Audience Mapping

DEFINING THE STAKEHOLDERS FOR YOUR CAMPAIGNS AND PROJECTS

It's important to know who your stakeholders and your audience are. Whether you're carrying out a strategic review or designing a new campaign, knowing who influences you and who you influence helps you understand the potential impact of your actions.

We find that a powerful approach to understanding your stakeholders is to view them as parts of a wider ecosystem. To do this, start with this mapping exercise as a group process. The power of the group process means you're more likely to uncover the best information and the learning goes much deeper. Once you've defined the audience, you can go on to identify relationships, who influencers who and then to develop appropriate messages and channels to connect with them.

What is Audience Mapping?

We developed the Audience Map over ten years ago as a fast and effective way for groups to identify and visually represent stakeholders and their relationships to each other, the campaign, project, process or organisation. The audience map works through a visual metaphor of concentric circles that identify our relationships that at four levels:

Direct	People or groups who directly interact with the project/campaign.
Indirect	People or groups who do not directly interact with the project but exercise strong influence over (or are strongly influenced/affected by) direct users.
Remote	People or groups who remain at a distance from the project but could be affected/influenced by the project (or vice versa, could indirectly influence).
Societal	Wider societal influences. Usually macro, they have no direct impact or influence and are themselves either not affected by or very indirectly affected by the system. This might include legislators or local authorities, quality assurance agencies or professional governing bodies and typical refers to a macro-level change or rule, law or policy has a trickle-down impact on this project.

Creating your Audience Map

It's a group process so we usually draw the Audience Map outline on a whiteboard but you can use an electronic template or big sheets of paper too (just so long as everyone can see it clearly and there's plenty of room for writing!). It works well to use post-it notes for stakeholders, that way you can move them around later as the groups understanding of the map deepens.

Consider what disagreement might occur as to the roles and relative influence of others. We will all approach this exercise form different points of view. Don't dismiss difference, let it evolve through discussion into consensus. Lack of awareness, limited exposure to a wider audience or failing to legitimate the role of people or groups for political or power reasons all lead to different weightings. But when this audience mapping exercise is carried out amongst a broad group it can lead to a more accurate, neutral and more widely accepted definition of your relationships, influences and influencers. It is also more likely to inform the group's own knowledge.

You now have three concentric circles, the innermost is labeled "direct", moving outwards to "indirect" and "remote". The layer outside the final circle is "societal". These layers visually represent distance from your organisation, campaign or project: the nearer the centre then the closer the stakeholder is (ie they have most impact/influence or are most impacted/influenced).

Identify the Audience

Ask the group to suggest stakeholders and nominate where they belong. Stakeholders can be people, organisations, media. Sometimes they can even be intangible objects too, such as Acts of Parliament, because they are a key influence on what you do (or you need to get one changed to succeed).

At this stage, it can work well to take a brainstorming approach and don't question or challenge. There's time later to refine the map (this is where post-it notes come are useful!).

You can focus on one category at a time. It is often easier to start with the "direct" stakeholders as they tend to be the more obvious and more readily drawn to mind because people are aware of who they are already – although there might be a few surprises by the time you've finished. This can act as a helpful warm-up for the rest of the process. As you work out through the circles, it can become increasingly challenging for the group to identify the audience. The brainstorming phase tends to last between 10 and 15 minutes but could be more or less depending on the nature of the group and the complexity of the project or campaign.

Review the Map

Once you've reached what feels like saturation point and no more new stakeholders are coming up, you can start to refine the process.

Ask the group to work through the stakeholders and confirm that they are happy with where they've been put. You're aiming for consensus here and, given that this model is always subjective, this can be more important than absolute accuracy. Work from the centre outwards and where there is disagreement, create the space for the group to explore.

You can also use this phase to merge entries and remove any duplication.

Identify the Relationships

Now that you have a list of stakeholders in the right place, identifying the relationships that exist between them can significantly help you to understand your stakeholder ecosystem. So now you're going to ask the group to create relationships between them.

Primary relationships can usually be found to exist between stakeholders in neighbouring circles and within circles (especially the innermost "direct" group).

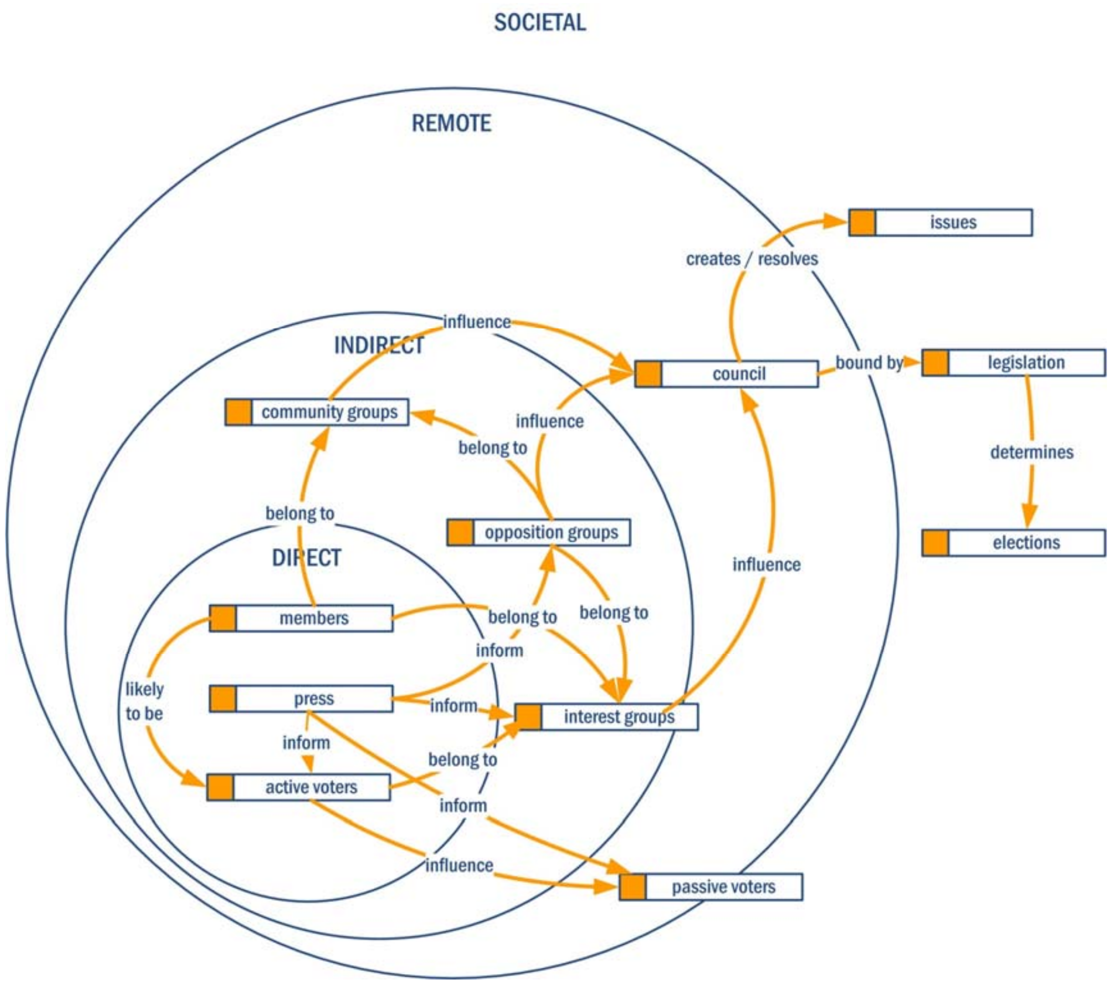
You can describe the relationship that exists (and the direction it flows) on the diagram if you wish.

The Audience Map

Once this session has been completed you will hopefully know who your stakeholders – your audience – are and how strongly they affect/influence or are affected/influenced by the project/campaign. You will also have some understanding of the key relationships that exist between stakeholders.

The end-result of this process is a graphical representation of the stakeholder ecosystem in the form of an Audience Map.

The example that follows is a real (but simplified) audience map for a start-up local political organisation. Remember this is not meant to be exhaustive or generic, it is intended to give your client, key stakeholders and the team a clear and (most importantly) shared understanding of the project's stakeholders before you start making assumptions about what it is that you're doing and the impact that it will have.



Stakeholders Defined

A visual representation of the project's stakeholders can be enough. If you want to drill down further to provide more information on stakeholders then a table of stakeholders is useful. This lets you transpose the information already gathered in terms of who they are and where they sit in relation to what it is you are doing. It then allows you to see clearly who they influence and are influenced by and to provide a definition of their role and potential impact in relation to the project/campaign. This example takes a sub-set of the Audience Map above by way of an example:

Stakeholder	Influences/Affects	Influenced/ Affected by	Description of role
DIRECT			
Party members	Other members Active voters Interest groups	Active voters Press Interest groups	Party members are the key project workers for the campaign. At this level of granularity, it includes candidates.
Active voters	Party members Passive voters Interest groups	Press Party members	This describes the section of the community who are actively informed regarding local body politics.

You can see from this that relationships can exist one or both ways and that a single stakeholder can be both influenced and an influencer. Often you will see that complex circular relationships exist where influence moves outwards through the layers of the Audience Map only to return to the centre through the influence of other groups.

Influence and Value

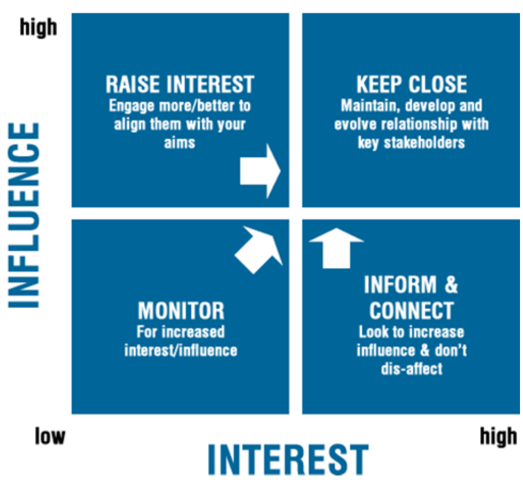
Influence can be obvious or subtle but not understanding who influences who else in your eco-system risks focusing time and effort in the wrong place. Spend some time looking at the key stakeholders on your Audience Map (most likely those in your direct sphere but it could include others further out if they are critically important) and how they are related to you and to others. Ask yourself where they get their information from? Who are they closely aligned with? Who do they trust? What is the value exchange between you and your key stakeholders?

You can describe these interfaces in a tabular form:

Organisation	Influences	Influenced	Value for them	Value for us
Interest Group A	Party, Public, Media	Parliamentary party, International organisations	Support, credibility, policy expertise	Voice in council

Shaping your Message

You now have a good understanding of the people and organisations in your audience eco-system, how they relate to each other and their relationship with yourself and others. Specifically, you understand their distance from you and their level of influence and importance in the wider eco-system. It's now possible to define and categorise your audience.



This will help you to identify the people you want to target for engagement. Whether it's creating a call to action, influencing their thinking and decision making or targeting some kind of behaviour change, you can now focus on developing your campaign messages according to each stakeholder's level of interest and influence:

- Monitor those with low interest and low levels of influence.
- Inform and connect with those in your audience who have a high interest in what you are doing, but exhibit relatively low levels of influence. This group matter because they can be supported to become more influential (by you and others, particularly through social media) and they are also potentially able to become dis-engaged and dis-affected and therefore become negative influencers.
- Maintain interest from those who are key influencers but have lower levels of interest (examples include politicians and journalists). You need to ensure that this group is kept connected to your campaign. Consider too that they you want to encourage them to become more informed and therefore more positively engaged but there is also a risk of them becoming dis-affected.
- Keep close to the key influencers with high levels of knowledge and expertise. These are the critical influencers in your network and must always be a focus of any communications strategy. It is too easy to focus on shifting other groups towards your position at the expense of maintaining the relationship and message with those already close.
- It is critically important that your communications strategy incorporates reflection and listening, particularly with the latter two groups.

You can map the stakeholders you identify earlier across the four quadrants above and then ask these three questions:

- What do they think now?
- What do we want them to think?
- What do we want them to say when they talk about our campaign/product/organisation?

You now have a starting point (as is) and a tangible end point (where to). The challenge now is to create an action plan for each key stakeholder (or groups of stakeholders where this is appropriate – but remember that the broader the audience the more generic the message and you might lose some of the necessary nuancing in your message).

For each of your target audience, you can also consider:

- Their direct and indirect influencers (who do they listen to)
- Their values
- Potential triggers for change
- Favoured and appropriate methods and media for communication

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