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# How to do (or not to do) . . .

## A stakeholder analysis

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This paper provides guidance on how to do a stakeholder analysis, whether the aim is to conduct a policy analysis, predict policy development, implement a specific policy or project, or obtain an organizational advantage in one's dealings with other stakeholders. Using lessons learned from an analysis of alcohol policy development in Hungary, it outlines issues to be considered before undertaking the stakeholder analysis concerning the purpose and time dimensions of interest, the time-frame and the context in which the analysis will be conducted. It outlines advantages and disadvantages of an individual or team approach, and of the use of insiders and outsiders for the analysis. It describes how to identify and approach stakeholders and considers the use of qualitative or quantitative data collection methods for estimating stakeholder positions, levels of interest and influence around an issue. A key message is that the process of data collection and analysis needs to be iterative; the analyst needs to revise and deepen earlier levels of the analysis, as new data are obtained. Different examples of ways of analyzing, presenting and illustrating the information are provided. Stakeholder analysis is a useful tool for managing stakeholders and identifying opportunities to mobilize their support for a particular goal. However, various biases and uncertainties necessitate a cautious approach in using it and applying its results.

### Introduction

Stakeholder analysis is an approach, a tool or set of tools for generating knowledge about actors – individuals and organizations – so as to understand their behaviour, intentions, inter-relations and interests; and for assessing the influence and resources they bring to bear on decision-making or implementation processes. Earlier in this volume, in *Stakeholder analysis: a review*, we described its origins and different applications, drawing on the policy, management, and development literature (Brugha and Varvasovszky 2000). The information from the analysis can be used to help understand how policies have developed and to assess the feasibility of future policy directions; to facilitate the implementation of projects, specific decisions or organizational objectives; and to develop strategies for managing important stakeholders. This paper aims to present a practical guide for those planning to use this tool, especially for the analysis and influencing of health policy. It assumes familiarity with the earlier paper, or the literature it reviewed.

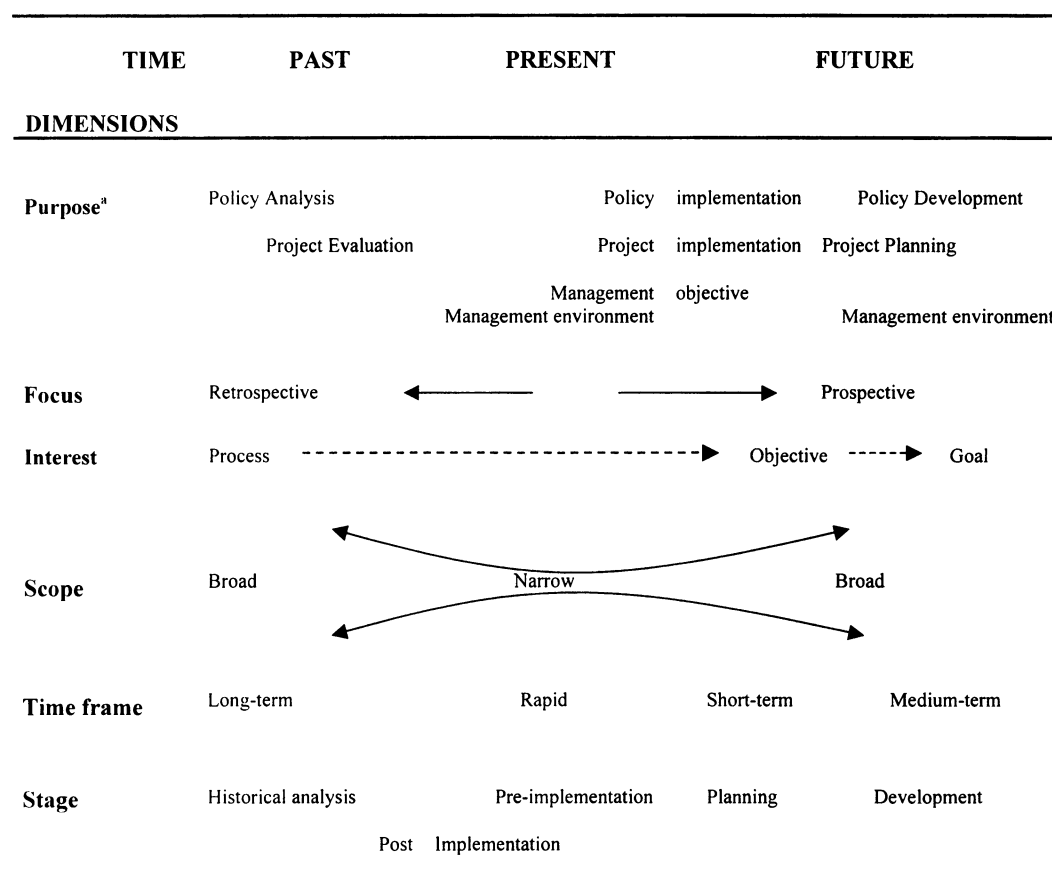
First, we discuss a set of interrelated questions to be considered before undertaking a stakeholder analysis. What are the purpose and time-dimensions of interest? What are the time-frame and resources available? In what contexts and at what level (e.g. ranging from the global to the local) will it be undertaken? Secondly, the process of conducting the analysis is explained, drawing on some of the literature and

the experience of one of the authors in conducting an analysis of national alcohol policy in Hungary. The paper provides guidance on the composition of the stakeholder analysis team, how to identify and approach stakeholders, data collection sources and methods; and on how to organize, analyze, present and utilize the data. Finally, some caveats and limitations around data validity and reliability are discussed.

### Preliminary questions

#### What is the aim and time dimension of the analysis?

Stakeholder analysis has developed as a tool, or set of tools, with different purposes in its application in the fields of policy, management and project implementation. Being clear about the aim helps to identify the scope and time dimensions of most interest: past, present and/or future. In policy, its scope can range from broad with a strong retrospective dimension, with the aim of understanding the roles of stakeholders in the evolution of the policy context and processes, to prospectively outlining more long-term and also broadly-focused policy directions (see Figure 1). As a policy analysis research tool, stakeholder analysis is frequently applied by a researcher whose interest is in conducting a comprehensive analysis which produces new knowledge about policy-making processes; this requires a strong retrospective dimension. The scope is broad where a



**Figure 1.** Time focus of a stakeholder analysis (past, present or future) by key dimensions to be considered in conducting the analysis

wide range of actors needs to be considered, especially where the policy context is complex and there is no clearly defined policy direction. A study of alcohol policy in Hungary (Varvasovszky 1998), to assess the feasibility of different policy options, revealed almost 30 different stakeholder groups which had an interest in, or would be affected by, such a policy. The complexity of the policy field meant that the analysis had to be deepened and extended, necessitating many months of data collection and analysis. It also necessitated a greater reliance on qualitative approaches to data collection. Figure 1 identifies different dimensions to be considered which will determine how one conducts the analysis.

An analysis to assist in formulating a national health insurance policy in the Eastern Caribbean was somewhat narrower and more goal-oriented than in the case of alcohol policy development in Hungary (Huff-Rousselle et al. 1998). The focus can be narrower still when the analysis is conducted to facilitate the implementation of a specific policy, as part of a political mapping process as described by Reich (1994). In health management, organizations use stakeholder analysis as a tool for achieving specific operational goals, or advantages in their dealings with other organizations, through identifying potential allies and building alliances or removing threats (Blair et al. 1996a). It may be carried out to inform strategic planning for a specific short-term objective, or as a periodically conducted exercise to scan the current or predict the future

organizational environment (see *Stakeholder analysis: a review* for examples, this issue).

In project management, stakeholder analysis is used to increase the chances of project success through informing their design, preparation and implementation; or as part of an evaluation, during or after project completion. Organizational wellbeing is of less importance than in health management, in that project personnel come together in a temporary alliance which focuses on, and is time-bound by, the life of the project. As in health management, the perspective is prospective and pragmatic. The results of the analyses can be used to develop project logical frames, and are useful in identifying assumptions on which the success or failure of project outcomes depend (Nancholas 1998). A stakeholder analysis to facilitate project implementation is frequently a less complex and time-consuming endeavour than when used to analyze policies.

Depending on the aim of the analysis and the resources available, it may be conducted over a short period of time (e.g. a couple of weeks to a month, where a rapid appraisal is sufficient). This can be the case in the planning stage of a small local project when only a limited number of stakeholders are involved, a brief assessment is sufficient to consider stakeholder interests, and there are only one or two well-defined questions. The time frame of the project cycle, including

project deadlines and resource limitations, frequently determines the scope of the analysis. A more in-depth analysis with detailed assessment of stakeholder interests, positions, networks and influence can take a few months. In this case the number of stakeholders and interests in the issue are usually greater, their positions and relationships more complex, and a more detailed analysis is needed for the success of the project or policy, especially if it involves major resource and policy implications. A longer-term and more considered analysis is feasible in a retrospective study without an immediate pragmatic goal; and may have more research value than a 'quick and dirty' analysis conducted for immediate decision-making purposes.

### What is the context?

Understanding the culture and context is necessary for deciding how to interact with stakeholders, collect and analyze data. Managerial, administrative and political cultures are influenced by history and cultural traditions: for example, in the United States, independence and individual initiative are valued within management practice; in Japan, organizational allegiance and specialization are highly valued (*Economist* 1999). In many developing countries, especially, ethnic and cultural affiliations may make demands on politicians and national policy makers to maintain channels of communication, and be accessible to potentially influential individuals and groups, which are not envisaged in the official positions they occupy. In moving between developed and developing country contexts, even those who have considerable transnational experience may fail to notice subtle, cultural and interpersonal communication constraints which can affect the success of the analysis. Therefore a wide range of key informants, including those who can mediate or transcend cultural positions, is recommended at all stages (Ford and Sporne 1988). They can assist in minimizing individual biases, reveal different ways of interpreting information and stakeholder positions, and help in developing a more comprehensive picture. In the study of alcohol policy in Hungary, the analyst needed to be aware of how strong top-down control, with its roots in the previous communist regime, had impaired the development of initiative at lower levels and the willingness and ways in which middle level managers would participate in the study (Varvasovszky 1998).

### At what level will the analysis take place?

The analysis can take place at one or more levels – local, regional, national and international – which influences how one collects data and who to consider a stakeholder. A comparative analysis of pharmaceutical policy formation was conducted across three countries (Reich 1995), alcohol policy analysis in Hungary focused on the national level (Varvasovszky 1998), while the analysis of decision-making in a US hospital focused only on a single organization at the local level (McDaniel and Ashmos 1996). A local level analysis often means that all stakeholders can be reached and interviewed individually. A supra-national analysis, involving international actors, is likely to rely more on a review of policy documents, reports and existing data. The definition of who is a stakeholder can also vary with the level of the analysis. The

Ministry of Health (MOH) may be treated as a single actor in the case of an inter-sectoral national policy on road injuries; or as a group of units or interest groups in developing a policy on health services decentralization, where different divisions (e.g. hospital services, manpower, vertical disease control programmes, etc.) have different interests and concerns about the outcome.

## Preparation

### Analysts and analysis teams

The analysis can be conducted by an individual, a team, or by an individual analyst working with the support of selected key informants and/or a supervisor. Resource and time constraints often determine which. Because judgement is critical, particularly as qualitative data are analyzed and quantified, a team approach can provide a more balanced analysis. A team can compensate for and neutralize individual biases and question untested assumptions. It can provide a more objective, or at least a less individually biased, perspective of stakeholder positions and interests, and assessment of levels of resources and influence they can bring to bear. Single analysts can ensure a more uniform approach in collecting qualitative data, ensuring higher reliability and more internally valid cross-comparisons of data. They can also work with a support group (or research supervisor) to whom they present interim conclusions and proposed next steps in the data collection and analysis. This can help to reveal unjustified assumptions and potentially fruitful directions which an individual analyst may otherwise overlook.

Analysts can be insiders and/or outsiders, distinguishing between insiders who are directly involved in the project, management question, or policy studied, and those who are insiders to the organization or cultural context, but outsiders to the study question. Location pertains to organizational affiliation, to having a potential vested interest in the outcome of the process, or to being part of or outside of the culture or context where the analysis is done.

'Managers (insiders) can sometimes hold strong opinions about stakeholders which conflict with generalised perceptions of the environment. The external analyst can play a valuable role as an 'independent auditor' of those stakeholders.' (Crosby 1992)

A potential limitation of the insider, especially one with a stake in the issue, is if pre-existing relationships with (other) stakeholders influence the latter's willingness to participate and their responses. A strength of being a cultural insider is familiarity with the local modes of verbal and non-verbal communication. In an analysis of alcohol policy in Hungary, the author's lack of previous involvement in the field was considered an advantage, facilitating objectivity in the data collection and analysis, while balanced by a good understanding of the public health environment and context (Varvasovszky 1998). A mixed team of insiders and outsiders provides the opportunity for outsiders to draw on the contextual insights of insiders and for insiders to gain insight into how their assumptions may be biasing the analysis.

## Conducting the analysis

### Identifying and approaching stakeholders

In conducting a policy analysis, the first step is to identify the different components of the policy issue or problem. Stakeholder analysis can then be used to map the positions of the actors in relation to the issue, as well as to each other. Stakeholders can be defined as actors who have an interest in the issue under consideration, who are affected by the issue, or who – because of their position – have or could have an active or passive influence on the decision-making and implementation processes. They can include individuals, organizations, different individuals within an organization, and networks of individuals and/or organizations, i.e. alliance groups. Familiarity with the issue, which may rely heavily on an initial review of secondary sources (literature, reports, etc.) where the focus is on the national or supra-national level, contributes to building an initial list of stakeholders.

In analyzing national policies to reduce the burden of alcohol-related problems, Varvasovszky (1998) considered the different possible components of a control programme: alcohol production, availability, price regulation, minimum drinking age, drink-driving regulations, advertising, primary prevention campaigns, and treatment and care. The different components helped identify relevant national organizations and individuals. In policy analysis, especially where the issues are complex or involve a range of national and international actors, the identification of stakeholders is often a protracted and iterative process. Unlike in the more stable context of US health management or in a circumscribed local development project, important actors may emerge at a late stage. Therefore, in the Hungary study a 'snowball technique' was used whereby, at the end of each interview, respondents were asked to identify all other important stakeholders who had, or could have, considerable influence in the alcohol policy arena (Varvasovszky 1998). In this way, a comprehensive list of almost 30 separate stakeholders (organizations or individuals) was compiled. In stable contexts where the issues are clearly defined and circumscribed, most of the relevant stakeholders may be visible and, as in the US health management field, the analyst may move quickly to deciding who is important and to ascertaining their opinions on how much importance to give to other stakeholders. Premature focusing down on a limited number of stakeholders can have pitfalls, through omitting important ones (see *Stakeholder analysis: a review*, this issue).

Gaining access to interview stakeholders can depend on how the approach is made, how potential respondents perceive the remit and status of the interviewer, and their interest in the issue. An introductory letter, phone call or other intervention from a powerful stakeholder may facilitate access but may also colour the perceptions of the potential respondent. It may influence and bias responses, especially if the introduction is from a stakeholder with a potential interest or advantage to be gained from the issue, or where there is organizational interdependence or competition. This can also be the case where the interviewer has a contractual relationship with, or is a member of, a stakeholder organization. An independent researcher is more likely to be viewed as a neutral player, but may not be perceived as being sufficiently

important. In the study of alcohol policy in Hungary, access was facilitated by a letter from an international research institution considered important in the public policy arena. This was preceded and followed by phone calls to secretaries to explain the importance of the study and to arrange interviews with busy, often senior officials (Varvasovszky 1998).

### Data collection methods and data

Face-to-face interviews using checklists, semi-structured interviews and structured – often self-administered – questionnaires can all be used to collect data from primary sources. Usually these are individual respondents, though groups of stakeholders may also be interviewed, e.g. through focus group or informal group discussions. Secondary sources include published and unpublished documents, reports, policy statements, internal regulations of organizations, etc. Interviews provide opportunities to access additional secondary sources, e.g. internal documents not obtained in the initial literature search. Semi-structured interviews can help structure data collection while keeping the focus sufficiently broad to allow for hidden or emerging themes. When analyzing complex issues, especially for policy analysis, qualitative approaches are essential so as to preclude premature focusing on a limited number of aspects of the issue, to the neglect of others which may emerge during the process of data collection and analysis. There is a wealth of literature on qualitative data collection methods which this paper does not attempt to review.

As the issues and positions of the key stakeholders emerge, particularly around how to move forward in developing a policy or implementing a project, more structured tools, e.g. Delphi methods, can assist in more reliably quantifying stakeholder positions and levels of stakeholder support or opposition. When used as an organizational management tool, where all the important stakeholders are believed to be known and issues have been defined and agreed by the stakeholders early on – or the analysis is around a pre-determined direction such as the implementation of a defined policy or project – the stage of qualitative interviewing may be curtailed early on, or even dispensed with altogether (Blair et al. 1996b). However, the premature use of quantitative tools may lead to the neglect of important issues. This is a bigger danger where a broader, less focused analysis is needed, as in an historical analysis of a complex policy process or, perhaps even more importantly, in charting future policy directions and developments. The principal objective at the beginning is to identify the issues and actors, generating rather than testing a range of hypotheses; careful judgement is needed to avoid premature assumptions on subsequent directions for the analysis. Approaching stakeholders with too narrow or tight a focus may prematurely determine which issues and questions are important, and where levels of consensus or disagreement need to be established. Too broad or loose a focus may allow the process to become chaotic; stakeholders may see no overall aim or justification for involvement and giving time to the process, and may lose or make no commitment to it.

A pair of interviewers can facilitate contemporaneous note-taking and are particularly useful where there is more than one respondent. They can help in picking up important non-verbal

clues and interactions. However, a single respondent may feel intimidated or inhibited by the absence of a one-to-one balance. The tape-recording of responses may be negotiated at the beginning, depending on the culture, the position of the respondent within the organization, and the sensitivity of the issue. Reaching agreement around issues of anonymity, attribution of opinions and how the information can be used is advisable. However, this may be postponed till the end of the interview when a measure of trust and openness has been established. As stakeholder organizations are approached and interviewed sequentially, a more complete and potentially more complex picture emerges. Interview checklists may need to be supplemented and earlier stakeholders revisited to clarify earlier answers or raise new questions. Because of the complexity of the issue and the cultural context, the analysis of alcohol policy in Hungary relied mainly on qualitative data, collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, with contemporaneous note-taking.

### Organizing and analyzing data

As data collection progresses, interim outputs such as matrix tables or maps are constructed to quantify stakeholder interests in an issue, the resources and/or influence they can bring to bear, their support or opposition to moving in particular directions; and, depending on the aim of the analysis, what level of importance to give to each (see Table 1). The analysis team needs to take stock, and the individual analyst to look for support and feedback from neutral informants or advisors, to determine when this stage has been reached. Structured tools such as Delphi questionnaires, visual analogue or ordinal scales, and likert scales or preferential ranking may be used to elicit additional data, e.g. by revisiting stakeholders interviewed earlier. Alternatively, the analyst or team may make these judgements and scores, based on the primary and secondary sources of data collected. Quantitative tools

can be a more reliable way of obtaining stakeholder assessments, and in making cross-comparisons of scores. However, the analyst needs to evaluate their validity because of the limitations of these tools and the potential for ascertainment bias (see Limitations). Tools are only as good as the people who use them. Assessments of levels of influence, support or opposition to how a policy position was reached or directions for moving forward are provisional and may need to be revised at later stages. Explicit criteria for making such assessments can assist in reducing research biases.

Feedback of summaries of discussions to the stakeholder respondents may help to build trust and enable them to correct inaccurate reporting, give more considered responses, or qualify earlier responses. These considered responses can help to clarify stakeholder positions around the more sensitive and potentially contentious aspects of an issue. Feedback, however, is not always beneficial as it may influence and alter the stakeholder's position, reducing the utility of the analysis. Feedback of outputs may also be inappropriate if the stakeholders are in a position to influence or control the outcome of the analysis, where a preliminary assessment is not favourable to them. The usefulness also depends on the intended audience and how the results will be utilized, whether it is intended for a single client, the academic community or a broader audience. Data collection and analysis are iterative processes: they entail a process of continuously extending and deepening the analysis until all important stakeholders have been identified, their positions and relationships mapped, and their actual or potential influences – and how these will be utilized – have been assessed.

### Presenting findings (outputs)

The literature includes many examples of matrices, charts, position maps, network maps and other figures for presenting

**Table 1.** Stakeholder characteristics around the development of a comprehensive national alcohol policy

Stakeholders	Characteristics				
	Involvement in the issue	Interest in the issue	Influence /power	Position	Impact of issue on actor
National Institute of Alcohol (NIA)	Coordinates national activities in alcohol research, prevention and treatment	High	Low	Supportive	High
National Public Health Institute (NPHI)	National centre of public health with strong support from MOH, alcohol has been a neglected public health issues, although now included in a new strategic plan	Low-medium	Medium	Non-mobilized	Low-medium
Transport and Road Safety Division of the Police (TRSDP)	Faced with alcohol problems in everyday practice; has not articulated specific policies around alcohol	Medium	Medium-high	Supportive	Medium
Association of Spirit Producers (ASP)	Has a market interest in maximizing alcohol sales; is worried about decreasing market share; currently is an influential lobby group	Low	High	Opposed	High

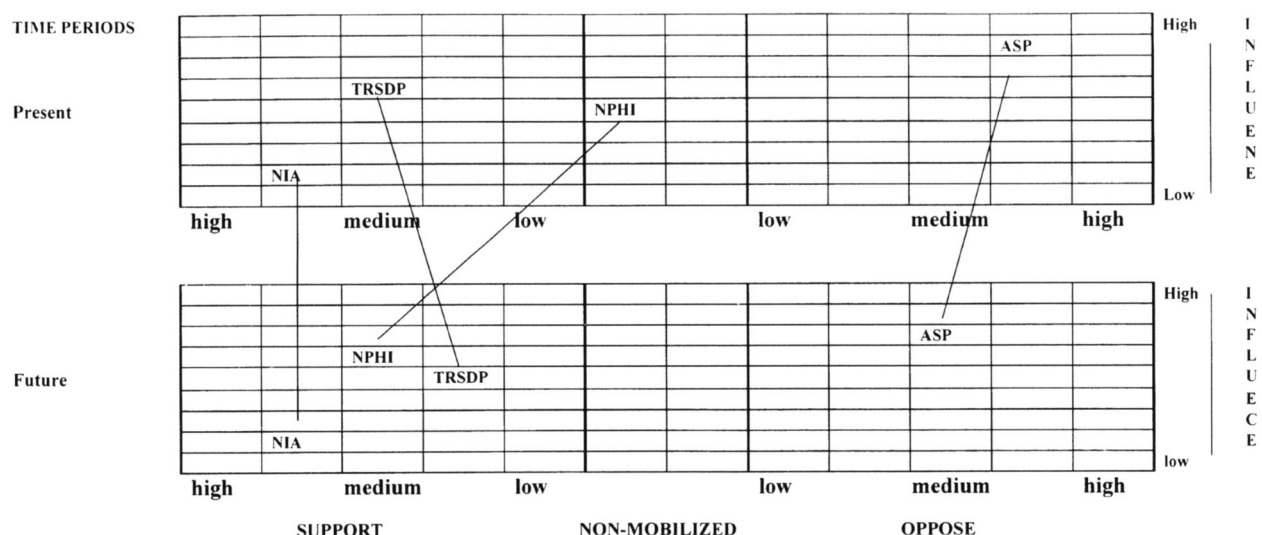
data (see for example: Reich 1994; ODA 1995; Blair et al. 1996b). Some examples are given below.

Tables or matrices can illustrate characteristics – interest in the issue, importance each gives to the issue, positions adopted, and influence – for each stakeholder (see Table 1). Where the potential for, and direction of, a national alcohol policy in Hungary was being explored, the characteristics of four important stakeholders are illustrated: two had a designated interest in public health issues, one in another sector with an interest in the health and safety issues pertaining to such a policy, and one had a commercial interest in alcohol production. On the basis of the characteristics of each stakeholder and the aim of the analysis, the analyst – or analyst's client – could then decide how much attention to give to each stakeholder. Outputs, such as tables and position maps, are provisional; they need to be revised and updated as new data are collected, the characteristics of stakeholders re-assessed, and the analysis refined. Maps and other ways of displaying data are both an output and an aid to the analysis and organization of data so as to produce useful information. They can be used, depending on the purpose of the analysis, both as tools for understanding and for influencing future directions and decision making. A limitation, where there is a large number of stakeholders, is that maps and figures can become too complex and cluttered.

Figure 2 is a forcefield illustration which shows how two key characteristics of stakeholders – levels of influence and support – for the development of an alcohol policy could shift over time. It predicts likely changes in influence and support, based on recent policy decisions; it also identifies opportunities for developing a more coherent public health policy around alcohol. The Association of Spirit Producers (ASP) was likely to become less influential in the policy arena because its most prominent leader, a member of parliament, had a serious illness and his avenues for lobbying political leaders and policy makers were being cut-off. Reduced influence and a change in leadership might provide an opportunity for the policy strategist to lessen the ASP's opposition to such a policy.

The prediction is that the National Public Health Institution (NPHI) would become more influential and would move from being non-mobilized to being supportive. This is because Parliament had delegated to it the task of developing strategies for reducing national alcohol consumption; financial resources had been allocated for this purpose; and because of the forthcoming appointment of a new director who had good personal relations with those in government. The Transport and Road Safety Division of the Police (TRSDP) would remain supportive but less so because its attention was shifting towards the control of illicit drug use, reducing its interest and support for an alcohol policy. However, its influence was also likely to reduce as it would no longer be a member of an influential parliamentary committee. The National Institute for Alcohol (NIA) would remain strongly supportive but would continue to have little influence on deciding the future direction of a national alcohol policy. Figure 2 is a way of illustrating shifts in power and the levels of support of key stakeholders in an historical analysis of how a policy has evolved (Shretta 1999). It can assist the strategist, e.g. the manager or policy maker, in assessing how effective strategies have been in managing stakeholders; and in advising on how to manage the future strategically. Repeating the analysis at a later stage in the process can demonstrate to what extent the strategists managed to shift influential stakeholders towards supporting the project or policy direction; and, where some stakeholders have remained opposed, how effectively their influence has been reduced.

Stakeholder analysis considers not only the characteristics of stakeholders with regard to the issue of interest, whether it be around a policy, project or organizational objective. It can also be used to illustrate existing organizational relationships and predict – or help develop – stakeholder alliances. Where there is a short-term pragmatic goal, e.g. implementation of a specific policy or project, the identification and assessments of the nature and strengths of these relationships can assist in developing strategies for managing the stakeholders. Reich (1994) and others use network maps of stakeholder positions,



**Figure 2.** Forcefield matrix showing predicted changes in stakeholder positions and influence regarding a national alcohol policy

showing internal, interface and external stakeholders in concentric circles, to illustrate influence, potential influence and conflictual relationships between them.

### Using the findings

Stakeholder analysis has been used as a management and strategic tool for identifying the optimal strategies for managing other stakeholders, identifying current and future opportunities and threats and how best to handle them (Blair and Fottler 1990). The optimal fit is about how much and what kind of attention to pay to other stakeholders. From the manager's perspective, the optimal fit is determined by the potential threat of others to, and potential for cooperation with, one's own organization. The optimal fits are to collaborate with 'mixed-blessing' stakeholders, i.e. those which combine elements of support and non-support and offer high potential for cooperation and are also a potential threat; involve supportive ones; defend against non-supportive ones, i.e. those who represent a high threat and low potential for cooperation; and to monitor marginal stakeholders who represent low threat and low potential for cooperation (Blair et al. 1996b). In the US health management field, collaboration may entail the need for highly detailed contracts, specifying duties and expectations, and less trust in inter-organizational dealings. Figure 3, from Blair et al. (1996b), shows the consequences of finding or not finding the optimal fit. Sub-optimal fits include missed opportunities, mainly through failing to involve supportive stakeholders; placing one's organization at risk, through failing to defend against non-supportive ones; and wasted energy through paying too much attention to marginal ones.

Similar strategic questions arise when a project or policy is implemented. If the analysis is undertaken in the planning stage, the aim is to get a comprehensive picture of the environment, stakeholder interests, their likely influence,

and what resources are available for implementation. The final report often remains an internal working document of those doing the planning. The ultimate aim is successful implementation, for which strategies to handle stakeholders with strong opposition to the project or policy but high influence in the policy arena are crucial. Attention must also be given to those with considerable resources but neutral positions, and to how these resources can be mobilized. A clear strategic alliance is needed with those who have both interest in the policy or project and also considerable influence in the policy arena. If the analysis is used for evaluation, results more often become public. If the aim is to improve performance, a careful balance of what aspects of the analysis are made public, and what should remain internal information, is required. This is of particular importance in a context where constructive open criticism is not a coherent part of the policy and decision making culture.





### Limitations, validity and reliability of the analysis

The analysis provides snapshots of what may be a rapidly changing context, where positions and influence are subject to change from internal events, external events and possibly the stakeholder analysis process itself. An in-depth analysis seeks to add value through obtaining and analyzing stakeholders' current perceptions of the historical processes which have led to the present. Recall and perceptions of these processes are influenced and coloured by the events in the intervening period, and by current positions and interests. Both strengths and limitations of the tool, as explained in the Conclusion of *Stakeholder analysis, a review* (this issue), lie in it being cross-sectional.

The environment, the context of the analysis, stakeholder interests, positions, alliances and influence change over time. The political context of policy-making is frequently unstable,

STRATEGIES POSITIONS	Involve	Collaborate	Defend	Monitor
Supportive	Optimal fit	Missed opportunities	Missed opportunities	Missed opportunities
Mixed	Risk	Optimal fit	Missed opportunities	Missed opportunities and Risk
Non-supportive	Risk	Risk	Optimal fit	Risk
Marginal	Resource waste	Resource waste	Resource waste	Optimal fit

	Optimal fit between diagnosed position and strategy		Suboptimal fit leading to missed opportunities for gaining support
	Suboptimal fit leading to excess attention to low potential stakeholders		Suboptimal fit placing venture/organization at risk

**Figure 3.** Strategies for managing stakeholders according to their organizational positions



especially in many developing countries, and can be subject to sudden, unexpected transformations. Therefore, if the time-frame of a prospective analysis is too long or study results are not applied in a relatively short period of time, especially in complex and unstable settings, the relevance of the analysis for informing stakeholders on how to manage the future decreases rapidly. However, its utility for policy research can be in demonstrating, through an historical analysis, the importance of an unstable or unpredictable political context; and the potential of individuals who achieve positions of national power to radically change the policy landscape, where major international stakeholders have invested years of effort to influence the policy process (Glassman et al. 1999).

Additional caveats need to be considered in conducting an analysis. In attempting to interpret responses, both for meaning and validity, the analysis needs to consider: the position of a respondent in an organization, and how stable or provisional that position may be; that responses reflect individual views which may contradict or run counter to those of the organization; and the degree to which a stakeholder has implicit or covert positions on an issue which are not revealed to the analyst. In situations where salary levels are low, positions of employment are temporary and organizational allegiances are uncertain, individual needs are frequently met in complex ways. A stakeholder may express support for a policy or project while covertly opposing and obstructing it. The validity and reliability of responses may be difficult or impossible to establish with any certainty, though they may become more evident as the process of data collection and analysis develops. Because of the inherent dynamic of the policy making process, as the position of one major player changes, others' positions are also likely to change.

Finally, the role and possible impact of analysts on the policy process need to be considered, especially where the focus is on mapping the future policy direction. Analysts bring to the analysis their own values, perspectives and understanding of the policy issue, which are essential to developing new insights into the process. In implementing a project or policy, analysts frequently are stakeholders themselves, or are acting on behalf of a stakeholder client. Policy researchers, in analyzing policy directions, may start with an aim, e.g. to assist in developing public health promoting policies. During the analysis they may develop a clearer picture and have an interest in seeing particular policies emerge which have the best chance of achieving this aim. Increasingly, thereby, they become stakeholders. Epidemiologists are particularly concerned about minimizing ascertainment biases and about the Hawthorne effect, whereby they change what they are studying. Policy researchers, throughout the process of data collection and analysis, need to give careful consideration to their role and impact on the process; and, when stakeholder analysis is used to predict and influence the future, where to find the balance between being analysts and being agents for positive change in the public health policy-making process.

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