeholder to manage when international firms expand into Africa as opposed to other developed markets. According to most participants, identifying who has the highest level of influence in the industry and the government in the market you are implementing is critical. Identifying who in the government matters and working with them to shape the environment to your advantage will support the SM efforts and SI because in Africa, you feel the weight of the government and various governmental institutions more than in EU markets, for example.

> *"I think a big part of stakeholder management is driven primarily by the primary environment. You cannot underestimate how powerful the government is as a stakeholder. Even if we take [redacted], for example, they do not exist in certain markets because of their complexity. And government on positions becomes a key element, So I think that is a key element in trying to do stakeholder management"(MRP8).*

> *"As early as possible, identify stakeholders with influence from high to low, and so doing that helps you see OK, like the institution which has strong influence, we may not easily be able to engage with them because of the relationship between the institution and our company—and so being able to see that a few years before is helpful then to say, OK. How do we want to increase our influence with this institution? How do we then go about it? Where are the big meetings? The convenience, the convenings, the opportunities where we need to shape the environment or work with these stakeholders? So, I think the influence of stakeholders influences management implementation. When done correctly, when thought through, again early, can have a profound impact"(MRP10).*

Situational analysis enables the categorising and prioritising of stakeholders. Analysing helps categorise your stakeholders into various types, whether the stakeholder is a customer or non-customer stakeholder, which then helps one determine what they can do and how best to manage them. Another perspective on the importance of analysing the situation is MRP3's perspective, which is the creation of networks and understanding the background and intricacies of each network and individuals you are networking with.

In contrast to MRP8's and MRP3's perspectives of situational and stakeholder analysis for stakeholders' groups, MRP5's perspective is that analysing helps understand the stakeholders' expectations on a deeper level. MRP7 touches on understanding the individual within the stakeholder. Providing an example on a manager engaging and managing external stakeholders in Africa.

> *"I think that the key is understanding the individual within that stakeholder. You know, the criticality that comes in there is that I do not need to understand media in Africa. I need to understand the individual I am engaging with because that is the person's mind and*

*perception that I need to change. It is not everybody's mind and perceptions in the media. So, it is the human-to-human connection. Understanding the individuals is the key driver in stakeholder relations" (MRP5).*

Most participants addressed the importance of analysing and, categorising and prioritising stakeholders. Categorising stakeholders helps weigh them, and based on their impact on the business, both the impact of success and failure and getting the right stakeholders fit for purpose. Based on the categories of stakeholders, whether due to their level of influence, power or impact, it is easier to prioritise the stakeholders. Prioritising stakeholders helps in managing and engaging them. To elaborate the granularity needed when categorising stakeholders.

*"So what kind of shift do you need to make as an organisation? Once you have defined that, you need to understand Who will impact positively or negatively and pinpoint those stakeholders, and you need to pinpoint them right to the nth degree. So not just the broad groupings of stakeholders, but right down to the nitty-gritty of who it is, so that you know whom you will package your communication for and your engagement with"(MRP5).*

It can thus be deduced that categorising and prioritising stakeholders also affects the communication process, how to communicate with stakeholders based on the weighting, what medium to use and at what frequency.

**Theme 3: Stakeholder engagement**

Findings showed that participants have different perspectives of what SM is. Hence, there is a misapprehension that stakeholder management and engagement mean the same thing. One participant, MRP3, could provide a clear distinction between the two.

*"So, there is engagement, and there is management; I think from the engagement standpoint is, you know, being able to accomplish your agenda. But I think from the management standpoint, I think being able to drive forward a specific objective"(MRP3).*

Few participants emphasised that organisations cannot run operations or implement strategies in a void. To drive their agenda and ability to bring internal and external stakeholders to the table based on their priority level comes down to how managers engage them. MRP1 explained that stakeholder engagement is driven by how well managers inform and educate the stakeholders on what is happening and how well they communicate.

*"I think it is the continuous engagement. You are giving them insights, invoking them in every step; you have close attached points with them; you are managing your relationships*

*properly, and the likelihood of success is huge. For example, let me put it this way: All roads lead to engagement. So, to get the right pricing, you must get your engagement right. You must get your conversations right. You must get the updates right for you to change your placement of whatever product service. Your stakeholders must know where you are heading, where you are managing, and where you are driving towards. So, everything else hinges on that. From that engagement. All roads lead to engagement" (MRP8).*

Most participants alluded to stakeholder engagement happening throughout the strategic, product, and service lifecycle if there are common objectives towards which stakeholders are striving. One commonality is having all participants alluding to stakeholder engagement across day-to-day activities. Stakeholder engagement is more than just informing stakeholders about decisions that have been taken strategically; it is about involving them, partnering with them, ensuring that conversations are aligned, and ensuring that both sides have a positive experience.

*"Engagement and to what level you involve stakeholders matters because many companies say that they involve their stakeholders in their decision-making, but they do not; they just inform the stakeholders. So, I believe that organisations that actively engage and involve stakeholders get more from them because they feel valued and committed when they can lend their voice" (MRP5).*

*"Internally engaging stakeholders, to be quite honest, but also externally engaging stakeholders more so partners entail ensuring that we are having aligned conversations; ensuring our stakeholders are having a positive experience in working with us, that we feel like we are advancing mutually agreed upon objectives and making you know creating impact and ensuring that we are operating and working to the highest standards" (MRP10).*

A few participants alluded to the importance of a good engagement plan when engaging with stakeholders and mentioned how organisations must actively plan their engagement with stakeholders.

*"But a good engagement plan should include objectives for the organisation, what individuals, what messages you want to convey and what kind of content you can provide to various stakeholders" (MRP6).*

*"Through your engagement journey, you have to understand that once you identify your stakeholders, then the way you are going to manage those stakeholders is sitting down and thinking for each organisation what are the key objectives of that organisation, the individuals, what is the opponent, what they are for and then what is that for you for them when you interact with them, right? So, it is to really make sure that you have a plan in*

*place for the duration of the relationship, not just for the beginning of the engagement with stakeholders" (MRP11).*

**a) Motivating factors for stakeholders to engage.**

There was a split perspective on what factors motivate stakeholders to engage with organisations and other stakeholders, ranging from intrapersonal to interpersonal factors to the fragility of stakeholder relationships in Africa due to the apparent lack of trust and governance in the region. A culture of mistrust requires transparency, and whoever is tasked with managing stakeholders must have a certain level of expertise in the field to command some attention and engagement. Due to a lack of trust, stakeholders, especially in African markets, will only want to maintain relationships with people who seem to know what they are doing.

*"I think it is important too that we are transparent in terms of our approach and our initiations and activities so that we can get the stakeholders to engage and buy into whatever we look into is key. So suddenly, I think establishing your goal or objective is always a motivation for that stakeholder engagement, too"(MRP3).*

*"I think transparency and accountability is another important one. So, when the organisation needs to be transparent about the actions, the decisions and of course the impact it will have on the stakeholders, stakeholders are willing to engage knowing what they are entering"(MRP5).*

*"There is also your competence on the subject; are you an expert? That also helps land the message and drive the engagement. So, it is always good to get prepared even when you have uncomfortable subjects, when you are not the experts, then it means you must get prepared to ensure a successful engagement"(MRP9).*

*"Customer and stakeholder centricity is key during stakeholder engagement"(MRP1).*

Meeting stakeholders' expectations translates to business sustainability due to customer retention and partnership continuity. Organisations that successfully engage stakeholders have better chances of managing them and delivering on stakeholders' needs on behalf of the organisation. Having stakeholders' and customers' best interests in mind also entails acknowledging that some trade-offs must be made, and stakeholders must benefit from the relationship. As MRP7 mentioned, in Africa, you must understand to be understood, and you have to give to receive; it comes with the transactional nature of the region. MRP9 provides a good example of this.

*"So, like I said, you need to make sure you connect with what people will get out of it. Most*

*of the time, people will come and engage with stakeholders and just share with them only what they need. Like I'll come and say, we will do this, we will do that, and we need you to give us this one, two and three points. Now, you have not connected with the person because you do not even know their needs. You do not even know if your 123 points will be more of a struggle for them or a hassle. So, for me, if I meet with the Ministry of Health in the Ivory Coast, for example, I will always start by asking about the needs. Where do you stand today? What are your objectives for the next 2-3 years? What is your main agenda? And based on that? I will use that to get my points across. Even if it is not connected immediately, I will find a way to find a common objective, a common goal so that he adheres to my own goals and that he feels it is connected to his, and for me that is very important because if you do not do that, you come and ask people questions or for them to provide you with information or anything. They do not care because it is not connected to their own objective. So what? Why would they go out of their way to help support you? See, so that it works as well internally as externally. Just make sure that people have something to get out of it"(MRP9).*

To delve even deeper into the importance of credibility, image and critical of the subject when managing stakeholders in Africa, MRP9 provided a detailed statement.

*"If you show up and you are not credible, people will not even like engage with you. If they say this is someone sitting like, we do not even know who it is. That credibility part is very key. So, you must take care of your image in Africa. When you meet with stakeholders, if they do not believe you are credible, you have already lost them. That is the first one—the second point would be critical of the subject if what you are coming to talk about is not of their interest. You have lost them as well"(MRP9).*

**b) Building trust, buy-in and relationships.**

For stakeholders to consider engaging, there must be a rapport and relationship between them and the organisation or whoever represents the organisation (MRP7). Most participants' perspective was that stakeholders need to buy into what the organisation is selling to build a relationship. This highlights the criticality of fostering buy-in from both internal and external stakeholders. If the stakeholders do not buy into the strategy, mission, objectives, goals, methods, etc, they will be reluctant to maintain a good level of engagement.

To foster buy-in, it is vital to identify critical information about stakeholders' needs, pull it through at the beginning of the SM process, and incrementally build on the organisation-stakeholder relationship.

*"To avoid forcing stakeholders to merely respond to whatever you are putting in place and wanting to implement, you must include them at the conceptual stage to ensure their buy-in. By doing that, managers help themselves build something that will much be much more sustainable". (MRP8).*

*"When managing stakeholders, I need to ensure that my internal stakeholders buy into the vision that we want to achieve and ensure that they provide that necessary support" (MRP4).*

Few participants mentioned in the service industry; buy-in is critical because customers need to be brought into the conception phase quite early; otherwise, engaging them later once you already have a semi-finished product or service will be challenging, and they will oppose you instead of adhering to what you are offering. Again, this highlights the previous points about the mistrust in the African region; people tend to be more invested in things they co-created, co-designed or were consulted on.

*"If you bring your stakeholder, let us say, later in your strategy planning, the likelihood is you end up defending your strategy against your stakeholders in terms of how you view it. Or you end up eliminating your stakeholders, not bringing them along, because you have missed the crucial aspect of conducting your market research or identifying the opportunities together with them" (MRP8).*

Building and managing relationships with stakeholders fosters continuous engagement. When stakeholders are involved in every step, and the relationships are properly managed, the likelihood of stakeholder engagement, management and implementation success is high. When relationships are solid, stakeholders help manage challenges that arise during the process because they have been included in the journey, and trust is present.

*"The second one is about building trust and credibility because trust is a strong foundation for stakeholder relationships. Moreover, for organisations to have that rapport with the stakeholder, it is important for them to deliver on their promises and be honest and ethical" (MRP2).*

A contradictory perspective to including stakeholder needs to ensure buy-in is MRP2's perspective that alludes to sharing the perceived risks for stakeholders and the organisation if whatever activity, implementation or change does not happen. Although other participants did not share this perspective, it highlights that stakeholders are different and must be appealed to differently.

*"It is all about getting those stakeholders into agreeing that if this process does not*

*happen, there are consequences, there will be certain consequences. The business might not succeed, or you might not grow as quickly as you would like, and everyone you know, whatever it might be, and you appeal to people differently. That is just getting people to agree on what is at stake here. So, you know, we are here and need to be there. And if we do not get there, then there is something at stake" (MRP2).*

The contextual realities within the African region, specifically the cultural norms and its demographics, influence stakeholder engagement in more ways than one. Respect is critical, and some actions that could be considered normal in other cultures can appear disrespectful in the African culture. For example, in the process of managing stakeholders, one could exercise judgment by withholding some information that may not be relevant at a specific time; once a stakeholder becomes aware of it, the stakeholder might conclude that the person was dishonest, therefore lacking respect, and that jeopardises the entire relationship. Cultural sensitivity is critical when building relationships for stakeholder engagement within the African context.

*"Listening to each other and demonstrating respect for and transparency are critical. If I am not transparent regarding engagement, I think that will not lead to a fruitful and long-term relationship. Respect, transparency, and Integrity are critical" (MRP3).*

Another interesting perspective on building relationships is the presence of power dynamics and leveraging one's position to exert influence. In other regions, mentioning someone like a CEO in a position of authority could speak to the urgency of what is required. However, it means usurping power in other regions like Africa, which never works.

*"And then, it is challenging to build the types of relationships you need the stakeholders to get anything big or complicated done" (MRP2).*

Again, this highlights cultural sensitivity and the importance of appealing to stakeholders differently based on the context.

*"I would always advocate for building good, solid relationships. Although sometimes, especially in the European context, the time seems too short. Uh, and there is too much time pressure. I have often found that in many African environments, more time is given and available to connect, understand and bond with people. However, once that is done and you have done it well, then people will work with you much more happily" (MRP2).*

Within the African context, building one-on-one relationships is important; if people feel like they do not know you personally, as an individual instead of an organisation, they are reticent about connecting and engaging with you. According to most participants, in other regions, things are structured, and processes, policies, and regulations usually govern relationships between organisations and stakeholders. However, in Africa, it is governed by more inherent attributes. People need to connect on a personal level.

> *"One of the biggest mistakes managers can make in the African context is that managers do not build, do not understand the people, and build relationships with them. Managers also need to show up as themselves instead of their titles; it is also about sharing yourself so that you build that rapport and that relationship, and they can start to see who you are as a human being. That is the number one thing probably across the board, but especially in the African context, in my experience to increase engagement, building rapport and relationship, for me it is critical" (MRP1).*

> *"Because for me to establish rapport with you, I need to connect with you on a human level before I can connect with you on a business level. I have learned over the years that you need to understand your stakeholders right down to the minutia. You are not necessarily engaging with the profile. You are engaging with the individual" (MRP5).*

**c) Perception**

According to a few participants, the community and stakeholders' perception of the company can affect the willingness and ability to engage or partner with the company. Participants spoke of how a lack of transparency and respect can affect the company's reputation and how local partners perceive the company.

> *"Transparency and the organisation's reputation are critical in the pharmaceutical industry. How people see you out there is vital. We have rules and processes that we need to follow. So, when, as an example, it comes to conducting a clinical trial, we do not just go into a community and start putting people on a drug to conduct a clinical trial. If the people in the communities do not have a good perception of the company, they will not participate in the trials, and we cannot implement our strategies because it is difficult to manage them then. So, that is why I say transparency is critical for reputation and perception "(MRP3).*

Transparency, integrity, and respect have come up very strongly as drivers of engagement and management from some participants. This indicates that all of these factors greatly influence the reputation of those who represent companies in Africa and, by extension, the perception within the industry. To summarise MRP9's very detailed explanation, to succeed in uncertain markets like Africa, managers need to constantly ask if the needs and interests of the people are considered.

> *"Do you do the things you say you will do? Do you look after the communities where your*

*company operates? It is a mix of the company's reputation, image, and credibility. When you engage with stakeholders, that is key to ensure that your message lands, but There is also your competence on the subject. Are you an expert on your subject?" (MRP9).*

Also, MRP12's perspective on the ability to create value as a driver of stakeholders' perception of the company supports MRP3's sentiment on the importance of perception. According to MRP12, if the perception externally is that whatever company only cares about their objectives and does not positively impact lives around them, stakeholders would not want to engage with the company, thus making Corporate Social Responsibility important. Most communities' basic needs are unmet, making the social impact of organisations very critical.

*"The ability to create value for stakeholders. Yes, that is exactly it, value. The ability to create value for stakeholders changes their perception of the company and determines whether they want to engage with it. Sadly, if the perception is that this company only cares about itself and does nothing for the people, they will not engage. That is why Corporate Social Responsibility is important; do good for the society and communities, and they will want to keep working with you" (MRP12).*

**d) Communication**

All the participants identified Communication as a critical driver of stakeholder engagement and management, while most participants implied that there is a direct correlation between Communication and engagement. According to most participants, one of the key drivers of effective communication is effective stakeholder mapping. Some participants emphasised that communication and engagement will be impacted if stakeholder mapping is incorrectly done. Correctly identifying and categorising stakeholders determines how effective the Communication between stakeholders will be.

*“So, one is you need to do your stakeholder map, prioritise it based on what I usually call weighting based on the influence on your business or the impact they can have on your business. Then, you determine what you need to be able to do as part of the communication. And, I will still go back to the three things I have said: Communicate sensitised info” (MRP8).*

Insights gathered from the analysis led to creating two categories of Communication, Business and stakeholder Communication: business communication being mostly informative and stakeholder Communication consultative.

**Why is Communication important?**

*"If Communication is not part of your DNA in terms of saying, how do we engage fully with your stakeholders constantly, you cannot engage with them simply because there is something you want to be able to do. So, you need to be able to engage with them, check if things are happening in their lives, rather than channelling what you want, and I think that it is key, it is key because It is the glue to a number of the things that you want to do" (MRP8).*

From an informative business communication point, MRP3 spoke of using Communication to increase the level of buy-in from internal stakeholders.

*"So then because you are not going to have, you know, initial buy-in from everyone. So by communicating what has been done, you can generate additional stakeholders to be involved because, in the beginning, you may be working with a small group" (MRP3).*

To further expand on using Communication to get buy-in, as stated by MRP3, Communication can also be used to get the right resources and capabilities needed to implement the strategy due to the buy-in within the organisation. This is very important in resource-constrained settings like Africa where business managers need to constantly motivate to access resources needed for allocation to managing specific relationships with external stakeholders.

MRP4 addressed using Communication to translate the strategic vision into tangible tasks for people to execute in collaboration with stakeholders. This speaks to communication in strategic leadership, getting buy-in and resources from within the organisation and internal stakeholders with high power, and managing external and internal stakeholders with high influence to execute tasks. This requires excellent communication skills and methods.

*"So, in order to get the right resources with the right capabilities, you need to be able to communicate and lead those resources in the successful implementation of the strategy, and you need to be able to take the vision of the strategy and translate that into more tangible tasks for people to execute" (MRP4).*

Again, MRP8 addressed the use of Communication to educate continuously; in a strategic setting within highly volatile markets like SSA, things change rapidly, so constantly educating and sharing information is crucial.

*"The second part is that I think to succeed, managers need to communicate and educate continuously. So, I think it is unsensitised. So, I say communicate, educate, and sensitise*

*because that becomes a key element to what needs to be happening. You need to be present. You cannot be passive from that perspective" (MRP8).*

When engaging with stakeholders, an element of Communication must be undertaken, so Communication plays a critical role. In every and in any situation, it is the most critical.

*"It is a critical component to stakeholder engagement. So, communication has to be embedded in everything. In the company's DNA, as something they do constantly, because the minute something goes wrong, if you are inefficient in communication, it does not happen, and you are merely pushing messages based on what you prioritise" (MRP8)*

MRP1's perspective on Communication and using the proper channels is the building blocks of effective stakeholder management. It enables the appropriate distribution of information and prevents frustration due to a void in Communication. Communication drives the engagement process; without effective communication, managers cannot constructively build relationships, understand stakeholders, discuss situations, and solve problems that arise during SM and SI. To put it succinctly, it creates an excellent environment for collaboration.

*"Effective Communication, you know, could include speaking clearly or writing well, and you might communicate very effectively, but you may not communicate the right message. So, it is not just a communication thing. It is the psychology of setting up how people collaborate" (MRP2).*

MRP12 also shared an example highlighting the importance of effectively communicating by tailoring the communication plan to fit the purpose based on the market or country where the strategy is being implemented.

*"There is something that we found is very important. When we wanted to grow into Mozambique, for example, and into Botswana. Communication with stakeholders and clients becomes very important, and as part of the strategy to grow into those markets, managers need to master it. So, communication is how you speak or convey and relates to understanding your stakeholders in various countries. Understanding your stakeholders, their customs and so forth. Outside our borders, things were significantly different from what we are used to, and we had to sharpen our communication skills to engage our stakeholders and customers effectively and adapt to these new markets" (MRP12).*

MRP9 also emphasised tailoring communication to fit the cultural context of the country. Culture came up as a critical factor of stakeholder management, more so in the context of Communication as explained by MRP9:

*"We are in Africa. How one communicates with a certain tribe is not the same way one*

*communicates with the other. How one communicates with elders is not the same as with young people. So, one always has to address the audience in order to be able to lift the message and learn. The way I will go and talk to the Minister, for example. I will consider him a god of whatever, and he will feel flattered. And then, you know, my message will land. However, I will speak differently to another audience because I know they do not need that to be flattered" (MRP9).*

An essential element in engaging and managing stakeholders is to create awareness of objectives, strategic direction, and intent; how one creates awareness matters. MRP11 provided an insightful perspective on addressing awareness using communication to drive engagement and implementation.

*"So, I think communication plays a very critical role in the stakeholder management process during strategy implementation because it boils down to communication but how you communicate, what needs to be communicated, and when that needs to be communicated. When you inform stakeholders, whatever follows, they know that they have been made aware. So, you are creating awareness, then you start consulting, you start involving, collaborating. Suppose that awareness is not created, and the consulting and involvement are not done because you fail to communicate throughout the strategy formulation and implementation process. In that case, they will not support you, but if you created awareness and brought them along with you during this process, then the chances of success are higher, but also it boils down to communication" (MRP11).*

Another interesting perspective from MRP10 is knowing how to be proactive instead of reactive in communicating, especially in moments of crisis when managing relationships, especially with external stakeholders.

*"Proactive Communication, rather than reactive, is critical because you do not want a stakeholder finding out something about you from someone else, and also if you have been working with them, if they have been part of that journey, transparent, open, reliable Communication is critical not only in terms of when something goes wrong or a big issue but also in terms of being able to advance objectives. It is challenging if I cannot go to a stakeholder and say, for example, we do not like this. This is hard. Then you will never have a successful partnership" (MRP10)*

**Theme 4: Barriers to Effective Stakeholder Management**

It was necessary for the completeness of the research to look both at the drivers and challenges of stakeholder management.

### a) Misalignment and Bias

Most participants cited misalignment and bias as challenges or barriers to stakeholder management. Participants stated that misalignment on expectations, mutual objectives and resource availability can impact the effectiveness of managing stakeholders. Managers should ensure appropriate discussions occur before any strategy is implemented to assess the expectations of all parties and confirm that the parties are committed to the same outcome.

*"Alignment is a big challenge because I call it meeting of the minds and based on how people tend to see things. So, for me, that is the biggest challenge and the jurisdiction through that" (MRP8).*

*"I think, also lack of perfect alignment in expectations, interest, and more from external stakeholders we rely on while doing business. It is also another challenge because, suddenly, we all have our expectations. We all know what good looks like, but sometimes. Given potential institutional processes and limitations, it may not always allow us to perfectly match that external partner's expectations"(MRP3).*

It is common in the corporate setting to find powerful and influential stakeholders with very conflicting agendas. As a stakeholder manager, it can be challenging to proceed with the implementation of strategy when all these stakeholders have grievances as a result of alignment, or the lack thereof. It then becomes crucial for the stakeholder manager to have leadership and negotiation skills to bring all the stakeholders to the table and find common ground.

*"Another major one is when stakeholders have conflicting agendas. So, for example, in my recent role at Deloitte, where a big part of my job was to harmonise the strategy for innovation across Deloitte, the different plots of Deloitte had very different views. Sometimes, trying to find a way to manage all those people with different agendas was very near to impossible; if you find yourself in a situation where you do not have enough authority to manage that situation or you do not have the sponsorship you need to manage. That can be very difficult" (MRP5).*

*. "If, as a stakeholder engagement professional, I do not set the strategy, I do not help to enable that strategy. So, if I am not connected to that strategy, if I am not sitting with the business owners, people that are driving that strategy and understanding it, understanding how it evolves, I cannot implement it because it is going to be misaligned to what I will convey to stakeholders I manage. Being the liaison between the organisation and the stakeholders, I must ensure perfect alignment by being involved in the strategy formulation and implementation; this makes managing everyone involved easier"(MRP10).*

### b) Cultural Challenges

Most participants alluded to the saliency of culture in the African context. Culture is an influential driver of effectiveness and impact when implementing strategy within the African region compared to other developed countries. Organisational culture was identified as critically important as a driver of SM; however, as a challenge, the inherent culture of both the organisation and the external environment regarding cultural norms can pose a challenge to managing stakeholders.

MRP4 alluded to the challenge of cliques and silos that form within the corporate environment in multiple countries in SSA because of stakeholders' affinity to each other due to their language or culture. This is a challenge because it requires more effort for a manager who is not necessarily part of that culture to build relationships or get people to work together, both in the operational and strategic context, when doing business in Africa.

> *"The silo mentality is a daily struggle for me and my team to overcome. We experience cliques within the corporate setting, usually based on people's language and how it draws them towards each other. If you do not try to blend in and learn about people's culture, they are reluctant to work with you or each other, creating silos which are just difficult to navigate. I have experienced this in Nigeria, South Africa and a few other countries when implementing projects"(MRP4).*

Similarly, to MRP4's perspective is MRP5's on the human connection that comes with cultural affinities and similarities.

> *"The human connection comes in understanding the individual but understanding him or her within the context of their culture. In Africa, different cultures affect how stakeholders differ from market to market, and it can be challenging to manage stakeholders considering all the cultures and how they influence engagement"(MRP5).*

In organisations with a weak collaborative culture and where everyone is stretched beyond capacity, sometimes, due to resource scarcity or excessive workload, engagement is adversely affected. It is challenging for stakeholder managers to balance conflicting availabilities.

> *"The dealing with the business that we all experience, but it is somebody who is in a senior position or someone who is in our less senior position. People tend to be incredibly stretched, so find a way to sit with them and then engage them and get them clear on where they are going and what they are doing to get there. Their views or instruction on what needs to happen, and you know it is tremendously challenging"(MRP5).*

### c) Geographical Challenges

Most participants implied that working with different countries posed a considerable challenge for strategy implementers who are physically based in different countries. Managers have to deal with challenges that come with a lack of physical proximity and working remotely, as well as challenges that result from the need for harmonisation in legislation enforced in different jurisdictions.

*"One is you are working in different jurisdictions, two because the direction is differently just to the nuances around you have to navigate different legislation and the environments make it very challenging to manage people and operations."(MRP8).*

Post-COVID-19, organisations had to reimagine how they worked and migrate from the traditional way of working to adopting more virtual collaboration tools. When managers find themselves in a position where they sit with a strategic team in South Africa and have to implement strategic projects in Senegal, for example, they have to work with stakeholders residing miles away, whom they have never met, and use virtual tools to collaborate. The lack of personal connection can make it a challenge (MRP5). Three years after COVID-19, my experience is that people in other African markets still need to be more active about working virtually and collaborating virtually, which results in managers having to travel back and forth to ensure these relationships are built and that engagement becomes more seamless.

*"I think that is probably the hardest thing, dealing with stakeholders who are always on the move, a stakeholder with time scarcity and in different geographies, that is that my overarching biggest challenge has been that I would say, I mean, there are many others I can talk about other challenges as well, but that is certainly probably the most commonly occurring challenge"(MRP2).*

### d) Service and contractual challenges

Maintaining a certain level of service and customer satisfaction consistently can be challenging in Africa due to the reliance on third parties and external service providers to implement organisational activities.

*"Just because of the lack of time, time runs out before you know it, and you have not covered everything you needed to, or you are relying on people to do things, but they have other things on their plate"(MRP2).*

Few participants emphasised that maintaining service levels and customer experiences can be challenging for organisations operating in Africa and result in strained stakeholders' relationships, which can hinder future collaboration.

> *"So, the first challenge will be maintaining the service levels. Two will also be linked to performance because we work largely with service-level agreements. We must maintain the performance of those service level agreements to ensure continued engagement with our stakeholders"(MRP8).*

> *"Some are demanding, some are impossible, and all of that. So, you have to be able to know how to deal with them. And it is not just helping you maintain the customer experience; I think that is one of the big challenges with stakeholders"(MRP8).*

MRP3 shared the perspective of circumstances where, in the pharmaceutical industry, academic stakeholders always assume unlimited resources are available to support their activities as collaborators of multinationals. The resource-constrained landscape of the region forces smaller firms or businesses to rely on bigger corporations to fund their activities. The willingness to continue a relationship towards common goals is impacted when those expectations are unmet.

> *"I think limited resources are a challenge; whenever you meet with any stakeholder, they have an expectation, especially if I think about external stakeholders, especially when we engage with academic stakeholders, they always have a baseline assumption that we have unlimited resources that will be provided to them"(MRP3).*

### 5.3.2 Construct 2: Strategy Implementation

Participants have defined strategy implementation based on their own experience and understanding, some of which were very insightful.

> *"When you formulate or develop a strategy, it is because you are dressing a certain need or issue or problem of where you what you want to overcome. What challenges do you want to overcome, or where do you want to pivot the organisation towards achieving its mission? It entails identifying the medium and long-term goals and using available resources to make them a reality. You make it a reality when you implement it"(MRP4).*

> *"So, the first thing to say is that strategy and implementation are together. You cannot separate them. Part of what makes a good strategy is that it can be effectively implemented. So, my perspective is never to separate them. There is the classic criticism of consultants who will come in and give you a strategy in a PowerPoint, but the implementation is not adequately addressed. And then the strategy never comes to life. So, they must be seen as one. Secondly, implementing strategy is using processes, guiding policies, systems, and people to lead operations and actionable plans to achieve the stated strategic goals"(MRP2).*

*"Strategy implementation is taking the different inputs of a business and the environment in which the business operates, the macro and micro economic factors, the political context of the country, the regulatory environment, the competitiveness of the industry and the expectations of the industry, stakeholders and the business and integrating them into a cohesive plan that is then actioned to drive the organisation towards where it wants to be by identifying various opportunities and using resources and assets to achieve the organisation strategic goals"(MRP9).*

**Theme 5: The external environment**

**a) Organisation's Ability to Engage Externally.**

Insights gathered during the thematic analysis suggest that when implementing strategy in Africa, organisations and their representatives must have excellent engagement skills to enable them to navigate the complex socio-political landscape of the region. MRP8 highlighted the volatility of the political landscape in most African markets. This results in unforeseen changes within the environment that can impact legislation, with organisations having to adjust their operational plans abruptly.

*"The President speaks publicly, which becomes or is taken as legislation. So, the role of government in people's lives. The government's position becomes a key element, so when you talk about the regulatory structures and the environment, it is a key element in trying to do stakeholder management" (MRP8).*

Most participants went on to explain that organisations' representatives need to know people in government with whom they can build relationships which will support their efforts in navigating changes and preventing their organisations from being negatively impacted by these changes. Building relationships and engaging outside the organisation requires effective use of public affairs professionals, who can scan the environment and alert their organisations of impending changes. To manage these highly influential stakeholders requires excellent stakeholder management skills. These changes can disrupt organisational strategic implementation plans. To support MRP8's perspective on the importance of building relationships when working in Africa, MRP2 shares some reflections based on past experiences.

*"There is an interesting thing that I have experienced in Africa. Generally, people do business with you once they know you, like you, and once a relationship is formed. However, sometimes, you can go straight to the business in more European contexts. After basic introductions, you do not need to know them, and you do not need to spend time investing in your relationships to the same extent"(MRP2).*

Some participants highlighted that in Africa, people like to engage with people with whom they have existing relationships and cultural affinities. It is very challenging to operate in Africa without the support and collaboration of smaller businesses already established in communities and various industries in the markets since these businesses have long-lasting ties with stakeholders. This perspective is consistent with MRP3's.

> *"The complexity of the African environment makes it nearly impossible to implement strategy without working with local organisations; take my industry for example, we cannot implement any strategy, initiative or even activities with high impact without collaborating with NGOs, key opinion leaders, subject matter experts operating within the specific industry with extensive networks. These organisations are closer to the customers and markets than we are. So, one needs to be able to engage with them; we need their network and expertise within the market to achieve our goals"(MRP3).*

Few participants emphasised that engaging with external stakeholders requires the company to make trade-offs, especially in these highly political markets. The company always has to trade something for the support of external stakeholders. It is important to highlight that trade-offs do not necessarily have a negative connotation; they are sometimes for the greater good.

> *"One has to balance the ability to keep stakeholders interested, but at the same time, you are getting from him or her what you set out to get" (MRP5).*

"Trade-offs in the context of relationships require some critical thinking in identifying which stakeholder relationships need to be invested in and which need to be reconsidered and when it is the right moment to engage or disengage stakeholders based on changes in the business environment"(MRP10).

**b) The ecosystem and the Micro and Macro-economic factors**

Most participants alluded to the African market being volatile and complex due to the political landscape and the constant disruptions and changes happening in the region. The region is plagued by a high rate of corruption (MRP4), unstable politics and regulations (MRP7) and fluctuating currency and unstable institutions (MRP9), making it challenging to implement a strategy compared to other regions.

Situational analysis and assessing the ecosystem is important when formulating and implementing strategy in Africa. Most participants mentioned the role of government as an influential stakeholder with influence on the organisation's ability to implement anything in very complex markets. According to MRP8, a big part of stakeholder management and strategy implementation is driven primarily by the primary environment.

*"You do an environmental assessment, allowing the information to flow externally and internally. OK, so you have indicated and say you have your internal and external stakeholders, you start right at the point where you feel you need to be able to do something"(MRP8).*

MRP12 highlighted the importance of assessing the environment and identifying who the key players are to get close to them. The environment and ecosystem matter, especially who your network is within the environment.

*"In Africa, you have to know someone who knows someone who knows someone to get you through the door. In Africa, it is not as straightforward as in Europe, for example, where you walk into an office and speak to the decision maker or the lead of the organisation you want to engage with. In Africa, everything depends on your engagement level with those organisations because everything is transactional and based on relationships"(MRP6).*

To add to situational analysis and assessment of the ecosystem, MRP2 says it is crucial to consider the broader context, supporting MRP8 and MRP6 perspectives.

*"We must always consider the strategy and its implementation within the broader context, right? In terms of where we operate, right, and then you must consider the different variables in terms of where your market is operating" (MRP1).*

Considering the volatility of the market and the constant changes, the relationships you invest in may not be long-term because of the high attrition rate in governments and public offices due to an unstable political landscape. So, the process of lobbying and relationship-building is an incessant one. Companies must ensure that the strategy and implementation plans remain adaptable and fluid because of constant changes in the environment. Most participants emphasised that strategic, operational, and planning agility and adaptability are critical in Africa; one must be able to quickly adapt to changes and navigate the nuances of the environment, including the political and industry ecosystem.

*"So, developing and implementing the strategy but understanding that it remains adaptable and fluid because as changes happen, then the organisation also needs to adapt the strategy to align with the changes in the macro-environment"(MRP5).*

MRP5 went on to add to the previous statement to expand on the point made about adapting to the changes in the macro-environment. A few notable factors in the macro-environment are the cultural, legal, and regulatory landscapes of African countries. These factors greatly influence how local stakeholders in those markets operate and whether they are fit for purpose when collaborating for implementation.

> *"It is about understanding the legal and regulatory issues surrounding the stakeholder. So, you can not necessarily go to a stakeholder without having a profound understanding of the space within which that stakeholder operates. Moreover, that need not only be legal and regulatory, but it could also be cultural. So, if you put the stakeholder at the centre, what regulatory issues confine how that stakeholder should engage with you? What are the legal parameters? And then, what are the cultural nuances around that stakeholder? Moreover, how do all of these affect the stakeholders' suitability and ability to support you in implementing your strategy?"(MRP5).*

Few participants mentioned the impact of currency fluctuation and money readily available on the ability to operate in Africa, both from a stakeholder management and strategy implementation perspective.

> *"Money drives engagement in Africa; no one wants to do business with you if they do not get their money in advance or on time" (MRP1).*

According to few participants, currency fluctuations in Africa can pose a problem with budgeting for implementation and payment accuracy to external stakeholders. MRP1 took an example on Ghana and said:

> *"Can I honestly offer this and that services and expand in Ghana? Will I be able to transfer funds? Will people be able to get their funds? Would I maintain their deposit? Can I secure their commitment? How do I deal with currency fluctuations and all those things? These can greatly impact stakeholder management when implementing strategy"(MRP1).*

Few participants mentioned that strategy implementation is at risk if people are unhappy because of money, payment, or anything else. This is supported by MRP2's perspective on the importance of paying attention to people, the social influence in these markets, and the impact of word of mouth instead of talking about the situation incessantly.

> *"Sometimes the situation is almost more important to everyone than the people, and that is where many people go wrong trying to manage stakeholders in an African context as they come and talk about the situation without enough attention paid to the people"(MRP2).*

**Theme 6: Resourcing for strategy implementation**

All the participants identified resource availability as an important driver of both SM and SI. However, there were few differences in the perspectives gathered. The participants' perspectives differed mainly in the types of resources identified as important. Some participants alluded to financial resources, while others alluded to skills and capabilities. Few emphasised the criticality of optimising resources in resource-constrained settings. Participants like MRP1 and MRP13 alluded to all the types of resources being critically important and highlighted resource optimisation as an important process both within the context of strategy implementation and Africa.

> ***"****So, the critical driver for me is what you call your resources or rather resource optimisation. When am I going to use or what am I going to need to drive this strategy or to see the strategy through? So, one of the critical success factors is whether you have the right resources to deliver on this strategy, whether it is people, whether it is a product, whether it is systems, whether it is service, whether it is a location" (MRP1).*

All the participants identified resources availability as a critical driver of both SM and SI. The difference between the participants was mostly on the types of resources each identified to be more important. Participants like MRP2 spoke to all the type of resources being critically important, and highlighted resource optimisation as an important process both within the context of strategy implementation and Africa.

> ***"****So, the critical driver for me then is what you call your resources or rather resource optimization. When am I going to use or what am I going to need to drive this strategy or to see the strategy through right? So, for me, one of the critical Success factors in terms of do you have the right resources to deliver on this strategy, whether it is people, whether it is product, whether it is systems, whether it is service, whether it is location".*

**a) Formulating strategy**

MRP5 emphasised that in the context of strategy, the formulation and implementation processes cannot be dissociated; they must be seen as one. So, planning for resources from the conceptualisation stage is important when discussing strategy implementation and the resources required for the process. According to a few participants, resources are always a key driver regardless of the region or the industry because resource availability impacts both the cost and quality of activities or operations. Resources and availability can influence the management of stakeholders and the quality of services they render to the organisation when implementing strategy.

> *"When you look at industry and Africa as a whole, it comes back to the issue of resources. An issue of resources you cannot disassociate from cost and quality, right? Because you must talk about the availability of the resources, the speed or access of those resources" (MRP1)*

One interesting perspective from MRP1 and MRP3 is the consideration of internal and external stakeholders as a resource because the organisation needs stakeholders to function correctly, especially when shaping and implementing strategy. Sometimes, customers help organisations co-create and even implement their strategies, making them a critical resource.

*"Sometimes your stakeholders could be, or by definition anyway, critical to your journey because your customers will determine whether they stay with you. So, if you do not involve them in that process, you are likely to lose out on critical insights, and therefore, you are losing out on whatever proposition or the market you want to play in; that is the challenge. So, for me, it is important that they participate in the formulation, the data they provide and everything that you may potentially get from them that you consider in shaping the strategy. OK, so they have a very high influence in strategy implementation". (MRP1)*

*"They, customers, need you to co-create the plan with them so that they can then have ownership of whatever you look into as a cube and then when it comes to the execution on implementations phase, where you think you may have all the ideas, without their support and incentive situations you may not have a full context." (MRP3).*

MRP8 considers employees on the ground and customers as critical resources for strategy formulation and implementation. Employees at the lower level of the organisation are usually the ones who are customer-facing and can inform the business on what is needed in the market by providing valuable insights.

*"So, I think one common thing is when you get into strategy, you try and do it bottom-up", and "you do an environmental assessment, so you allow the information externally internally"(MRP8).*

**b) Skills and Capabilities**

Most participants mentioned the criticality of skills and capabilities for strategy implementation. The right level of skills and capabilities impact the ability to implement strategy. People leading strategy implementation must have the proper management and leadership skills. Few participants alluded to the importance of continuous skills development and capabilities training to ensure employees and implementing stakeholders are always equipped with the right skills.

*"So, if you do not have the right leader, anything you may have, all the other drivers, you will not be able to be successful in your implementation" (MRP4).*

In addition to the right leadership skills as critical in strategy implementation, few participants emphasised that the right capabilities and skills are needed for effective implementation. The right leader needs people with the right skills and capabilities to drive forward implementation efforts.

*"However, you may have the right leadership but not the right resources to go and execute. Do you have the right people? And then, do you have the resources with the right capabilities and skills to drive strategy implementation? Do you know what the right capabilities are? I believe that these drivers have interdependencies with each other. If one is weaker than the other, it will show in the implementation of the strategy and the level of success that the organisation will achieve. On the journey of implementing a strategy, leadership is important because you need clear direction and people to understand and be provided with guidance on what is required. So, these are the skills and abilities of those who can assist with or do the actual implementation. Then you need to have the people that follow this leader with the right ability and skills or capabilities and skills. So those two, for me, are highly interlinked with each other"(MRP4).*

*"The level of expertise of the people that you engage with when implementing strategy is important, but I have to say that even if somebody does not feel like an expert, if they know the environment and if they know the industry, they already know people, they already know organisations, they can successfully implement strategies"(MRP11).*

*"For drivers of strategy implementation, I will look at micro and macro. So, the micro would be things like resources, and whether the organisation has enough resources, capability skills, experience that the organisation has at its disposal"(MRP11).*

**c) Technology and infrastructure**

Before COVID, managing stakeholders remotely and collaborating towards common goals took much work. Post-COVID, engaging and interacting with stakeholders remotely has been less challenging; nothing could have prepared the world for the changes that resulted from COVID-19. Everyone had to adjust. Companies had to invest heavily in technology to enable business continuity (MRP13). Many MNEs and International companies with headquarters in other countries must manage stakeholders and partners remotely, requiring the right technology and collaboration systems.

*"It is setting up the right collaboration system, using communication and the tools to manage stakeholders remotely"(MRP2).*

*"Companies with limited resources to transform their ways of working to work remotely faced challenges, like one would face the limited resource resources, you know, technology depending on where you are. If we look at South Africa, for example, I mean it,*

*it became such a challenge to manage stakeholders, especially if you have stakeholders that are sitting in different countries"(MRP11).*

Few participants provided some examples, including SMEs who lost critical partnerships because of their inability to support their local stakeholders financially in their effort to acquire new technology that enables remote working. Small businesses expanding into Africa were surprised by COVID-19 and unprepared for the fall back on their business. Companies with limited resources to adapt to working remotely due to limited technology lost collaborators. Most participants identified financial resources and cash flow as important in strategy implementation. Organisations need to plan for capital and operational expenditure for their strategic initiatives, without which failure is inevitable.

*"Do you have the Assigned or required capital from our capital and operational expenditures to support the strategic initiatives? Do you have enough or the required amount to assist with strategy implementation? These questions must be answered before starting the strategic process and engaging stakeholders to support the implementation"(MRP4).*

*"Secondly, I would say the internal resources that are put towards stakeholder management because if you put no money or no resources, then you are not going to have good stakeholder management, and without the help and input from stakeholders, you can forget about implementing your strategy because the company cannot do it alone, you need stakeholders"(MRP10).*

**Theme 7: Enabling Systems and Processes.**

Organisations need to have enabling processes and systems to support implementation. Processes are necessary for internal controls of resources, progress monitoring, and reporting on requirements and status. MRP8 and MRP2 shared their perspectives on having processes when managing change due to strategic execution.

*"Any good strategic player has to be able to sit and say, OK, we have this long-term trajectory. However, we introduce the following incremental elements in the operational environment. So, you allow the systems to also alter themselves through the process and the function of people and the operators to be able to execute properly. Leveraging these processes to implement strategic changes is important for success" (MRP8).*

*"In terms of actually implementing, you need processes; you need guiding policies because implementation requires people to go out and do things, and they cannot always check with you. They need guiding policies to help them act, which is the next point. So, regarding policies, they need action orientation with incentives for action; those are essential parts of*

*implementation" (MRP2).*

**a) The Stakeholder Integration Process**

Integrating stakeholders in the strategic process was a key focus of the research. The findings highlighted that the success of the stakeholder management process and strategy implementation hinges on how and when to integrate stakeholders into the strategic cycle. The perspectives were split between early integration and gradual integration. Most participants advocated for early integration, while some advocated for the integration process to depend on the stakeholder category for confidentiality or to ensure a good flow of information on a need-to-know basis.

The statements below by a few participants explain why it is vital to integrate stakeholders as early as possible in the strategic process.

*"So, a process a, a foolproof process, a good process integrates stakeholders at purely the point of conception" (MRP8).*

MRP2's example is based on the technical aspect of strategy, mainly for organisations that deliver products to their customers. This perspective highlights bringing stakeholders involved in designing the product early, but only as observers or for information purposes, from a design thinking perspective.

*"Sometimes you only need certain stakeholders at certain points in strategy. So, for example, the technical people often find themselves being brought in late. Because once the strategy is done and everyone is decided, they want to go to the technical people and say, please build it on a very simplistic level, which is a big mistake. You need to bring all of the stakeholders in early. Thus, you need the authority, so to give a simple example, you need the authority to say technical people, I am bringing you along because you need to be part of this journey from the beginning, but we are not ready to start designing the tech" (MRP2).*

*"Internally, the staff is a stakeholder that needs to buy into the strategy. So, all stakeholders must be engaged from the onset to ensure you can implement it and add value to customers and other stakeholders" (MRP12).*

*"I think right at the beginning, the very first. It is where you are before you even engage them. You need to understand what you want to achieve from a strategic perspective. So, what kind of shift do you need to make as an organisation? You will not just bring stakeholders when you are ready to implement strategy. You need to bring them even when you formulate" (MRP5).*

MRP9 elaborates more on strategy becoming an actual problem, or the actual problem of the leader when it comes to implementation, should the stakeholders not be involved from the beginning.

*"From the beginning, the stakeholders help you map the strategy. You cannot decide the strategy without the stakeholders because, as a leader, you do not know it all; moreover, you need different expertise in order for you to put a strategy together. So, you need to involve the stakeholders from the initial stage to build the strategy. You can look at it holistically, but one cannot decide on a strategy and ask everyone to execute it. That does not work. People need to feel connected with your strategy. They need to feel engaged with that. If you decide on the strategy, that is your problem. It will become your problem, not your strategy" (MRP9)*

MRP10 has a slightly different perspective on whom to integrate and to engage only the person who will lead and manage the implementation process as early as possible. The leader must feel connected and aligned to translate the strategy into actionable tasks.

*"If I do not set the strategy as a stakeholder engagement professional, I help to enable that strategy. So, if I am not connected to that strategy or sitting with, you know, you know, business owners, people that are driving that strategy and understanding how it evolves, I cannot implement. It is going to be misaligned" (MRP10).*

MRP12 supports early integration of stakeholders, but only a small pool of stakeholders who can help identify and remove barriers earlier in the process and who are resolute in what the organisation is trying to achieve.

*"Some stakeholders help with removing that artificial barrier you encounter in African countries because of how the environment is, so to me, they are critical. It is critical to ensure you have the right stakeholders identified. They do not have to be tonnes could be ten people, but those are the right stakeholders because they will move mountains if they believe in what you do, and that is why, going back to what we said before, it is so important to involve them early as possible and to have them along with you in the journey" (MRP6).*

Few other participants provided insights into integrating stakeholders at various stages of the strategic cycle. MRP3 speaks to having relevant stakeholders for each stage; only the relevant stakeholders should be integrated at a particular stage.

*"I think that is important, right? Sometimes, we say, you know, I have a plan. I have a strategy. It is endorsed. However, who endorsed it? Are there irrelevant stakeholders that endorsed it? So, having the relevant stakeholders at each stage of that process is critical for successful implementation"(MRP3).*

MRP10 perspective encompasses organisational politics and power dynamics and how that can affect the decision of the time stakeholders should be integrated.

*"Integrating stakeholders should happen early. There is always tension in the business environment about how early or when the right moment to engage stakeholders is. However, I think to find a compromise between split opinions and power dynamics, some stakeholders need to be brought in during the design of the strategy and others towards the implementation or go-to-market phase"(MRP10).*

One perspective spoke to the importance of communicating the strategic objectives and a high-level overview of the implementation plan, even if stakeholders are not brought in early in the strategic process.

*"You bring in various stakeholders in various stages of the implementation of the strategy, but you need to communicate Right from the start what it is that you want to achieve and how you are going to achieve that and break it down, as I said into manageable tasks"(MRP4).*

*"Your resources, the people that are going to go out and do this, they must be brought on board from the beginning when you are going to translate that Strategy into tactical or operational plans, and those resources may be people directly or indirectly involved, and they are mostly internal"(MRP4).*

*"The external resources that I believe you need to bring on board at the beginning, specifically the stakeholders whose problems this strategy or the implementation of the strategy seeks to address, so you need to make them understand that the formulated strategy. This is what we want to achieve. This is how we will achieve it with a clear plan with milestones and what goals you want to achieve within those specific milestones, and they need to buy in The Implementation part of it"(MRP4).*

**Theme 8: Challenges to strategy implementation**

Like any strategic process, implementation comes with challenges, as the interview participants identified. Insights gathered were categorised into execution, geographical, cultural, resource and communications challenges. Like stakeholder management, these factors can be drivers and challenges to processes.

**a) Execution Challenges (Cultural, Financial)**

Few participants identified alignment and the inclusion of all stakeholders as possible challenges and explained why. Alignment can be challenging due to the difference in people's perspective of things and their ladder of inference, which affect how things should be done. MRP1 added that including all the stakeholders in the planning of the implementation results in more extended conversations because of wanting to hear everyone's perspective.

*"Alignment is a big challenge because I call it a meeting of the minds and based on how people tend to see things. So, for me, that is the biggest challenge and the jurisdiction through that"(MRP8).*

*"Conversations take longer. Implementation takes longer simply because in the strategy, you try to get by in from everybody and depending on where you are"(MRP8).*

The government's interference, the African region's complexity, and the nuances that implementers must navigate can challenge strategy execution. Although effective stakeholder management, including early integration of stakeholders in the strategic process, is a driver of strategy implementation, it can concurrently be a challenge, as highlighted by MRP4 and MRP5. The failure to plan processes in advance and accordingly can impede the implementation process.

*"If you do not get the stakeholder management right and make them understand what the expectations and the needs are to ensure that the strategy is implemented successfully and what is required of them, then Yeah, you are doomed to fail before you even start it"(MRP4).*

*" Often, things also go wrong further down where there are implementation challenges or things have not been correctly planned. People do not always plan very well, But the reason can be that they were not brought along on the journey, which we talked about prior to that, which is where I said they should always be involved, you know, from the early stages. I think that was the important point"(MRP2).*

The lack of technological advancement and the inability of local stakeholders to use tools at their disposal in many African countries can be a challenge, an important one at that, due to the heavy reliance of organisations on technology to do business in Africa.

*"Understanding the technology; the Stakeholders in broader Africa do not always understand the technology because it is not their core business. One main challenge is the lack of access and understanding of technology on the stakeholder side"(MRP12).*

As alluded to by most participants, the environment, especially the solid cultural norms and the unstable political landscape of the African region, impact organisations' ability to integrate, operate and drive strategy in these volatile markets. MRP5 provided a perspective with a detailed explanation of the impact of the regulatory and legal parameters on implementation.

*"The regulatory and legal background of a country also matters and poses a huge challenge when working in Africa. So, there was training in the South African context, but we were not doing business in Nigeria, and in Nigeria, how you do business is quite different. So, bribery and all of that is very much part of how they do business. It was a bit of a mind Bender because you want to do business there. However, you are now confined by your company's local rules and regulations. So, understanding how we could adapt to that and still partake of that in a compliant way was a massive challenge, you know? So, it is like a double-edged sword because you are saying you are trying to comply with bribery in a compliant way. Finding ways around that and then briefing our people who were at the forefront of negotiations and all of that, I think, was so challenging, but at the same time, it was so refreshing to get a different perspective. Therefore, I say it is important to understand the culture and the regulatory and legal compliance, business landscape, and those stakeholders and their mindsets"(MRP5).*

**b) Geographical Barriers**

Working in different countries and jurisdictions poses different challenges for strategy implementers, mainly because one must familiarise themselves with how things work in different markets. This can be attributed to the need for more harmonisation of legal processes within the same regions, and each country does things differently.

*"One is you are working in different jurisdictions; two, because the direction is different just to the nuances around, you have to navigate different legislation and the environments, which can be challenging for people implementing strategy in countries different from their base country. It is challenging when you are in certain territories to try and convince people that they need to be able to do bottom-up and consult and get feedback because that is intricate in how successfully an organisation will deliver"(MRP8).*

The use of technology due to geographical limitations is a challenge when collaborating from different regions, as explained by MRP11, who provided an excellent example of the limitations imposed.

*"I think just broadly, there are challenges that one would face, the limited resources, you know, technology depending on where you are. For example, managing stakeholders in South Africa becomes challenging, especially if you have stakeholders in different countries. Where you have to tell them, or you are in the middle of a call, an important meeting. You know your power shuts down. Are you being able to meet, you know, certain*

*expectations because of shortage of electricity or in the country, so it could be that it has been that for me"(MRP11).*

### c) Cultural Challenges

Cultural challenges are two-fold and include organisational and environmental cultural challenges. From an organisational perspective, the organisation's culture can pose a challenge depending on whether it is centralised or decentralised. Some centralised structures have challenges, and decentralised structures have different challenges when managing stakeholders when implementing strategy.

*"You touch on some centralisation and decentralisation as common challenges" (MRP1).*

Another perspective on an organisation's cultural challenges is the availability and understanding of guiding policies and the absence of their application, which can impede implementation. Organizational culture and the ability to utilise internal policies, guidelines and SOPs can be a challenge.

*"And that happens a lot in organisations where the strategy is not implemented correctly, and you think the people do not believe in the strategy, and it is not the case. The problem is that it has not been addressed adequately. They have not been adequately helped to understand how to implement"(MRP2).*

From an environmental and cultural perspective, people from different countries see things differently, and their perspectives are shaped by their cultural backgrounds and beliefs.

*"So, the global nature of the business that we do, it is the environment. So, I think many people are capitalised and cultured based on their environment. So, they tend to see things from their peer perspective, which can simultaneously be a constraint and challenge"(MRP8).*

MRP11 integrated all the challenges into one cohesive statement, looking at the stakeholders themselves, the environment that shapes the stakeholders' behaviour, the resources that adversely impact stakeholder management and the ecosystem and socio-political landscape of the country.

*"Challenges could be the stakeholders themselves because you have different stakeholders. You have the ones that are supportive and collaborative, but you have ones that can be difficult and resistant to things you are trying to implement. Thus, the challenges have been, you know, within the stakeholder group itself, but also Changes outside of my control or area of influence, such as limited resources, technology, you know,*

*could be social and social disparities and political landscape. Whatever we operate, I have faced challenges in managing stakeholders and making the stakeholders understand those challenges and how to navigate them is also a challenge itself"(MRP11).*

To add to MRP11's perspective on the socio-political landscape and cultural norms of the countries in which strategies are implemented, MRP6 identified the lack of cultural awareness by implementers as a challenge.

*"If you ignore how things are done regarding the corruption culture and regulatory landscape, you will not go anywhere with your strategy implementation. In other parts of the world, you do not need to know the people personally, which reduces corruption. You just need to know the office or the function where that approval is going. And to me, the corruption element is a big challenge"(MRP6).*

MRP6 further added misalignment and bias as cultural challenges when implementing strategy. To elaborate, MRP6 provided a detailed example from experience.

*"Knowing your stakeholder is important, and by knowing your stakeholders, I do not mean the people that you know. So, an unbiased knowing of your stakeholders because you might need to interact with people you do not like or do not think are the right people, but those are the decision-makers. So, to me, it is about knowing and having a clear, unbiased overview of who your stakeholders are and who can move forward to ensure you can implement your strategy. That is the most critical part; having an unbiased view of your customers is needed. However, being clear on why certain stakeholders are there, and others are not even more important because that will guide your discussions and your team. I am just saying that sometimes you receive feedback or stakeholders' names from everywhere. You do not need to lose your discipline and not be influenced, right? So, adopting an unbiased knowing of your customers, I think, is a key challenge, remaining objective and unbiased"(MRP6).*

#### d) Communication Challenges

Some participants identified under-communicating, overcommunicating- and language barriers as the primary communication challenges in Africa when implementing strategy.

*"Communication is key. Because without communication, you know people will not understand what is required of them. What is the expectation? You know the needs and what they need to do, so as a leader, you must clearly communicate your expectations. That is a big challenge in Africa, communicating expectations in a language they understand. You need to communicate and give feedback to say what is not working and what is working, and you know what the stumbling blocks or the challenges are. If language is a barrier, it becomes impossible to communicate and collaborate towards a*

*successful implementation" (MRP4).*

*"Some managers tend to overcommunicate, and by communicating, I mean that sometimes, if you overdo it, you can create too much noise in the system, which may become too burdensome for your stakeholders and also sometimes alerts them to things that they do not need to know, which when divulged can set back the implementation" (MRP5)*

From a communication perspective, MRP11 mentioned that the lack of access to the right technology and infrastructure for communication and collaboration poses a considerable challenge in managing stakeholders for practical implementation in Africa. The technology, software, and platforms exist and can be supplied locally, but the cost associated with acquiring those prevents local companies from acquiring them, as financial resources are a challenge for most developing countries due to the economic landscape in Africa.

*"The lack of technology, because it takes longer to do things because there is no right technology in place, even where there is, you know, the right technology in place, the access to that technology is a challenge in Africa, Infrastructure, let me just say infrastructure"(MRP11).*

### 5.3.3 Linking Stakeholder Management and Strategy Implementation.

Participants were asked to provide their perspectives to understand stakeholder management and its influence on strategy implementation in Africa. All the participants believed SM has a huge influence and importance in the strategic process as organisations rely on and collaborate with stakeholders in all the steps towards implementation.

*"Stakeholder management is like going into a mirror; you get it. So, stakeholder management is a feedback mechanism through which you can draw information to help augment yourself, your business, and the product to be able to respond better or better position itself for what it has to deliver and the people it has to interact with which is critical for the success of the implementation"(MRP8).*

MRP3 spoke to the importance of continuous engagement throughout the strategic cycle to ensure stakeholders stay on track with their commitment.

*"I think that stakeholder management plays an important role in strategy implementation because If people have to backtrack on their commitment, you will not be able to implement your strategy. However, if you effectively manage the stakeholders and keep*

*them engaged and interested, Then you can implement your strategy successfully"(MRP3).*

MRP3 gave a second perspective on the importance and influence of SM on SI.

*"If you manage the stakeholders effectively, keep them engaged and interested. Then, you will be able to implement your strategy successfully. You know who is important, who is influential, and who is not so important or not so influential, and then you can position each stakeholder appropriately as part of your pre-planning phase so that you know how to manage each one"(MRP3).*

MRP4 spoke about SM's role in landing the message and ensuring buy-in by stakeholders.

*"Stakeholder management plays a key role in strategy implementation, how you position the strategy, and the narrative that goes with it. You know, it plays a key role in landing the message with the audience or the stakeholders. And for me? You can get that part wrong if you do not position it correctly because if you do not, your strategy is deemed to fail specifically with the stakeholders required to implement it"(MRP4).*

MRP2 had another perspective on why SM is important. This perspective highlighted the importance of adopting a system-thinking approach to strategy implementation.

*"I tend to look at these things as systems, and you cannot pick one driver as being more important than the other parts very easily because it is a system that makes things work. And so. It might be that you can get away with having some parts not there. One way to look at drivers is to ask which SM process is often not correctly done and keep an eye on that, and stakeholder management helps one look at all pieces and the entire process as one cohesive whole"(MRP2).*

MRP5's answer, when asked about the influence of SM on SI, highlighted the role stakeholders and SM play in navigating complexities within the ecosystem, especially the regulatory and legal aspects of countries in which the parent organisation is not based. Leveraging stakeholders to ensure adherence to regulations is critical as it may be outside the scope of internal stakeholders' roles.

*"So, I think stakeholder management is not an aspect of strategy implementation; it is a core part of the process. Organisations must recognise the importance of engaging with their stakeholders and managing them effectively to navigate challenges and embrace opportunities to achieve their strategic objectives. Managing stakeholders effectively helps mitigate adverse impacts. So, it is risk mitigation. So, how do you mitigate the negative impact of whatever your strategy wants to do? And then, obviously, ethical, and regulatory compliance becomes a big part of why you need to engage stakeholders because effective*

*stakeholder management can help organisations navigate these complexities, especially if you know it is something that is not quite in the regulatory or ethical landscape of the parent organisation. You must get to and manage the right stakeholders well to overcome those hurdles"(MRP5).*

MRP9 provided a perspective on SM and decision-making, stating that it harmonises decision-making and ensures that blockages and grievances are dealt with timeously and effectively to avoid business interruptions.

*"I think stakeholder management helps harmonise decision-making. It also helps speed up decision-making because sometimes, some can block your business if you do not manage your stakeholders. That is the way it is. You need to manage your stakeholders. Sometimes, they come, and they are upset about things. You need to take it on, you manage them, and then at least you know that the big business will go on"(MRP9).*

Engaging the right stakeholders and using good SM practices to ensure a good relationship with these stakeholders can positively influence strategy implementation by enabling fast execution and delivering strategic objectives ahead of time.

*"I have seen strategy being implemented in no time because you were approaching the right stakeholders, and by that, I mean the right stakeholders who have power in making decisions. That is so critical for Africa compared to other countries. Let me give you an example. It could be that you have a dossier that is not going through approval, and then you meet somebody and talk to the right person, the decision maker, and it goes through overnight. Or maybe that person could have specific certifications or approval to get your product approved in that country. Again, all those elements could help you compare to other countries and other parts of the world, where sometimes it is more like a coordinated approach of different stakeholders. Right in Africa specifically, if you want something to be implemented, you have to make sure that you have the right people that could influence that decision"(MRP6).*

**Theme 9: Partnerships and sustainability**

**a) The Role of Partnerships in Strategy Implementation.**

Some participants spoke of the importance of forming partnerships with local organisations and stakeholders in markets where the strategy will be implemented.

*"So, we want first to identify the right partners, and we partner with them to be able to go in specific markets. So that becomes a critical part of our stakeholder engagement and management process" (MRP8).*

MRP4 also provided a perspective concerning the sustainability and long-term impact of what has been implemented. A good return on strategic investment is the ability to sustain the value created for both the customer and the organisation.

> *"I want to achieve X amount of growth in that segment with this product over a particular period, maybe to have a return on the investment. However, if I do not have the people in these countries that are going to do it and market it, and if I do not have the right partnerships and stakeholders that are at ground level who will adopt that this is what we want and what it is that they want then you do all for nothing. And whatever you have implemented will not be sustainable and impactful in the long run; remember strategic objectives are not short-term goals; it is creating value for the customers over a long period"(MRP4).*

To further expand on the above perspective on long-term growth and using partnerships for sustainability and scalability, MRP4 added:

> *"The adoption at that stage for the external and the internal people, if you bring them on board right up front, makes it easier for the strategy to be sustainable. So, I believe that you need to identify the stakeholders first and which various Milestones or phases they play in, and you bring on board as many as you can right from the start because, through that communication and onboarding, you create an environment that makes the implementation of the strategy sustainable. From a shared value perspective, these same stakeholders can become long-term partners for future implementation, and you do not need to go through the process of building new relationships all the time"(MRP4).*

### Theme 10: Critical Drivers of SM for Strategy Implementation in Africa

The researcher aimed first to identify the key drivers of stakeholder management and then investigate how these drivers and stakeholder management influence the strategy implementation in Africa. When asked to identify the most critical drivers for stakeholder management and strategy implementation, participants provided answers summarised in Table 4.

As indicated in Table 4 below, ***Communication, Engagement*** and ***the Environment*** were identified by nine participants, while ***Alignment*** and ***Stakeholder Mapping*** were identified by eight and seven participants, respectively. One important observation is that these five drivers ranked higher, as more than half the sample population identified them. Five participants identified four other drivers: ***Relationship Building***, ***Resource Availability, Stakeholder Analysis*** and ***Organisational Factors***, which are not listed in order of importance, considering they have an equal number of recurrences.

Three participants identified two other drivers as drivers, including ***Technology Infrastructure*** and ***Transparency***. Despite being identified by only three participants, the researcher deemed it essential to list them as key drivers; the rationale for this is the rule of three, which is made to believe that everything that comes in three appears to be factual or accurate because three is the smallest number of elements required to create a pattern.

For completeness and accuracy purposes, the researcher added the 12 other variables that were listed as drivers for SM by at least one or two participants. These drivers included ***Perception, Capabilities and skills, Ability to create value, Strategic clarity, Trust and credibility, Stakeholder centricity, Situational analysis, Quality of service, Leadership abilities, Effective planning, Credibility,*** and ***Awareness***. Because these drivers have less than three counts, they were not represented as key or stand-alone drivers in Figure 11, illustrating all the drivers consolidated in a framework. However, the researcher did not exclude them as part of the findings but added them as factors under key drivers on the framework depending on the context and explanation by the participant(s) who initially identified them.

**Table 5**: Key drivers of stakeholder management for strategy implementation in the context of Africa as identified by participants.
**Source**: Consolidated by Author

| MRP1 | MRP2 | MRP3 | MRP4 | MRP5 | MRP6 | MRP7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stakeholder mapping<br>Engagement<br>The environment<br>Stakeholder analysis<br>Communication | Communication<br>Resource availability<br>The environment<br>Quality of service<br>Stakeholder centricity<br>Engagement<br>Ability to create value. | Transparency<br>Resource availability<br>Trust and credibility<br>The environment<br>Alignment<br>Stakeholder mapping<br>Organisational factors<br>Communication<br>Engagement | Leadership abilities<br>Resource availability<br>Organisational factors<br>Capabilities and skills | Stakeholder mapping<br>Situational analysis<br>Communication<br>Engagement<br>The environment<br>Transparency<br>Stakeholder mapping<br>Alignment<br>Organisational factors | Ability to create value.<br>Relationship building<br>Communication<br>Engagement<br>Technology<br>Stakeholder mapping<br>Alignment | Stakeholder centricity<br>Engagement<br>Communication<br>Stakeholder analysis<br>Alignment<br>The environment<br>Trust and credibility<br>Relationship Building<br>Transparency |
| **MRP8** | **MRP9** | **MRP10** | **MRP11** | **MRP12** | **MRP13** | |
| Communication*<br>Engagement<br>Alignment<br>Stakeholder mapping<br>The environment<br>Stakeholder analysis<br>Strategic clarity<br>Building relationships | Credibility<br>Stakeholder centricity<br>Communication<br>Engagement<br>Awareness<br>Alignment<br>Perception<br>The environment<br>Technology and infrastructure | Alignment<br>Strategic clarity<br>Resources availability<br>The environment<br>Organisational factors<br>Relationship building<br>Perception | Technology and infrastructure<br>Resources availability<br>Engagement<br>The environment<br>Stakeholder mapping<br>Organisational factors<br>Relationship building<br>Capabilities and skills | Engagement<br>Stakeholder mapping<br>Stakeholder Analysis<br>Effective Planning | Alignment<br>Communication<br>Stakeholder centricity<br>Technology and infrastructure | |

Important driver for stakeholder management
Critical driver for strategy implementation
*Indicates driver which is critical for both SM and SI

**List of drivers by number of recurrence and citation by participants**

Communication (9)
Engagement (9)
The environment (9)
Alignment (8)
Stakeholder Mapping (7)
Relationship building (5)
Stakeholder analysis (5)
Resource availability (5)
Organisational factors (5)
Stakeholder centricity (4)
Technology and Infrastructure (3)
Transparency (3)
Perception (2)
Capabilities and skills (2)
Ability to create value (2)
Strategic clarity (2)
Trust and credibility (2)
Stakeholder centricity (2)
Situational analysis (1)
Quality of service (1)
Leadership abilities (1)
Effective planning (1)
Credibility (1)
Awareness (1)

## 5.4 Summary of research findings

All the drivers listed in Table 4 were then illustrated in Figure 13 to represent the key drivers identified in the findings. The researcher deemed it important to add interdependencies in the form of solid and dotted lines to explain the relationship between the drivers. The dotted lines indicate interdependencies between the drivers, where the effectiveness or availability of one driver affects or depends on another driver. For example, the findings showed that stakeholder mapping is helpful for communication, as it enables the stakeholder manager to tailor communication and make it fit for purpose. Another observation was that technology and infrastructure, which enables communication for geographically dispersed stakeholders, are drivers that are dependent on (financial) resource availability. The solid lines indicate the direct influence or impact of the driver on stakeholder management during strategy implementation in Africa.

Another observation was that resource availability is a driver of stakeholder engagement, as mentioned by multiple participants, because, in Africa, many stakeholders are only interested in engaging with companies with resources to invest in them or their businesses. It was also highlighted that stakeholder analysis, especially prioritisation and stakeholder centricity, is vital for stakeholder managers to decide which relationships are critical for the implementation and how to build on those.

However, stakeholder analysis can only be done if stakeholder mapping and identification have been done. The interdependency between transparency and alignment is equally important to highlight because unless the company and its representatives are transparent on their strategic intent and show integrity, there can never be complete alignment, and lack of alignment will adversely impact stakeholder engagement. Therefore, all the drivers, including the external environment in which the organisation operates and the internal organisational factors, influence strategy implementation.

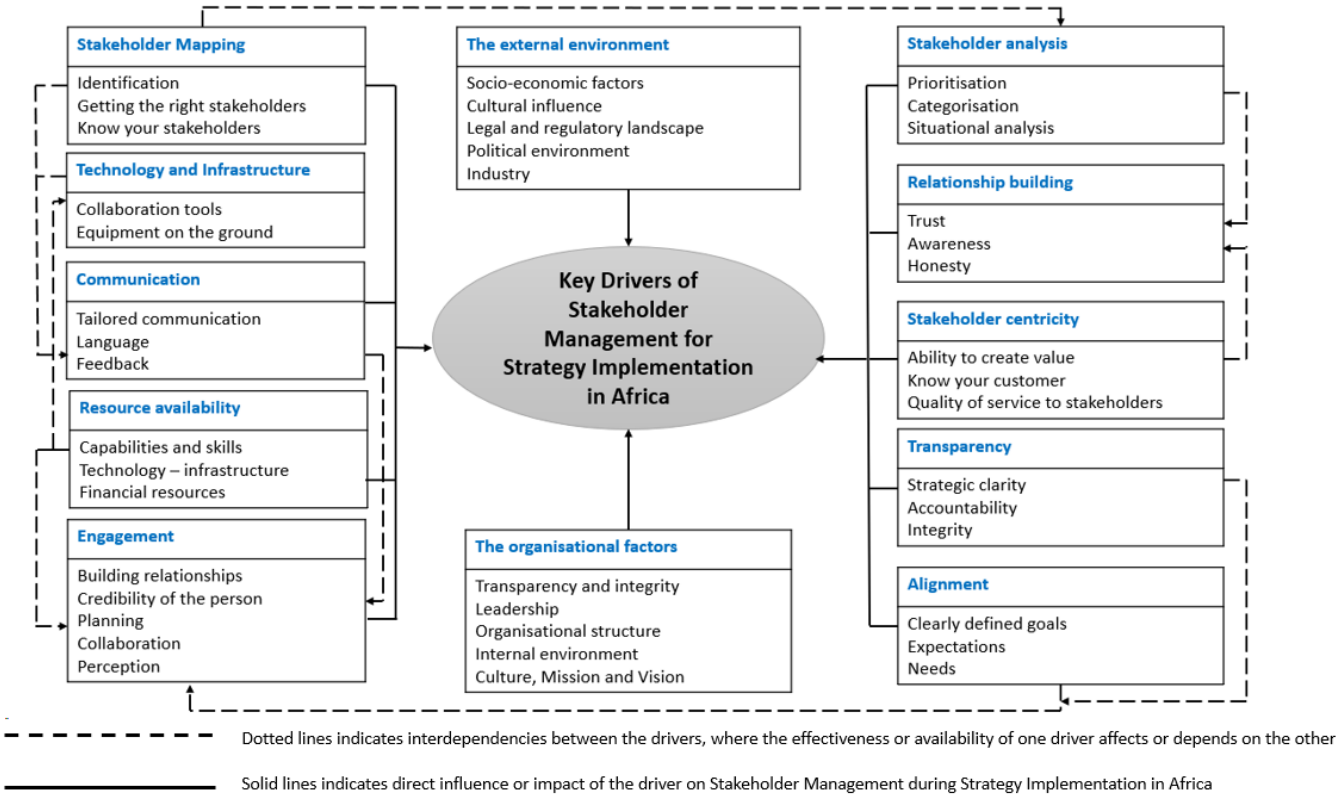


**Figure 13:** Key drivers of stakeholder management: The perspective of African strategic managers
**Source:** Developed by Author

### The Conceptual Framework

To ensure the comprehensiveness of the investigation, the researcher also found it useful to investigate the other mediating factors and challenges of stakeholder managers. Strategy implementers encounter in the process of SM and SI. These challenges were explained in detail under previous themes. Every strategic process happens with challenges. To provide future researchers and strategy professionals who work in Africa with a comprehensive framework useful to navigate the strategic management process, the researcher integrated all the research findings, including the key drivers, the challenges, and other mediating factors that affect and influence strategy implementation. Figure 14 provides a graphical representation of the conceptual framework with a detailed list of the challenges and mediating factors as generated from insights gathered from the analysis of the cases.

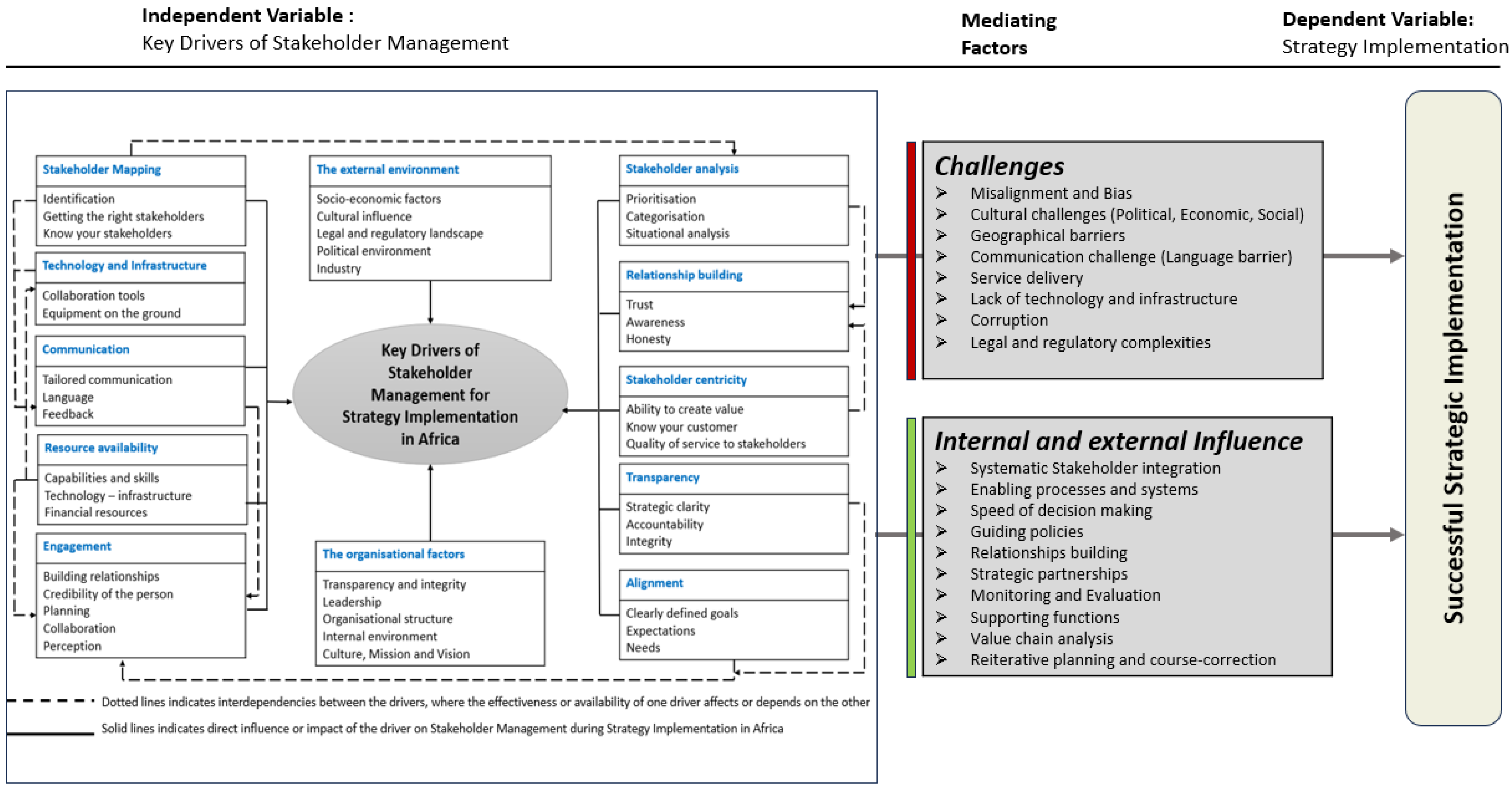


***Figure 14***: Conceptual framework - Key drivers of stakeholder management and its influence on strategy implementation in the African context

***Source:*** Develop by Author

# CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSIONS

## ‘6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings reported in chapter five. It focuses on triangulating the themes derived from the data analysis process and the literature review to extend the understanding of the factors that drive stakeholder management and the relationship between these factors, stakeholder management and strategy implementation in the chosen context, a highly volatile and complex SSA region. Establishing the interdependencies between SM and SI and the factors affecting this relationship bridges a gap in management theory and managerial practices specific to the SSA region, which the researcher aimed to do from the onset of the study. Additionally, this paper highlights areas of future research and provides insights into what factors are critical and have more influence on strategy implementation within the SSA context.

The current literature presented opportunities for further research on the operationalisation of SM and the role and importance of SM as a managerial tool to support strategy management and value creation, as stated in Pedrini and Ferri's (2019) invitation for future studies on the SM theory. In addition, understanding and providing a comprehensive paper on the findings of this research paves the way for managers to better integrate and apply SM in their operational activities. Additionally, as elaborated in chapters one and two, Sedmark (2021) provided a very concise explanation of the practical implications of effective stakeholder management integration in the organisation's strategic planning and implementation to create value.

The subsequent section of this chapter compares the findings from the research with the constructs and the findings from the literature review as outlined in chapter two by using profound reflective interpretations to explain the data in conjunction with theoretical insights. The findings are discussed according to the themes from the study instead of the research questions to show consistency with the structure adopted in Chapter Five; the researcher established a clear link between the discussions by themes and the research questions identified in Chapters Two and Three.

## 6.2 Discussion of research findings by themes

**Theme 1: The internal environment**

**a) The Role of Organisational Culture and Structure**

Culture was identified in the findings as one of the critical elements determining the impact of organisational drivers on SM when implementing strategy. In addition, within the context of Africa, internal and external culture catalyses strategic management processes. The findings highlighted the importance of an inclusive culture for sustained collaboration and engagement for successful implementation. This is consistent with the literature about organisational culture being a key determinant of stakeholders' perception of an organisation and a deciding factor on stakeholders' decision to engage with the organisation.

The findings also highlighted that the right culture helps organisations align with stakeholders better. It promotes a psychologically safe environment where stakeholders can articulate what they feel is important; leaders and managers can also communicate and get buy-in on the organisation's purpose, vision, and aspirations. This finding confirms the arguments from previous scholars about culture being a driver of strategic alignment as it influences managerial abilities to align strategic intent, dynamic capabilities, and competitive priorities with stakeholders to achieve organisational strategic implementation and organisational goals. For effective collaboration, transparency should be engrained within the organisation's culture.

Surprisingly, a finding that did not come out too strongly in the literature and is now an extension of the literature is the peculiarity of the African culture, specifically in the context of strategic management. Managers should avoid adapting what works in foreign organisational cultures to the African context. In the case of MNEs and international corporations, the organisational culture will significantly differ based on the country, so the culture in a European branch will be different from the African branch even though it is the same company. Therefore, exercising cultural awareness and sensitivity within the organisation is critical in managing stakeholders in various contexts.

**b) Leadership and Decision-making**

Strategic management requires responsible and strategic leadership to achieve organisations' strategic outcomes. Strategic leaders play a pivotal role in mobilising the required resources and influencing stakeholders' participation and collaboration through their ability to translate strategic intent and plans into activities. The evidence from the findings is consistent with this argument from the literature. The findings found that strategic leadership is important when managing stakeholders. A leader who understands the strategy and can converge that into execution plans while identifying the right resources and people with the right attributes to drive implementation is critical for SM's and SI's success. Another finding suggests that stakeholders are more inclined to listen and adhere to what the leaders say, making the leadership skills of strategic managers critical, as stated in the literature. The findings highlighted that strategic leadership plays an even more significant role in African cultures, where implementation relies more on people than processes.

**Theme 2: Stakeholder Mapping**

**a) Planning the Stakeholder Management Process**

The research findings suggest that stakeholder management requires rigorous and careful planning because of the impact of the primary environment and macro and micro factors, including culture, regulatory and political instability, and the complexity in emerging economies, including Africa. Additional findings indicate that planning is the first step in establishing alignment and needs, and identifying stakeholders and establishing and communicating the organisation's overarching goals and objectives are vital in managing stakeholders.

These findings are consistent with the literature's view on SM planning as a critical step in any organisational process. The role planning plays is to identify and outline critical elements needed to execute organisational activities, including assessing and aligning stakeholders' and organisational mutual goals and expectations, enabling processes, and identifying available resources and people needed for the execution (Bal *et al.*, 2013). The findings are also consistent with the literature's view on strategic planning as a process by which an organisation actively analyses the environment and its stakeholders to better develop strategies and appropriate responses in terms of identifying and managing stakeholders needed in the strategic processes and getting them to coalesce around the strategic objectives.

**b) Identifying and Understanding Stakeholders**

The importance of stakeholder identification as a driver of stakeholder mapping came out very strongly in the study's findings. The evidence from the study confirms observations from the literature that identifying stakeholders right from the beginning and early in the strategic process is essential to the SM planning process (Achterkamp & Vos, 2007). Additionally, the findings show that identifying stakeholders is even more critical in the African environment, given the complexities and non-standardisation of processes. The findings also confirm the risk associated with the incorrect identification of stakeholders and its negative implications on the success of both SM and SI. In essence, identification must be done correctly to ensure the SM process is successful, which will positively impact strategy implementation.

Surprisingly, the findings suggested that identifying stakeholders is more than just discovering their interests and role in the grand scheme of things, as alluded to in the literature. It should be about getting to know stakeholders as people, knowing their individuality, values, opinions, and most importantly, their perspective on the strategy, and ascertaining early in the process if they are supporters or potential opponents. Knowing this will help you prioritise your stakeholders and how to manage them.

**c) Stakeholder Analysis and Prioritisation**

Companies must engage multiple stakeholders simultaneously, which can be a daunting task, thus making prioritising stakeholders a critical step in the process of managing stakeholders. As highlighted in the literature, situational and stakeholder analysis emphasising saliency, influence, and importance of stakeholders (Wood *et al*., 2018) makes the prioritisation and integration process more efficient, especially in resource-constrained settings. The study's findings are consistent with this argument; the findings highlight that strategic managers from SSA markets share the perspective that the earlier stakeholders are identified, the quicker they can be categorised and prioritised based on their influence from high to low. The findings also confirm that categorising stakeholders helps in weighting them based on their impact on your business, both the impact of success and of failure and that identifying the right stakeholders who are fit for purpose, whether due to their level of influence, power or impact should then be a priority from a management and resourced perspective as determined in the literature.

The combination of stakeholders' saliency and attributes enables a more comprehensive and accurate managerial assessment and strategic decision-making when allocating resources where they are most needed and valuable. When stakeholders are effectively prioritised, it becomes easier to integrate them into various steps of the organisation's strategic management process. Thus, doing that helps to see which stakeholders should be prioritised and engaged as soon as possible in the strategic process and what opportunities exist for relationship building. The findings also highlighted those categorising stakeholders helps in weighting them based on their impact on your business, both the impact of success and of failure, and that identifying the right stakeholders who are fit for purpose, whether due to their level of influence, power or impact should then be a priority from a management and resource perspective. In addition, the study's findings confirm that the level of influence and saliency of stakeholders dictates the effort required in managing that stakeholder and the resources committed to ensuring a successful stakeholder relationship and SM process.

An observation from the findings which is contradictory to the literature is the perspective that, sometimes, even when understanding the needs and interests of shareholders, managers are unable to meet those needs as interactions are guided by very defined available resources, making early identification and categorisation not a guarantee for successful stakeholder management. Local stakeholders sometimes have unrealistic expectations, and engagement and management become challenging if no guarantee of satisfaction is provided from the onset of discussions.

**Theme 3: Stakeholder engagement**

**a) Motivating factors for stakeholders to engage.**

According to the literature, transparency, and organisational efficiency drive stakeholders' perception of the organisation, influencing stakeholders' willingness to engage. Additionally, scholars have argued that disclosure and transparency positively affect stakeholders' perceptions, thereby improving stakeholder engagement (Schnakenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). This is confirmed by the research findings, highlighting the importance of transparency and trust in an environment prone to a lack of trust and governance like Africa.

The findings confirm that a culture of mistrust requires transparency in terms of approach, activities, objectives, and goals to encourage stakeholders' Engagement, as explained in the literature. Scholars have argued that transparency influences trust, thus improving relationships between organisations and stakeholders, especially at a strategic level, leading to sustained stakeholder engagement and performance. Companies that are transparent appear to be trustworthy and better perceived by stakeholders, a perspective confirmed by the research findings.

**b) Subject Matter Expertise and Competence**

As highlighted in the literature, a certain level of expertise, competence, and capabilities is required of organisational managers who engage in leading projects (Bhatt & Sable, 2022) because strategic objectives are implemented and translated into actionable projects prior to their implementation. Literature has identified decision-making, team management, commitment, conflict management, problem-solving and leadership competencies necessary for managing stakeholders. The research findings confirm the importance of competence as a critical driver. However, functional and industry credibility were identified as essential drivers for stakeholder engagement in Africa, a perspective which the researcher did not discover during the literature, notably because of limited research of SM in the African context and is now an extension of the literature.

**c) Stakeholder Centricity**

The findings from the research show that customer and stakeholder centricity are critical during stakeholder engagement because they increase managers' ability to meet stakeholders' expectations and result in stakeholder retention and partnership continuity. Stakeholder retention and partnership sustainability can translate to business sustainability and long-term value creation. Organisations that successfully engage stakeholders have better chances of managing them and delivering on stakeholders' needs on behalf of the organisation. These findings corroborate the current literature on stakeholder centricity, which identifies stakeholder centricity as a holistic approach to stakeholder engagement and an enabler of the organisation's efforts to put stakeholders' needs at the centre of their strategic planning and endeavours to create value (Gummersson, 2008). As stated in the findings, in Africa, stakeholder managers need to understand stakeholders to be understood by stakeholders.

**d) Building Trust, Buy-in and Relationships.**

The literature identifies transparency and the resulting trust (Hillman & Keim, 2001) as the foundation for stakeholder relationships, as multiple scholars have identified. Relationships among stakeholders are the basis of their continuous participation with companies and for establishing customer relations that drive financial performance. This is substantiated by the findings of the research, which suggest that for stakeholders to consider engaging, there must be a rapport and relationship between them and the organisation or whoever is representing the organisation.

Another argument from the literature is the impact of relationship building on the company's ability to acquire and sustain its competitive advantage because it can constitute intangible and socially complex resources that competitors may not acquire or duplicate (Kaplan *et al*., 1996). Relationship building due to interactions between firms and stakeholders can result in relational values, making them invaluable as they are not easily duplicated as a value from transactional interactions. The findings from the literature suggest that by building relationships, organisations are helping themselves to build stakeholder relationships that will be much more sustainable for the business in the long term and will result in better output in terms of value-creation for all parties. This is mainly because stakeholders with whom organisations have an established relationship can provide insights into market conditions and opportunities that the organisation may need help identifying. As a result of established relationships, stakeholders are also more inclined to navigate and address challenges that occur during the strategic management process with organisations. This corroborates the literature findings on relational value for the organisation.

In contradiction to, and a new extension of the literature, the findings from the study highlight the importance of building relationships over and above essential professional context when operating in Africa because rapport rather than relationship is critical in the African context. Stakeholders are interested in knowing people and their individuality instead of their professional attributes.

**e) Stakeholder Perception**

Perception in an organisation is determined by the importance stakeholders attach to specific organisational dimensions and is a driver of stakeholder engagement and management. Organisations must consider how they are perceived internally and externally and integrate the perception into their corporate strategy. The literature identified sustainable development, cultural context, organisational drivers, digital transformation, efficiency, and productivity as factors influencing stakeholders' perceptions.

Literature notes that the higher the efficiency and productivity of the organisation, the higher the likelihood of stakeholders remaining loyal and supportive towards the organisation, thus enabling the sustainability and longevity of the stakeholders' engagement and business relationship. The findings of the research are consistent with this view from the literature. The findings suggest that the organisation's ability to create value and meet stakeholders' needs indicates productivity and efficiency. If the stakeholder perceives that the organisation cares about them and creates value, they will likely engage with it.

From a cultural perspective, the findings confirm that cultural factors like transparency, credibility and integrity determine the company's reputation and influence perception, as argued in the literature. The findings from the research are that to succeed in uncertain markets like Africa; one needs to constantly ask if the needs and interests of the people are considered and if the communities perceive the organisation positively because of their social impact. Suppose the perception is that the company only cares about themselves and does nothing for the people. In that case, stakeholders will not want to engage with the company, thus complicating the stakeholder management process.

**f) Communication**

Literature highlights the importance of effective communication and its fundamental role in exchanging information to increase stakeholder engagement and alignment. However, how communication is planned is just as important as what needs to be communicated. Tailored communication based on context, including alignment, relationship, and interactions, drives effective Engagement. This is fully substantiated by the findings, which state that there is a direct correlation between communication based on stakeholder mapping and engagement. As highlighted in the findings, planning how to engage your audience based on the output of your stakeholder mapping ensures that the right message is sent to the right group of stakeholders.

Another critical argument from the literature is the importance of proactive stakeholder communication (Bushuyev & Shkuro, 2019). According to the literature, proactive communication entails always keeping in touch even when the need is not apparent, instead of communicating only when needed and sometimes during crisis management. Stakeholders always need to feel important, and proactively communicating can result in information discovery that could be important in planning strategic processes. This is evident from the study's findings, which confirm that communication should be part of the organisation's processes, so stakeholders are engaged not only when needed but also continuously. Another finding which corroborates this argument is the perspective from participants that in highly volatile markets like SSA, things change rapidly, and the need to educate stakeholders on upcoming changes continuously requires proactive communication, so stakeholders are not informed after the changes happen.

An aspect of effective communication from the literature is the importance of integrating culture into communication strategies from organisational and national perspectives. Based on the current literature, organisations need to consider the type of organisational culture and the cultural context of the country they operate in, stating that some cultures may require one communication style over the other based on the values, beliefs and overarching norms within the context (Prajogo & McDermott, 2005). If communication is not tailored to the cultural context, stakeholders with communication preferences in that context will not be able to engage effectively. The findings of the research are fully aligned with this perspective. The findings confirm that the organisation's communication plan should be fit for purpose based on the market or country in which the strategy is being implemented and should be part of the strategy to grow into the markets.

One highlight from the findings that further corroborates the importance of integrating cultural aspects into the strategic communication plan is that the way you communicate makes all the difference in SSA because the communication style best fitted for a particular tribe will be unsuitable to a different tribe. In addition, how the organisation communicates with older people should be different from how communication is done with the younger generation—the level of granularity of cultural and contextual consideration matters.

A fourth point of communication identified in the literature is the effective use of communication channels to disseminate information to relevant stakeholder groups (Chinyio & Olomolaiye, 2009). The channels used should be selected based on the intended audience, thus limiting the possibility of wrongful communication and the issues that may arise from communicating to an audience using a specific channel. Using the right channel is conducive to effective Engagement as it reduces the likelihood of stakeholders' frustrations due to a void or gap in communication. Similarly, the findings from the research elaborate on the importance of using the proper channels as building blocks for effective engagement, as it enables the appropriate distribution of information and prevents frustration. From the findings, effective communication could include speaking clearly or writing well, and one might communicate very effectively but may only communicate the right message if channels are used accordingly. A message can be perceived as wrong if communicated in a particular method, consistent with the literature stance on communication channels.

**Theme 4 and Theme 8: Barriers to effective stakeholder management and Strategy Implementation**

One of the study's key findings are the extreme similarities between stakeholder management challenges and strategy implementation. When asked about challenges to SM and examples provided when answering questions on strategy implementation, the participants alluded to the same challenges, albeit using different explanations to elaborate. As a result, the research deemed it essential to combine the two themes in discussing these findings to avoid duplication and unnecessary reiteration in consideration of the readers. The challenges identified as barriers to SI and SM include

Misalignment and bias, cultural challenges, lack of resources, legal and regulatory challenges, geographical challenges, and communication challenges.

**a) Misalignment and Bias**

As elaborated in the literature section of the paper, multiple researchers identified multiple challenges to SM and SI, amongst which misalignment in expectations. When expectations, interests, objectives and goals are not aligned, it can lead to distrust, conflicts, blame, and frustration during the management of strategic processes (Baker & Singh, 2019). A perspective fully corroborated by the findings of this research, which stated that alignment is a big challenge because, ultimately, stakeholders tend to see things differently, which affects the control of SM and SI processes. Although alignment is critical, sometimes potential institutional processes and limitations may not facilitate the organisations' alignment with external partners' expectations.

A few drivers of misalignment are the late integration of stakeholders in the strategic management processes, lack of effective communication and the lack of situational or stakeholder analysis, all of which can impede the process of SM and SI. In addition, an excerpt from the literature confirms that very often, when stakeholders have specific expectations not disclosed or considered during the organisation's strategic process, the resulting misalignment leads to implementation issues, which can significantly derail progress. Few of the participants from the study corroborate this perspective by highlighting the importance of having managers and strategic leads involved in the strategy formulation process to ensure the effective dissemination of information and management of resources for SI. From the findings, it was evident that managers are often in perfect alignment with the strategic teams and the stakeholders when they are involved in both the strategy formulation and implementation processes, making the management of everyone involved easier.

**b) Cultural challenges**

In the literature on SM and SI, Culture has been identified as a critical barrier to stakeholder management within the African context, with literature highlighting the interlinkage of both organisational culture and country culture, creating a cause-effect relationship between both types of culture and strategic processes. Poverty and limited resources (Chunga *et al*., 2023) can lead to employees being overworked and over-stretched, which may result in unhappiness, grievances, and frustration, thus encumbering the process of SM and SI. This argument is corroborated by the findings, which highlighted that stakeholder engagement is adversely affected in organisations with a weak prioritisation culture and where everyone is stretched beyond capacity, sometimes due to resource scarcity or excessive workload. It is challenging for stakeholder managers to balance conflicting availabilities and unhappy employees. Unhappy employees tend to be counter-productive and opposed to progress in the long run, and if a course correction is not initiated, it is detrimental to SI.

Another cultural challenge of SM and SI highlighted in the literature and confirmed by the research findings is corruption (Chunga et al.,2023; Saizarbitoria, 2011). According to the literature, corruption, poor regulatory framework, and regulatory enforcement are key barriers in the African context. The culture of corruption is deep-rooted in African countries and communities due to unstable politics and lack of governance and social. The rising income gap, cost of living and widening social gaps force people into unethical practices to raise more money to afford a particular lifestyle.

As a confirmation of this theory, some research participants shared insights into the impact of bribery and corruption on their organisation's operations in some African countries, noting the regulatory and legal parameters as critical influencers of public-private partnerships. Therefore, it is vital to understand the culture, regulatory, legal, compliance, and business landscape, as well as that of the stakeholders and their mindsets, when planning strategic processes

**c) Silos and Cliques**

The formation of silos and cliques is dominant in multiple organisations based on the culture and ways of working. Some research into organisational culture has found that various stakeholders often work in silos, with a high prevalence of this phenomenon in African countries. As elaborated in the literature, the presence of silos impedes collaboration during SI processes and the coalescence towards common objectives (Angelstam *et al*., 2017). This is confirmed by the findings of the research, which shed light on the presence and prevalence of silos and cliques in SSA because of cultural and language affinities between stakeholders. Silos and cliques are a challenge because it requires more effort for a manager who is not necessarily part of that culture to build relationships or get people to work together, and that is both in the operational and strategic context when doing business in Africa. Some findings state that the silo mentality is a daily struggle with cliques forming within the corporate setting.

**d) Geographical Challenges**

The literature identified geographical challenges as barriers to SM and SI, stating that physical distance introduces multiple barriers to SM, including communication challenges, relationship-building challenges, and reliance on electronic communication tools (Damian & Zowghi, 2002). Electronic communication during SM can sometimes be challenging when no rapport has been built due to the lack of face-to-face interaction, and stakeholders must collaborate with individuals they have never met. The human-to-human connection fostered by face-to-face interaction is missing and can be challenging for stakeholders who strive to build rapport building and establish relationships. In corroboration of this, the findings highlighted that the human connection with cultural affinities and similarities is critical in building relationships, which is not evident when working with remote teams. This is particularly important in organisations with geographically dispersed stakeholders.

One aspect of the geographical impact on SM and SI is geographical challenges due to cultural diversity (Damian & Zowghi, 2002). The presence of multiple cultures and languages affects global collaboration, as highlighted in the literature. As noted in the findings, the human connection helps in understanding the individuals within the context of the culture that they come from. In Africa, many different cultures affect how stakeholders differ from market to market, and it can be challenging to manage stakeholders considering all the cultures and how they influence Engagement.

Furthermore, in corroboration to the impact of cultural diversity, the findings highlighted that working with different countries posed a considerable challenge for strategy implementers who are physically based in different countries. Managers must deal with challenges that come with a lack of physical proximity and working remotely, as well as challenges that result from the lack of harmonisation in legislation enforced in different jurisdictions.

A third challenge due to geographical dispersion is the lack of technological and collaboration tools, the inability to use those tools and the impact of time zones. The difference in time zones makes it impossible to reach out to stakeholders when immediate contact is required as part of crisis management or urgency associated with certain organisational activities. The findings are consistent with this theory by elaborating how many managers working internationally and having to manage stakeholders in different time zones faced challenges regularly. From a technology and collaboration perspective, the findings confirmed that the lack of technological tools due to resource limitations in Africa posed a challenge for SM and SI because some local companies or partners either lack the tools or others cannot use them effectively. The lack of technological advancement and the inability of local stakeholders to use tools at their disposal in many African countries can be a challenge, an important one at that, due to the heavy reliance of organisations on technology to do business in Africa, as corroborated in the findings.

**e) Resources Challenges**

Resource constraints, including limited finance and a shortage of skills for the workforce, are encumbering organisation-stakeholder relationships and strategy implementation. When an organisation has limited financial resources, finding cheaper or cost-effective solutions to implementation becomes unavoidable, which may result in sub-standard delivery of outcomes. This can result from a struggling economy, budget cuts, and other measures organisations take to ensure the company remains afloat. As an extension of the literature, the findings suggested that resourcing could pose a challenge to SM and SI when service delivery is involved in meeting contractual obligations regarding the quality of goods and services to customers (external stakeholders). Maintaining a certain level of service and customer satisfaction consistently can be challenging within the African context due to the reliance on third parties and external service providers who do not necessarily have the required resources to support the organisation in implementing organisational activities.

**f) Communication Challenges**

The literature identified multiple communication challenges, including language barriers, lack of tools to enable seamless communication, communication challenges due to cultural diversity, inappropriate use of communication channels and the inefficiency in tailoring communication based on the audience. The research's findings highlight that without communication, employees who are required to implement strategies will not understand what is required of them. Communication efficiency supports the alignment of expectations and the dissemination of information by a leader. Findings suggest that communicating expectations in Africa is a big challenge; communicating expectations in a language people understand is critical but not evident.

Another research finding that corroborates the literature view on communication challenges is the need for access to the right technology and infrastructure for communication and collaboration. This poses a considerable challenge in managing stakeholders for effective implementation in Africa. The technology, software, and platforms exist and can be supplied locally, but the cost associated with acquiring those prevents local companies from acquiring them, as financial resources are a challenge for most developing countries due to the economic landscape in Africa. This is a critical challenge in the African context.

## **<u>Construct 2: Strategy Implementation</u>**

### Theme 5: The External Environment

#### *Strategic adaptability*

Organisations exist within the confines of the external environment and the industry within which they operate, making It unavoidable to consider the various aspects of the environment and the industry when formulating and implementing strategy. Strategic and senior managers must consider the macro and micro factors, including the political-legislative, socio-economic, technological, industry, and stakeholders within the external environment when engaging in strategic management processes (Voiculeţ *et al*., 2010). Therefore, organisations must ensure a high level of awareness and sensitivity to stimuli and continuously adapt their strategies (Waruwu *et al*., 2016) to meet the changes in the environment due to turbulence caused by changes in technology and economic, political, and legislative factors.

According to the study findings and in confirmation of the theory in the current literature, companies must ensure that their strategy and implementation plans remain adaptable and fluid because of constant changes in the environment. Strategic operational and planning agility and adaptability are critical in Africa; one must be able to quickly adapt to changes and navigate the nuances of the environment. Furthermore, consistent with the literature, the findings also identified African countries' cultural, political, legal, regulatory, and socio-economic landscapes as notable factors to assess and include in the organisation's strategic planning. All these factors greatly influence how local stakeholders in those markets operate and whether they are fit for purpose when collaborating for implementation.

#### *Situational and Environmental Analysis*

One central argument in the literature on strategy implementation in volatile markets is the criticality of a thorough situational and external environmental analysis because change is so constant that the environment needs to be continuously assessed (Wheelen *et al.,* 2012). The literature review explains that companies must leverage their relationships and stakeholders to navigate the environment and implement their strategies. In SM and SI, situational and external environmental analysis is unavoidable for identifying the most powerful and influential stakeholders within the environment and the industry and the available opportunities and threats to strategic processes. By identifying external stakeholders, organisations can better shape their engagement and implementation strategies to factor in all the external stakeholders, including the government, competitors, customers, suppliers, local partnerships, and regulators at the forefront of the industry and the government institutions.

The above remarks on the importance of situational external analysis to assess changes in the ecosystem and organisations working with stakeholders to navigate these changes were highly substantiated by the research findings. The findings alluded to the African market being volatile and complex due to the political landscape and the constant disruptions and changes happening in the region. Further confirmation of the literature by the findings highlighting that situational analysis and assessing the ecosystem is important when formulating and implementing strategy in Africa, notably because doing an environmental assessment allows the information to flow externally and internally. According to the findings, a big part of stakeholder management and strategy implementation in SSA is driven primarily by the primary environment, and factoring in the environment enables the consideration of the broader context.

***External Stakeholders' Identification and Trade-offs***

The literature review and the research study discussed the importance of identifying and managing stakeholders at great length. Multiple scholars argued that it is paramount for organisations to use systems thinking and consider external factors when managing powerful and influential stakeholders during SI. One strategy identified in the literature to effectively manage stakeholders in developing countries where the opposition and influence of the government and public administration are prevalent is trade-offs and negotiations (Chinyio & Akintoye, 2008). In confirmation of this, the research findings highlight the need to trade off in highly political markets, where companies must balance the ability to keep stakeholders interested and simultaneously get what they need from the stakeholders. The studies also highlight the need for critical thinking in identifying which stakeholder relationships need to be invested in, which need to be relinquished, and when it is the right moment to engage or disengage stakeholders based on changes in the business environment.

***Public affairs and External Engagement***

To balance the open system between the organisation and the environment, companies must establish public relations and define strategies to engage publicly to sustain their strategic partnerships and stakeholder relationships. The public relations managers are tasked with building sustainable relationships with key players in the government and industries to ensure that the organisation's strategic objectives are promoted and highlighted in the external space. Relationship building is critical in ensuring the interconnectedness of the organisation with its external environment (Richardson & Hinton, 2015), especially in terms of turbulent changes and risk and reputational management at a strategic level. Public relations and stakeholder management are the gateway to representing an organisation externally and ensuring buy-in and support from key stakeholders and policy shapers.

Insights gathered from the findings are consistent with the theory that when implementing strategy in Africa, organisations and their representatives must have excellent engagement skills, enabling them to navigate the complex and volatile landscape of the region. Building relationships and engaging externally requires effectively using organisations' public affairs professionals to scan the environment and alert their organisations of impending changes. This is particularly important because the high rate of changes in the region can impact legislation, causing organisations to adjust their operational plans abruptly. Furthermore, the findings that organisations' representatives need to build relationships with government representatives with whom they can rely for support in navigating changes that can impact their organisations also corroborate the findings from the literature review.

**Theme 6: Resourcing for Strategy Implementation**

***Resource Planning and Optimisation during Strategy Formulation***

This study's current literature and findings established that resources and their availability are critical for the success of both SM and SI in every context. However, the socio-political nature of the SSA region may lead to additional resources needed for SI in the region. Resources like skills and capabilities (Rose et al., 2012). including consultancy skills for strategy formulation and technology and financial resources for strategy implementation, have been highlighted as paramount. The literature highlighted the importance of resources, including skills and capabilities in the implementation of strategy necessary, and that the organisational resources must be considered from the conceptualisation phase of any strategy; managers must critically examine what assets, both tangible and intangible and capabilities the organisation, has at its disposal when planning their strategic processes.

This perspective is corroborated by the study's findings, which emphasised that the formulation and implementation processes cannot be dissociated in the context of strategy. Therefore, strategic managers need to plan for resources from the conceptualisation stage. The findings also found that resources are always a key driver regardless of the region or the industry because resource availability impacts both the cost and quality of activities or operations.

Surprisingly, from a resource perspective, the findings suggested that stakeholders can be considered organisational resources because they need stakeholders to function correctly and significantly when shaping and implementing its strategy. However, this finding is an extension of the literature because it is not augmented in the literature review. Stakeholders may be incorrectly categorised as resources because they can choose to withdraw their participation from the strategic process at any time. Although instrumental and indispensable in strategy implementation, stakeholders are not acquired resources; they are voluntary resources on whom the organisation has no claim.

***Skills and Capabilities***

Strategy can only be successfully implemented if the professional skills necessary are available and the stakeholders involved in the implementation possess the required abilities. These can include problem-solving, technical, leadership, and professional skills, including interpersonal and communication skills (Al Darmaki, 2016). The lack of professional skills is one of the biggest challenges to strategy implementation because interpersonal skills enable the ability to work and interact with people. In contrast, communication skills facilitate Engagement and collaboration. Other critical skills instrumental in strategy are managerial skills and the strategic perspective skill, which sets top management apart from middle managers. During strategic management, a strategic perspective enables the incumbent to adopt a strategic instead of a managerial view of the situation, thereby approaching it with the appropriate perspective when implementing.

The theory of skills and capabilities being critical in strategic management processes has been equally substantiated by the findings of the study, which suggest that the right level of skills and the right capabilities impact the ability to implement strategy and that people leading the implementation of strategy must have the right managerial and leadership skills. Additional findings highlighted that the right capabilities and skills are needed for effective implementation. The right leader needs the right resources and people with the right skills and expertise to progress implementation efforts.

***Resources for Digital Transformation***

According to the literature, organisations have been forced to rethink their strategies to integrate the digitalisation of many processes, systems, and operations in an era of digitalisation. Looking back at the impact of COVID-19 on organisations, companies had to integrate various technologies into their operations to continue collaborations with their internal and external stakeholders. Companies that needed to be more agile to adapt to the 'new way of working' suffered a massive loss due to reduced stakeholder engagement.

The findings are consistent with the literature on the importance of technology and digital tools in strategy implementation; the findings also highlighted that organisations had to adjust their strategies to factor in changes due to COVID-19 and heavily invest in technology to enable business continuity. Many MNEs and International companies with headquarters in other countries must manage stakeholders and partners remotely, requiring the right technology and collaboration systems. Companies with limited resources to transform their ways of working remotely face challenges, specifically in SSA, which can result in losing partnership opportunities with local partners and stakeholders in different countries.

**Theme 7: Enabling Systems and Processes.**

Enabling organisational systems and processes plays a fundamental role in strategy implementation, and the lack thereof will impede its success. Organisations must build the proper structure and systems to implement their strategies effectively. Equally critical is developing involvement and integration techniques for stakeholders based on their saliency. The early involvement and integration of stakeholders and the alignment of clear rules are critical for stakeholders' successful integration and participatory process when implementing strategy. However, strategy managers should understand and differentiate which stakeholders should be integrated sooner or later in the strategic process. Suppose the integration techniques and the decision to involve stakeholders early or later in the implementation process are not communicated. In that case, stakeholders may feel excluded from the process, leading to mistrust and consequences on the implementation process.

The research findings are consistent with the literature on integrating systems and processes for strategy implementation, including integrating stakeholders effectively. The findings suggest that organisations must have processes and systems to support implementation. Processes, including guiding policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), are necessary for internal controls of resources, progress monitoring, and reporting on requirements and status. Organisations also allow the systems to alter themselves through the processes and functions of people and the operators to execute appropriately. Leveraging these processes to implement strategic changes is vital for success. In addition, the findings found that stakeholders need guiding policies to help them act and action orientation with incentives to action. Those are critical parts of the implementation.

The findings also substantiated the literature's view on defining and adopting a stakeholder integration and involvement process because the success of the stakeholder management process and strategy implementation hinges on how and when to integrate stakeholders in the strategic cycle. The findings also highlighted that some stakeholders need to be integrated early and others gradually as the implementation proceeds depending on the category of stakeholders; this is important to control a good flow of information on a need-to-know basis and confidentiality when necessary. Sometimes, certain stakeholders are only needed at specific points in strategy, and managers also need to understand what the company wants to achieve from a strategic perspective.

**Construct 3: Linking stakeholder management and strategy implementation.**

**Theme 9: Partnerships and Sustainability**

The literature section of this paper elaborated on the importance of organisations forming partnerships with external organisations to support their strategic management processes and achieve their organisational goals through continuous and monitored collaboration (Leach *et al*.,2002). Strategic and operational partnerships are critical for any organisational success because no private organisation has the in-house expertise, skills, and capabilities to fund, design, plan, build and execute their strategies; thus, entering partnership arrangements combines the strengths, including knowledge, assets, resources and technical expertise of the parties involved and share the challenges between the parties. The argument in the literature on the need to clarify the time and efforts needed to co-create multi-stakeholder strategies, mutual objectives, mutual expectations, and the risks and opportunities to sustain the partnership.

During the implementation of strategy, managers must be able to manage multiple partnerships effectively to not only sustain buy-in throughout the process but also ensure sustainability and long-term impact and value creation. To achieve this, adequate resources from all partners involved must be allocated to the partnership, failing which, implementation of mutual goals will be impeded. Monitoring the partnerships, objectives, and KPIs is necessary to ensure that the goals set out to be achieved are met and that both parties are interested in continuing to collaborate.

The findings from the research highlighted the importance of forming partnerships with local organisations and stakeholders in markets where the strategy is to be implemented. However, organisations must first identify the right partners in specific markets, which must be part of the stakeholder engagement and management process. The findings also alluded to the importance of partnerships for sustainability and scalability, stating that a company can achieve long-term impact only through established sustainable networks and partnerships. Therefore, a high level of investment in relationship building and resources is necessary to ensure the longevity of these partnerships, mainly because a lot of time and effort goes into forming these partnerships. These findings fully corroborate and confirm the literature and highlight the practical implications of partnerships for implementation.

**Theme 10: Critical drivers of SM for strategy implementation in Africa**

To integrate SM and SI, the researcher added this theme to discuss the findings that address the main research question, which is to establish the drivers of SM that influence SI. As identified in the literature and substantiated by this study, the drivers below were critical not only to the process of SM but also to the success of strategy implementation in Africa. Chapters five and six detail how each driver influences and affects the process of managing stakeholders when implementing strategy, so this sub-section aims to summarise the drivers for the readers as identified in the literature and discussed in the findings.

Most participants identified ***Communication***, ***Engagement*** and the ***Environment*** as extensively debated and argued in the literature, emphasising their criticality to the processes. It has equally been noted that communication and Engagement, both in the context of SM and SI, are highly dependent on the environment analysis conducted by the organisation from the onset of the strategic planning process.

While ***Alignment*** and ***Stakeholder Mapping*** were identified by fewer participants than the drivers above, one important observation is that these drivers ranked high as they were identified by more than half the sample population and, identified by many scholars and included in multiple frameworks in the literature.

Six other drivers were identified in the literature and the research findings, including ***Relationship Building, Resource Availability, Stakeholder Analysis, Organisational Factors, Technology and Infrastructure,*** and ***Transparency,*** and they are not necessarily listed in order of importance. These drivers, more specifically relationship building, resource availability and transparency, were identified as significant drivers in Africa due to the region's impact of cultural and socio-economic factors.

Surprisingly, one of the drivers that was not identified as necessary in the African context for stakeholder engagement and stakeholder management was the sustainable development strategy of the companies. It did not come up in the research findings, although strongly argued in the literature. This could be due to the context of the research in the literature, which was mainly on developed countries; developing countries' stakeholders are very intentional about considering the ESG strategies of the companies before engaging with them in their strategic journey. The absence of this driver from the findings indicates its low importance for stakeholders in most African countries.

## 6.3 Summary of discussion of findings

The findings of the study largely corroborate and are consistent with the literature on SM and SI. The contextual differences between SSA which is a developing region, and more established markets where most of the studies that underpinned this research, are evident. The interrogation of the findings in relation to the literature highlight that situational analysis is important prior to the formulation of any strategic process. Situational analysis informs the identification, prioritisation, resource planning, communication, and stakeholder engagement as sub-process of the overarching strategic management process. The discussion also highlighted the cultural, socio-economic, and macro-political factors that influence SM during SI, all of which need to be closely monitored by managers throughout the strategic cycle. The contextual differences highlighted during the findings call for a tailored approach to SM and SI in Africa compared to established markets.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

## 7.1 Introduction

This research extends the literature in the field of strategy implementation by employing the stakeholder management perspective to understand and explain the role of key drivers of stakeholder management in the strategic management process of companies operating in emerging markets, most specifically in Sub-Saharan Africa. The research first investigated the concepts of stakeholder management, strategy implementation, emerging markets, and multinational enterprises in Africa through a theoretical analysis of previous research. After the theoretical analysis of the literature, the research collected data from strategy experts and, through thematic analysis, identified themes as a consolidation of different participants' perspectives on the focus of the study. The study's findings were then compared to the literature to highlight evidence consistent with, an extension of, or contradicting the literature.

## 7.2 Research Summary

The research found that in terms of stakeholder management during strategy implementation, companies operating in Africa are required to navigate very volatile and turbulent markets with powerful cultural norms and socio-political factors, which impact their ability to effectively manage stakeholders and implement strategy compared to more developed and structured countries. The research also interrogated how the drivers of SM influence SI in Africa and finds evidence that the drivers that affect SM also extensively impact SI, and the two are not very mutually exclusive in the context of strategic management process and that an effective implementation process depends on the ability to navigate partnerships and complex micro-political situations. In the following sections, the researcher discussed the theoretical and practical contributions of the research, the theoretical and methodological research limitations, the recommendations for management and suggestions for future research.

## 7.3 Research contribution

This section summarises the paper's discussion section and highlights the research's theoretical and practical contributions.

### 7.3.1 Theoretical contribution

Salamzadeh (2020) states that a theoretical contribution could constitute examining a previously tested theory in a new context, investigating a new relationship amongst different concepts, or considering new assumptions in previously studied models. This research extends the literature on stakeholder management and strategy implementation by investigating the drivers of stakeholder management and the relationship between the two concepts in the context of Africa. Pedrini and Ferri (2019) contend that due to the depth and breadth of the stakeholder management and strategy fields, research to interrogate the importance and influence of stakeholder management as a managerial tool to support strategy development and value creation through its implementation will contribute towards developing the theory.

The area of study, Africa, is largely under-researched in the current management field, and this research conceptualises stakeholder management in the context of strategy implementation in Africa into a framework encompassing multiple aspects of the strategic management process, including drivers, mediating factors and challenges. The research builds on the work of Rankinen *et al*. (2022) and Bal *et al*. (2013), who have developed generic frameworks for stakeholder management. However, the research extends the literature of the SM and SI theories by not only further developing the frameworks to include additional drivers of SM but also by developing a comprehensive framework of the drivers of SM for SI in Africa, factoring in various challenges and other mediating factors. Rankinen *et al*. and Bal *et al*. research was focused on projects. However, their work set the stage for further research into additional drivers, the interrelationships between those drivers, and the level of consideration managers in firms attach to them when operating in turbulent and volatile markets.

Evidence from the research suggests that the drivers of stakeholder management proposed by (Rankinen *et al*.,2022; Bal *et al*., 2013) applies differently from context to context, with some drivers being very critical in the context of developed markets and others more important in the context of emerging markets, notably Africa. This results from different contextual factors, including highly adopted cultural norms, a rapidly changing and turbulent environment that characterises the African region, and socioeconomic inequalities and disparities between developed and emerging regions. The difference in context has informed the basis of the research scope and enabled the interrogation of the influence of the drivers in Africa. The findings have been synthesised into a conceptual framework by the Author, as illustrated in Figure 14.

The conceptual framework below, developed by the Author, is a more comprehensive version of Rankinen *et al*. (2022) and Bal *et al*. (2013) frameworks and the Author's contribution to the literature.

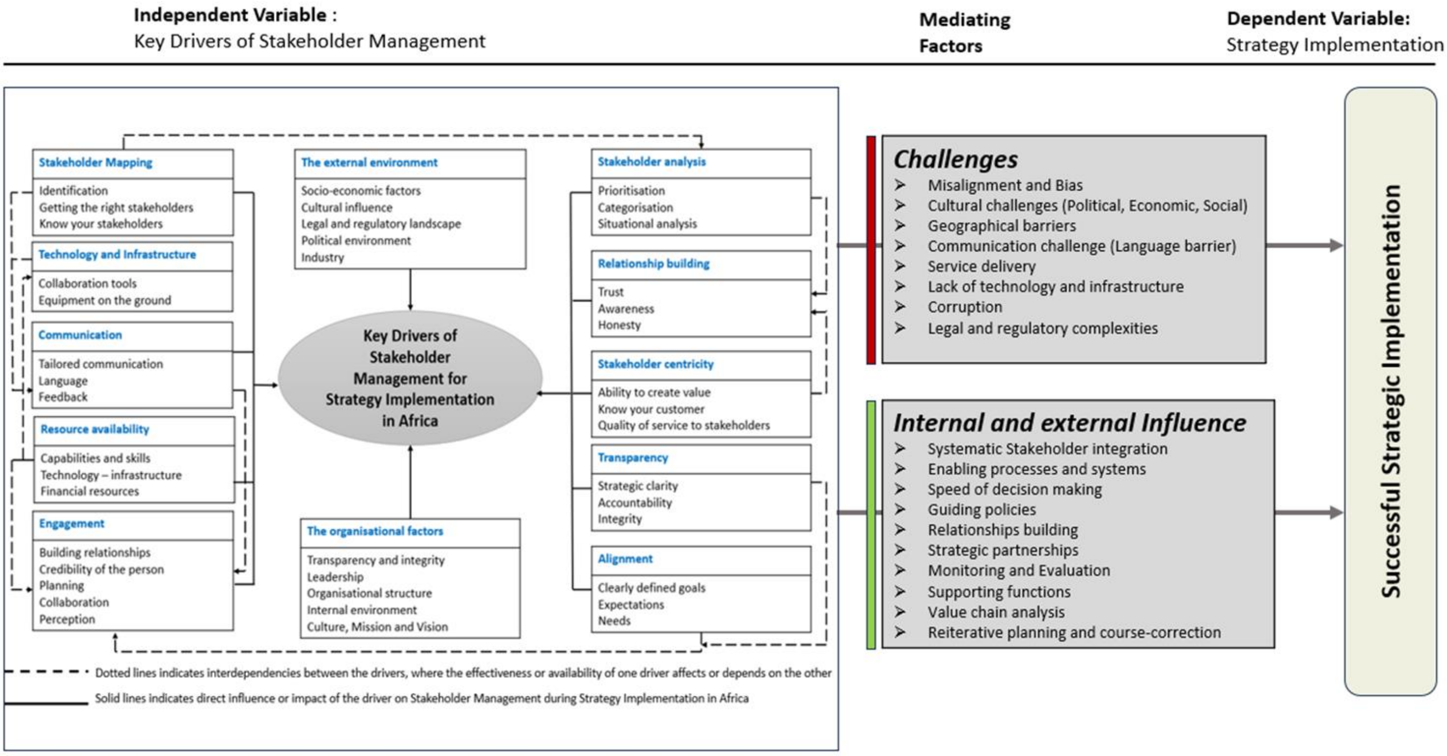


***Figure 15***: Conceptual framework - Key drivers of stakeholder management and its influence on strategy implementation in the African context

***Source:*** Develop by Author

However, this framework is a conjecture of the findings. It further clarifies the need for more quantitative research into SM and SI in Africa to define borders for which SM as a managerial tool can be integrated into the strategic management process to enable value creation.

### 7.3.2 Practical contribution

Based on real-life and lived experiences and perspectives from managers operating in Africa, the research contributes to the practice of international business and regional SMEs within Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings from the study provide valuable insights for managers, particularly those in management positions of organisations looking at internationalising their operations into other African markets. The findings of the study can better guide managers from emerging markets MNEs about how to integrate stakeholder management when conceptualising their strategy for implementation in highly volatile and turbulent markets prone to rapid changes as a result of macro and micro-politics, economic fluctuations, legal, regulatory and social instabilities; all of which may affect their ability to meet stakeholders needs.

As a recommendation to African businesses and their managers, the researcher advocates for the integration of data analytics into stakeholder and strategic management processes. As per the research findings, using data analytics and analysis tools to gather information from stakeholders and use those data for evidence-based stakeholder management and strategy implementation decision-making is almost non-existent. In an era of digitalisation and the possibility and opportunity businesses have to access and gather significant data, businesses should invest in digital transformations that will enable the integration of data analytics into their African business operations for efficiency.

Strategy managers from MNEs who have experience implementing strategies in developing countries but are looking to move into emerging environments like Africa can use the findings from this research to be more efficient in their new work setting. As elaborated in the findings and the discussion, strategy formulation and strategy implementation processes should be seen as one and should not be dissociated. As a result, the researcher recommends that strategy practitioners refrain from adopting a generic approach to formulating strategies for countries in SSA. The cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors and the SM planning process must be critically evaluated and considered for each country. This is because of the complexities and differences that exist between the countries' environments, even though they are all in the same SSA region.

In addition to contributing to managerial practices, the research also contributes to developing knowledge for the African region, enabling African businesses to use insights from research conducted in their setting when implementing strategies to create value for stakeholders within the region. According to Onaji-Benson (2019b), between 1990 and 2015, only 154 articles focused on management research in Africa have been published, a tiny number compared to research conducted in other regions. Therefore, this research conducted in the context of Africa will motivate future scholars to build on this research and further develop the knowledge base for the continent, in addition to developing empirical data which can enable future managers to make evidence-based decisions when managing stakeholders during their strategic management processes.

Lastly, the practical implication and recommendation to policymakers and regulators in the region is to employ a standardisation approach for the legal and regulatory frameworks in African countries. Findings showed that factors like corruption, lobbying, and the need to build personal relationships with key stakeholders in governmental institutions are critical to secure their participation in and support of companies' operations in the country. Managers with non-existent personal relationships who strictly adhere to doing business ethically and without underhanded negotiations and lobbying often face roadblocks and opposition in their implementation efforts, usually at an advanced stage. The legal, policy, and regulatory frameworks and processes should be reviewed, and compliance should be enforced. That way, standardisation can be across the board, and the guidance on approval processes can apply to all, regardless of personal rapport or relationships.

## 7.4 Research Limitations

The research instrument, semi-structured interview questions, was mostly derived from past qualitative dissertations in stakeholder management. Although the core of the questions was grounded in the literature, the process of deriving the questions was not.

### 7.4.1 Research Design Limitation

The research instrument, semi-structured interview questions were mostly derived from past qualitative dissertation in the field of Stakeholder management, and although the core of the questions were grounded in the literature, the process of deriving the questions was not.

Another limitation of the research design was the dual approach to the sampling strategy, which entailed initially selecting the primary population sample and then purposive sampling, which has an inherent risk of Bias later, thus reducing the findings' external validity and generalisability. However, the researcher employed a dual approach to participant selection, including a pre-qualifying call to ensure a broad African experience before engaging in a final selection based on stakeholder and strategy experience. This was necessary to ensure the participants had the depth and breadth of information needed.

Additionally, Africa, a broad scope with a large geographical distribution of businesses, was identified as a limitation of the research design. Most MNEs in Africa have businesses in the central, southern, eastern, and western parts of the continent, with limited operations in northern Africa. This could be due to the economic and development landscape in these regions; however, after reflection by the researcher, this increases the Bias on the conclusion of findings and makes it more challenging to make broader inferences. Notwithstanding, the research's contribution to the SM field during SI in Africa remains applicable and evident.

### 7.4.2 Methodology Limitation

One of the main methodological limitations of the research is the sample size of 13; although not unusual in qualitative research, the small sample size means the findings from the research cannot be generalised until tested quantitatively with a more significant sample.

Bias has been identified as a limitation due to the participant's selection process using the researcher's personal and professional network. Although very specific selection criteria were utilised, some participants know the researcher personally in a professional context and have some affinities and preferences towards the African region, which could constitute Bias.

Another limitation of the research is that the content analysis method employed to identify insights into drivers of SM and how they influence SI may be limited because the researcher was the only coder. At least two coders should do the coding to ensure the reliability of research findings (Gaur & Kumar, 2018).

### 7.4.3 Theoretical limitations

Scholarship on stakeholder management is observed as being limited in the current literature; both in the context of its applicability as a managerial tool in the value creation process (Pedrini & Ferri, 2019) and in the context of emerging economies. One of the theoretical limitations is the lack of the theoretical foundation on the relationship between the two constructs investigated, including the drivers and challenges of synthesising these two important processes for value creation, which thesis also had to grapple with. This limitation provides an opportunity for future research to further interrogate the relationship between these two managerial processes at a more granular level within the African context of SM and SI.

## 7.5 Recommendations for future research

The recommendations for future research highlighted in this section provide an opportunity to address some of the findings, theoretical contributions and limitations discussed in the previous sections of this paper.

Firstly, as identified as a limitation, the research findings cannot be generalised due to the population sample used to conduct the research. Hence, the researcher invites future research to conduct quantitative testing of the findings and the framework's applicability with a larger population sample size. This will ensure the generalisability of the findings and provide empirically data-backed information on managing stakeholders when implementing strategy in the African region, in addition to providing an opportunity for testing in other emerging regions.

Secondly, future research could explore the challenges and mediating factors identified in the findings and represented in the conceptual framework developed by the Author. This will provide a deeper understanding of the contextual nuances of how these challenges and mediating factors impact organisations' stakeholder management processes and influence strategic management.

Thirdly, to address the limitation because of using Africa, which broadened the scope of the research, future research can interrogate the drivers of stakeholder management and its influence on strategy and value creation at a more granular level, looking into various sub-regions of SSA. The researcher suggests using Central Africa, East Africa, Northern Africa, Southern Africa, or West Africa- as areas of focus for future research to investigate the difference between these regions in the context of stakeholder management practices and their influence on strategic management.

Fourthly, future research could consider investigating the role of data in managing stakeholders and how companies could leverage data analytics to monitor the stakeholder management process during their strategic management processes. In the era of digitalisation and data availability, businesses and strategists in Africa could benefit from studies on data analytics, which they can leverage to integrate data analytics in their operations in a region characterised as being underdeveloped in the technological and analytics field.

Lastly, social media has been identified as a medium through which companies commonly engage with some of their stakeholders, including communities, the environment and other secondary stakeholders; however, social media did not come up in the findings as a driver, mediating factor or challenge in the management of stakeholders during the strategic processes. Future studies could explore the role and process of leveraging social media to improve decision-making when managing stakeholders during strategy implementation.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

# Appendix A: Invitation to participate in further research and potential investigation.

The third observation relates to the learning process and competence development in SM. Studies have investigated how SM can influence the development of resources, but two areas of potential investigation have been neglected: "Is information collected through SM actually used in decision-making processes and how?" and "What role does SM have in the innovation process?" Future studies could then start from these questions and further the understanding of the importance of SM as a managerial tool to support strategy development and value creation. Moreover, the literature on Big Data analysis techniques could be applied to SM and further the understanding of how firms could gather information and data on the needs and expectations of stakeholders without having direct dialogue with them.

Fourth, this review has revealed that the analysis of the measurement of SM performance and impacts is still in its infancy. Although some scholars have proposed models and processes of analysis, the question involving how the effectiveness of SM can be measured is still open and calls for increased research efforts. The topic is of utmost importance for both academics and practitioners, as it may help boost the performance of SM and the commitment of companies to SM practices.

Another implication of the study comes from the recent stream of research focused on the impact of the institutional setting on SM. This stream is of importance if applied to the investigation of the behaviors of multinational companies toward stakeholders in the different contexts. In line with this, future studies could consider questions such as: "How can multinational companies balance the different stakeholders' necessities when they are located in different institutional contexts?," "What advantages and barriers may multinational companies encounter when having to operationalize SM in different institutional contexts?" or "What kind of capabilities are required to maximize the synergies among SM policies and practices in different contexts and minimize the potential inconsistencies?"

Finally, the last observation originates from the fact that most of the previous works have focused on large companies, whereas small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been scarcely considered. The literature on SMEs has often underlined their orientation to the more informal behavior of these firms compared to large ones, and previous studies have often found the existence of a strong tie to the local community. Hence, future studies could further explore the differences between the SM realized by large and SMEs, starting from questions such as "What are the similarities and differences in the approach to SM of large companies and SMEs?" or "What could large companies and SMEs learn from each other in terms of SM operationalization?" In the same research stream, another interesting focus could be centered on entrepreneurship and new ventures and, specifically, on

# Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter.

## Informed consent for interviews

I am conducting research on 'The Influence of Key Drivers of Stakeholder Management on Strategy Implementation In Africa.' Our interview is expected to last sixty minutes and will help us understand what the key drivers of stakeholder management are and how these drivers influence strategy implementation in developing countries, specifically Africa. **Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty**. By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

• The interview to be recorded.

• The recording to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber

• Verbatim quotations from the interview may be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation.

• The data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and

• All data to be reported and stored without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Researcher name:** [redacted] | **Research Supervisor name:** [redacted] |
| **Email:** 22029614@mygibs.co.za | **Email:** [redacted] |
| **Phone:** [redacted] | **Phone:** [redacted] |

Signature of participant: ______________________________

Date: ________________

Signature of researcher: ______________________________

Date: ________________

# Appendix C: Research Instrument: The interview guide

## Interview Guide

**Part A: General Questions**

1. Please tell me about yourself, initial training and general work experience.
2. Currently , what industry do you work in?
3. Please tell me about when your interest in industry XXX began.
4. What position do you currently hold? And for how many years have been in the role?
5. What are your current roles and responsibilities?
6. On a scale of one to ten, where one is non-existent and ten is an expert, how would you rate your level of expertise in stakeholder management and strategy implementation?
7. Please describe what formal stakeholder management and / or strategy training you have done or been exposed to.
8. In your current role, to what extent do you manage stakeholders?
9. What are the challenges you face?

**PART B: Understanding of Stakeholder Management and strategy implementation.**

1. What is your understanding of the drivers of stakeholder management?
2. In your opinion, what do you think the key drivers for SM are?
3. Looking at the African context, how would you rank the drivers in order of importance?
4. Please describe how you would define strategy implementation?
5. In your opinion, at what stages of strategy implementation are stakeholders to be integrated?
6. Please describe what you think is the influence of stakeholder management in strategy implementation looking at both your industry and Africa as a whole?
7. Revisiting the drivers you mentioned earlier, what would you say is the most critical driver to ensure the success of strategy implementation? And why? Please provide an example
8. Please describe what role communication play in the process of stakeholders' management during strategy implementation?
9. How important do you think stakeholder management is in the implementation of strategy and why?

## Appendix D: Ethical Clearance Approval

# GIBS ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION FORM 2023/24

**RESEARCH PROJECT INFORMATION**

| | |
|---|---|
| **NAME:** | [redacted] |
| **STUDENT NUMBER:** | 22029614 |
| **PHONE NUMBER:** | |
| **E-MAIL ADDRESS:** | 22029614@mygibs.co.za |
| **PROPOSED TITLE OF STUDY:** | |
| **RESEARCH SUPERVISOR:** | [redacted] |
| **E-MAIL OF SUPERVISOR:** | [redacted] |
| **RESEARCH CO-SUPERVISOR** | |
| **E-MAIL OF CO-SUPERVISOR** | |

The purpose of this Research Ethics process is to ensure that all research conducted under the auspices of GIBS is done so in an ethical manner, in accordance with the University's policy and in such a way that **the rights of all stakeholders** associated with the research are protected.

In order for the GIBS Research Ethics Committee to assess your application, you are required to submit **a description of your Research Methodology** that must contain sufficient detail to ensure that the required steps have been taken to achieve this purpose, in the research design, data collection, analysis and storage of data used in the conduct of this research.

**Please indicate the nature of the output your research is aimed at producing (mark one box only):**

- ☐ ABP Applied Business Project
- ☐ MBA Research Report
- ☐ MBA Project Publish Article
- ☐ MBA Teaching Case Study
- ☐ MBA Entrepreneurship Stream Portfolio
- ☐ MBA Consulting Stream Portfolio/MBA Health Stream
- ☐ MPhil Research Report

**GIBS Ethics Policy distinguishes between FOUR main types of data and THREE main types of methodology. Please complete the table for ALL the data types that you plan to use. Note that all applications must be accompanied by a description of the methodology to be used in the study. Initial all sections that apply to your research**

# Appendix E: The list of codes used for qualitative reports.

| Construct 1: Drivers of Stakeholder Management | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ○ Persona | ○ Emotional intelligence | ○ Social perception | | ○ Customer satisfaction |
| Individual motivating factors | ○ Honesty | ○ Perception difference | Stakeholder Communication | ○ Perspective-taking |
| ○ Ambition | ○ Human connection | ○ Proffessionalism | ○ Communication style | ○ Problem solving |
| ○ Agreement | ○ Integrity | ○ Professional identity | ○ Cross-cultural communication | ○ Self-reflection |
| ○ Alignment of purpose, values and goals | ○ Persuasion | ○ Transparency | ○ Tailoring communication | ○ Stakeholder satisfaction |
| ○ Career advancement | ○ Creating a transparent process | ○ Quality of service | ○ Virtual communication | |
| ○ Employees experience | Building relationships | ○ Reliability | ○ Communication strategy | |
| ○ Confidence | ○ Human centricity | ○ Reputation | ○ Cross-cultural communication | |
| ○ Job satisfaction | ○ Human to human connection | ○ Stakeholder satisfaction | ○ Cross-cultural understanding | |
| ○ Opportunity for growth | ○ Individual perspective | ○ Trust | ○ Emotional intelligence | |
| ○ Personal growth | ○ Interpersonal connection | | | |
| ○ Personal values | ○ Open-mindedness | | | |
| ○ Respect | ○ Perspective-taking | | | |
| ○ Responsibility | ○ Psychologically safe environment | | | |
| | ○ Rapport building | | | |
| Theme 4: Navigating Barriers to effective stakeholder management | | | | |
| Misalignment and Bias | Cultural Challenges | Communication Challenges | Intrapersonal Challenges | |
| ○ Lack of alignment | ○ Bias | ○ Language barriers | ○ Doubt | |
| ○ Bias | ○ Cultural barriers | ○ Lack of stakeholder communication | ○ Feeling unheard | |
| ○ Lack of consultation | ○ Cultural differences | ○ Miscommunication | ○ Frustration | |
| ○ Lack of follow-through | ○ Social disparities | ○ Communication difficulties | ○ Lack of confidence | |
| ○ Unrealistic expectations | ○ Insecurity | ○ Virtual communication | ○ Lack of consideration | |
| ○ Competing priorities | ○ Silos | ○ Information overload | | |
| | ○ Region-specific challenges | ○ Remote work | | |
| Construct 2: Strategy Implementation | | | | |
| Theme 5: The external environment | | | | |
| Organisational ability to engage externally | Compliance and Ethics | Ability to adapt to changes | Macro-economic factors | Trends and Disruptions |
| ○ Advocacy | Policies Rules and Regulations | ○ Adaptability | The industry ecosystem | ○ Market and evolving trends |
| ○ Continuous Collaboration | ○ Compliance | ○ Adaptation | ○ Industry analysis (type of industry, key players, IFC) | ○ Future-oriented |
| ○ Customer research | ○ Conformity | ○ Agility | ○ Competitive analysis | ○ Focus |
| ○ Customer understanding | ○ Business ethics | ○ Feedback collection | ○ Situational analysis | ○ Global expansion |
| ○ Curiosity | ○ Ethics committees | ○ Flexibility | ○ Environmental analysis | ○ Globalization |
| ○ Customer engagement | ○ Ethical considerations | ○ Fluidity | ○ Competitiveness | ○ Incrementalism |
| ○ Cultural perspective | ○ Legal and regulatory issues | ○ Proactive approach | ○ Economy | |
| ○ Government engagement | ○ Policy influence | | ○ Environmental awareness | |
| ○ External collaboration | ○ Policy and strategies | | ○ Interconnectedness | |
| ○ External dynamics | ○ Policy changes | | ○ External dynamics | |
| ○ Government relations | ○ Policymakers | | ○ Influence of contextual factors | |
| ○ Public affairs | ○ Political environment | | ○ Institutions | |

| Themes | Categories | Sub-categories | Code groups |
|---|---|---|---|