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Suinteresuotųjų šalių įsitraukimo, verslo procesų lankstumo ir verslo rezultatų sąveika	**The Interplay Among Stakeholder Engagement, Business Process Flexibility, and Business Performance**

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INTRODUCTION

Relevance and novelty of the Research

In today's volatile and competitive business environment, organizations must demonstrate not only high performance but also the capacity to adapt quickly to changing external conditions. This dual requirement makes stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility central to organizational success. While stakeholder engagement is increasingly recognized as a strategic imperative that allows companies to align with evolving expectations of customers, employees, partners, and society (Morsing and Schultz, 2006), it alone does not guarantee adaptability. Internal processes must be capable of translating stakeholder input into meaningful action. Here, business process flexibility becomes crucial, enabling rapid response to environmental uncertainty, regulatory changes, and market shifts (Trkman, 2010).

Although each of these constructs – engagement, flexibility, and performance – has been studied independently, limited research explores their interconnected dynamics. Especially underexplored is the mediating role that business process flexibility may play in the relationship between stakeholder engagement and business performance. Understanding this triadic relationship is of both theoretical and practical importance for organizations striving to remain competitive and resilient. This thesis aims to fill that gap by providing a structured, empirical analysis of how stakeholder engagement contributes to business performance through its impact on internal flexibility mechanisms.

Topic historiography

Research on stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance has grown across multiple fields. Freeman (1984) introduced the stakeholder concept, later expanded by Greenwood (2007) as an interactive process. Morsing and Schultz (2006) highlighted relational engagement, and Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) proposed a stakeholder classification model. Freudenreich, Lüdeke-Freund and Schaltegger (2020) emphasized value co-creation.

A. Sethi and S. Sethi (1990) were among the first to define types of process flexibility, followed by Swafford, Ghosh and Murthy (2006) and Tallon and Pinsonneault (2011), who linked flexibility to performance. Trkman (2010) and Hanelt, Hildebrandt and Polier (2021) stressed flexibility's strategic role in digital transformation. Zain, Rose, Abdullah and Masrom (2005) introduced decision-making flexibility as part of organizational agility.

The construct of business performance is explored from the perspective of various researchers: Dess and Robinson (1984), Hubbard (2009), Smith and Reece (1999) provided a definition of the concept. Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986) presented it as a multidimensional concept but focused on financial performance, while Kaplan and Norton (1992) included customer, innovation, and internal metrics. That view was supported by Bititci, Garengo, Dörfler and Nudurupati (2012). Herremans, Akathaporn and McInnes (1993) as well as Nadkarni and Narayanan (2007) linked strong performance to greater flexibility and stakeholder investments. Li, Y. Liu and H. Liu (2018) as well as Driessen, Kok, Hillebrand and Verhallen (2013) discussed the reinforcing nature of these constructs. Neely, Adams, and Kennerley (2002) also contributed to the exploration of the business performance providing a stakeholder-oriented approach for its measurement.

Although foundational works by Freeman (1984), Trkman (2010), and Teece (2018) advanced these ideas, integrated models remain rare. The theoretical foundation for this research is the Dynamic Capabilities Theory, as presented by Teece (2007; 2018). Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) and Teece (2007; 2018) argued for studying capabilities as interconnected.

Aim of the Research

To explore how stakeholder engagement contributes to business process flexibility and how these dynamics influence overall business performance.

Objectives of the Research

1. To explore how organizations engage internal and external stakeholders in ways that enhance business process flexibility.;

2. To understand how flexible business processes contribute to improved business performance;

3. To identify how stakeholder engagement, flexibility, and performance are interrelated in practice;

4. To provide qualitative insights that can inform the future development of a conceptual model linking these constructs.

Research Methods

In order to explore the relationships among stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance, this thesis applies a qualitative research approach. Given the

multidimensional nature of the topic, a qualitative design allows for a deeper understanding of how these mechanisms operate in real organization environments. Data for the analysis will be collected via in-depth interviews with mid- and senior-level managers who have direct influence on all three aspects within their organization – stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance. The collected interview data will be analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), following the six-phase procedure of coding, theme development, and interpretation. The described approach will help to identify recurring patterns and relationships across participants' experiences. To ensure research credibility and trustworthiness, transparent documentation of the analytical process will be applied.

Scientific and practical value

The scientific significance of this study lies in its contribution to the evolving field of strategic management and organizational flexibility. While many studies explore stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility and business performance independently, few integrate those concepts and explored their interconnected mechanisms and contextual dynamics in practice.

From a practical standpoint, the study provides managers with insights into how stakeholder-oriented practices can enhance business process flexibility and lead to real performance outcomes – and if so, through which mechanisms. By capturing real experiences from professional in digitally oriented organization, the results of the current research may inform strategic planning, digital transformation, process design, and corporate governance initiatives. The research emphasizes an interpretive perspective that managers can adapt to their own organizations.

Structure of the paper

The current paper consists of three major parts: theoretical framework, research methodology, and empirical research findings.

The theoretical framework is structured into several subchapters that present the main academic perspectives related to the three core constructs of the study – stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance. The chapter integrates stakeholder theory, business process management, and dynamic capabilities theory to establish a foundation for the research hypotheses and conceptual model.

The second part focuses on the research methodology, outlining the qualitative exploratory design, describing the data collection process, instrument development, sampling strategies, and analytical approach. It explains how semi-structured interviews were applied in order to gain a deep

understanding of the mechanisms linking stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance.

The final part presents and interprets the empirical findings and managerial insights derived from the interviews.

The paper concludes with insights for theory, practice, and future research directions.

1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, BUSINESS PROCESS FLEXIBILITY AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

1.1 Stakeholder engagement as a strategic capability

Theoretical foundation: Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, first introduced by Freeman (1984), challenged the traditional shareholder-centric view of the firm by proposing that organizations should consider a wider group of actors affected by or capable of affecting their operations. Freeman defined stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives," emphasizing the need to manage relationships not only with shareholders, but also with employees, customers, suppliers, government agencies, communities, and other interest groups.

Over the years, the theory has evolved from a normative ethical foundation – asserting what managers should do – to a strategic management framework that integrates stakeholder interests into organizational decision-making. Greenwood (2007) distinguishes between stakeholder management and stakeholder engagement, noting that the latter requires mutual involvement, dialogue, and responsibility sharing. Engagement is not simply about informing stakeholders but about building two-way, value-generating relationships.

In modern strategic thinking, stakeholder theory serves as a foundation for concepts such as corporate social responsibility, sustainability, inclusive innovation, and shared value creation, especially as organizations increasingly operate within complex ecosystems.

Given the broad definition of stakeholders, not all stakeholder groups hold the same relevance or influence at all times. To address this, Mitchell et al. (1997) proposed the Stakeholder Salience Model, which classifies stakeholders according to three key attributes:

1. Power (the ability to influence the organization);

2. Legitimacy (the perceived appropriateness of a stakeholder's claim);

3. Urgency (the time sensitivity and criticality of the stakeholder's demand).

According to the model, stakeholders are categorized as latent (one attribute), expectant (two attributes), or definitive (all three attributes). Managers must dynamically assess these attributes to prioritize stakeholder concerns effectively. This model is especially relevant in the context of dynamic business environments, where stakeholder salience can shift rapidly due to market changes, crises, or regulatory developments.

Dimensions of stakeholder engagement

In recent years, stakeholder engagement has become more than just a tool for communication or reputation management – it is increasingly seen as a strategic capability that can strengthen an organization's adaptability and performance. However, engagement is not a one-dimensional concept. Scholars from different fields have approached it in diverse ways, offering a range of dimensions that help to define what meaningful stakeholder engagement actually involves. This section summarizes and synthesizes these academic perspectives to provide a comprehensive view of the key dimensions that shape effective stakeholder engagement.

R. Edward Freeman (1984), who introduced the concept of stakeholder theory, did not outline specific dimensions of engagement, but his work laid the groundwork for how organizations should approach stakeholders. Freeman emphasized that all groups or individuals who can affect or are affected by an organization's activities deserve consideration. Based on his ideas, we can identify several implicit dimensions:

1. Transparency (open and ethical communication with stakeholders);

2. Mutual responsibility (two-way obligations between a company and its stakeholders, a company's readiness to not just inform stakeholders, but also respond to their needs);

3. Strategic integration (prioritization of stakeholder interests in organizational decision-making).

Michelle Greenwood (2007) took the concept further by distinguishing stakeholder engagement from stakeholder management. While management is often top-down, engagement – according to Greenwood – requires genuine dialogue and ethical responsibility. She identified several key characteristics:

1. Inclusiveness (participation of diverse stakeholders in shaping organizational decisions);

2. Responsiveness (organizational action in response to stakeholder concerns);

3. Dialogue (two-way communication embedded in stakeholder engagement);

4. Trust and Commitment (consistent behavior and support for stakeholder interests)

5. Fairness and Authenticity (sincere and ethical stakeholder engagement practices).

In their study of corporate social responsibility (CSR), Morsing and Schultz (2006) proposed three levels of stakeholder communication: informing, responding, and involving. These strategies help explain how organizations can move from basic awareness-raising to real engagement. From their model, we can derive the following dimensions:

1. Dialogue quality (not just frequent, but also reflective and respectful communication);

2. Responsiveness (respect to the stakeholders' feedback and readiness to learn and adapt processes based on that feedback);

3. Co-determination (Shared influence over organizational processes, decisions);

4. Reflexivity (continuous self-evaluation and adaptation based on stakeholder feedback);

5. Trust-building (formation of lasting relationships grounded in openness and mutual confidence).

The literature on stakeholder engagement shows a clear evolution from instrumental, management-centered views to more interactive and moral approaches. Table 1 provides a comparative view of the key differences in how various authors conceptualize stakeholder engagement.

Table 1.

Perspectives on stakeholder engagement

Author(s)	Theoretical focus	Role of stakeholders	Type of engagement	Strategic relevance
Freeman (1984)	Stakeholder theory	External actors to be considered	Strategic, managerial	Balance interests in strategic decisions
Mitchell et al. (2017)	Stakeholder salience model	Classified by power, legitimacy, urgency	Flexible, situation-based	Helps identify which stakeholders to focus on
Greenwood (2007	Ethical foundations of engagement	Equal partners in dialogue	Moral, relational	Stresses mutual responsibility and fairness
Morsing and Schultz (2006)	CSR communication strategies	Influencers of identity and trust, active participants in dialogue	Two-way, reflexive	Engagement shapes trust and reputation
Freudenreich et al. (2020)	Stakeholders in sustainable value creation	Co-creators of value	Collaborative, ongoing	Engagement supports innovation and long-term goals

Source: compiled by the author, based on Freeman, 1984; Freudenreich et al, 2020; Greenwood, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2017; Morsing and Schultz, 2006.

For the purposes of this research, stakeholder engagement is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct composed of five core dimensions, presented in Table 2. These

dimensions were selected based on their recurring presence and strong theoretical grounding in the stakeholder engagement literature, particularly in the works of Freeman (1984), Greenwood (2007), and Morsing and Schultz (2006).

Table 2.

Five core dimensions of stakeholder engagement used in this Research

Dimension	Based on the following author's research	Description
Transparency	Freeman (1984); Morsing and Schultz (2006)	This dimension is rooted in Freeman's (1984) original work, which argued for honest, ethical, and open communication with stakeholders to build legitimacy and trust. Freeman considered transparent communication central to fulfilling mutual stakeholder obligations.
Inclusiveness	Greenwood (2007)	Stakeholder engagement should involve active participation, voice, and decision-making power from a broad base of stakeholders. This moves beyond mere stakeholder management to relationship-based collaboration.
Dialogue quality	Greenwood (2007)	Morsing and Schultz (2006) highlight the shift from one-way to two-way communication, stressing the importance of dialogue for understanding and responsiveness.
Responsiveness	Greenwood (2007); Morsing and Schultz (2006)	Greenwood (2007) as well as Morsing and Schultz (2006) highlight this dimension as a key part of engagement, showing how organizations actively listen and adapt to stakeholder concerns. This ability to respond sets true engagement apart from just sending static messages.
Trust and commitment	Greenwood (2007); Morsing and Schultz (2006)	Greenwood (2007) explains that trust builds slowly through consistent, ethical behavior. Commitment shows a company's willingness to support stakeholders even when it's difficult or not immediately beneficial.

Source: compiled by the author, based on Freeman, 1984; Greenwood, 2007; Morsing and Schultz, 2006.

Taken together, these five dimensions illustrate how stakeholder engagement has evolved from a simple public relations function into a more meaningful, interactive, and cooperative approach that emphasizes shared value creation. First, these five dimensions reflect a balanced integration of ethical, relational, and strategic perspectives. Second, these five dimensions are widely referenced across both corporate social responsibility (CSR) and strategic management literature. Third, the selected dimensions complement each other both conceptually and empirically. For instance, transparency supports trust, while inclusiveness and dialogue quality enable more meaningful responsiveness.

1.2 Business process management and flexibility
Definition and core principles of business process flexibility

Business Process Management (BPM) is a comprehensive methodology aimed at improving organizational performance by managing and optimizing a company's business processes. According to Trkman (2010), BPM is essential for aligning processes with strategic goals, continuously enhancing process efficiency, and supporting decision-making across functional departments. BPM includes identification, documentation, monitoring, measurement, and improvement of business activities. The importance of BPM has grown in recent years due to the increasing complexity of organizational environments, globalization, and the integration of digital technologies. Trkman emphasizes that BPM is not only a means of improving operational efficiency but also a mechanism for enhancing strategic agility, innovation, and cross-functional coordination.

Scholars give different definitions of business process flexibility, depending on the context. In BPM, flexibility is understood as an organization's capacity to handle both expected and unexpected changes while taking into account their effects on the business processes governing organizational activities (Schonenberg et al., 2008). In this way, business process flexibility refers to "the ability to properly manage the coordination between organizational aspects, technical environments, and their changes" (Cognini, Corradini, Gnesi, Polini and Re, 2018). It is the capacity of processes to be reconfigured, scaled, or modified without significant disruption to ongoing operations. This flexibility allows firms to respond to market fluctuations, customer demands, technological innovations, and competitive pressures.

According to Tallon and Pinsonneault (2011), process flexibility means the capability of business processes to be altered regarding timing, flow, resource use, and results to accommodate

changing organizational requirements. Similarly, Trkman (2010) defines it as the capability of business processes to adapt and develop to achieve strategic goals and maintain a competitive edge.

Dimensions of business process flexibility

While the concept of business process flexibility initially emerged from manufacturing and operations management, academic interest in the topic has expanded over time to encompass strategic, organizational, and digital domains. As a result, scholars have proposed various dimensions of flexibility, each reflecting the evolving nature of business environments and organizational capabilities.

One of the earliest and most detailed classifications was proposed by A. Sethi and S. Sethi (1990) in the context of manufacturing systems. They identified several types of operational flexibility, including machine, routing, volume, and product flexibility — all focused on how physical systems can adapt to variability. Their work laid the groundwork for understanding flexibility as a technical capability.

Swafford et al. (2006) provide a framework of four key dimensions of process flexibility:

1. Product flexibility, which refers to the ability of an organization to modify or expand its range of products or services to align with evolving customer needs or market demands;

2. Volume flexibility, which reflects the capacity to scale production or service delivery up or down efficiently in response to fluctuations in demand;

3. Routing flexibility, which represents the availability of alternative methods, processes, or resources to achieve the same operational outcomes.

4. Operational flexibility, which refers to the company's capability to reorganize tasks, shift responsibilities, or adapt scheduling in day-to-day operations to accommodate changes or disruptions.

This view on business flexibility dimensions is supported by A. Sethi and S. Sethi (2011), who also provided one of the first flexibility dimensions classifications.

Decision-making flexibility is an additional dimension of process flexibility sometimes discussed in the academic literature. For instance, Zain et al. (2005) highlight that decision-making flexibility is a key aspect of organizational agility, which reflects how quickly and effectively companies can make and adjust decisions when faced with changing stakeholder needs or market conditions. Along with decision-making, Zain et al. (2005) highlighted process and structural flexibility. These dimensions are particularly relevant in information-intensive environments, where

the speed and adaptability of managerial decision-making are crucial to organizational survival and learning.

In the context of digital transformation, Hanelt et al. (2021) propose a broader understanding of flexibility that extends beyond internal operations. They distinguish between digital process flexibility, business model flexibility, and ecosystem flexibility – reflecting the increasing importance of inter-organizational collaboration, platform integration, and system-wide adaptability.

As we can see, a number of scholars have examined process flexibility from various angles. Table 3 presents a comparative overview of how business process flexibility is conceptualized across the literature. While early works (Sethi and Sethi, 1990) focus on operational aspects such as volume and routing, later studies (Zain et al., 2005; Hanelt et al., 2021) highlight more strategic and digital dimensions. Swafford et al. (2006) offer a bridge by connecting classical flexibility types with performance outcomes, positioning flexibility as a source of agility. This evolution reflects the growing recognition of flexibility not only as an operational tool, but as a strategic capability vital for navigating complex, dynamic environments.

Table 3.

Types and dimensions of business process flexibility in the literature

Author(s)	Flexibility dimensions identified	Application area
Sethi and Sethi (1990)	Product, volume, routing, input flexibility	Manufacturing systems
Swafford et al. (2006)	Product, volume, routing, operational flexibility	Supply chain, operations
Zain et al. (2005)	Decision-making flexibility	Organizational IT agility
Tallon and Pinsonneault (2011)	Strategic IT flexibility	IT-business alignment
Hanelt et al. (2021)	Digital process flexibility	Digital transformation in services

Source: compiled by the author, based on Hanelt et al. (2021); A. Sethi and S. Sethi (1990); Swafford et al. (2006); Tallon and Pinsonneault (2011); Zain et al. (2005).

The comparison highlights a clear evolution from operational definitions toward strategic and digital views of flexibility.

Flexibility in digital environments

The rise of digital technologies has significantly transformed the nature of business process flexibility. Digital transformation, encompassing innovations such as cloud computing, real-time data analytics, robotic process automation, and artificial intelligence, has enabled organizations to adapt their operations with unprecedented speed and precision. As Hanelt et al. (2021) emphasize, such technologies do not only enhance process efficiency – they provide the infrastructure for real-time process reconfiguration, allowing companies to continuously align their activities with dynamic environmental conditions. Digital technologies not only accelerate the pace of change but also increase the complexity of stakeholder interactions and internal processes, thereby amplifying the need for greater business process flexibility and more active stakeholder engagement to remain competitive. This aligns with Vial (2019), who highlights that digital transformation accelerates change and intensifies the complexity of networked interactions, thus demanding higher flexibility and more active stakeholder engagement from organizations.

This capacity for digital flexibility is particularly critical in platform-based businesses that operate within complex, multi-stakeholder ecosystems. As Simeone and Marzi (2021) note, these organizations must respond simultaneously to diverse stakeholder groups – including users, developers and business partners – each with evolving expectations and demands. Consequently, flexibility in digital environments encompasses not only the internal ability to adapt processes but also the strategic agility to reconfigure business models, reshape value propositions, and renegotiate inter-organizational relationships.

In addition to facilitating internal efficiency, digital transformation also supports proactive sensing and response. Li et al. (2018) argue that firms with mature digital capabilities are more adept at identifying early signs of environmental change – whether through data analytics, customer feedback, or competitive monitoring – and translating those insights into timely and targeted process innovations. Thus, digital flexibility becomes embedded in the organizational learning and innovation cycle, enhancing not just operational responsiveness but long-term strategic adaptability.

Furthermore, the successful implementation of digital flexibility depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on organizational design and culture. Flexible companies tend to foster decentralized decision-making, cross-functional collaboration, and continuous learning

(Bharadwaj et al., 2013). This highlights that digital flexibility is best understood as a socio-technical capability, combining IT systems with structural and behavioral readiness.

In summary, flexibility in digital environments refers to an organization's dynamic ability to modify its internal processes, business models, and stakeholder interfaces in response to rapidly changing conditions. It represents a core enabler of strategic resilience and innovation in the context of digital transformation.

Given the focus of this study on digitally-driven organizations – such as software firms, platform providers, and technology-enabled service companies – the digital context is particularly relevant. These organizations operate within dynamic, data-intensive environments where stakeholder expectations evolve continuously and technological change is constant. In such settings, business process flexibility becomes a critical mechanism for sensing external signals, integrating stakeholder feedback, and adapting organizational routines accordingly (Hanelt et al., 2021; Li et al., 2018). Moreover, digital infrastructures enable new forms of stakeholder engagement – often in real time – which place even greater demands on responsiveness and process agility (Simeone & Marzi, 2021). Therefore, incorporating the digital environment into the theoretical foundation of this study is essential to capture the complexity of how flexibility and stakeholder engagement interact to influence business performance.

Key dimensions of business process flexibility for further research

To support the empirical phase of this research, five key dimensions of the business process flexibility construct were selected. These dimensions serve as analytical lenses to assess the degree to which process flexibility is present within organizations and how it potentially contributes to business performance. The selection was guided by existing literature and adjusted to reflect the context of digitally-driven firms. As we can see, most researchers are aligned in their view, providing similar lists of key flexibility dimensions. They consistently emphasize that product/service flexibility, routing flexibility, resource flexibility, and decision-making flexibility are fundamental aspects for understanding and measuring an organization's capacity to adapt effectively and sustain competitive advantage. Taking into account the discussed importance of digital process flexibility, it was marked as one of the dimensions. Table 4 presents the core dimensions used in this study, along with their theoretical sources and definitions.

Table 4.

Five core dimensions of business process flexibility used in this Research

Dimension	Based on the following author's research	Description
Product/service flexibility	Swafford et al. (2006); A. Sethi and S. Sethi (1990)	This dimension refers to the ability of an organization to introduce new products or modify existing ones in response to changing customer needs or market conditions.
Digital process flexibility	Hanelt et al. (2021); Bharadwaj et al. (2013); Li et al. (2018)	This dimension captures the organization's capability to leverage digital technologies in order to continuously sense environmental changes, rapidly adapt workflows and reconfigure business processes in real time. It enables seamless integration of new digital tools and data streams.
Routing flexibility	Swafford et al. (2006); A. Sethi and S. Sethi (1990)	This dimension indicates the availability of alternative methods, paths and workflows to achieve the same operational outcomes depending on changing circumstances or resource availability.
Resource flexibility	Swafford et al. (2006); Zain et al. (2005)	This dimension captures the company's ability to shift roles, rearrange tasks, or adapt scheduling in response to internal or external disturbances.
Decision-making flexibility	Zain et al. (2005); Hanelt et al. (2021)	This dimension refers to the capacity to make timely and informed decisions when facing uncertainty.

Source: compiled by the author, based on Bharadwaj et al. (2013); Hanelt et al. (2021); Li et al. (2018); Sethi and Sethi (1990); Swafford et al. (2006); Zain et al. (2005).

The multi-dimensional structure allows for a more comprehensive assessment of process flexibility, capturing both operational and strategic aspects. While some dimensions relate to structural responsiveness (routing and resource flexibility), others, such as digital process flexibility and decision-making flexibility, reflect cognitive and technological capabilities. The chosen dimensions are particularly relevant for digitally-driven organizations, where technological infrastructure and real-time stakeholder interaction demand continuous adaptation. In such environments, flexibility manifests not only in structural reconfiguration but also in rapid sense-making, learning, and digital innovation cycles (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Hanelt et al., 2021).

1.3 The construct of business performance

Business performance as a construct was studied by various researchers. According to Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986), "business performance refers to the overall effectiveness of the organization in achieving its financial and strategic objectives, encompassing both financial outcomes (such as profitability and growth) and non-financial outcomes (such as market share and product quality)". This broad view acknowledges that financial success alone does not fully capture organizational health and sustainability. Dess and Robinson (1984) support this idea and suggest that business performance can be seen as various financial and non-financial factors that help evaluate how effective a company's actions are.

Hubbard (2009) states that business performance indicates a level at which an organization fulfills its targets, considering financial outcomes, market share, and effectiveness of operations.

Smith and Reece (1999) define business performance as "the operational ability to satisfy the desires of the company's major shareholders". This means that business performance must be assessed based on how well the organization achieves its goals, how successfully or unsuccessfully the tasks are accomplished; in addition, both financial indicators, such as profit and revenue, and non-financial indicators, such as customer satisfaction or process quality, are taken into account.

Business performance as a multidimensional concept

The literature on business performance presents a wide range of approaches to exploring this construct, reflecting the complexity and multidimensionality of organizational success. The foundational work of Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986) establishes a clear distinction between financial and non-financial indicators, emphasizing the importance of considering not only economic outcomes but also operational quality. Their framework highlights the balance between results and processes, which is essential for understanding sustainable organizational development.

Building on this, the Balanced Scorecard model introduced by Kaplan and Norton (1992) broadens the perspective by incorporating four key dimensions:

1. Financial;

2. Customer;

3. Internal processes;

4. Learning and growth.

This framework has since become one of the most widely applied performance management systems across industries.

The conceptualization of business performance has evolved to reflect the increasing complexity of the business environment. According to Richard, Devinney, Yip and Johnson (2009), performance should not be limited to accounting measures but must integrate operational, strategic, and organizational components to offer a comprehensive view of firm success. Performance is no longer solely about financial returns but also about creating long-term value for stakeholders.

Further, Bititci et al. (2012) argue that business performance in dynamic contexts must include learning capacity, adaptability, and stakeholder satisfaction as key metrics. These broaden the scope of performance management systems, enabling firms to remain resilient and competitive.ё

One of the most comprehensive and stakeholder-oriented approaches to business performance evaluation is the Performance Prism, developed by Neely, Adams, and Kennerley (2002). Unlike traditional frameworks such as the Balanced Scorecard, which focus primarily on internal processes and financial outcomes, the Performance Prism explicitly incorporates the needs and contributions of multiple stakeholder groups as a core element of business success. The model is built around five interrelated facets, which together provide a holistic view of organizational performance:

1. Stakeholder satisfaction (degree to which the organization meets the needs and expectations of key stakeholders, such as customers, employees, and partners);

2. Stakeholder contribution (the value stakeholders provide to the organization, including loyalty, effort, investment, or compliance);

3. Strategies (strategic objectives the organization pursues to align stakeholder satisfaction with its long-term goals);

4. Processes (internal activities and workflows required to execute strategies effectively and consistently);

5. Capabilities (organizational resources and competencies (skills, technologies, culture) that support and enhance core processes).

In the context of this study, the Performance Prism is particularly relevant because it aligns with the conceptual integration of stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance. It supports the view that performance is not simply an outcome to be measured but a result of continuous interaction, adaptation, and capability development in response to evolving stakeholder demands, especially salient in digitally-driven organizations. Unlike traditional models that focus primarily on shareholders or customers, the Performance Prism recognizes that organizations must manage relationships with a broad range of stakeholders in order to achieve long-term success. Neely et al. argue that to effectively measure business performance, one must

consider the entire company and update the metrics regularly to ensure they remain relevant in a changing world. This approach demonstrates that sustainable success depends not only on the final results but also on managing the mutual expectations of all stakeholders in a thoughtful manner.

Multidimensional models of business performance in the literature

To compare how business performance is perceived in different theoretical models, Table 5 summarizes the main dimensions used by key authors. It can also be noted that some dimensions repeat across authors, confirming their importance for further research of the construct. This repetition highlights key aspects of business performance that consistently receive attention in the literature, suggesting they are fundamental to understanding and measuring the concept – such as financial and operational business performance. Some researchers pay particular attention to stakeholder involvement.

Table 5.

Multidimensional models of business performance in the literature

Author(s)	Performance dimensions identified	Focus area	Rationale for multidimensionality
Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986)	Financial and operational	Strategy research	Financials alone are insufficient
Kaplan and Norton (1992)	Financial, customer, internal process, learning and growth	Balanced Scorecard	Aligns performance with strategic objectives
Richard et al. (2009)	Financial, operational, strategic, organizational	Performance measurement theory	Advocates holistic and valid measurement approaches
Bititci et al. (2012)	Financial, operational, innovation, stakeholder	Dynamic environments	Adds learning and adaptability to performance scope

Continuation of Table 5.

Neely et al. (2002)	Stakeholder satisfaction, stakeholder contribution, strategies, processes, capabilities	Performance Prism	Emphasizes managing stakeholder relationships and aligning strategies, processes, and capabilities for sustainable success

Source: compiled by the author, based on Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1986; Kaplan & Norton, 1992; Richard et al., 2009; Bititci et al., 2012.

As we can see, early models such as Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986) extend the view of performance beyond financial indicators, while Kaplan and Norton (1992) institutionalize a balanced, four-dimensional model. More recent contributions – such as Richard et al. (2009) and Bititci et al. (2012) – argue for even broader definitions that reflect dynamic contexts and stakeholder needs. This evolution supports the use of a multidimensional model in the current study, combining financial, operational, customer, innovation, and employee performance dimensions.

Key dimensions of business performance for further research

In order to structure the empirical analysis of business performance, this study adopts a five-dimensional framework that captures both traditional and contemporary aspects of organizational success. The selected dimensions reflect a synthesis of established models such as the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1992) and the Performance Prism (Neely et al., 2002). Table 6 outlines the five dimensions used in this research, together with their conceptual definitions and theoretical foundations.

Table 6.

Five core dimensions of business performance used in this Research

Dimension	Based on the following author's research	Description
Financial performance	Bititci et al. (2012); Kaplan and Norton (1992); Richard et al. (2009); Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986)	This dimension refers to the organization's ability to generate economic value, typically measured through profitability, revenue growth, and return on investment.

Continuation of Table 6.

Operational/process performance	Bititci et al. (2012); Neely et al. (2002; Richard et al. (2009); Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986)	This dimension reflects the efficiency and effectiveness of internal business processes, including metrics such as process cycle time, quality, productivity, and cost control.
Customer performance	Kaplan and Norton (1992)	This dimension captures outcomes related to customer satisfaction, loyalty, retention, and market share.
Innovation performance	Bititci et al. (2012)	This dimension includes innovation rates, successful product launches, and the impact of innovation on business growth and competitiveness.
Stakeholder/employee performance	Bititci et al. (2012); Neely et al. (2002)	This dimension reflects the engagement, productivity, and development of employees and other key stakeholders. It includes workforce motivation, talent retention, skill enhancement, and the contribution of stakeholders to organizational goals.

Source: compiled by the author, based on Bititci et al. (2012); Kaplan and Norton (1992); Neely et al. (2002); Richard et al. (2009); Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986).

1.4 Conceptual integration of stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance

Existing literature on bilateral relationships

Previous research has extensively studied the pairwise connections among stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and performance. Freeman (1984), Morsing and Schultz (2006) as well as Freudenreich et al. (2020) show that effective stakeholder engagement supports value co-creation, enhances customer satisfaction, and improves innovation outcomes. Trkman (2010), Swafford et al. (2006), and Tallon & Pinsonneault (2011) establish a positive link between various types of process flexibility and operational or strategic performance. Greenwood (2007) and Simeone & Marzi (2021) indicate that stakeholder engagement practices – especially in digital contexts – can influence internal adaptability and responsiveness. Swafford et al. (2006) also highlight that internal process flexibility enhances organizational agility, leading to better results in terms of cost control, quality, and customer service.

Links between stakeholder engagement and internal process flexibility have also been recognized. Greenwood (2007) and Simeone and Marzi (2021) note that stakeholder engagement

practices, particularly in digital ecosystems, can influence how organizations adapt and reconfigure internal operations. Sharma and Henriques (2005) support this view, suggesting that firms with proactive stakeholder engagement tend to develop adaptive capabilities. Driessen et al. (2013) strengthen this link by showing that stakeholder engagement facilitates organizational learning and responsiveness, which naturally leads to more flexible business processes.

Furthermore, Zhou and Wu (2010) suggest that dynamic capabilities – especially business process flexibility – can serve as mediating mechanisms between external inputs and business outcomes, providing a pathway for companies to respond strategically to external challenges.

Hunjra, Arunachalam, Verhoeven, Colombage, and Bouri (2024) examine how corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder engagement interact to create sustainable value in organizations and improve business performance; the authors find that stakeholder engagement plays a moderating role here – it enhances the positive impact of CSR on learning, innovation, what enables sustainable value creation by making these processes more effective and comprehensive. Therefore, stakeholder engagement has a positive influence on business performance, although this model lacks the integration effect of business flexibility.

There may be reverse causality where business performance also affects stakeholder engagement and business flexibility. Business performance in modern strategic management is considered not only as an indicator of success, but also as an important feedback mechanism that allows organizations to adapt, make informed decisions and develop sustainably.

According to the theory of dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007), performance indicators serve as signals on the basis of which a company rethinks its strategies, redistributes resources and changes internal processes to better meet changing environmental conditions. This makes performance not just the result of actions, but an active element of change management.

From the point of view of stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Harrison et al., 2010), business performance reflects how successfully an organization meets the interests of various stakeholders – customers, employees, investors and others. High performance indicators are interpreted as evidence of a balanced and responsible approach to managing these relationships. In addition, as noted by Kaplan and Norton (1992), modern performance management systems, including the Balanced Scorecard, emphasize the need to measure not only financial but also non-financial aspects: internal processes, customer satisfaction, learning and innovation capabilities. This approach allows organizations not only to record current achievements, but also to strategically direct their development.

While we can see that the existing academic literature often concentrates on the directional influence of stakeholder engagement and flexibility on business performance, some researchers also suggest a reverse influence. For instance, there is evidence that companies that perform well financially are more likely to invest in process improvements and stakeholder initiatives (Herremans et al., 1993; Nadkarni and Narayanan, 2007). Therefore, high performance may enhance the organization's capacity to remain flexible and maintain strong stakeholder relationships.

Thus, in the context of this study, business performance is not only the outcome of stakeholder engagement and process flexibility, but also the basis for understanding how these two constructs contribute to the creation of sustainable value and strategic adaptability in the context of digital transformation. Moreover, business performance itself also influences stakeholder engagement and the adaptability of business processes; however, this reverse relationship remains insufficiently explored in the existing literature.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece, 2018) provides a comprehensive strategic lens for understanding how organizations adapt to changing environments through stakeholder engagement, flexibility, and performance. These capabilities refer to a company's ability to systematically integrate, develop, and transform both internal and external resources in response to external conditions. Unlike the traditional view based on resources, this theory highlights a company's adaptability as the source of competitive advantage (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997).

Teece (2007, 2018) describes dynamic capabilities through three main processes:

1. Sensing, which means a company's ability to identify external changes, risks, and opportunities including new customer needs, regulations, or technologies;

2. Seizing, which means optimization of the company's resources and internal capabilities in order to address the changes;

3. Transforming, which means ability to continuously improve and adjust the internal processes and workflows in order to remain competitive and not to lose relevance in a rapidly changing business environment.

In this research, dynamic capabilities provide the foundation for linking the constructs of stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance.

In the context of the dynamic capabilities framework, stakeholder engagement plays a pivotal role in the sensing process. It acts as an environmental sensing mechanism, allowing companies to detect shifts in stakeholder expectations, respond to new challenges, and continuously

adjust their internal processes in order to work effectively. Through structured dialogue, feedback mechanisms, and transparent communication, firms can recognize shifts in customer preferences, regulatory landscapes, and societal expectations (Freeman, 1984; Greenwood, 2007). These engagement efforts enable organizations to detect emerging opportunities or threats early.

On the other hand, business process flexibility reflects the firm's responsiveness as well as ability to seize and transform. Seizing involves mobilizing internal resources to address new opportunities – for example, adapting a business process based on stakeholder input. Transforming refers to continuous adjustments and reconfiguration of internal routines and workflows to sustain strategic alignment (Teece, 2007; Swafford et al., 2006; Hanelt et al., 2021). Thus, flexibility is not only operational but strategic, enabling the firm to remain responsive in dynamic contexts.

Bringing these elements together, dynamic capabilities theory offers a causal logic that connects the study's three central constructs. Stakeholder engagement functions as a sensing mechanism, enabling firms to gather timely insights from their environment. Business process flexibility acts as the vehicle through which these insights are translated into internal actions – reflecting both seizing and transforming capabilities. Business performance is then the observable outcome of this interplay.

This research treats business process flexibility as mediating variable between stakeholder engagement and performance. Organizations that are both responsive to stakeholders and capable of adapting their internal processes are more likely to improve outcomes in areas such as innovation, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Teece, 2018).

Figure 1 illustrates how Teece's theory of dynamic capabilities resonates with the theoretical understanding of the interaction between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility and business performance in this research.

Figure 1.

Dynamic capabilities logic linking stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance
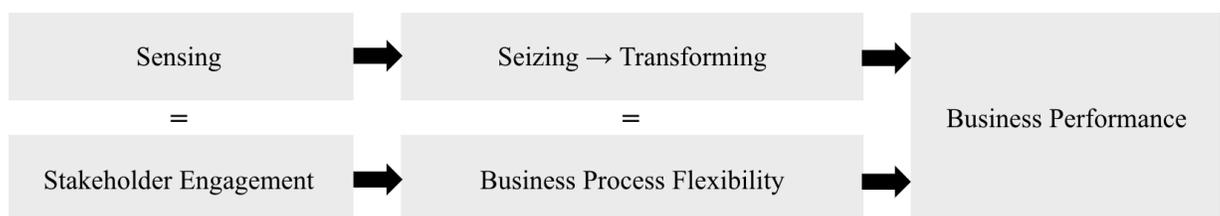
Source: compiled by the author, based on Teece (2008).

Gaps in integrated perspectives

Although the current literature has extensively examined the individual relationships between stakeholder engagement, business process agility, and business performance, there is little comprehensive research that integrates these three aspects into a single model. Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) and Teece (2007; 2018) emphasize that capabilities should be analyzed not in isolation, but as interdependent mechanisms that support strategic agility. Hanelt et al. (2021) further argue that stakeholder engagement, especially in digital ecosystems, plays a role in enabling dynamic responses through internal reconfiguration.

Most existing work focuses on dyadic relationships: either how engagement influences business process flexibility or how business process flexibility influences business performance. This fragmentation prevents a full understanding of how these key elements interact with each other in complex and dynamic organizational systems.

Furthermore, the available research rarely considers the reciprocal, bidirectional influences between these factors. For example, stakeholder engagement is thought to improve process flexibility, but there is little in-depth analysis of how changes in process flexibility may influence stakeholder engagement and vice versa. Similarly, the relationship between business performance and flexibility is often studied in a one-way manner, without considering feedback loops and development cycles.

The existing literature notably also lacks investigation into the integrating role of business process flexibility within the relationship between stakeholder engagement and business performance. While stakeholder engagement and process flexibility have each been linked to improved organizational outcomes, there is a significant gap concerning how process flexibility functions as an intermediary mechanism translating stakeholder engagement into enhanced business performance. This integration effect remains underexplored both conceptually and empirically.

Particularly little attention has been paid to how these three factors work together as part of a single system that supports organizational flexibility and resilience. In today's rapidly changing and digitally transformative environment, where companies must simultaneously manage relationships with multiple stakeholders and rapidly redesign internal processes, such integration is critical. The lack of a comprehensive model that explains the interactions between engagement, agility, and performance makes it difficult to develop effective management strategies and practices.

A comprehensive review of the literature reveals that there are no studies that clearly describe the strength and nature of the relationships between these constructs. There are no precise

estimates of, for example, the extent to which process flexibility enhances the effect of engagement on performance.

Therefore, there is an obvious and significant research gap that requires further research. Developing a more comprehensive and holistic approach will not only allow us to better understand how these factors interact with each other, but also offer practical recommendations for companies seeking to improve their competitiveness and adaptability in an ever-changing business environment.

Theoretical contribution of the Research

This study integrates perspectives from stakeholder theoryб business process managementб and dynamic capabilities theory to develop a conceptual understanding of how organizations align stakeholder engagementб process flexibility, and business performance.

Rather than treating these constructs as isolated or measurable variables, the research conceptualizes them as interconnected strategic capabilities that jointly shape organizational adaptability and long-term competitiveness.

By exploring these mechanisms qualitatively, the study contributes to theory by offering a contextual and process-oriented view of how stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility interact to sustain business performance.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Problem and aim of the Research

In today's fast-changing business environment, companies are under constant pressure to stay both competitive and adaptable. Organizations are expected not only to perform well but also to respond quickly to external demands and create value together with customers, partners, and society. In this context, stakeholder engagement has become a key part of strategic decision-making. However, while it is widely recognized as important, there is still a lack of research on how exactly it influences business performance – especially when we consider internal factors like business process flexibility. The integrated interplay among three key constructs in organizational management – stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance – is not explored in a unified framework.

This thesis aims to investigate the dynamic interaction between stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility and the reciprocal effects of business performance on both engagement and flexibility. Additionally, it examines the integrating role of business process flexibility in the relationship between stakeholder engagement and business performance.

Research questions

The main research questions of this study are:

RQ1: How do organizations perceive and manage the interplay between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance?

RQ2: How do stakeholder engagement and process flexibility together contribute to perceived business performance outcomes?

Research methods

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist research design to explore the interplay among stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance. Since the objective of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of how and why these constructs interact rather than to measure them numerically, a qualitative approach allows for richer and more contextually grounded insights. The interpretivist paradigm aligns with the study's theoretical foundations in Stakeholder Theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which emphasize social interactions, adaptability, and strategic responsiveness within companies.

The research employs semi-structured expert interviews as the primary data collection method. This approach enables the researcher to explore predefined topics while allowing flexibility to pursue emerging themes and insights during the interviews. Such flexibility is crucial for examining complex and dynamic constructs such as stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility, which are often influenced by organizational context and individual interpretation.

Sampling strategy

To ensure relevance and credibility of the responses, purposive sampling was employed to identify individuals with direct knowledge of stakeholder engagement and internal processes. This includes employees in managerial, strategic, or operational roles. To expand the sample while maintaining quality, snowball sampling was used by encouraging initial participants to share the survey with equally qualified colleagues.

The research targets respondents from Lithuania, Germany, the Netherlands, and Nordic countries. A purposive sampling technique is applied to identify participants with substantial experience in process management, stakeholder coordination, and organizational performance evaluation. The study focuses on professionals occupying managerial or leadership positions in medium-sized and large organizations (with more than 50 employees) operating in information service or technology-oriented sectors. This ensures that participants are familiar with structured business processes, stakeholder-related initiatives, and strategic decision-making practices.

A total of 15 participants were interviewed to achieve thematic saturation, defined as the point where additional interviews no longer produce new insights or patterns. The sample size aligns with recommendations for qualitative research involving expert participants − for instance, Bernard (2013) insists that a sample of 10-20 core participants typically provides enough depth to uncover and interpret the main themes emerging from participants' experiences. Kuzel (1992) also suggested that a sample of 6-8 interviews is sufficient when participants have relatively similar backgrounds, whereas 12-20 interviews may be required to capture the full range of variation within a more diverse sample. Given a relatively heterogeneous set of expert roles across digitally oriented organizations, a target of 15 interviews is appropriate for achieving thematic saturation, consistent with classic guidance for maximum variation samples (12-20) and expert studies (10-20)

Potential interviewees were contacted through professional networks and LinkedIn, and participation will be voluntary. Anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed in accordance with ethical research standards.

To ensure anonymity and maintain ethical research standards, all interview participants were assigned anonymized identifiers. Each interviewee is referenced in the findings using respondent codes R1–R15. Personal names, company names, or identifying organizational data are not disclosed. The coding system prevents any direct or indirect identification of individuals, fully complying with data protection regulations and academic ethics.

Research instrument – semi-structured interview

The interview guide was developed based on the theoretical foundations presented in Chapter 1, ensuring that each question aligns with the constructs and interrelationships identified in the conceptual framework. The theoretical foundation combines Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), Business Process Management, and the Dynamic Capabilities Theory (Teece, 2007), which together explain how stakeholder engagement and process flexibility contribute to business performance.

The development process of the interview questions followed a theory-driven and iterative approach. The first version of the guide was structured into thematic sections that reflected the three core constructs of the study − stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance. Each section included both descriptive and exploratory questions, allowing participants to reflect on specific experiences and organizational practices. The questions were formulated to move from general to specific, beginning with background questions to establish context.

To ensure conceptual consistency between the theoretical and empirical parts of the study, each construct was further divided into dimensions derived from the theoretical framework in Chapter 1. These dimensions served as analytical lenses for developing focused questions within each section of the interview guide.

To ensure the clarity, coherence, and relevance of the questions, a pilot testing phase was conducted with two professionals in managerial positions to evaluate the wording, sequencing, and timing of the interview guide. Based on their feedback, minor adjustments were made to simplify language, clarify definitions (for example,"stakeholder" and "flexibility"), and ensure that all topics were easily understandable across industries.

Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on the depth of discussion and the participant's level of engagement. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via online platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, depending on the participant's location and preference. Participants received an interview invitation and an information sheet at least one week

before the scheduled session, including the study's purpose, confidentiality terms, and their rights as participants. Before each interview began, the researcher obtained informed consent for participation and for audio recording of the conversation.

All interviews were audio-recorded (with participant consent) and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then uploaded into NVivo software for thematic analysis. Each participant had a unique code to ensure anonymity during analysis and reporting. To protect data confidentiality, recordings and transcripts were securely stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher. The data collection phase took approximately four to six weeks, depending on participants' availability. The interviews were conducted sequentially, allowing for preliminary reflection and minor refinements to later interviews if recurring patterns or new themes emerge.

The final structure of the interview guide consists of five sections:

1. General background information (role, company, context);
2. Stakeholder engagement practices and mechanisms;
3. Business process flexibility;
4. Business performance outcomes and their drivers;
5. Integrative perspective;
6. Reflection and future perspectives.

Each section includes open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed insights rather than binary responses. The structure allows for both comparability across participants and the flexibility to adapt to different organizational contexts. Table 7 outlines the interview questions, their correspondence to the studied constructs and dimensions, as well as the scientific sources on which the formulation of these questions is based.

Table 7.

The interview guide development and theoretical grounding

Thematic section	Main questions and corresponding dimensions of the constructs	Authors
Stakeholder engagement	● Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes (internal and external)? ● How does your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders? *Dimension: Transparency*	(Freeman, 1984), (Morsing and Schultz , 2006), (Greenwood, 2007).

Continuation of Table 7.

	• In what ways are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, or improvement initiatives? To what extent do stakeholders influence strategic or operational decisions in your organization? *Dimension: Inclusiveness* • How does your organization build and maintain trust with stakeholders over time? *Dimension: Trust and Commitment* • How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders? *Dimension: Dialogue Quality* • How quickly and effectively does your organization respond to stakeholder concerns or requests? Can you share an example when quick response led to a positive outcome? *Dimension: Responsiveness*	(Freeman, 1984), (Morsing and Schultz , 2006), (Greenwood, 2007).
Business process flexibility	• How does your organization adapt or modify products or services to meet changing stakeholder needs or market conditions? *Dimension: Product/Service Flexibility* • How quickly and effectively can your team implement such changes when required? *Dimension: Digital Process Flexibility* • How does your organization reallocate people, time, or financial resources when priorities shift? *Dimension: Resource Flexibility* • In what ways can workflows or process routes be altered to handle unexpected events or priorities? *Dimension: Routing Flexibility* • How flexible is your decision-making structure when urgent or unexpected situations arise? *Dimension: Decision-Making Flexibility*	(Swafford et al., 2006); (A. Sethi and S. Sethi, 1990), (Hanelt et al. , 2021), (Bharadwaj et al., 2013), (Li et al., 2018), (Zain et al., 2005).

Continuation of Table 7.

Business performance	- How would you assess your organization's current financial health and stability? *Dimension: Financial Performance* - How effectively do your processes operate in terms of productivity, quality, and timeliness? *Dimension: Operational/Process Performance* - How does your organization measure and maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty? What recent feedback or indicators show improvement or decline? *Dimension: Customer Performance* - How do you evaluate the organization's capacity for innovation? *Dimension: Innovation Performance* - How do you assess the performance and engagement of internal teams or key stakeholders? *Dimension: Stakeholder/Employee Performance*	(Bititci et al., 2012), (Neely et al., 2002), (Richard et al., 2009), (Venkatraman and Ramanujam, 1986), (Kaplan and Norton, 1992), (Neely et al., 2002).
The interplay among constructs	- How do stakeholder interactions or feedback influence adjustments in your processes or operations? - What examples can you share where process flexibility directly improved efficiency, innovation, or customer satisfaction? - How do stakeholder engagement affect your organization's performance results? - How does business process flexibility help your organization translate stakeholder needs into measurable results? Can you describe a case where responding to stakeholder needs through flexible action improved outcomes? - How would you describe the overall relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance in your organization? Which of these three elements tends to drive the others in your experience?	(Freeman, 1984), (Morsing & Schultz, 2006), (Freudenreich et al., 2020), (Trkman, 2010), (Swafford et al., 2006), (Tallon & Pinsonneault, 2011), (Greenwood, 2007), (Simeone & Marzi, 2021), (Sharma & Henriques, 2005), (Driessen et al. al., 2013), (Hunjra et al., 2007), (Kaplan & Norton, 1993).

Compiled by the author.

Through in-depth interviews with experienced professionals, the study aims to demonstrate how these phenomena manifest in practice − how companies interact with their stakeholders, how they adapt processes to changing conditions, and how these actions impact overall performance.

Data analysis approach

The collected interview data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach is suitable for the present research, as it allows for the identification of patterns and meanings across participants' experiences while maintaining a strong link to the theoretical framework established in Chapter 1.

Data analysis will be conducted using NVivo software, which allows for convenient interview organization, text coding, and identification of recurring themes in respondents' responses. The analysis process will be conducted in stages and will include six main phases presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Empirical data analysis scheme

Familiarisation with the data

Initial coding

Searching for themes

Reviewing themes

Defining and naming themes

Reporting and interpretation of results
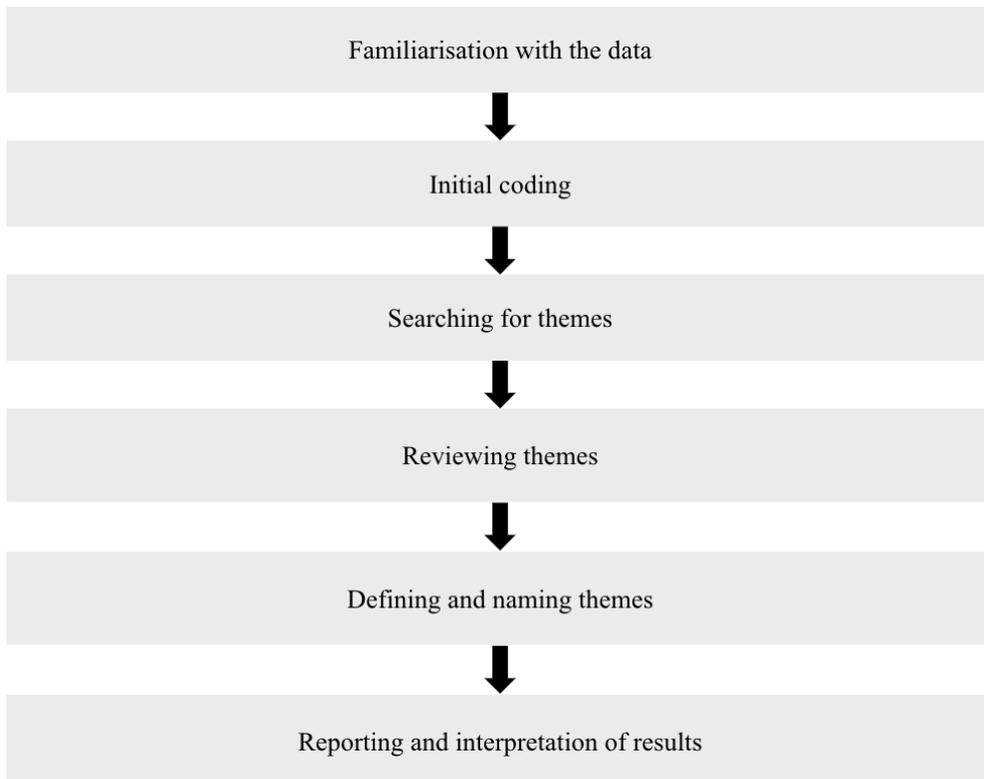
Source: compiled by the author, based on Braun and Clarke (2006).

It is important to note that during the stage of initial coding, relevant segments of text were coded line by line. A hybrid deductive-inductive coding approach was used for this research. Deductive codes were derived from the theoretical dimensions established in Chapter 1. These dimensions represent the three main constructs of the study: stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance.

At the same time, an inductive approach was applied to identify additional patterns and ideas emerging directly from the participants' responses. This dual strategy ensures that the analysis remains both theory-informed and open to new insights.

Each theme was clearly defined and supported by representative quotations. Themes were related back to the theoretical model to demonstrate how the empirical findings reflect or extend the conceptual relationships proposed in the study.

Limitations of the Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between stakeholder engagement and organizational performance and business process agility, it has several limitations that need to be addressed.

The study uses purposive sampling, focusing on professionals with direct experience in process management and stakeholder interaction. While this ensures relevance and depth, it may also introduce selection bias: participants from well-structured organizations may hold more mature views on process flexibility and engagement than those from smaller or less developed companies. This may limit the diversity of perspectives.

Second, this study focuses primarily on organizations operating in European information service sectors. Cultural and institutional factors may influence stakeholder relationships and decision-making processes differently in other regions or industries. Thus, the contextual specificity of the sample may limit cross-regional comparability.

Third, the constructs – stakeholder engagement, flexibility, and performance – are multifaceted and multidimensional. While the interview questions are based on robust literature, some important subcomponents may still be underrepresented.

Future studies could continue this research by collecting data over a longer period of time, using different types of data sources, or including participants from a wider range of industries and regions.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Between October 20, 2025, and December 10, 2025, 15 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview method. All respondents (see Table 8) work in the technology sector and represent companies engaged in software development or IT consulting services. The respondents' level of professional experience varied depending on their seniority; however, all participants were experienced professionals with practical project and/or product management experience and at least three years of industry experience.

Table 8.

The list of respondents

Respondent	Role	Type of company
R1	VP of Product	FinTech company
R2	Director of Engineering	Digital entertainment platform
R3	Business Development Manager	IT consulting company
R4	Director of Engineering	E-commerce and digital services company
R5	Product Manager	Cybersecurity-focused IT company
R6	Head of Operations	AI-driven product company
R7	Product Manager	IT consulting company
R8	Project Manager	IT consulting company
R9	Senior Product Manager	FinTech company
R10	Senior Director of Engineering	Digital media and audio streaming platform
R11	Product Manager	Enterprise IT services provider
R12	Platform Engineering Manager	Digital platform company
R13	Data Product Manager	Data and analytics software company
R14	Security and Compliance Lead	Cybersecurity solutions provider
R15	Customer Success Lead	Product-oriented software company

Compiled by the author.

3.1 Stakeholder engagement as a foundation for controlled flexibility

This theme reflects how interview participants describe stakeholder engagement not as a set of communication activities, but as a mechanism that creates the conditions for more coordinated and controlled process change. A consistent theme throughout the interviews was that it is not the frequency of interactions, but the nature of engagement that determines a company's ability to adapt without chaos, unnecessary rework, and conflicting priorities. The analysis revealed several consistent patterns, presented in the following subthemes.

Stakeholder engagement is result of shared sense-making rather than communication volume

One of the noticeable patterns is that in most organizations, stakeholder engagement is fostered primarily through regular, rhythmic, and structured communication. Participants describe a wide range of recurring practices − from short daily syncs to monthly strategic meetings − that create the foundation for aligning expectations and collaborative decision-making. Frequency and predictability of communication are seen as a key mechanism for maintaining engagement at the operational and strategic levels.

Regularity of communication is also emphasized in the context of project activities, where consistent exchange of information ensures transparency of processes (R8).

At a broader organizational level, a formalized set of communication practices is encountered − from operational command statuses to meetings with management (R2).

Frequent communication allows stakeholders to participate in planning and agreeing on priorities, reducing the risk of gaps in understanding goals. Respondents note that regular synchronicities create conditions for ongoing alignment (R3).

Additionally, even when stakeholders cannot attend meetings, companies ensure transparency and access to information through written summaries and follow-up communications (R11).

Taken together, these data demonstrate that frequent, rhythmic, and structured communication is key to maintaining stakeholder engagement. Regular synchronization, periodic reviews, ongoing updates, and accessible communication channels create the foundation for aligned actions, early problem identification, and more effective decision-making.

But at the same time, some respondents made distinction between frequent communication and truly involvement in business processes and transparency. They emphasized that engagement is effective only when parties reach a shared understanding of key constraints and tradeoffs − such as

timelines, risks, quality, resources, and expected results. As one interviewee explained, the team strives to discuss not only the results but also the reasons:

Thus, the effectiveness of interaction depends not on the number of interactions, but on whether communication facilitates a shared transparent understanding of what is happening. For instance, the way the information is perceived and analyzed by management plays an equally important role as the frequency of interactions with stakeholders and between stakeholders:

In some cases, respondents reported a large number of communication channels and mandatory meetings and syncs, but despite this large amount of communication, there was no agreement on fundamental operational issues and future goals, resulting in a lack of synchronization and coordination in the work of different departments (R9).

Other respondents noted that in situations where communication becomes abundant but superficial, consensus remains elusive, and discussions tend to multiply opinions rather than bring them together. In some cases, excessive communication even hindered decision-making, creating informational noise rather than fostering shared understanding (R10).

Table 9.

Mechanisms of successful stakeholder engagement

Category	*Subcategory*	*Citation*
Regular communication as a baseline for engagement	Structured meetings (weekly/bi-weekly)	"Openness and transparency are ensured through frequent and structured communication. For most projects, regular meetings are scheduled on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, depending on scope and complexity of the problems we're discussing." (R8) "We also have many channels of communication: official emails, meetings, regular project status updates − we have them weekly… um… agile ceremonies… um… For example, daily standups, sprint planning, demos. Microsoft Teams is our most popular communication tool." (R1) "We have structured forums: weekly meetings, bi-weekly updates with senior leadership, all-hands meetings where we show progress on OKRs, and demos. Transparency is very important for us." (R2) "Internally, engagement happens through daily stand-ups, weekly syncs, and monthly all-hands meetings." (R6)

		"I hold recurring status meetings where I gather questions from stakeholders and share weekly updates. I mean what has been done, what was planned, current metrics, existing problems, open risks… everything." (R9)
	Recordings and written follow-ups	"We usually try to invite all relevant stakeholders to meetings. If someone cannot join, which may happen sometimes, because we all have ongoing tasks and responsibilities… yeah… So, these colleagues either receive a recording or a written follow-up, depending on the topic. This helps avoid misunderstandings and the so-called "broken phone" effect. I think we do everything in order to keep everyone updated, even if they're not present in the meetings." (R11)
	Cross-functional synchs	"Additionally, we have an anonymous Q&A channel where anyone could ask any question. That helps maintain openness. We hold weekly "lead meetings" − all function leads including marketing, support, sales, share their updates, blockers, progress, maybe cross-functional issues, if there are any… Those meetings ensure alignment." (R3)
Importance of shared sense-making	Explaining decision logic	"We also try to explain not only what decisions are made, but why. For example, when we say no to a request, we clearly articulate the trade-offs and risks involved. Over time, this reduces frustration and builds understanding." (R12) "It's one of the main responsibilities I have − to communicate the vision to them [employees]. Many engineers were getting tired of working on the same consumer product for years. The new product is innovative, challenging, and has a direct impact on high-value clients. Our employees see the business logic behind it − and they are motivated because they understand the scale of what we're building, they understand the potential. Good for business also means good for them as professionals." (R4)
	Leadership willingness to listen	"But how effective this engagement is depends a lot on whether leadership is actually willing to listen and adjust." (R6 − Head of Operations)

Continuation of Table 9.

	Collective decision-making	"All questions and all decisions must be made together within this committee. There is no other way, honestly. <...>And those experts… um… they're supposed to collaborate about every single detail of the project. I really mean every single detail. So, we're always very open about everything…" (R1)
	Unclear responsibilities or personal interests as limitations of successful communication	"The frequency is there, but the quality is missing because of not fully understanding their responsibilities. The company is competing with other big enterprises, but internally the resources are limited, which means that there are a lot of things that have to happen at the same time and a lot of important things get out of focus and then the loudest voice gets through and that's how the next thing to work on is happening, which is not a very good quality." (R10) "When certain stakeholders try to slow down changes or… I don't know… push their own interests, I bring them into open discussions with the operational team… <...> I also participate in strategic service-track calls to connect… um… operational realities with technical strategy. Um… There was initially a disconnect with the product team. They sometimes launched initiatives without operational alignment, and in this case the call center learned about changes only from customers." (R9)

Source: compiled by the author.

These observations indicate that structured and frequent communication merely serves as a precondition for this. True stakeholder engagement capable of supporting decisions that were agreed upon, stable processes, and effective flexibility occurs only when communication fosters a shared logic, a common understanding of the issues, and mutual understanding of tradeoffs.

Transparency and dialogue quality create conditions in which shared understanding can be transformed into business process flexibility

An analysis of the interviews reveals that transparency and the quality of professional dialogue form the foundation upon which shared understanding can translate into coordinated and timely action. Unlike simply regular communication, transparency requires the accessibility of

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decision logic, clarity of tradeoffs, and visibility of risks for all stakeholders. This enables not only the correct interpretation of information but also the ability of teams to adapt without chaotic interruptions or disruption to operational stability. In all the cases examined, transparency is not a consequence of successful agility, but rather a prerequisite for it.

Table 10.

Transparency and dialogue quality as enablers of business process flexibility

Category	*Subcategory*	*Citation*
Transparency supporting proactive adaptation and business process flexibility	Early identification of risks and deviations	"Engagement helps detect risks early. Very often clients point out issues before they turn into churn, and employees highlight problems before they become systemic." (R6)
	Continuous exchange of signals with stakeholders	"Stakeholders are deeply involved in planning. Every week we align on goals, decisions, problems, and next steps. If something remains unresolved, we schedule an additional session. But it's not a hierarchical, top-down environment − it's more collaborative. People challenge ideas, ask tough questions, and refine decisions together." (R4) "These colleagues either receive a recording or a written follow-up… This helps avoid misunderstandings and the so-called 'broken phone' effect." (R11)
	Clarity of goals, constraints and trade-offs	"We also try to explain not only what decisions are made, but why. For example, when we say no to a request, we clearly articulate the trade-offs and risks involved. Over time, this reduces frustration and builds understanding." (R12)
Consequences of insufficient transparency	Reactive, firefighting-driven changes	"Very quickly [react to stakeholder requests], but that's not always a good thing. The culture used to be very reactive − firefighting, changing priorities constantly. This causes burnout and instability. In general we lack strict prioritization." (R2)
	Operational disruptions due to missing information	"The call center learned about functional changes from customers, causing stress, disruptions, and the need for urgent task redistribution." (R9)

Source: compiled by the author.

A typical example is the case described in the interview R8, where transparency functions as a mechanism for early detection of deviations. Continuous, open exchange of signals with clients and internal teams enables a shared understanding of emerging risks before they escalate into crises. This allows processes to be adjusted proactively, rather than at the point of disruption. In this configuration, transparency creates the foundation for "predictive agility," where the organization adapts proactively rather than reactively.

In another case (R2), transparency manifests itself as a factor that reduces coordination costs and accelerates decision approval. Open discussions of constraints, causality, and risks enable teams to act faster and more confidently, without having to repeatedly confirm the same context. Clarity of decision logic eliminates unnecessary approval cycles and makes changes manageable. Here, transparency acts as an infrastructural condition: it provides a common cognitive framework within which agility can be implemented without disrupting process synchronicity.

The opposite is observed in another case (R9), where a lack of transparency led to system failures. The product team implemented changes without providing operational units with the necessary information. As a result, the call center learned about functional changes from customers, causing stress, disruptions, and the need for urgent task redistribution. Here, a lack of transparency undermined the very possibility of agility: adaptation occurred either too late or in a "firefighting" manner. The introduction of transparent cross-functional dialogue changed the situation: risks were discussed in advance, consequences were modeled jointly, and adaptation occurred in a coordinated manner.

In the case R11, transparency serves as a means of maintaining a unified information space. Regular meeting notes, structured follow-ups, and accessible decision summaries eliminate the "broken phone effect" and prevent fundamental divergences in understanding. This allows different functions to act within a unified context, avoiding chaotic adjustments. In this case, transparency ensures not only the availability of information but also its clarity, which is what makes business process flexibility manageable.

Taken together, the presented cases demonstrate that transparency creates sustainable preconditions for business process agility. Open information and accessible decision rationales reduce uncertainty. As a result, process changes occur not reactively but in a more predictable and manageable manner, making business process flexibility an integral, rather than an episodic, characteristic of organizational activity.

Business process flexibility relies not only on stakeholder inclusion but also on clearly defined ownership

In addition to the quality of dialogue, ownership − clearly defined responsibility for decisions, prioritization, and the final outcome of the process − is a key condition for alignment. Analysis of interviews shows that even with high levels of openness, frequent interaction, and formal stakeholder involvement, an organization loses alignment if roles are unclearly defined, accountability expectations are not clearly established, or there is no single decision-maker. Under such conditions, communication ceases to function as a facilitator and devolves into long discussions without any progress (R10). According to respondetsm without assigned responsibility, a gap arises between discussion and implementation, and communication ceases to perform its coordinating function.

Interviewees note that ownership serves coordinating, cognitive, and social functions simultaneously. It not only helps align stakeholders' actions but also creates a shared understanding of the context, builds trust, and ensures the transition from discussions to consistent decisions and controlled adaptation.

As some respondents emphasize, a clear division of roles and responsibilities helps maintain systemic transparency and predictability of processes (R5, R7).

Several interviews show that having accountable individuals allows organizations to remain flexible without falling into chaos. One respondent describes how decisions are made quickly when there is trust and clear accountability (R9). This demonstrates that ownership is not only a formal responsibility, but also social capital: trust in the decision owner allows for faster approval cycles and increased flexibility without losing control.

Empirical material also demonstrates that organizational business process flexibility is most evident in situations of high urgency, requiring rapid and coordinated action. In such cases, decisions are made not by all potential process participants, but by a small, pre-determined group of responsible stakeholders. Clearly defined ownership allows an organization to respond quickly, without falling into chaotic activity or increasing the burden of coordination:

"In urgent situations, decision-making was highly flexible. Usually, only two or three key stakeholders were involved. This helps to reduce coordination costs and allows fast Responses." (R9)

This passage reflects an important principle: the speed of adaptation is achieved not by expanding the number of participants in the discussion, but by clearly defining those who have the authority to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty and time constraints. Concentrating

responsibility among a small circle of competent stakeholders reduces transaction costs and maintains alignment. Thus, the presence of clearly established ownership is a key mechanism that allows an organization to maintain flexibility even in stressful situations, without losing control of processes and preventing a transition to reactive, inconsistent behavior.

In the literature on stakeholder engagement, inclusiveness − the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in discussions, the evaluation of options, and the development of solutions − is traditionally considered a key dimension. Respondent interviews confirm the importance of this logic: increased participation indeed promotes transparency, improves the quality of information, and allows for the consideration of diverse perspectives, especially during the stages of idea generation and problem identification. However, research data shows that, particularly in contexts requiring increased business process flexibility, inclusiveness cannot be considered a sufficient criterion for successful stakeholder engagement. On the contrary, broadening the circle of participants in operational or crisis situations can slow the decision-making process and increase competing interests, which, in its turn, will lead to a decrease in the flexibility of the system. In such cases, the decisive factor is ownership − the clarity of responsibility distribution, not the scale of inclusion. Some respondents noted that even with high levels of openness in discussions, decisions can be forgotten during implementation if roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined (R10).

Table 11.

Ownership as a mechanism enabling business process flexibility

Category	*Subcategory*	*Citation*
Ownership as a coordination mechanism and a driver of decision flexibility	Clear division of roles and responsibilities for follow-up and implementation	"...But also sometimes there is, for those leaders with whom it was communicated, let's say if it's not on RFC, then those leaders have to take it back to their teams and explain and prepare them. And sometimes that doesn't happen. Mostly I'm going to guess and assume that it was not accepted as something of high importance. And again, back to lack of accountability, promising things that then later cannot be delivered and might be forgotten or broken all the way and not be continuously said further."." (R10) "Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined: for example, delivery managers focus on service quality and client satisfaction, while project teams… um… um… they handle implementation. This structure creates clear communication channels with stakeholders." (R7)

Continuation of Table 11.

	Authority to make final decisions	"That said, the speed of decision-making also depends heavily on who is involved. If there is a strong lead or someone who has authority and credibility, the issue will move quickly to the person who can make the final decision. So I would say that decision-making is flexible, but it's… not automated or process-driven. It's very much… um… dependent on people, their experience, their willingness to take responsibility." (R5) "Even if something works not ideally, but it still works, a sudden change can break it. Then someone has to take responsibility. You need to prepare the team, you have to establish processes…" (R3)
	Trust in the decision owner	"In situations where trust has already been established, decisions are made quite quickly. Yeah. There were also cases where stakeholders relied on my professional judgment and approved proposals without extensive discussion. And this level of trust significantly increased… um… decision-making speed and also process flexibility." (R9)
Limits of inclusiveness without ownership	High participation without accountability	"You can be in a meeting where things are discussed, negotiated, agreed on, and then people leave the room and two days later everything is forgotten." (R10) "People clearly pointed out problems and proposed reasonable adjustments, but nothing changed because decision-makers were not ready to adapt. In those cases, engagement actually became counterproductive." (R6)

Source: compiled by the author.

An analysis of interviews shows that inclusiveness ensures a rich flow of information, reduces blind spots, and increases acceptance of change, but only ownership transforms inclusion into agreed-upon decisions and controlled business process flexibility. These concepts should be viewed not as competing, but as complementary elements of effective stakeholder engagement. Inclusiveness forms the cognitive basis for shared understanding, while ownership provides the institutional and procedural conditions for coordinated action.

3.2 Early stakeholder engagement as a factor in improving business performance

Interview data indicate that early stakeholder engagement plays a significant role in achieving sustainable business results. R14 described situations in which late involvement of key

participants led to rework, operational failures, reduced decision quality, and wasted time. After the transition to early stakeholder engagement, the situation changed leading to positive changes. In the field of Customer Success, late stakeholder engagement also resulted in direct losses (R15). The introduction of systematic early engagement, based on regular work with customer feedback, has led to noticeable changes.

Table 12.

Early stakeholder engagement as a factor in improving business performance

Category	Subcategory	Citation
Early stakeholder engagement improving delivery quality, speed, and business outcomes	Systematic use of stakeholder feedback	"Then we introduced a clear Customer Success system, which was based on customer feedback, and after that, renewals increased. <...> They [stakeholders] determine priorities. Without direct customer interaction, many internal problems would remain invisible until they affected revenue. " (R15)
	Early collaboration replacing late-stage reviews	"Shifting security engagement from late-stage reviews to early collaboration… had a clear positive impact on delivery speed and quality." (R14)
Consequences of late stakeholder engagement	Requirements emerging too late	"When teams consistently report that requirements appear 'out of nowhere,' it's a signal that our engagement model needs to change." (R14)
	Reactive problem handling and operational failures	"Previously, we worked with clients on an ad hoc basis… we reacted to their issues when they had already happened, and it was all quite random, there was no unified strategy." (R15)

Source: compiled by the author.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that early stakeholder engagement has a multidimensional impact on business performance as It reduces the likelihood of rework.

3.3 Stakeholder heterogeneity as a factor determining different models of process flexibility and business performance

An analysis of the interviews reveals that stakeholders not only differ in composition across the organization but are also conceptually understood differently. As a result, the very logic of engagement and business process flexibility is built on different assumptions.

A number of interviews reveal a belief that customers are not stakeholders because they are not involved in internal processes and do not participate in shared decision-making (for example, R1). This approach is typical for engineering and technology roles, where stakeholders are understood as internal teams with dependencies and influence over architectural and operational decisions. In some cases, customers are mentioned only as consumers of the outcome, not as actors involved in approval processes.

Since different teams interact with fundamentally different groups, the relationship between stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and performance metrics manifests itself differently depending on who the key stakeholders are in a particular team.

For customer-facing and service functions (for example, R15, R8, R6), the main stakeholder is the external client, so business process flexibility is perceived as the ability to quickly respond to changes and problems:

"Strong relationships create early warning signals. When customers trust us,

they raise issues earlier, giving us time to react before performance suffers." (R15)

External stakeholder-focused teams view business process flexibility primarily as the ability to quickly respond to customer signals, prevent operational disruptions, and maintain the quality of interactions. The interviews' material emphasizes that early signals from customers enable timely process adjustments, reducing the risk of incidents and negative impacts on the customer experience. For such teams, business performance is measured by service consistency, the absence of complaints, and the speed of value restoration for the customer.

In departments working with internal stakeholders, flexibility takes on a different meaning. For technical teams (for example, R11, R12, R2), the stakeholders are internal product, analytics, and operations teams. Technical teams describe business process flexibility as the ability to change processes within architectural, integration, and operational constraints. In such cases the risk of chaos is much higher, and therefore flexibility must be controlled. Respondents emphasize that it is precisely contextual consistency, clear ownership, and clarity of responsibility that allow their teams to adapt without compromising system stability. For them, performance is primarily associated with reduced rework, predictable releases, and fewer operational failures.

Operations teams describe another model: here, stakeholders are internal product and engineering teams, but their decisions directly impact the service in real time. Some interviews (for example, R9) show that a lack of early communication leads to incidents and critical failures. When communication becomes planned and transparent, business process flexibility becomes the ability to prepare processes for change, rather than deal with the consequences of unforeseen events.

Thus, differences in stakeholder types shape different models of process flexibility. For customer-facing teams, business process flexibility is reactive and aimed at preventing deterioration in the customer experience. In engineering teams, it manifests itself in careful, controlled changes that do not disrupt the system's architecture. In operations, it involves proactive steps that help maintain service stability in advance.

3.4 Alignment as a condition enabling business process flexibility and business performance

Despite the strong differences in the logic of work, all interviews emphasize one common relationship: the effects of flexibility and its contribution to business performance are possible only when there is alignment − consistency of context. This study examines alignment as a qualitative dimension of stakeholder engagement, reflecting the degree of shared understanding of goals, priorities, and responsibilities among process participants. Unlike formal involvement or high-intensity communication, alignment represents a state of shared understanding, distributed responsibility, and shared priorities that enables organizations to transform stakeholder participation into practical, manageable process flexibility.

Respondents describe this not in academic terms, but in very practical terms: "a shared understanding of priorities" (R9), "aligning different stakeholders around a unified picture" (R7). This alignment is the key mechanism linking the three research concepts − stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance. Although respondents described problems with communication, decision-making, and implementation processes in different ways, almost all cases converged on one common cause: when teams are not aligned, neither stakeholder engagement nor process flexibility leads to improved business performance and business results. Conversely, alignment allows companies to use stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility as complementary tools, delivering sustainable performance improvements.

The interviews demonstrate that a lack of alignment leads to a direct breakdown of the chain between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility and business performance. For example, in the interview R9, the product team released changes without coordination with operations. Here, stakeholder engagement was formally present (meetings were held, requests were discussed), but there was a lack of shared understanding and alignment of decisions. As a result, business process flexibility degenerated into chaotic changes, and business metrics showed decline due to failures and repeated rework.

A similar situation is described in the interview R10: even with high frequency of communication, there was a lack of agreement on principles and priorities, which turned engagement into competition.

In contrast, interviews demonstrate that consistency helps transform stakeholder engagement into a real operational resource. For example, the interview R11 emphasizes that structured meeting notes and subsequent summaries of the meetings created a unified context. This means that engagement becomes a shared context, which, in its turn, makes flexibility manageable and controllable. Where there is a common logic and alignment, business process flexibility becomes a predictable tool for adaptation, not a risk. Similar observations are made in interviews R9 and R12, where alignment of interpretations and priorities allows teams to make decisions faster and with lower transaction costs.

Table 13.

The role of alignment within stakeholder engagement in enabling business process flexibility and performance

Category	*Subcategory*	*Citation*
Alignment as shared understanding	Shared goals and priorities	"Everything starts with communication. If teams have aligned goals and work toward them collectively, business processes adapt naturally, and business performance improves. And if stakeholder alignment is missing at the beginning, nothing else will work. It should be like one body that has one clear goal. All actions should be… dedicated to that goal." (R3) "...the dialogue is frequent, but its quality… It varies. Technically, there is no lack of meetings or communication channels. The real challenge is alignment − making sure that everyone understands dependencies and implications." (R10)
Alignment as an enabler of manageable flexibility	Faster and simpler decision-making	"Stakeholder engagement influences flexibility mainly through alignment and trust. When stakeholders share an understanding of goals and trust the project team, processes can be adapted without some lengthy approvals. But unfortunately, there are cases when engagement is driven by politics or conflicting interests, and it can slow down decision-making and reduce flexibility." (R6)

Continuation of Table 13.

	Rapid adaptation in high-impact situations	"In high-priority situations, responses were immediate. For example, when a decision was made to urgently repay debts to a customer group, we understood that failure to act would lead to serious financial consequences. Stakeholders aligned quickly, resources were mobilized, and the process was implemented without delay. This demonstrated how stakeholder alignment directly enabled rapid process changes." (R9)
Consequences of misalignment	Suffering flexibility	"Sometimes the challenge is that different managers send conflicting messages. In such situations, people don't always know whose priorities come first, and this slows things down. When stakeholders are not aligned, process flexibility immediately suffers." (R11)
	Decreasing trust	"Adaptation often means redefining metrics, adjusting data models, or restructuring dashboards. Technically, these changes are easy. Organizationally, they are complex. Stakeholder engagement is critical here. Without alignment, changes feel arbitrary and reduce trust, even if they are technically correct." (R13)
	Suffering business performance	"If stakeholders are aligned and their communication flows well, processes will be more adaptable, and then performance will improve naturally. If not, no amount of reporting or meetings will fix the problem. So, it's again about communication and alignment." (R5)
	Discoordination between departments	"There was initially a disconnect with the product team. They sometimes launched initiatives without operational alignment, and in this case the call center learned about changes only from customers." (R9)

Source: compiled by the author.

Overall, the analysis results show that alignment is the key mechanism that unites stakeholder engagement, business process agility, and performance metrics. It is the presence of a common logic, unified interpretations, and agreed-upon priorities that enables stakeholder engagement to transform into managed business process flexibility, and for business process flexibility to generate sustainable positive effects on operational, customer, and strategic business performance. Alignment thus forms the connecting link, without which the interaction between the three concepts remains fragmented and fails to improve performance.

3.5 Business performance as a multi-dimensional outcome of stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility

The interviews show that study participants perceive three concepts − stakeholder engagement, process agility, and business performance − as parts of a single system. However, respondents do not describe these categories abstractly: they explain their connections through real-life situations, typical failures, areas of alignment and inconsistency, and through the everyday elements that truly help processes remain resilient. A consistent pattern emerges across all interviews: engagement creates the foundation for business process flexibility, which, in its turn, enables effective responses, and this results in improved performance.

Many participants explicitly emphasize that all three elements function as a single mechanism (R1, R2, R3). Their statements reflect not only their understanding of the interdependence of concepts but also their practical experience of how the absence of one element prevents the other two from working.

It should be noted that respondents quite clearly establish a hierarchy of importance. In their view, stakeholder engagement is the element that determines how well a team can adapt and how this will impact performance (R3, R8, R15,). Only one respondent noted that flexibility can be considered more important to business than stakeholder engagement, since it enables the company to overcome difficulties connected with limited stakeholder engagement (R11).

These observations highlight that respondents perceive engagement as a source of understanding of what needs to be done and why. Without this foundation, business process flexibility devolves into reactive, chaotic actions, and performance becomes unstable (R15). The second element in the respondents' thinking is business process flexibility. It is viewed not as an independent value, but rather as a function of the quality of stakeholder interactions. Some respondents describe this relationship literally as a cause-and-effect chain (R6).

Finally, the third level − business performance − is primarily interpreted by respondents as the result of how effectively the organization has combined engagement and business process flexibility. This could include reducing errors and rework (R8), preventing operational failures (R9), increasing approval speed (R12), preventing negative customer experiences (R15), or maintaining process resilience in the face of change (R14).

At the same time, several respondents note that declining performance, conversely, may increase engagement and lead to increased flexibility (R2, R7).

Table 14.

Perceived systemic relationship between three constructs

Category	*Subcategory*	*Citation*
Interdependence of the three concepts	Engagement, flexibility, and performance as a single system	"They all depend on each other − tightly." (R1) "They're tightly connected − each depends on the others. You can't separate them." (R2) "They're really tightly connected − like a wheel. If one part doesn't work, the whole wheel breaks." (R3)
	Perceived hierarchy within the interaction	"From my experience, stakeholder engagement is the signal. It tells you where problems and opportunities are. Business process flexibility is the mechanism that allows you to act on those signals, to react if necessary, to change what's outdated and doesn't serve its purpose anymore… And the level of business performance is clearly the result." (R6) "Stakeholder engagement is the primary driver, as it shapes both process flexibility and performance." (R8) "I see the first two − stakeholder engagement and flexibility − as the main elements, honestly, and business performance as the final result. If the first two work well, performance follows naturally. Performance simply… um… reflects how well the first two interact." (R3) "People come first. You hear people. You hear their ideas, their concerns, their problems. That's the stakeholder engagement. Then it comes into the idea part. That's your flexibility to implement those ideas to address those things and if you do things right then the third thing is the performance. Then you perform well if you are high performance and you deliver great value to your stakeholders or to humanity in general." (R10) "For me, process flexibility is the key element, it defines everything else. If processes are flexible, you can work around stakeholder constraints. For example, if one stakeholder is unavailable, a flexible process allows you to reach out to someone else − maybe a colleague, or a manager. And this way you can still move forward. This saves time and directly improves performance." (R11) "Stakeholder engagement defines what kind of flexibility is acceptable. Process flexibility determines whether engagement leads to alignment or chaos. Together, they shape business performance by influencing decision quality." (R13)

Continuation of Table 14.

Consequences of imbalance	Flexibility without engagement leading to instability	"We can change our processes as many times as we want, but what for, if the main people who should profit from the processes are not really satisfied? And performance becomes unstable too, if there is not enough stakeholder engagement. Not enough insights from them." (R15) "Stakeholder engagement determines where flexibility should be applied. Process flexibility determines how engagement translates into outcomes. Together, they shape business performance. Without engagement, flexibility is blind." (R12)
	Engagement without flexibility leading to delayed response	"If engagement is high but flexibility is low, performance suffers." (R6) "Without flexibility, engagement becomes just… just symbolic." (R12)
Reverse influence of business performance	Declining performance triggering engagement and flexibility	"In urgent cases, the first step is always to clarify the impact on business performance. Once this is understood, stakeholders align more quickly, and… um… decisions… decisions are made faster too. In this sense, declining or threatened performance often triggers stronger stakeholder engagement, which enables rapid process changes." (R7)
	Strong performance reinforcing interaction	"I think business performance [tends to drive the others]. In today's economic environment, if performance is low, everything else − flexibility, engagement − suffers. Performance sets the tone. When there are good performance indicators, stakeholders will feel more interested and motivated, and it will help teams to develop better flexibility." (R2)

Source: compiled by the author.

To summarize, respondents view the relationship between the three concepts as a coherent system, where each element is enabled by the previous one: stakeholder engagement creates shared logic and trust; on this foundation, managed flexibility becomes possible; and business performance reflects how successfully these elements were implemented. This interpretation expressed by study participants provides a practical basis for understanding how the three theoretical concepts function in a real organization.

3.6 The context of automation and its impact on stakeholder engagement and process flexibility

As automation and artificial intelligence increasingly shape the architecture of modern companies, understanding their impact on stakeholder engagement and business process dynamics is particularly important. The study asked respondents to consider how the relationship between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance might change in the future in an environment of increasing automation.

According to respondents, artificial intelligence and automation are not considered factors capable of replacing stakeholder engagement or significantly simplifying management processes. On the contrary, respondents emphasize that technological advances increase demands for consistency, transparency, and the quality of interactions between process participants. Most respondents note that automation can increase the speed of operations and reduce manual work, but it does not address the challenges of setting priorities and interpreting context as well as managing tradeoffs between speed, quality, and risk. These aspects still require active stakeholder engagement and joint discussion. In this context, stakeholder engagement is perceived as a source of direction and meaning, rather than a technical element of processes.

One of the most consistent themes in interviews is the expectation that increased automation will lead to reduced reliance on the human factor in operational and coordination activities. Respondents associate human involvement with emotional instability, subjectivity, and the risk of communication breakdowns, while AI is perceived as a more reliable and predictable element of the organizational system. In this context, automation is seen as a way to reduce the risks associated with human communication, rather than as a rejection of stakeholder interaction (R4).

Despite expectations of a reduction in the number of people involved in processes, respondents consistently reject the idea of stakeholders disappearing altogether. Instead, they describe a qualitative shift in roles, in which the ability to formulate, explain, and translate requirements for automated systems becomes a key value. In this sense, automation does not eliminate the need for dialogue; on the contrary, it raises the demands on its quality. Stakeholders become intermediaries between the organization's strategic goals and the technological capabilities of AI (R11). This position is complemented by the assertion that AI cannot replace strategic alignment and meaningful interaction:

> *"..strategic alignment and stakeholder interaction will remain essential. People should decide where and how to progress. AI is the human creation, too!"* ***(R5)***

Table 15.

Perceived impact of automation on stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility

Category	Subcategory	Citation
Automation improving business processes	Automation as a source of stability and predictability	"More automation means fewer people involved and also more stability. I think it's for the best because people have emotions, moods, personal problems, and AI clearly doesn't. That's why, I believe, AI can be trusted more. <...> Companies won't eliminate all employees of course, I don't think it's possible, but automation will reduce human-related risks, especially communication issues." (R4)
	Faster implementation compared to people-driven processes	"Managing people is complex, is a complex work, and individual decisions or miscommunication can have a strong negative impact on performance. With automation and AI, changes can be implemented much faster. What takes months with people can take days with… um… automated system, automated tools. This will likely increase flexibility and reduce dependency on individual stakeholders." (R6)
Limits of automation	Stakeholder engagement as a source of direction and meaning	"I know a lot of people live in fear that with AI companies will get rid of employees, but I personally don't believe in it. AI will improve decision-making, analysis, and execution speed, that's for sure. But strategic alignment and stakeholder interaction will remain essential. People should decide where and how to progress. AI is the human creation, too!" (R5) "With the AI coming into play human connections will get much more important. <...> Not less important, much more important because in my opinion AIs can replace a lot of automatic things that humans are doing. <...> …that person's job will not disappear but that person needs to make sure that he or she can speak right with the AI to describe what needs to be done as well as that person needs to communicate with the stakeholders to get the requirement right meaning that the job becomes a translator. You basically gather the requirements, you then give it to the AI who will do all the stuff meaning that the good communication is going to be the highest valued skill in the future." (R11)

Source: compiled by the author.

This highlights that with development of AI and automation tools, stakeholder engagement remains a source of purpose and meaning, while AI enhances an organization's ability to act quickly toward those goals.

3.7 Synthesis of empirical findings

The purpose of this research was to examine how stakeholder engagement contributes to business process flexibility and how these dynamics impact overall business performance. The empirical findings demonstrate that stakeholder engagement influences business process flexibility primarily through mechanisms such as transparency, dialogue quality, and clearly defined responsibilities for decision-making and process management. These mechanisms enable organizations to transform stakeholder feedback into coordinated, timely, and managed process changes, rather than reactive and fragmented actions. Thus, stakeholder engagement manifests itself not as a separate communication activity, but as a prerequisite for the development of controlled process flexibility.

RQ1: How do organizations perceive and manage the interplay between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance?

The study results show that organizations perceive stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance as interrelated elements of a unified system, rather than as isolated phenomena. Stakeholder engagement is viewed as a core management practice that facilitates the alignment of expectations and the development of a shared understanding between internal and external stakeholders. Business process flexibility, in turn, is perceived as an operational mechanism through which this alignment is translated into adaptive actions. Business performance is viewed not only as the outcome of these processes but also as a source of feedback influencing further engagement practices and process adaptation.

RQ2: How do stakeholder engagement and process flexibility together contribute to perceived business performance outcomes?

An analysis of the empirical data shows that stakeholder engagement alone does not directly lead to improved business performance. Positive effects on business performance arise when incoming signals and stakeholder expectations are operationalized through flexible business processes. In such situations, process agility enables faster adaptation, improved coordination, cost control, higher quality results, and higher stakeholder satisfaction. This demonstrates that business process flexibility plays a mediating role, linking stakeholder engagement practices to business results.

Overall, the empirical results demonstrate that stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility and business performance form an interdependent system rather than a linear cause-and-effect relationship.

3.8 Discussion

The obtained results generally confirm the findings of previous studies on the relationships between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance. Existing literature shows that stakeholder engagement promotes value co-creation, increased customer satisfaction and innovation (Freeman, 1984; Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Freudenreich et al., 2020), while business process flexibility has a positive impact on the operational and strategic performance of organizations (Trkman, 2010; Swafford et al., 2006; Tallon & Pinsonneault, 2011). The results of this research confirm these relationships, but show that in practice they manifest themselves in an interrelated manner, rather than as separate effects.

From a stakeholder theory perspective, the findings are consistent with the work of Freeman (1984) and Greenwood (2007), who emphasize that stakeholder engagement involves active participation in management processes, not just information exchange. Empirical results show that engagement elements such as transparency and high-quality dialogue help organizations better align expectations and build a shared understanding, which in turn enhances their ability to adapt to change. This is also consistent with the findings of Simeone and Marzi (2021), who point to the particular importance of stakeholder engagement in digital and ecosystem contexts.

The study's findings also confirm the link between stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility previously described in the scientific literature. Greenwood (2007) and Simeone and Marzi (2021) noted that engagement practices influence organizations' ability to redesign internal operations, while Sharma and Henriques (2005) linked proactive stakeholder engagement to the development of adaptive capabilities. The empirical data confirms these findings, demonstrating that engagement's contribution to business process flexibility becomes significant when companies are able to translate stakeholder feedback into concrete and manageable process changes.

The research focuses specifically on the role of business process flexibility as a link between stakeholder engagement and business performance. While previous studies have noted the positive impact of stakeholder engagement on business performance, the findings indicate that improved business performance only occurs when engagement is accompanied by process flexibility and adaptation. This finding is consistent with the arguments of Zhou and Wu (2010), who view dynamic capabilities as a mechanism linking external influences and business performance, and fits well with the logic of dynamic capabilities theory (Teece, 2007; 2018).

Within the framework of dynamic capabilities theory, stakeholder engagement can be viewed as a mechanism for detecting changes in the external environment (sensing), while business process flexibility reflects organizations' ability to respond to these changes and restructure internal

processes (seizing and transforming). Thus, the obtained results demonstrate that it is the combination of stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility that enables organizations to achieve sustainable results.

Finally, the study's findings support the notion of business performance as a dynamic element of organizational development. Consistent with the approaches of Kaplan and Norton (1992) and Neely et al. (2002), business performance includes not only financial metrics but also process, learning, and stakeholder satisfaction indicators. The findings are also consistent with the findings of Herremans et al. (1993) and Nadkarni and Narayanan (2007), which show that high performance enables organizations to invest more actively in process improvements and engagement practices.

Overall, the findings of this research complement the existing literature by demonstrating that stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance form an interdependent system. In the context of digital transformation, such a system enables organizations to build resilient and adaptive development models.

The key contribution of this study is its identification of alignment as one of the dimensions of stakeholder engagement as well as a central integrating condition that mediates the interaction between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance. Unlike much of the existing literature, which often focuses on the intensity of engagement or frequency of communication as primary factors, the results demonstrate that alignment is a qualitative state characterized by shared understanding, consistent interpretations, and agreed-upon priorities. In the absence of such alignment, neither engagement nor flexibility leads to positive outcomes, even when formally present.

Furthermore, the findings clarify the prevailing view in the scientific literature of business process flexibility as an unambiguously positive characteristic. Empirical data demonstrate that business process flexibility without sufficient stakeholder engagement or alignment can lead to reactive behavior, coordination breakdowns, and instability in business results. This suggests that business process flexibility should not be viewed as an inherently positive attribute, but rather as a capability whose effects depend on the context of stakeholder engagement and alignment.

This research advances theoretical understanding by reconceptualizing stakeholder engagement, business agility, and business performance as a dynamically interrelated system in which alignment serves as a key condition determining whether engagement and agility will lead to sustainable outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the existing scientific literature was used to define the essence of three constructs – stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility and business performance – as well as identify the gap in current academic research regarding their interplay and mutual influence. Over the course of the work on this thesis, the following conclusions were made:

1. The study results show that stakeholder engagement, business process agility, and business results are perceived by respondents as elements of a unified system, rather than as isolated management categories. The effectiveness of one element directly depends on the state of the others, confirming their close interrelationship in real-world organizational settings.

2. Stakeholder engagement in the study is interpreted by respondents primarily as a cognitive and social process aimed at developing a shared understanding of goals, constraints, priorities, and risks. It is not limited to formal participation in meetings or information exchange. Instead, the key outcome of engagement is the achievement of a coherent context that allows process participants to act within a unified logical framework.

3. The research demonstrates that it is the quality of interaction, not its intensity, that determines an organization's ability to change processes without losing control. Regular communication alone does not guarantee engagement unless it is accompanied by transparency and discussion of the rationale for decisions.

4. Respondents perceive business process flexibility as a mechanism for transitioning from a shared understanding to the practical implementation of change. However, business process flexibility is not viewed as an inherently positive phenomenon. Empirical data shows that without engagement and alignment, business process flexibility can take the form of chaotic, reactive changes, operational disruptions and decreased efficiency.

5. One of the central findings of the research is the role of alignment as a connecting mechanism between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance. Alignment manifests itself in the consistency of interpretations, priorities, and responsibilities among participants. It is the presence of a common context that allows organizations to maintain flexibility without losing control over processes.

6. Empirical evidence shows that clearly defined process ownership plays a crucial role in ensuring business process flexibility. Even with high levels of openness and engagement, a lack of accountability leads to a gap between discussion and implementation.

7. Early stakeholder engagement positively impacts business results, reducing the likelihood of repetitive work, operational failures, and negative customer experiences. Late-stage engagement, on the other hand, leads to wasted time and a deterioration in the quality of results.

8. Empirical data also shows that the types of key stakeholders significantly influence the nature of business process flexibility. For functions facing external customers, business process flexibility is primarily associated with responsiveness and the prevention of negative customer experiences. In engineering and technical teams, agility is understood as the controlled ability to change processes within architectural and operational constraints. Thus, there is no universal model of business process flexibility, as it is shaped by the context and stakeholder composition.

9. Respondents perceive business performance not so much as a goal in themselves, but rather as an indicator of how successfully an organization has combined stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility. Improved results are associated with the predictability of changes, reduced disruptions, rework, and interdepartmental conflicts. At the same time, deteriorating business performance can act as a trigger for increased stakeholder engagement and faster decision-making, highlighting the dynamic nature of the relationships under study.

10. In the context of automation and artificial intelligence, respondents do not view technology as a substitute for stakeholder engagement. On the contrary, the development of AI increases the demands on the quality of interaction. Issues of prioritization, context interpretation, and tradeoff management remain human responsibility.

11. Automation is perceived as a factor that enhances the speed and stability of process execution, but does not eliminate the need for strategic alignment and meaningful dialogue between participants. In these conditions, stakeholder engagement retains its role as a source of direction and meaning.

12. Overall, the research findings suggest that sustainable business results are achieved not by improving business process flexibility or stakeholder engagement separately, but through a coordinated and context-sensitive combination of both. Stakeholder engagement forms the foundation for meaningful change, business process flexibility ensures its implementation, and business performance reflects the quality of this interaction within specific organizational contexts.

The results of this study provide both theoretical and practical insights. For scholars, it offers a framework for examining how external and internal capabilities interact in dynamic contexts. For practitioners, it highlights the importance of considering stakeholder engagement as a strategic tool for business performance improvement.

Suggestions

These recommendations are addressed to managers, process owners, and cross-functional teams in technology organizations operating in environments of high uncertainty, frequent change, and automation. All recommendations are directly based on empirical interview data and research findings.

The research results show that stakeholder engagement in organizations often occurs through intensive information exchange, but this does not always lead to consistent actions and decisions. Interview participants emphasized that the key problem is not a lack of information, but rather differences in the interpretation of goals, constraints, and priorities among stakeholders.

In this regard, management is recommended to make the logic of management decisions explicit and repeatable. In particular, when making decisions that affect multiple functions, it is advisable to consistently record and communicate what problem the change solves, what constraints influenced the decision, фтв what consequences are considered acceptable for various stakeholders.

Interviews show that the lack of such explanations leads to a decrease in trust and repeated discussions of decisions already made. Therefore, managers are advised to view decision explanations not as an additional burden, but as a tool for increasing flexibility and speed of implementation.

Process owners are encouraged to systematically initiate discussions with key stakeholders at early stages, when it is still possible to adjust the direction of change without significant costs. Particular attention should be paid to documenting agreements. Interviews indicate that even when there is agreement in discussions, a lack of clear understanding of next steps and responsibilities leads to a gap between the decision and its implementation. Therefore, process owners are advised to ensure that discussions result not only in agreement but also in a clear understanding of responsible parties and deadlines.

Interview participants also noted that expanding the circle of participants in discussions does not always improve the quality of decisions and, in some cases, reduces flexibility. In this regard, cross-functional teams are advised to clearly distinguish between the discussion and decision-making stages. During the discussion stage, it is advisable to gather diverse perspectives and identify potential risks, while during the decision-making stage, it is important to limit the circle of participants to those directly responsible for the outcome.

In the context of the development of automation and the application of artificial intelligence technologies, the study's findings also highlight the need to combine technological solutions with sustainable engagement practices. Automation improves the speed and stability of processes, but it

does not replace the need for strategic alignment, contextual interpretation, and trade-off management, which remain the responsibility of humans.

Future research

This research lays the foundation for further exploration of the relationship between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance, but also points to several avenues for future research.

First, given that the research was conducted using a qualitative method and a limited number of interviews, further research could expand on these findings by employing quantitative or mixed methodological approaches. This would allow for testing the identified relationships with a larger sample and assessing their robustness across different organizational contexts. In this regard, the most promising direction for future research appears to be a quantitative test of the indirect nature of the relationship between stakeholder engagement and business performance, focusing on business process flexibility as the key mediating mechanism. Such a study would empirically confirm the central finding of this paper: that stakeholder engagement translates into performance not directly, but through changes in the way processes operate.

Second, expanding the scope of the study's industry coverage is a promising direction. This study focused on organizations in the technology sector. Further research would be useful to examine whether the identified mechanisms persist in more stable or highly regulated industries, as well as in public sector organizations.

Third, future research could examine in more detail the dynamics of the interaction between stakeholder engagement and business process flexibility over time. This would allow us to identify how these relationships develop at different stages of organizational change and digital transformation.

Furthermore, a more in-depth analysis of the factors that may strengthen or weaken the identified relationships is a promising direction. Specifically, future research could include variables such as organizational culture, leadership style, level of digital maturity, or governance structure, which would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which engagement and agility lead to sustainable results.

Finally, given the growing role of automation and artificial intelligence, further research could explore how new technologies influence stakeholder engagement and decision-making processes. This would provide a deeper understanding of how human interaction and technological solutions jointly shape organizational agility and business performance.

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THE INTERPLAY AMONG STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, BUSINESS PROCESS FLEXIBILITY, AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

LIUBOV EVTINA

Master Thesis

Business Process Management

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Vilnius, 2026

SUMMARY

159 pages, 15 tables, 2 figures, 36 references.

The primary objective of this paper is to explore the motives and mechanisms underlying stakeholder engagement and determine how such engagement fosters business process flexibility and impacts overall business performance. The paper consists of three main parts: a literature review, the research and its results, as well as conclusions and recommendations.

The theoretical section examines the development of stakeholder engagement concepts, approaches to business process management, and theories of business process flexibility. A literature review has shown that high-quality stakeholder engagement is essential for increasing alignment, improving communication, and reducing process uncertainty, while business process flexibility enables organizations to respond more quickly to changes in the external and internal environment.

Following the theoretical analysis, the author conducted an empirical study on perception of stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility and business performance based on a series of semi-structured interviews with representatives from various functional areas − product, engineering, operations, customer service, and compliance. To ensure a systematic and rigorous analysis, interview data were coded and analyzed using NVivo qualitative analysis software to identify recurring themes, consistent patterns, and conceptual relationships in respondents' responses.

As with previous studies, the results confirm that high-quality stakeholder engagement helps reduce uncertainty, improve alignment, and enhance process predictability. Furthermore, the study supports the conclusion that business process flexibility does not develop in isolation but relies on transparent communication, shared decision logic, and clearly defined accountability. It was also discovered that the key mechanisms influencing performance indicators include transparent communications, consistent interpretations across functions, early stakeholder involvement in decision-making, and clear assignment of responsibility. The study's results demonstrate that it is the combination of these factors that enables organizations to reduce operational errors, reduce inconsistency between departments, and ensure more predictable process performance. It was found that companies with a unified decision-making logic and aligned priorities demonstrate greater process resilience, shorten delivery cycles, achieve greater service quality consistency, and improve customer satisfaction. According to international publications, all of these indicators are considered key components of business performance, underscoring the practical significance of the study's findings.

In conclusion, based on the results of the literature review and empirical research, the author expresses her belief that the study's findings can serve as practical recommendations for organizations seeking to improve team alignment, build more transparent and effective communications, enhance business process flexibility, and, as a result, reap greater benefits from a systematic approach to stakeholder engagement and the development of business process flexibility.

SUINTERESUOTŲJŲ ŠALIŲ ĮSITRAUKIMO, VERSLO PROCESŲ LANKSTUMO IR VERSLO REZULTATŲ SĄVEIKA

LIUBOV EVTINA

Magistro baigiamasis darbas

Verslo Procesų Valdymas

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Vilnius, 2026

SANTRAUKA

159 puslapiai, 15 lentelės, 2 paveikslai, 36 literatūros šaltiniai.

Pagrindinis šio darbo tikslas yra ištirti motyvus ir mechanizmus, kurie lemia suinteresuotųjų šalių įsitraukimą, ir nustatyti, kaip toks įsitraukimas skatina verslo procesų lankstumą ir daro įtaką bendram įmonės veiklos efektyvumui. Darbas susideda iš trijų pagrindinių dalių: literatūros apžvalgos, tyrimo ir jo rezultatų, taip pat išvadų ir rekomendacijų.

Teorinė dalis nagrinėja suinteresuotųjų šalių įsitraukimo koncepcijos raidą, verslo procesų valdymo metodus ir verslo procesų lankstumą aiškinančias teorijas. Literatūros apžvalga parodė, kad aukštos kokybės suinteresuotųjų šalių įsitraukimas yra būtinas didinant suderinamumą, gerinant komunikaciją ir mažinant procesų neapibrėžtumą, tuo tarpu verslo procesų lankstumas leidžia organizacijoms greičiau reaguoti į išorės ir vidaus aplinkos pokyčius.

Po teorinės analizės autorius atliko empirinį tyrimą apie suinteresuotųjų šalių įsitraukimo, verslo procesų lankstumo ir verslo veiklos rezultatų suvokimą, pagrįstą pusiau struktūruotų interviu serija su įvairių funkcinių sričių atstovais – produktų valdymo, inžinerijos skyriaus, operacijų valdymo, klientų aptarnavimo ir atitikties funkcijų atstovais. Siekiant užtikrinti sistemingą ir griežtą analizę, interviu duomenys buvo koduojami ir analizuojami naudojant NVivo kokybinės analizės programinę įrangą, siekiant identifikuoti pasikartojančias temas, nuoseklius dėsningumus ir konceptualius ryšius respondentų atsakymuose.

Kaip ir ankstesniuose tyrimuose, rezultatai patvirtina, kad aukštos kokybės suinteresuotųjų šalių įsitraukimas padeda mažinti neapibrėžtumą, gerinti suderinamumą ir didinti procesų prognozuojamumą. Be to, tyrimas patvirtina, kad verslo procesų lankstumas nesivysto izoliuotai, o remiasi skaidria komunikacija, sprendimų priėmimo logika ir aiškiai apibrėžta atsakomybe. Taip pat buvo nustatyta, kad pagrindiniai mechanizmai, darantys įtaką veiklos rodikliams, apima skaidrią komunikaciją, nuoseklias interpretacijas tarp funkcijų, ankstesnį įtraukimą į sprendimų priėmimo procesą ir aiškų atsakomybės paskirstymą.

Tyrimo rezultatai parodo, kad būtent šių veiksnių derinys leidžia organizacijoms mažinti operacines klaidas, sumažinti nenuoseklumą tarp padalinių ir užtikrinti labiau prognozuojamą procesų veikimą. Nustatyta, kad įmonės, turinčios vieningą sprendimų priėmimo logiką ir suderintus prioritetus, demonstruoja didesnį procesų atsparumą, sutrumpina pristatymo ciklus, pasiekia didesnį paslaugų kokybės nuoseklumą ir pagerina klientų pasitenkinimą. Pagal tarptautines publikacijas visi šie rodikliai laikomi įmonės veiklos efektyvumo rodikliais, pabrėžiant šio tyrimo išvadų praktinę reikšmę.

Pabaigoje, remdamasis literatūros apžvalgos ir empirinio tyrimo rezultatais, autorius išreiškia įsitikinimą, kad šio tyrimo rezultatai gali būti praktinės rekomendacijos organizacijoms, siekiančioms pagerinti komandų suderinamumą, kurti skaidresnę ir efektyvesnę komunikaciją, padidinti verslo procesų lankstumą ir, kaip pasekmė, gauti daugiau naudos iš sisteminio požiūrio į suinteresuotųjų šalių įsitraukimą ir verslo procesų lankstumo vystymą.

APPENDIX 1.

The Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Ethical consideration before each interview

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study as part of a Master's thesis at Vilnius University. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility, and business performance in organizations.

Your participation is voluntary, and all of your responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

By proceeding with the interview, you confirm that:

- You are at least 18 years old;
- You voluntarily agree to participate in this research;
- You have been informed about the purpose and use of the data collected.

Section 1. Background and context (general information)
1. Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your organization?
2. How long have you been working in this role or within this organization?
3. Could you describe the main business processes or projects you are involved in?
4. How would you define "business performance" in your department or company?
5. What are the most common performance indicators your company uses?

Section 2. Stakeholder engagement practices and mechanisms
6. Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes (internal and external)?
7. How does your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?
8. In what ways are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, or improvement initiatives? To what extent do stakeholders influence strategic or operational decisions in your organization?

9. How does your organization build and maintain trust with stakeholders over time?

10. How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders?

11. How quickly and effectively does your organization respond to stakeholder concerns or requests? Can you share an example when quick response led to a positive outcome?

Section 3. Business process flexibility

12. How does your organization adapt or modify products or services to meet changing stakeholder needs or market conditions?

13. How quickly and effectively can your team implement such changes when required?

14. How does your organization reallocate people, time, or financial resources when priorities shift?

15. In what ways can workflows or process routes be altered to handle unexpected events or priorities?

16. How flexible is your decision-making structure when urgent or unexpected situations arise?

Section 4. Business performance outcomes and their drivers

17. How would you assess your organization's current financial health and stability?

18. How effectively do your processes operate in terms of productivity, quality, and timeliness?

19. How does your organization measure and maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty? What recent feedback or indicators show improvement or decline?

20. How do you evaluate the organization's capacity for innovation?

21. How do you assess the performance and engagement of internal teams or key stakeholders?

Section 5. Integrative perspective

22. How do stakeholder interactions or feedback influence adjustments in your processes or operations? What aspects of stakeholder engagement make your organization more adaptable or open to change?

23. What examples can you share where process flexibility directly improved efficiency, innovation, or customer satisfaction?

24. How do stakeholder relationships and engagement affect your organization's performance results?

25. How does business process flexibility help your organization translate stakeholder needs into measurable results? Can you describe a case where responding to stakeholder needs through flexible action improved outcomes?

26. How would you describe the overall relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance in your organization? Which of these three elements tends to drive the others in your experience?

Section 6. Reflection and future outlook

27. Looking back, how would you describe the role of stakeholder engagement and flexibility in your organization's success over time?

28. What practices would you recommend to organizations aiming to strengthen this balance?

29. How do you see these relationships evolving in the next few years (with AI, automation, sustainability trends)?

30. Is there anything else you would like to add that might help me understand how these three elements − stakeholder engagement, flexibility, and performance − interact in your organization?

APPENDIX 2.

The Interview Transcripts

R1

Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your company?

Respondent: Currently I'm working in a bank in one of the largest technology centers here in Germany. It is actually a big IT department, which automates and supports… um… all the… um… digital channels − for example, digital bank, mobile app. And… um… many more internal application - for example, the ones that help to calculate properly the rates for any kind of loans − for mortgages or other more complicated loans like trade finance loans. So there are a lot of different applications, both external for our clients and internal for employees, which… um… we are developing and supporting. And my role there is a technical product owner, gathering the business needs and then translating them into… um… low-level technical requirements for developers. Because I have advanced… um… technical background. Actually, I graduated from a technical university… um… computer science faculty. That's why for more than 20 years I worked as a software developer and then I became a technical product owner. But technical − I'm not a… um… true banker, I would say.

Interviewer: Yes, thank you. And how long have you been working in this current role in your company?

Respondent: Um… When I just joined this company, I was responsible for loans. For credit, credit… credit rates, credit risks − all of those credit things. And now I moved slightly to data analysis department, which is becoming very important in our modern world. Everything about data is now… um… having much more value than before. Because those who own data also own the world.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's true. And how would you define business performance in your department or company? What is the metric of business performance?

Respondent: I think for the bank… um… the metrics are very simple: our revenue versus our internal costs. For the IT department, it's also very simple to calculate efficiency. So, each IT employee costs a certain… certain amount of money. Each IT application costs a certain amount of money because it must be hosted − for example, in a cloud provider like Amazon or maybe Google Cloud. It must be hosted, so you have to pay for hardware and for software. And if, for example, an

application which is developed by these IT guys and hosted by… um… a certain cloud provider… If this application doesn't bring value, it means you are losing. So… um… you don't have enough profit, enough money. Your profit suffers. If the application brings a lot of money − for example, it helps to save money because it performs complicated calculations automatically that before were done only manually in Excel − then it… um… brings value. You create an automated platform, and this platform allows the bank to reduce some kind of internal staff. This also brings money. So, we're always talking about profit and loss, value and cost − that's the simplest and basic metric for any IT-driven… um… area. Then, if we go deeper… um… after we understand that an application brings profit, we can ask: How efficient is it? How profitable? How much money do we earn because of it? Imagine you have a team of developers, a very mature, very… um… experienced team. Then you have a metric like time-to-market. A very skillful and mature team can bring a new feature from scratch to production in two weeks − that is a high-performing team. And then you have another team, which not so experienced − students, interns, some juniors − and the same feature will be delivered in two months. This way you calculate the velocity and efficiency of a certain team. As a business owner of such a department, you will always prefer ideas to come to market quicker of course. Another important metric is related to error handling, the so-called SLA. Imagine you have your online banking app, and suddenly some issue occurs. For example, your balance cannot be displayed. That is a defect. The first metric is: how many defects appear over a certain time? Maybe the idea of the app was brilliant, but the implementation was dirty, and you created a lot of bugs, so that the app stops working when you click something. Too many defects is also a metric. It must be reduced to zero. Then, even if you have a bug, there is SLA − service level agreement − defining how much time you need in order to fix it. For example: someone reports "balance is not displayed". In an hour you already apologize and the balance is available again. That is a good reaction time. I think… um… this is the most important metric in the IT world.

Interviewer: Great. So now let's discuss the primary stakeholders you have in your team, in your company. Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business, both internal and external?

Respondent: Actually, we have a lot of stakeholders, and they are not very obvious from the first glance. Of course, the major stakeholder is the client − but not always they are a stakeholder, so they're not necessarily interested in the same things we are… um… interested in. I mean all bank clients would like to have money for free, so they are not a… "proper" stakeholder. But nevertheless, they are modern users of our services. Yeah, I mean they are still stakeholders, but not fully. Then, within the company, we have our management board, our business department − for

example, the credit department − and they are interested in revenue. So that is a major stakeholder we have. Then, because it is a bank, we have another very important stakeholder: risk management. You know… um… the bank must be reliable, stable, and of course with good reputation. We can earn a lot of money, but if we accidentally support fraud or finance terrorism, that is unacceptable. So, risk management and compliance are very important stakeholders. We operate in Europe, in Germany, and Germany itself has many laws and… um… regulations. As a German company, we must provide different types of reports for the government, reporting is extremely important for us you see. That's why compliance and risk management are key stakeholders. Then we have… um… another stakeholder − marketing. Everyone is talking about AI nowadays − AI forever, AI everywhere − and if we don't talk about AI, it's strange, it's not good for the long-term profit. The market expects us to talk about it a lot, to develop in… in this direction. Or charity: everyone talks about charity, but if we don't do charity, it becomes a marketing problem, I mean it becomes even a reputational problem. To occupy a niche in the financial markets, you have to follow the rules. That's why marketing is always a very important stakeholder. When we define which feature we have to develop, the most fashionable and bright feature must be implemented first because it improves our position in the market, obviously. And of course, Legal. Legal is very important. They must be involved in every project because we must satisfy regulatory requirements and respect local laws. For example, in Germany there's… um… it starts with "G". I think I forgot. Oh, no. It's GDPR, right? Yes, exactly. We must always be compliant with GDPR. in Germany no company can exist without it! Every application must have a disclaimer at the bottom because we must follow the existing laws of our country.

Interviewer: And how do you think your organization ensures openness and transparency in communication with those stakeholders? What are the ways to ensure openness?

Respondent: Usually, we have a committee for each project. When we start a big project or initiative, we bring all stakeholders together, and they form a project committee. All questions and all decisions must be made together within this committee. There is no other way, honestly.

Interviewer: So in this committee, are there representatives of each department or only managers?

Respondent: Yes, representatives − I would say, experts, not only managers. And those experts… um… they're supposed to collaborate about every single detail of the project. I really mean every single detail. So, we're always very open about everything we're… um… um… working on.

Interviewer: And in what ways are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, or improvement initiatives?

Respondent: Always involved. In each and every project. They all have a voice. You might have a great idea by itself, but if marketing sees no value in it, it won't move forward. Every idea must be discussed with all departments that may be involved or affected.

Interviewer: And this project committee − does it work throughout the whole project?

Respondent: Yes, even before kickoff, at the initiative stage. All stakeholders are involved throughout the full lifecycle. After deployment, every stakeholder group continues monitoring the application. We also have many channels of communication: official emails, meetings, regular project status updates − we have them weekly… um… agile ceremonies… um… For example, daily standups, sprint planning, demos. Microsoft Teams is our most popular communication tool.

Interviewer: And is everyone encouraged to offer initiatives?

Respondent: Yes. Yes, everyone. We even have an official button on our… um… our intranet − if you have an idea, you click it, I mean you click the button and submit your idea. Anyone can propose improvements.

Interviewer: What kind of ideas are usually submitted?

Respondent: Anything − not only technical. Procedural improvements, simplifications, suggestions across departments. So, honestly it can be anything. For example, you noticed that the intranet doesn't work… um… really convenient for you. You can suggest what to improve and how to improve it. So, your suggestions, even the small ones, can… um… really help the company. I mean if you're satisfied with the way your intranet looks like, if it's comfortable for you to work with it, you will have more time and more will to concentrate on your work, and it… um… it brings value. It develops the company.

Interviewer: How does your organization build and maintain trust with stakeholders over time?

Respondent: In the financial industry, trust must exist from the very beginning.

Interviewer: And what techniques help maintain commitment? How do you ensure employees are dedicated to the company's values and goals?

Respondent: We have a performance-based bonus system. And importantly − we use the product we create. We use the app daily: to pay, to save, to invest. It matters when you build something you yourself will use − your family and friends will use it too. That motivates people to create great… um… great tools. If they know they will profit not only as employees, they will also profit as customers.

Interviewer: And how would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders?

Respondent: Very high. We do everything together. There are no isolated initiatives in a bank.

Interviewer: How quickly does your company respond to stakeholder concerns or requests?

Respondent: Very, very quickly. For example, earlier this year, all banks in Europe had to implement the IBAN-to-name verification button. We implemented it immediately, it probably only took a couple of days with all the testing stuff, all the tasks for all the departments involved. We are in good shape here.

Interviewer: Right, thank you. Now let's move to business process flexibility. How does your organization adapt products or services when stakeholder needs or market conditions change?

Respondent: We must be flexible and prepared for anything to come − especially because we are a bank, not only because we're in IT. Regulations are changing constantly. Sometimes the market situation changes − let's say collateral value, risk models… um… what else… real-estate factors. If something changes in the external environment, we must adapt our internal models, like, immediately. The same relates to technological changes and new requirements. When something becomes mandatory, we implement it very fast. For example, the IBAN-to-name verification I mentioned − when the regulation came, we implemented it immediately. Every German bank did it very quickly. That's the only way you can continue your work. If you're not flexible, you'll lose everything at once − not only money at this current point, because you will not… um… be eligible to work in the future.

Interviewer: And how quickly can your team implement such changes?

Respondent: It depends on the complexity of the task we have. Small changes can be delivered quickly; big changes − like… um… regulatory requirements which affect… um… the entire process − take more time, but they still must be prioritized, so to speak. We cannot ignore regulatory tasks. If we are not flexible, then… "goodbye" to the money − because non-compliance has huge consequences.

Interviewer: How does your organization reallocate people, time, or financial resources when priorities shift?

Respondent: Usually people do not switch teams in the middle of a project. E− every project needs stability. But when a project ends, talented engineers are always needed elsewhere − there is always demand for good people. Competition between projects is high because everyone, in every team always wants senior-level developers or analysts. It's not a wonder. Regarding money − if

something important appears, like a regulatory change, we stop all the… all the lower-priority work and redirect time and resources to what is really urgent, what needs… requires our attention.

Interviewer: How flexible is the decision-making structure in urgent situations?

Respondent: Very flexible. Yes, yes, very flexible. In every project we have… um… refinement sessions where we discuss what happened, what changed, and what we have to prioritize next. We constantly re− reevaluate priorities. This flexibility is essential, because in a bank you simply cannot wait till something important changes. You should predict and act accordingly.

Interviewer: Thank you. Now I'd like to talk about business performance outcomes. How would you assess your organization's current financial health and stability?

Respondent: I mean we are one of the biggest banks in the world. Our public quarterly reports show strong results − revenue is high, the bank is stable in the market. Financially, we are in very good condition, that's without a doubt.

Interviewer: How effectively do your processes operate in terms of productivity, quality, and timeliness?

Respondent: I would say performance is high. Yeah, it is high. In my department we rarely have bugs or incidents − teams are quite mature. Some teams are less mature and less experienced and need more time, but they grow and become quicker over time. So, maturity improves efficiency. But overall, you know, the processes work well.

Interviewer: How does your organization measure and maintain customer satisfaction?

Respondent: There are different indexes, surveys, and feedback channels. Clients' growth also reflects satisfaction. Our corporate banking department was recently ranked #1 in the region in terms of client satisfaction. Marketing contributes a lot because brand reputation influences how clients see− see the bank.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate the company's capacity for innovation?

Respondent: Nine or even ten out of ten. We are very innovative. We have a large technology center focused on innovation. We use AI, we introduce new technologies, and have many ongoing AI projects. I can't list specific tools for confidentiality reasons, but we are definitely on top, yeah.

Interviewer: How would you assess the performance and engagement of internal teams or key stakeholders?

Respondent: Our company has many talented people. Sometimes I am surprised how many brilliant specialists we have. I would estimate performance as 8 or 9 out of 10. Why not 10? Because every company has some underachievers − it's normal. But in our bank the proportion of

underachievers is very low. We also have processes that help measure performance and make changes when needed.

Interviewer: What happens if someone is underperforming but trying hard?

Respondent: It's simple. If someone is not strong in IT, maybe they are good in another department − legal, business, compliance, something else. Many people switch departments and succeed. Or they change projects. It also may happen and we're open to such changes if… um… if needed. For example, one project may have extremely strong seniors, and juniors feel lost. But another project is new, less mature − and that same person grows with the team and feels more comfortable. Changing a project can solve the problem. People also can switch teams if they are not mentally comfortable in their current one.

Interviewer: And what about junior developers who don't understand tools yet − do you have mentorship programs?

Respondent: Yes, of course. We have official programs, and they are described even on LinkedIn. We have a regular summer internship and a postgraduate program. If you are a student, you can apply for the internship − during several months you work on a project to understand if you like the field. If you are writing your diploma, you can join the postgraduate program and then work two days per week, study three days per week. After graduation, interns have the opportunity to stay full-time with the company. Many of our great specialists started as interns. And we also participate in talent events at technical universities. And every intern has a mentor and a buddy to help with tasks.

Interviewer: Which examples can you share where flexibility directly improves efficiency, innovation, or customer satisfaction?

Respondent: Flexibility allows us to reorder priorities immediately based on business needs. For example, we had a regulatory requirement − we stopped some ongoing activities and quickly shifted to implementing it. We must be flexible: we are a bank, and if we are not flexible, we lose money.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder relationships and engagement affect performance results?

Respondent: Directly. If the bank generates good revenue, employees receive good bonuses. Everyone is interested in performance. This connection is very clear in the banking environment.

Interviewer: How would you describe the overall relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance?

Respondent: One hundred percent involvement. They all depend on each other − tightly.

Interviewer: Looking back, how would you describe the role of flexibility and stakeholder communication in your company's success over time?

Respondent: I wouldn't say it has "improved" over time — it has always been like this. In banks, stakeholder involvement has been essential for decades. Collaboration is a must. Imagine not collaborating with risk management — you would lose all your money. So this is not something new; it is the nature of financial organizations.

Interviewer: How do you see these relationships evolving in the next few years with AI, automation, and sustainability trends?

Respondent: I think risk management stakeholders will become more powerful. With wars, bad geopolitical situation, and trade wars, financial organizations will need some… um… some stricter procedures. Business decisions will depend more on risk management. Also, financial companies or tech companies in general will try to expand to new markets — especially China and India — new emerging markets. So business stakeholders will become more active there. Risk management plus emerging markets — these will be key trends.

Interviewer: How can new stakeholders in new markets influence business performance?

Respondent: Directly and strongly. Each region has its own regulations. For example, China may require that all data must be stored inside the country — no cloud, no external hosting. This alone can shape business architecture dramatically. Stakeholders influence business decisions all the time.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add that might help me understand how stakeholder engagement, flexibility, and business performance interact in your company?

Respondent: They work very closely together. All our stakeholders are part of all business decisions. Our revenue depends on the involvement of all of them. I can give you a simple example. Business can earn a lot of money — for instance, through certain deals. But if risk management is not involved, and we accidentally support wrongdoing — like financing terrorism — then we will face huge penalties or even closure. So yes, these elements are extremely tightly connected.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time.

R2

Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your organization?

Respondent: I'm Director of Engineering and I'm responsible for the technical and financial leadership of everything that's related to cloud topics in the company.

Interviewer: How long have you been working in this role or within this organization?

Respondent: I joined the company this year in March, and since the beginning I've been in this… um… this department.

Interviewer: Could you describe the main business processes or projects you are involved in?

Respondent: I'm involved in several key initiatives. One is financial control of the cloud environment assessing our cloud spend and overall cloud financial health. Another is developing the cloud strategy for next year, including a decision tree on technologies and a push for standardization. I also work on our streaming platform and the big data migration from on-premise to the cloud.

Interviewer: How would you define the level of business performance in your company?

Respondent: The performance is quite high. The company operates in a certain branch which is media and entertainment. Currently it generates very strong revenue. And even with current trends, I mean with AI and all the automations we had in recent years. No matter how much AI progresses, people still want to be entertained.

Interviewer: Does the company achieve its performance goals?

Respondent: Yes, all goals for this year − both business and technological − were achieved.

Interviewer: What are the most common performance indicators your company uses?

Respondent: OKRs… We work with traditional OKRs. Each OKR has two to four key results. We do quarterly business reviews where we map key results to the OKRs and assess progress.

Interviewer: And which indicators do you personally oversee?

Respondent: In my department, one of the major OKRs is the cloud footprint. For it I define key results like the number of workloads being migrated, cloud expenses, and related metrics.

Interviewer: Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes, both internal and external?

Respondent: Mainly internal. It's development teams using the streaming platform, data teams, delivery engineers − basically everyone moving to the cloud. I work with developers, data engineers, and delivery engineers.

Interviewer: How does your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: We have structured forums: weekly meetings, bi-weekly updates with senior leadership, all-hands meetings where we show progress on OKRs, and demos. Transparency is very important for us.

Interviewer: How are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, or improvement initiatives?

Respondent: They provide requirements and have a strong influence. We map their requirements to technological decisions. If something is too costly or not feasible, we include them in the discussion.

Interviewer: To what extent do stakeholders influence strategic or operational decisions?

Respondent: A lot. We're a product-driven company. Stakeholders play a major role in both strategic and operational decisions, supported by data.

Interviewer: How do you build and maintain trust and commitment with stakeholders?

Respondent: With the structured OKR and QBR process we introduced this year. It aligns everyone around goals and responsibilities and helps build trust over time.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue between the organization and the primary stakeholders?

Respondent: Right now there's almost too much communication, I would say. You see we're in a transformation phase, so stakeholders still need time to trust the new processes. This sometimes creates something like communication fatigue.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively does your organization respond to stakeholder concerns or requests?

Respondent: Very quickly, but that's not always a good thing. The culture used to be very reactive − firefighting, changing priorities constantly. This causes burnout and instability. In general we lack strict prioritization.

Interviewer: Can you share an example when a quick response led to a positive outcome?

Respondent: Yes… I can. Recently during entertainment events, a stakeholder needed certain database KPIs. BI engineers delivered them within a day, which helped make well-informed decisions quickly.

Interviewer: Which types of stakeholder feedback or signals most often trigger changes in processes?

Respondent: Feedback that includes suggestions for improvement − not only criticism. But many people focus only on what didn't work. Maybe around 40% don't propose any next steps. Constructive suggestions help a lot more.

Interviewer: How does your organization adapt or modify products or services when stakeholder needs or market conditions change?

Respondent: That's the reason we're introducing a new product structure and stronger stakeholder management. Right now adaptation is a bit slower than we want. With AI and generative AI, the pace of market changes is much higher, so we're restructuring to respond faster.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively can your team implement such changes?

Respondent: Small changes: hours to a day. Large ones − like migrations or major feature shifts − take weeks or months.

Interviewer: How does your organization reallocate people, time, or financial resources when priorities shift?

Respondent: We're quite flexible in this… in this regard. We're working toward a flexible team environment with a pool of engineers who can move between teams. Regarding financial reallocations… They need justification, but once approved they move quickly through procurement.

Interviewer: In what ways can workflows or process routes be altered to handle unexpected events or urgent priorities?

Respondent: Right now, because the culture historically was firefighting, workflows are frequently reshuffled to address urgent issues. This gives flexibility, but it's not healthy. The goal is to move to clearer prioritization so that changes are controlled, not chaotic.

Interviewer: How flexible is your decision-making structure in urgent or unforeseen situations?

Respondent: Quite flexible at the moment, especially because I have direct access to leaders who control the technology budget. In previous companies, approvals took much longer.

Interviewer: What typically triggers the need to adjust products, services, resources, or processes?

Respondent: New features, technological changes, or the need to integrate new capabilities. For example, adding GNI capabilities for AI service integrations.

Interviewer: Are there areas in your processes that are less flexible or more difficult to change? Why?

Respondent: Engineering is usually the easiest. Procurement and GDPR processes are slower. Legal is the most difficult − there are lots of manual steps and approvals. And within my department, the hardest thing to change is headcount because it depends on yearly budgets. So, it can be predefined only at the beginning of each year, there is not much flexibility throughout the year.

Interviewer: How would you assess your organization's current financial health and stability?

Respondent: Very strong. We have a solid market capitalization in Germany and other European countries and… consistent revenue.

Interviewer: How effectively do your processes operate in terms of productivity, quality, and timeliness?

Respondent: We're in the middle of a transformation. I'm pushing for an AI-driven SDLC to boost productivity. Some processes still require involvement from multiple teams, but overall we operate quite timely.

Interviewer: How does your organization measure and maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty?

Respondent: There are different ways to check it. We use surveys, user groups, tests−both B2B and B2C. Recent feedback is positive, especially because we've introduced new and improved features.

Interviewer: What recent feedback or indicators show improvement or decline?

Respondent: Recent indicators show improvement − mainly because of better features and overall platform enhancements.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate the organization's capacity for innovation?

Respondent: When I first arrived, I wasn't fully convinced. But with the current transformation, I'm very positive. Innovation is accelerating.

Interviewer: Which process changes in the last 1–2 years have had the strongest impact on performance? What triggered these changes?

Respondent: The main impact came from OKRs, QBRs, and standardizing our cloud architecture, because it… um… reduced dependencies and accelerated the– the delivery. The shift was driven by stakeholder pressure and the need to move away from a reactive setup, which was quite unsustainable.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder interactions or feedback influence adjustments in your processes or operations?

Respondent: We follow agile practices − retrospectives, fast iterations, open communication. When something isn't working, we adjust quickly. Basically, the company transformation is pushing the same idea on a larger scale.

Interviewer: Can you share examples where process flexibility directly improved efficiency, innovation, or customer satisfaction?

Respondent: Um… Well… A recent example is offering Google Cloud as an additional provider. Flexibility allowed us to integrate it quickly, finalize a key feature, and then prepare it for rollout. Expectations are very positive.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder relationships and engagement affect your organization's performance results?

Respondent: We maintain strong relationships based on transparency. Even when conflicts happen, we resolve them in a way that minimizes business impact.

Interviewer: How does business process flexibility help translate stakeholder needs into measurable outcomes?

Respondent: Flexibility allows us to convert requirements into features faster − without waiting for long approvals or rigid plans. It shortens time-to-delivery and helps to measure results sooner.

Interviewer: Can you describe a case where responding flexibly to stakeholder needs improved results?

Respondent: It's probably an example of our AI-driven customer satisfaction bot for the B2C segment. Because of our flexibility and AI capabilities, the bot was developed and rolled out quickly, and immediately started generating valuable insights.

Interviewer: If stakeholder engagement had been lower, how would this have affected your ability to adapt processes?

Respondent: It would have been negative for sure. Stakeholders are our main source of business requirements. Without their engagement we'd be lost − we're not a pure tech company, but we use tech to achieve business goals.

Interviewer: When processes were not flexible enough, how did that impact stakeholder satisfaction or overall performance?

Respondent: In the past, when there was no flexibility it caused delays, frustration, and dependence on multiple teams. Stakeholders had to wait, and engineers often got blocked. The move toward standardization and a self-service model is specifically meant to solve this problem.

Interviewer: How would you describe the overall relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance?

Respondent: They're tightly connected − each depends on the others. You can't separate them.

Interviewer: Which of these three elements tends to drive the others?

Respondent: I think business performance. In today's economic environment, if performance is low, everything else − flexibility, engagement − suffers. Performance sets the tone. When there are good performance indicators, stakeholders will feel more interested and motivated, and it will help teams to develop better flexibility.

Interviewer: Looking back, how would you describe the role of stakeholder engagement and flexibility in your organization's success over time?

Respondent: They've been essential. Openness to requirements, constant adaptation, and strong collaboration helped us grow and deliver results. Without engagement and flexibility we wouldn't have achieved this level of performance or transformation.

Interviewer: What practices would you recommend to organizations aiming to strengthen this balance?

Respondent: Be transparent about performance goals. Align business, stakeholders, and technology. Make sure your architectures and processes support those goals. Reduce ambiguity because clarity helps everyone move faster.

Interviewer: How do you see these relationships evolving in the next few years, with AI, automation, and sustainability trends?

Respondent: AI and automation will drastically change everything. Many tasks that required entire departments can now be automated. Even engineering roles − for example, SRE, DevOps − will be heavily supported or partially replaced by AI. Yes, I think so. There is a danger some roles can be fully replaced. Productivity will increase, but the structure of companies will change significantly.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add that might help me understand how stakeholder engagement, flexibility, and performance interact in your organization?

Respondent: Just that the more transparent and aligned these elements are, the better they work. Everyone needs to understand the goals and their responsibilities. That's when everything comes together.

Interviewer:Thank you very much for your time.

R3

Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your role and your main responsibilities in your company?

Respondent: Yes. I'm Business Development Manager, and my role included several key areas. First, I'm responsible for understanding customer problems and identifying which of them were important to solve for our business goals. I am the main person, the main point of contact, so to speak, who the customers can share their issues with. I'm gathering their insights, understand their pain points… All of that. Then I also translate these findings into product requirement documents, prioritize initiatives based on what I found out, and coordinate delivery. I don't do the delivery myself − I had product owners for that − but I drive the vision, scope, and prioritization. Once a product initiative is launched, I work backwards: define metrics, collaborate with analytics, and assess whether the initiative was successful. I also communicate regularly with stakeholders across the company. Those are different departments: marketing, support, sales, and C-level. So, that is my role.

Interviewer: How would you define business performance in your department or company?

Respondent: Do you mean at the team level or per individual?

Interviewer: Overall.

Respondent: We were just starting to introduce metrics and KPIs, and it was challenging to connect personal success with product or company success. For example, you might have several PMs contributing to one KPI, but it is hard to quantify whose work had the biggest impact. And for the product team overall, we have metrics such as NPS after certain feature releases, product performance indicators, retention... But let's go one level deeper. Measuring each PM's individual contribution − it− it can be very difficult. Many functions influence the same outcomes. So, many people from different departments are involved in the same processes, and it always gets more complicated when there are too many people involved. Everyone has their own story, I mean their own way of working and their own targets. And also their own opinions.

Interviewer: Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes − internal and external?

Respondent: Externally, I would name two groups… um… First, our customers − especially larger B2B clients who stayed with us from earlier years when the product was only B2B. We need a specific communication approach for them. Support and customer success handles most of the issues, but the product also stays closely involved. It was important for me that big clients have access to product and felt heard. I often talk to them directly because I want to− to better understand their problems and validate ideas. The second external group are vendors and third-party tools − for example, providers for surveys, campaign tools… And now − internally… Internally, our stakeholders include customer support and success teams, marketing, sales, C-level − so, that's CEO

− and… um… the finance department, because they need to have an understanding of the… understanding which changes we planned.

Interviewer: How does your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: We are fully remote, so we rely heavily on Slack. Most communication happens in public channels that everyone can access at any time. There are a few private channels too − for example, executive-level channels. Anyone can message the CEO directly. You wouldn't expect an immediate reply, of course, but you know the message will be seen and answered. We also have regular meetings. At least monthly, the C-level holds all-hands, that's company-wide updates: where the company stands, what our challenges are, progress, future plans. It is always very transparent. Additionally, we have an anonymous Q&A channel where anyone could ask any question. That helps maintain openness. We hold weekly "lead meetings" − all function leads including marketing, support, sales, share their updates, blockers, progress, maybe cross-functional issues, if there are any… Those meetings ensure alignment. Inside product, we also have more… um… focused meetings. I'd say weekly or bi-weekly syncs with support, sales… Yeah.

Interviewer: In what ways are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, or improvement initiatives?

Respondent: We have a structured quarterly planning process. Since we are remote, those planning sessions happen offline, usually in different countries. We spend 2–3 days together reviewing the previous quarter, identify key issues, and discuss next quarter priorities. Before the planning sessions, each department has to do the pre-work and align all our proposals with the CEO. During the planning days, we have to make sure that also all functions are aligned on business goals and understand why certain initiatives become prioritized. So I'd say stakeholder involvement starts before planning and continues throughout the planning workshops.

Interviewer: How does your company build and maintain trust and commitment with stakeholders over time?

Respondent: Transparency and visibility. In the lead meetings, we always show progress. Stakeholders can see real numbers − NPS, CSAT, retention, various product performance metrics. These metrics can't be faked, so trust is built through visible results. On a personal level, the offline planning sessions help a lot − we could connect as people. Professionally, trust comes from delivering what you commit to. If you promise something and deliver it consistently, stakeholders ask fewer questions next time.

Interviewer: How does the company motivate employees to stay committed and perform effectively?

Respondent: Well, motivation works in two ways: financial and non-financial. Financial incentives include bonuses of course when quarterly goals are achieved. There are also budgets for remote work setup, home office equipment, sports, overall well-being. Non-financial motivation includes a "thank-you culture." If someone helped you, you can publicly thank them, and each thank-you generates a small monetary value. At the end of the month, there is a lottery where two people can win real money. I really like this way to encourage people because, you know, it creates a culture of appreciation and visibility where you're motivated to work more not only as an− as an individual player but also to help your peers, to work together, to achieve the common goal together and− and rely on each other. Even if it's not your personal value to help, you'll start doing it in order to get something… something material, you know. Then it will become your very positive habit, your normal attitude. That's great. And career growth is another motivator − for many functions, strong performance creates opportunities for the next step. But not for all roles. It depends.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders?

Respondent: Efficient. It is efficient, yeah. The weekly meetings cover a lot, and communication with the CEO is very, very direct. You know, the dialogue is still professional but also very open. I never had concerns regarding communication quality.

Interviewer: Let's talk about business process flexibility. You mentioned earlier that the structure limited your career growth. Would you say the organization lacks flexibility in internal processes?

Respondent: Yes, from that perspective it… um… it does, yes. Maybe I'm too ambitious, but the internal processes aren't flexible enough to offer me a clear growth path. It is also hard to measure my contribution because many KPIs aren't granular enough, so my work… um… isn't visible. I'm afraid it can be not visible enough.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively does your company respond to stakeholder concerns or requests? Can you give an example when a quick response led to a positive outcome?

Respondent: We can message People Operations directly and usually get a response within a few hours. They might not solve the issue immediately, but they acknowledge it and… um… and follow up later. One example is that we had cost cuts and had to leave our office. It was concerning for the team. After raising this issue, the company quickly arranged another office which was smaller and cheaper because it was a way to support employee well-being.

Interviewer: How flexible was your decision-making structure in urgent or unexpected situations?

Respondent: Very flexible − extremely fast, I would say. If something is important and you provide a clear reason why it matters and needs attention, decisions can be made immediately or… if not immediately, then as quickly as possible. It depends on the leaders involved, of course, but with strong leaders decisions came fast and execution followed quickly. But it isn't automated − it's just very people-driven. Flexibility depends heavily on the individuals involved.

Interviewer: Are there processes in your company that you consider less flexible or more difficult to change? Why?

Respondent: Um, yes… It's probably engineering. The structure isn't set up properly yet, so making changes is difficult. There is resistance, and the whole engineering department is in… um… a transition phase. We have been working on restructuring for one or two quarters, but we still aren't where we want to be. Um… I think we will need another two or three quarters to fully reach the goals that we established… Yes.

Interviewer: So the main issue was people?

Respondent: Yes, um… People and processes. You can't change everything in one day, you know. Even if something works not ideally, but it still works, a sudden change can break it. Then someone has to take responsibility. You need to prepare the team, you have to establish processes, and then change things gradually. Big changes create some big risks because people may leave. They may not like the disruption. But if you introduce changes step by step, people often don't even notice something big happens, or they feel more empowered. It increases their efficiency and motivation because they understand the benefit.

Interviewer: Why do you think people resisted these changes?

Respondent: Imagine we restructured our QA department and decided that developers should close QA tasks themselves, without any testers. Naturally, they didn't want that. It meant additional responsibilities, additional time and efforts. Another example: even a small tool change requires effort. We once replaced a password security tool. At first we created a testing group, so that we could validate the new tool. It caused conflict, um… not major, but still a conflict. People were used to the old tool, and switching required mental effort from them. They had to get used to a new way of doing something. There is usually resistance, especially when something is done in a certain, unchanged way for a long time. For too long, I'd say. It took then two months in total to… um… fully adapt, to accept the new tool. When you introduce something new, you must test it, validate it, estimate the cost, and only then implement it. So the resistance is usually a mix of two

things: high effort, low perceived value. And yes, sometimes management didn't explain clearly why the change was happening − that made the resistance stronger. So, it was clearly a lack of communication from their side. They didn't think they had to explain too much.

Interviewer: How would you assess the financial health and stability of your organization − on a scale from 1 to 10?

Respondent: I'd rate it a "7." We're financially stable, but we're also in a build-and-adjust phase. Leadership is still maturing, which creates some variability across teams. But the company has enough resources and cost control to stay steady while these gaps are being addressed. So it's not perfect, but it's clearly not fragile either.

Interviewer: So would you say the lack of financial stability is connected to instability in business processes?

Respondent: Yes. I think we definitely could achieve more with the same resources, but we're not in a wasteful mode, it's more that we still have some friction from evolving processes. The basics are stable. I mean payroll, budget control. And effectiveness is decent, too − I'd estimate around 70%, with clear opportunities to improve, if we have clearer roles, fewer handoffs, and better planning.

Interviewer: How efficient are your processes in terms of productivity, quality, and timeliness?

Respondent: We have KPIs at three levels: for each person, for each team, and then for each function. Everyone has quarterly goals, too. We used a system of "digital cards" outlining what each person needed to achieve within a certain period of time. Um… These were aligned with product goals and with company priorities. At some point it worked well, the whole team was aligned with business needs.

Interviewer: How would you evaluate your company's capacity for innovation?

Respondent: Maybe… maybe a 7 out of 10. We have dedicated teams working on AI automation, they run experiments… um… they build prototypes. For example, we create an efficiency tracker where each person writes weekly goals and compares completed tasks to what was planned before. That helps to identify patterns and measure output. We are actively adapting to new technologies.

Interviewer: How does your company measure and maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty?

Respondent: We have the tightest metrics. It's acquisition, satisfaction, conversion... And also we measure it through broader business metrics like NPS. We run interviews, collect customer

data, track usage, measure churn. It is very data-driven. Customer satisfaction is one of the core priorities because in SaaS it's always directly linked to revenue. The more satisfied our customer is, the more financial stability we achieve.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate the performance and engagement of internal teams and key stakeholders?

Respondent: Each function has measurable goals set during planning. For example, Marketing has quantitative goals; Product has goals like improving customer satisfaction. And we check regularly whether goals were achieved, why or why not, and what actions are needed next.

Interviewer: How does stakeholder feedback influence adjustments in your processes or operations?

Respondent: We have a quarterly feedback loop — employees rate processes, managers, work conditions, and cross-functional collaboration. Managers can see their own feedback scores, NPS, and breakdowns by different groups. That helps identify problem areas and understand how to improve motivation. And what I find great, this feedback directly influences process adjustments.

Interviewer: Can you share an example where process flexibility directly improved efficiency, innovation, or customer satisfaction?

Respondent: Customer satisfaction is the biggest example. We collect customer responses, understood their problems, and resolved them quickly. Once we receive feedback, we implement a solution as fast as possible, gather new feedback, and iterate. This strengthens all functions: the company earns more money, teams are less stressed, and customers are happier. As I said, for SaaS companies, customer satisfaction is everything.

Interviewer: If stakeholder engagement were lower, would that affect your ability to adapt processes?

Respondent: Definitely. For external stakeholders — without customer feedback, Product wouldn't know what to build. For internal stakeholders — without collaboration, we wouldn't know what should be improved. Both types matter.

Interviewer: When processes were not flexible enough, how did that impact customer satisfaction or overall performance?

Respondent: Luckily, we are usually very flexible, so I don't have many examples. But in cases where something wasn't worth building or selling, motivation decreased and performance suffered.

Interviewer: How would you describe the overall relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance?

Respondent: They're really tightly connected − like a wheel. If one part doesn't work, the whole wheel breaks. Everything must run smoothly and with as much automation as possible. Everyone wants fewer resources consumed but better output in the end.

Interviewer: What practices would you recommend to companies to strengthen the balance among these three elements?

Respondent: Everything starts with communication. If teams have aligned goals and work toward them collectively, business processes adapt naturally, and business performance improves. And if stakeholder alignment is missing at the beginning, nothing else will work. It should be like one body that has one clear goal. All actions should be… dedicated to that goal.

Interviewer: How do you see these relationships evolving in the future with AI, automation, and digital tools?

Respondent: More automation means fewer people involved and also more stability. I think it's for the best because people have emotions, moods, personal problems, and AI clearly doesn't. That's why, I believe, AI can be trusted more. Companies won't eliminate all employees of course, I don't think it's possible, but automation will reduce human-related risks, especially communication issues. And yes − flexibility will absolutely increase with AI. What takes people months, automation can do in days. You send a command to… um… to your automation tool, whatever that is, and you can be sure you'll get an answer or a direction almost immediately.

Interviewer: Finally, is there anything else you want to add that can help me understand how these three elements interact in your organization?

Respondent: I see the first two − stakeholder engagement and flexibility − as the main elements, honestly, and business performance as the final result. If the first two work well, performance follows naturally. Performance simply… um… reflects how well the first two interact.

Interviewer: You mentioned your meetings and communication are strong, but the company's financial health is still low. Why is that?

Respondent: Because many key stakeholders are still new and not very competent yet. The company spends a lot of resources trying to build the right leadership, but we don't yet have the people who can elevate business results. And, you know, flexibility isn't the issue − we're very flexible. The issue is understanding how flexibility influences business performance and having the right leaders to drive results.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for your time.

Respondent: Thank you.

R4

Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your company?

Respondent: I am Director of Engineering and currently I manage ten engineering teams. Each of those teams has its own product domain, and each works closely with a product manager. My role is to supervise two major business zones − the Growth zone and the Transformation zone. Essentially, I'm responsible for ensuring that our engineering organization can deliver, scale, and support the long-term product strategy. I switch between many contexts daily. Managing engineering managers, coordinating with product managers, aligning with C-level executives… And also making sure that engineering execution meets the company's strategic goals. It's a mix of operational decision-making, organizational and technical leadership.

Interviewer: How long have you been working in this role?

Respondent: A bit more than a year and a half.

Interviewer: Could you describe the main business processes or projects you are involved in?

Respondent: The biggest initiative right now is building a completely new web-based product targeted at marketing teams and content creators. Historically, the company focused on individual users, but now we're entering the business segment, going B2B. Agencies can bring us their brand kits, guidelines, visual assets − basically everything that defines their brand. And then we use AI to generate entire advertising campaigns for them. They can then publish those campaigns directly to multiple platforms in one click. This is a huge shift because the business segment is far more valuable than individual users. We have already launched the first version, and several large agencies are working with it. At the same time, we haven't abandoned our original product line for individual users. We are maintaining it while simultaneously building the new direction. And of course all of this requires an enormous amount of flexibility from engineering because we're like sitting on two chairs at the same time. Working for different segments of clients, creating something new and also supporting what has already been created.

Interviewer: Do employees understand this shift? Are they motivated by it?

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. It's one of the main responsibilities I have − to communicate the vision to them. Many engineers were getting tired of working on the same consumer product for years. The new product is innovative, challenging, and has a direct impact on high-value clients. Our employees see the business logic behind it − and they are motivated because they understand

the scale of what we're building, they understand the potential. Good for business also means good for them as professionals.

Interviewer: How would you define business performance in your company? What metrics do you use?

Respondent: We use revenue as the primary measure. We track monthly revenue and year-over-year growth. For a long time, we also tracked monthly active users, but today our focus is more on revenue and financial efficiency. There is also a financial framework called "Rule of 40." You take your clean revenue percentage and add the yearly growth rate. If the result is 40% or above, the company is considered very healthy. Right now, we are around 20% year-over-year growth and 15% clean revenue. The goal is to raise these numbers steadily.

Interviewer: Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes?

Respondent: Internally that's the CEO, CTO, and COO. They are extremely involved in product decisions and engineering strategy. And what is the most interesting fact about our leadership — they are all hands-on. They come with ideas, they try to create some tools themselves… It's quite rare, especially when a company isn't a start-up anymore. And speaking about external stakeholders — that's the company's major investors. They meet with the leadership regularly and have strong influence on long-term direction. In general, stakeholders depend on your role. For example, for engineering managers, I'm the stakeholder; for me, the C-level team is the stakeholder.

Interviewer: How does your company ensure transparency and openness in communication?

Respondent: Every month we hold a business review meeting with all senior and middle managers. Each department presents its metrics — revenue, uptime, performance, latency, everything. We also have weekly two-hour management meetings for each functional area. The COO, directors, product managers, engineering managers — everyone participates. We discuss priorities, blockers, risks, decisions, long-term direction. And the culture is very transparent. Communication is direct, informal, and, if I can call it so, um… it's psychologically safe. If someone behaves unprofessionally due to stress, HR helps resolve it privately. They can arrange a meeting with a person who struggles or has problems, has conflicts with someone else, and it will be discussed very calmly, without additional stress.

Interviewer: And what about planning?

Respondent: Stakeholders are deeply involved in planning. Every week we align on goals, decisions, problems, and next steps. If something remains unresolved, we schedule an additional

session. But it's not a hierarchical, top-down environment − it's more collaborative. People challenge ideas, ask tough questions, and refine decisions together.

Interviewer: How quickly does the organization respond to stakeholder concerns?

Respondent: Very quickly. For example, once a PM made team seats free in a certain pricing plan. The CEO reviewed the feature, realized it could reduce revenue, and asked engineering to fix it immediately. The team changed it the same day. Right after that, a large client purchased a multi-seat package, which validated that fast response.

Interviewer: How does your company adapt products or services when conditions change?

Respondent: We adjust very fast. The market itself moves quickly, and we follow it closely. It is the only way to stay on track, to stay… um… valid. For example, when competitors introduced nodal editing interfaces, we built our own AI-driven nodal product. We delivered the MVP in one month, and the team worked extremely hard − even releasing updates early in the morning. AI helps a lot. We can build MVP versions in a week, validate, and then improve architecture and scalability afterward.

Interviewer: How quickly can you reallocate people, time, or financial resources when priorities shift?

Respondent: So, we recently optimized our workforce to improve key financial indicators. We also have a special engineering group that can join any team needing urgent support. Resource flexibility is high, especially for critical initiatives.

Interviewer: Do you rely on guidelines or predefined steps in urgent situations?

Respondent: No, not really. Because every case is different. A formal playbook wouldn't work because the environment changes too fast. Experience and intuition are much more important. That's how I see it. And how our leadership sees it, too.

Interviewer: Are there areas in your processes that are less flexible?

Respondent: For sure legacy areas − both in people and in technology. Some long-term employees become tired or resistant to change. Legacy monolithic code slows us down as well − that's why we're moving to micro frontends.

Interviewer: How would you assess your company's current financial stability?

Respondent: Probably around 9 out of 10. The company introduced stricter processes, better discipline, and professionalized leadership. We became much leaner and more efficient.

Interviewer: How effective are your processes in terms of productivity, quality, and timeliness?

Respondent: Quite effective. Productivity improved after we standardized Scrum and JIRA practices. Quality improved thanks to synthetic monitoring − that's the automated tests that check critical user flows and block merges if something breaks. And timeliness is always the hardest − people get sick, dependencies appear, unexpected issues happen − but overall speed is still high.

Interviewer: How does your organization measure customer satisfaction?

Respondent: Mostly through user reviews and direct feedback. Positive reviews mention how helpful and easy the tools are. Negative reviews often relate to payment restrictions or limitations that we plan to improve. A large part of our clients are freelancers and small businesses who rely on our tools daily.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate innovation capacity?

Respondent: Very high. Even junior engineers propose ideas and provide arguments as to why these ideas are good and defend them, can you imagine? We have a dedicated internal channel for suggestions, and many ideas get implemented. And that's because people feel empowered to innovate. They feel seen and heard.

Interviewer: How does stakeholder feedback influence process adjustments?

Respondent: Feedback is part of a natural cycle: feedback, then analysis, then understanding the root cause, implementing, and reporting back. It affects everything: product decisions, engineering processes, resource allocation.

Interviewer: Can you share an example where flexibility improved performance?

Respondent: Splitting the legacy monolithic editor into micro frontends. We automated regression tests and integrated synthetic monitoring. Quality improved dramatically, stability increased, user experience improved − and we saw clear business growth.

Interviewer: How does flexibility help translate stakeholder needs into measurable outcomes?

Respondent: Well… I think a perfect example is the nodal creative tool. Stakeholders identified it as a trend, we implemented it fast, clients adopted it, and business performance increased. This is a direct chain: from stakeholder engagement to flexibility and then to performance.

Interviewer: Which of these three elements drives the others?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement always comes first. Then flexibility. Performance is the outcome of both.

Interviewer: How will these relationships evolve in the future with AI?

Respondent: AI will become a tool but not a replacement for engagement. I know a lot of people live in fear that with AI companies will get rid of employees, but I personally don't believe in it. AI will improve decision-making, analysis, and execution speed, that's for sure. But strategic alignment and stakeholder interaction will remain essential. People should decide where and how to progress. AI is the human creation, too! Imagine how great and innovative new things can be that humans will create! Especially if they're motivated enough, if they're involved and encouraged as stakeholders in some business.

Interviewer: Anything you would like to add?

Respondent: If you stay engaged, stay flexible, and out-innovate the market, you win. That's the whole model.

R5

Interviewer: To begin with, could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in the company?

Respondent: Since I'm a Product Manager, my role is mainly focused on understanding which problems we should solve and how solving them would impact overall business goals. I'm the main person communicating with customers, learning about their problems, and then translating those insights into some product initiatives. A big part of my job is to make this knowledge accessible to the team. I write product requirement documents, work on prioritization, and coordinate closely with product owners who are responsible for delivery. Once an initiative is launched, I work backwards by defining metrics together with analytics to understand whether it was successful or not. I'm also responsible for communicating progress and results to different stakeholders, including marketing, customer support, customer success, sales. And senior management, of course.

Interviewer: How would you define business performance in your department or in the company overall?

Respondent: Well, defining business performance was actually quite challenging, especially at the individual level. We have just started introducing metrics and KPIs, and the goal was to somehow link individual performance to overall company or product success. However, in a product team with several product managers, it was difficult to say whose work contributed most to a given result. For example, if we had one KPI for the whole product team, it was almost impossible to isolate the impact of each individual PM. At the team level, we used metrics such as NPS, customer

satisfaction scores, retention, and feature-level performance indicators. But going one level deeper and measuring individual impact remained a challenge.

Interviewer: Who were the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes?

Respondent: Externally, the most important stakeholders are customers. The product is SaaS and initially more B2B-oriented, which meant we have long-term business customers who require close and structured communication. Customer support and customer success are involved, but the product team also works directly with these customers. This is important because it allows us to validate problems and solutions directly. We also have third-party vendors who provide us with tools and services that are integrated into the product. Internally, key stakeholders include customer support, customer success, marketing, sales, finance, and the C-level executives, especially the CEO.

Interviewer: How did your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: At some point the company went fully remote, which actually increased transparency. Slack is now the main communication tool, and most discussions happens in public channels that everyone can access. There were only a few closed channels, mostly for executive-level topics. Otherwise, employees can message senior leaders directly, including the CEO. In addition, there are regular company-wide meetings, at least monthly, where leadership shares updates about the company's direction, challenges, and successes. At the end of these meetings, employees can ask questions openly. Actually, they're encouraged to ask questions, to contribute what they can. Because, you know, a question which is formulated right… um… can bring some great ideas to the table, can make people think of another unpredictable direction, and that's good for brainstorming. We also have weekly leadership meetings where department leads share progress, risks, and issues that other teams should be aware of. This helps ensure alignment across functions.

Interviewer: In what ways were stakeholders involved in planning and decision-making?

Respondent: Planning is done on a quarterly basis and involves all functional leads. Because the company is fully remote, as I mentioned, these planning sessions are usually held offline in different locations and last two to three days. Before the planning sessions, each department prepares proposals aligned with business goals. For example, as a product manager, I prepare initiatives for the next quarter based on input from sales, support, and customer feedback. During the planning sessions, we review… um… the previous quarter, discuss key challenges, and align all functions on priorities.

Interviewer: How did your company build and maintain trust and commitment with stakeholders?

Respondent: Trust is built mainly through transparency and delivery, I think. Progress is visible to everyone through shared dashboards and metrics such as NPS, retention, and customer satisfaction. At a professional level, trust develops when people consistently deliver on their commitments. If someone commits to a goal and reaches it or comes close, stakeholders trust them more in the future. At a personal level, trust can get stronger… um… during offline planning sessions, where people could connect beyond formal roles and really get to know each other.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders?

Respondent: The dialogue… is efficient and professional. Weekly leadership meetings cover most important topics, and it's easy… um… it's easy to raise questions or concerns directly with senior management. But efficient dialogue don't always mean that everything can be changed in reality. In some areas, especially related to people processes and career development, flexibility is quite limited despite open communication. I mean there are limits for the company's resources. And not all of the roles can progress and grow inside the company. Sometimes it's just not possible, and there is nothing we can change about it. I mean the company is relatively small, it's not a huge enterprise with a lot of… um… neighboring departments where people do the same things but for… I don't know… different tools, different features, for example. Leadership is established, and if an employee is brilliant, they can't grow to be a CTO, for example, because this role is already taken.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively did your company respond to stakeholder concerns or requests?

Respondent: Response times were generally fast. We had people operations managers who could be contacted directly, and employees usually received a response within a few hours. Even if a problem could not be solved immediately, it was acknowledged and followed up later. One example was when the company had to give up its office due to cost-cutting measures. Employees raised concerns, and management responded by securing a smaller but suitable office relatively quickly. I mean it happened in the past, later we still… um… decided to go fully remote.

Interviewer: Can you give an example of a quick response to a technical or process-related issue?

Respondent: In my team, we faced issues related to design handover and quality. Designers reported that what was designed was not always what was delivered. I quickly proposed a solution by adjusting the workflow in Jira, adding automation and review steps. The change was

implemented without lengthy approvals and improved coordination between design and development. In general, technical issues were addressed quickly, while financial requests took longer due to approval and setup processes.

Interviewer: Which types of stakeholder feedback most often triggered changes in processes or workflows?

Respondent: If we're speaking about external stakeholders, customer-reported bugs are a major trigger. I was particularly concerned about how long it sometimes takes for customer issues to reach the product team. To address this, I created a dedicated board where customer-reported bugs were immediately visible, assigned to a responsible person, and prioritized. This improved response times and communication with customers. Even feedback from new employees was taken seriously. I shared many concerns during my probation period, and they were addressed despite my junior position.

Interviewer: How flexible is your decision-making structure in urgent or unforeseen situations?

Respondent: In urgent situations, decision-making is usually quite fast, especially if the issue is clearly important and the reasoning behind it is well explained. If you can clearly articulate why something is critical, then it is usually addressed as soon as possible. So, it's a matter of communication. That said, the speed of decision-making also depends heavily on who is involved. If there is a strong lead or someone who has authority and credibility, the issue will move quickly to the person who can make the final decision. So I would say that decision-making is flexible, but it's… not automated or process-driven. It's very much… um… dependent on people, their experience, their willingness to take responsibility.

Interviewer: Are there areas in your processes that you find less flexible or more difficult to change? Why?

Respondent: Yes, definitely. The most difficult area to change is the team structure and people-related processes, I've already spoken about limited possibilities to grow inside the company due to its size and current stage of… um… development, let's say. The company has been in a transitional phase for quite a long time, and the structure was not set up in the way it ideally should have been. We have been trying to change this for at least one or two quarters, but progress has been slow, and I think… um… it will take at least another two quarters to get closer to the desired state. The main reason is unfortunately resistance from people. I see that changing people-related processes is risky. Even if the current setup is not perfect, it still works to some extent. If you change everything at once, you risk breaking what is already functioning. And this way you also

take full responsibility for potential failures, which may happen. That is why changes need to be prepared carefully and communicated very attentively, very clearly… And then they should be implemented step by step.

Interviewer: Why do you think people were resistant to faster or more radical changes?

Respondent: I think resistance is a very natural thing. Even when people understand that change makes sense, I mean rationally, they may still feel quite uncomfortable because it disrupts their routine, which they're already used to. Any change initially means additional effort and uncertainty. Even if you're a great professional you'll feel a bit lost at times, when… um… you need to restructure everything that belongs to your… um… to your working routine. For example, we once implemented a new way of prioritizing work that limited the number of tasks teams could work on simultaneously. From a management perspective, this greatly helped with focus and achieving results, but many team leaders were initially unhappy. They felt they were losing flexibility and control over their plans. Another example is an attempt to standardize team documentation. Before this, everyone had their own style. Was it perfect? Probably not. But while it wasn't perfect, people still got used to it. The new approach initially seemed some… um… unnecessary bureaucracy. Only after some time, when onboarding new team members already became easier, people began to embrace it. And we even encountered resistance when we automated some processes that were previously done manually. Yes, people weren't even that happy with automations, because they hadn't done things that way before. Although automation reduced errors, some people felt uncomfortable because they no longer had direct control over each step. In most cases, resistance subsided only after people saw benefits in their daily work. That's why we typically try to implement changes in stages, first testing them on a small group and only then rolling them out to a wider audience.

Interviewer: Do you think the main issue was lack of motivation or lack of perceived value?

Respondent: Yes, very often the problem was that people saw a lot of effort and very little immediate value. When employees already have a lot of responsibilities, any additional task feels like a burden, even if it is beneficial in the long run. This is not necessarily a management failure, but management communication definitely plays a role here. If the purpose and value of the change are not clearly explained, resistance increases, that's easy.

Interviewer: How would you assess your organization's current financial health and stability?

Respondent: Should I rate it? OK. If I had to rate it on a scale from one to ten, I would say around one or two. The company is still in a transitional phase and is trying to build leadership

capacity. Many leaders are promising, but they lack experience, and that creates vulnerability across functions. As a result, there is either a need for micromanagement or an acceptance that mistakes will happen. Trust between functions is still developing, and this affects overall stability.

Interviewer: Do you see a link between financial performance and business process flexibility?

Respondent: Yes, absolutely. With the same resources, the company could achieve much better results. A lack of flexibility leads to inefficiencies, which directly translates into financial losses. We spend a lot of energy and money on inefficient processes. When you pay salaries but do not get even 60% efficiency, this becomes very expensive. There is a clear gap between how processes function and how much money the company spends.

Interviewer:How effectively do your processes operate in terms of productivity, quality, and timeliness?

Respondent: We had KPIs at different levels: for individuals, teams, and functions. Each person had scorecards aligned with quarterly goals, and these were linked to product and business objectives. At certain points, this helped align the company and improved focus. But alignment alone… Well, it's not always enough to ensure efficiency, especially when processes are too complex or poorly adapted.

Interviewer: How would you evaluate your organization's capacity for innovation?

Respondent: I would rate it around seven out of ten. Um… There are separate initiatives focused on innovation, such as experimentation with automation and AI. For example, one initiative focused on tracking efficiency by asking employees to define weekly goals and completed work. The idea is to make work measurable and transparent. From that perspective, the company is… um… actively trying to adopt new technologies. And there is space for experiments.

Interviewer: How does your organization measure and maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty?

Respondent: Mostly through data and continuous feedback: for example, usage analytics for features, customer interviews, inputs from customer success, adoption-type metrics like trained users, feature usage). It was very feedback-loop driven.

Interviewer: How do you assess the performance and engagement of internal teams and stakeholders?

Respondent: Each team has defined goals during the planning phase, and performance is measured against those goals using quantitative indicators. For example, marketing teams have certain targets related to user acquisition, and in product teams the situation is different. We 're

focused on retention improvements. The results are reviewed regularly, and teams analyze whether goals were achieved, exceeded, or missed, and why.

Interviewer: How does stakeholder interaction and feedback influence process adjustments?

Respondent: We conduct quarterly surveys focused on processes, management, and overall engagement. The results were shared openly. Managers could see their own ratings, broken down by different criteria. This allows them to identify problem areas and track improvements over time. The goal is to understand motivation, engagement, to see if the processes are effective and then adjust accordingly. If something doesn't work, it will be found and… um… analyzed.

Interviewer: Can you share examples where process flexibility improved efficiency, innovation, or customer satisfaction?

Respondent: The company is very customer-centric. We actively collect user feedback and try to address the gaps quickly. This approach definitely has a positive impact across functions. When customer satisfaction improves, revenue increases, stress levels decrease, and overall company health… it improves, for sure. And generally speaking, for product-led companies, customer satisfaction is one of the strongest drivers of performance.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder relationships and engagement affect performance results?

Respondent: I would not say the influence is always direct, but feedback loops definitely exist. Stakeholders can influence managers, managers influence decisions, and those decisions impact performance. But the effect depends on how well feedback is structured and how seriously it is taken.

Interviewer: How would you describe the relationship between stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance?

Respondent: I see them as interconnected wheels. If one wheel doesn't work or… isn't taken seriously, the whole system slows down or stops. The elements influence each other continuously. When there is proper stakeholder engagement, it helps to highlight issues and opportunities, process flexibility determines whether the company can respond to those issues and opportunities, and business performance reflects the outcome of the first two elements.

Interviewer: Which of these elements drives the others?

Respondent: As I said, they all influence each other, but stakeholder engagement and process flexibility are the primary drivers. Business performance is more of an outcome.

Interviewer: How do you see these relationships evolving in the future with AI and automation?

Respondent: I believe there will be fewer people involved and more automated processes. Managing people is complex, is a complex work, and individual decisions or miscommunication can have a strong negative impact on performance. With automation and AI, changes can be implemented much faster. What takes months with people can take days with… um… automated system, automated tools. This will likely increase flexibility and reduce dependency on individual stakeholders. And in the end it will all improve efficiency.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: For me, stakeholder engagement and process flexibility are the core elements. Business performance simply shows how well these two work together. If stakeholders are aligned and their communication flows well, processes will be more adaptable, and then performance will improve naturally. If not, no amount of reporting or meetings will fix the problem. So, it's again about communication and alignment.

R6

Interviewer: Could you describe your role and main responsibilities in your organization?

Respondent: Currently I'm working in two technology startups at different stages, and in both cases my role sits very close to everyday operations. I deal mostly with people-related processes, so some… um… internal coordination, finances, and a lot of practical problem-solving. For example, I manage onboarding, internal policies, office and equipment issues, but I also regularly get involved when teams or leaders have questions. Questions related to budgets, salaries, or resource planning. Often, I act as a translator – when someone comes with an operational problem, I may have to explain it in financial terms to leadership, or the other way around. Because of this, I'm constantly interacting with different stakeholder groups and see quite clearly how their expectations translate into processes and, eventually, performance.

Interviewer: How do you understand business performance in practice, based on your experience?

Respondent: In practice, business performance is very strongly tied to money, even if people don't always like to say it directly. Revenue growth, subscriptions, retention, and cash flow are the main indicators everyone eventually looks at. But that's not all, there is also a more operational layer. For example, if engineering milestones are constantly delayed, or if teams are burned out and people start leaving, this will show up in performance sooner or later. I've seen situations where the metrics looked fine month by month, but internally it was clear that the organization was overstretched. Leadership still felt everything was "in the red", even when numbers were

objectively better than in comparable companies. That perception then influenced decisions and pressure on teams.

Interviewer: Who are the most influential stakeholders in your business processes?

Respondent: Clients are definitely the most influential external stakeholders. If a client reports a serious issue, especially one that affects billing or usage, everything else immediately becomes less important. Investors are also important, but in a more indirect way. They influence expectations, reporting, and long-term strategy, but they are not involved in daily operations. Internally, leadership has a disproportionate influence. In small or growing organizations, a few people – founders or directors – can effectively block or enable flexibility, regardless of how engaged employees or clients are.

Interviewer: How does stakeholder engagement actually happen in everyday work?

Respondent: With clients, engagement happens continuously rather than through formal frameworks. For example, there is 24/7 support, and each product usually has a dedicated engineer responsible for fixing issues. If a client reports a bug that blocks usage, the message often reaches top management very quickly. I've seen cases where a client contacted the CEO directly, and within hours the issue was escalated to engineering and resolved. Internally, engagement happens through daily stand-ups, weekly syncs, and monthly all-hands meetings. But how effective this engagement is depends a lot on whether leadership is actually willing to listen and adjust.

Interviewer: Can you give examples of stakeholder feedback that led to concrete changes?

Respondent: Yes, a very typical trigger is potential revenue loss. For instance, if a client says, "If this is not fixed, we will cancel, and this contract is worth several thousand euros per year," that immediately changes priorities. In such cases, engineering resources are pulled from other tasks, sometimes from completely different products, to fix the issue. Less critical tasks are delayed without much discussion. Another example is when several clients report similar issues. Even if each issue alone is not critical, the pattern signals a deeper problem, and processes or product priorities are adjusted accordingly.

Interviewer: How flexible are your business processes when priorities shift?

Respondent: Operationally, processes are quite flexible. Resources can be reallocated, tasks can be postponed, and priorities can be reshuffled quickly. But this flexibility is not unlimited. People are highly specialized, and it's not easy to move someone from one role to another. Also, hiring skilled engineers is very difficult, so you cannot just "add capacity" when things get busy. This creates a situation where flexibility exists, but it comes at a cost – there can be delays elsewhere, increased pressure on teams, burnout risks… There are a lot of risks.

Interviewer: How does your organization react to unexpected events or crises?

Respondent: In real crises, processes are basically invented on the spot. During major disruptions, like pandemics or geopolitical events, the first priority is to stabilize the situation and take responsibility. For example, relocation of employees, introduction of remote work policies… These situations were all handled ad hoc at first. Only months later these actions were formalized into proper policies, I mean on paper they barely existed at first. This shows that flexibility in practice is often improvisation on the very first stages, and then, when there are signs that everything works properly… um… the company and responsible teams prepare documentation.

Interviewer: Are there areas where lack of flexibility creates problems?

Respondent: Yes, especially when leadership is very rigid. I've seen situations where people clearly pointed out problems and proposed reasonable adjustments, but nothing changed because decision-makers were not ready to adapt. In those cases, engagement actually became counterproductive. Employees and stakeholders spoke up, but since processes didn't change, employees got… um… they got quite frustrated, and as a result, performance suffered. Legal and regulatory areas are another example. Those processes are completely inflexible, and organizations have to work around them rather than trying to change them.

Interviewer: How does stakeholder engagement translate into performance outcomes?

Respondent: Engagement helps detect risks early. Very often clients point out issues before they turn into churn, and employees highlight problems before they become systemic. But engagement only improves performance if the organization can respond flexibly. So, the engagement itself is not a direct way to better performance. It's important but it's not everything. When feedback leads to quick action, performance improves – customers stay, revenue is protected, trust increases. When feedback is ignored or acted on too slowly, we usually see the opposite… um… we see that dissatisfaction grows and performance declines.

Interviewer: Can you describe a concrete case where flexibility improved performance?

Respondent: Yes, for example when there was a risk that we would lose a key client due to some technical inefficiency. The potential loss was so significant that it totally justified immediate action. Resources were reallocated, the issue was fixed within a very short time, and the client renewed the subscription. In that case, flexibility directly prevented churn and protected revenue. At the same time, the client's trust increased, which later led to upselling and longer-term cooperation. So, we managed to align our stakeholders, to react flexibly, which improved our business performance and helped us to stay… um… financially healthy, so to speak. And then we also

managed to develop trust and commitment of our external stakeholder, who was our client. I see it that way.

Interviewer: How would you describe the overall relationship between stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance?

Respondent: From my experience, stakeholder engagement is the signal. It tells you where problems and opportunities are. Business process flexibility is the mechanism that allows you to act on those signals, to react if necessary, to change what's outdated and doesn't serve its purpose anymore… And the level of business performance is clearly the result. It can be positive or negative, and it always reflects how engaged stakeholders are and how flexibly they can work. So, business performance depends on how well the signals from stakeholders are translated into action. If engagement is high but flexibility is low, performance suffers. If flexibility exists but engagement is low, you react too late. You need both.

Interviewer: Which element tends to drive the others?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement is the starting point. It creates pressure and direction. Flexibility determines whether the organization can respond. Performance follows from that interaction.

R7

Interviewer: Could you describe your main responsibilities and the types of projects you are involved in?

Respondent: I work in a consulting company, so my responsibilities depend heavily on the client and the specific project. In general, our work is always somewhere at the… um… so called intersection of… um… business goals, processes, and people. We may be asked to help launch a new product, fix an existing program that is not delivering results the client was expecting, or… um… redesign internal processes that have become inefficient… um… over time. In all these cases, our role is not only to deliver a technical solution, but also to align different stakeholders around a unified picture of what we're striving for. We need to get a shared understanding of the problem and the expected outcomes.

Interviewer: Who are the key stakeholders you typically work with?

Respondent: The primary stakeholders are usually decision-makers on the client side, such as CEOs, Chief Product Officers, or Chief Technology Officers. At the same time, end users often play a critical role. Their vision, their feedback is extremely important. Depending on the industry, the end-users can be doctors, warehouse employees, retail staff… um… internal corporate users

who work with systems like ERP or CRM platforms. In practice, these stakeholder groups often have very different priorities. And that directly affects how flexible processes can be.

Interviewer: How do you define business performance in your company and in client projects?

Respondent: At the company level, business performance is mainly measured through revenue and overall company valuation. For client projects, performance… um… is usually defined more broadly, I would say. Performance includes financial results, like cost reduction or revenue growth, but also we should… um… pay attention to operational indicators like process efficiency, error rates, and the level of client and user satisfaction. These indicators usually determine how much freedom, how much flexibility a project team has to change processes.

Interviewer: How does your company ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: I think organizational structure plays a very critical role here. Transparency is ensured primarily through this structure and shared values we have… As a company, as a team. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined: for example, delivery managers focus on service quality and client satisfaction, while project teams… um… um… they handle implementation. This structure creates clear communication channels with stakeholders. At the same time… um… openness is strongly supported by company culture. Continuous feedback, regular check-ins, and client-centricity are emphasized from the very beginning. If someone faces difficulties in communication with stakeholders, they can rely on mentors, delivery managers, resource managers for support… There are many options. This internal support system helps maintain a consistent level of engagement across different projects. And of course it… um… reduces the risk of communication breakdowns.

Interviewer: How are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, and improvement initiatives?

Respondent: Stakeholder involvement really depends on the type of stakeholder we're talking about. Um… Their role and influence. End users are actively involved through user research, interviews, prototyping, feedback loops… um… user acceptance testing. Their feedback is what directly shapes product features and process design. This type of engagement often increases process flexibility, because solutions are adjusted iteratively. So, they're not fixed upfront. Senior business stakeholders and sponsors are involved mainly in defining… um… some strategic things like priorities, budgets, success criteria, all of that. Their engagement can either enable or limit our flexibility. When sponsors focus on value and outcomes, teams have more freedom to adapt

processes. When they insist on predefined solutions, flexibility… decreases, even if stakeholder involvement formally remains high.

Interviewer: Can you share an example where stakeholder engagement directly influenced process flexibility?

Respondent: A good example involved a large company with around 600… no, 700 stakeholders who needed to provide regular input into a shared process. Initially, the process relied on Excel files and all of the data was entered manually, which resulted in high error rates and low transparency. Stakeholders were involved, but the way engagement was organized actually reduced flexibility and efficiency. After analyzing stakeholder feedback, we proposed… um… a redesigned process, because it was obvious we needed to change the very essence of the project, the way of working. We built… um… an additional system module with predefined options, automated logging, and a clear history of changes. Then we needed to support adoption, and for that we organized webinars, communicated the rationale behind the changes, and provided recordings for all stakeholders who were involved in the project. So, I would consider it to be structured engagement, which… um… allowed the process to become more flexible and more reliable at the same time. As a result, errors decreased, coordination improved, and stakeholder satisfaction increased.

Interviewer: How flexible is your organization in reallocating resources when priorities change?

Respondent: Resource reallocation is relatively flexible, especially when priorities are clearly linked to business value. If project scope changes or a project is closed, resources can be reassigned to other initiatives immediately. Decisions are mainly driven by scope and funding: once these are clarified, people can be added to the group, I mean to the project, or moved quickly. In urgent situations, it is possible to find and onboard specialists within one to two weeks, which I quite quickly.

Interviewer: How flexible is decision-making in urgent or unforeseen situations?

Respondent: Decision-making is pragmatic and very performance-oriented. In urgent cases, the first step is always to clarify the impact on business performance. Once this is understood, stakeholders align more quickly, and… um… decisions… decisions are made faster too. In this sense, declining or threatened performance often triggers stronger stakeholder engagement, which enables rapid process changes.

Interviewer: How quickly can processes be adapted to market or stakeholder demands?

Respondent: The speed of adaptation depends on… um… how well stakeholders do… how well stakeholders understand the value of change. During situations like COVID or major

regulatory shifts, processes were redesigned very quickly because… yeah… the impact on performance was obvious to everyone. Performance would suffer, it will be impossible to continue business if we don't shift, if we don't… um… react fast. In contrast… um… when the benefits are less visible, stakeholder alignment takes longer, and flexibility reduces. So, all in all, I would say that everyone should see their personal value and business value in quick adaptation of processes. That's where engagement is a must. Everyone should be proactive, contribute to the change, and gain benefits.

Interviewer: Which performance indicators are most important in guiding changes?

Respondent: Financial indicators like revenue and cost efficiency are important, but operational indicators play a key role as well. For example… When we deal with high error rates − one, delays − two, or maybe negative user feedback − three, we should see all of that as early signals that existing processes are no longer effective, they should be changed. These signals usually activate stakeholder discussions and lead to process adjustments.

Interviewer: How does process flexibility influence business performance in practice?

Respondent: Flexible processes… um… allow teams to respond faster to problems and opportunities. Instead of being stuck because of some… how to call it… um… rigid procedures, teams can experiment, learn, and improve when they see the result of their action. It's always helping when they can see the direct result of what they're doing. This usually leads to higher efficiency, better quality, and increased client satisfaction, what matters here, after all. And over time, I think… um… these improvements translate into stronger business performance.

Interviewer: How does stakeholder engagement influence this relationship?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement influences flexibility mainly through alignment and trust. When stakeholders share an understanding of goals and trust the project team, processes can be adapted without some lengthy approvals. But unfortunately, there are cases when engagement is driven by politics or conflicting interests, and it can slow down decision-making and reduce flexibility. In many cases, stakeholder engagement is reactive rather than proactive. When business performance declines, stakeholders become more involved, and this… um… pressure forces processes to change. The effectiveness of these changes depends on how constructive the stakeholder engagement is.

Interviewer: Which element do you see as the primary driver: engagement, flexibility, or performance?

Respondent: In my view, business performance is often the initial trigger. When performance indicators worsen, engagement increases, and processes start to change. However, once engagement

improves and trust is already established, flexibility becomes more sustainable. So, it can support performance improvements in the long term.

Interviewer: Are there areas in your organization that are particularly difficult to change?

Respondent: Yes, definitely there are internal assessment and promotion processes are among the least flexible. These processes are highly standardized and formalized, which limits the ability to adapt them quickly, even when there is clear stakeholder feedback.

R8

Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your organization?

Respondent: I work as a… um… as a Project Manager in a B2B software company that provides customer loyalty solutions for retailers, both physical and online. My role is mainly focused on managing onboarding projects for new clients and coordinating the rollout of new modules or functionalities. In addition to external projects, I am also involved in internal initiatives that arise during day-to-day operations. My responsibilities require constant coordination between client-facing activities and internal teams, ensuring that customer requirements, technical implementation, and internal processes are aligned throughout the project lifecycle.

Interviewer: How long have you been working in this role or within this organization?

Respondent: I joined the company relatively recently, but within this time I've already been involved in several onboarding and implementation projects. So, I've already gained a comprehensive understanding of how the company operates, how projects are delivered, and how internal and external stakeholders interact.

Interviewer: Could you describe the main business processes or projects you are involved in?

Respondent: Those are mostly client onboarding, system integration, and project coordination across multiple functions. Let me list what I do every day: I ensure timelines, align expectations with clients, and coordinate work between onboarding specialists, developers, customer success managers, and sales teams. A significant part of these processes is adapting implementation approaches to the specific technical and organizational context of each client.

Interviewer: How would you define "business performance" in your department or company?

Respondent: I'd say that business performance is primarily defined through successful project delivery. It's all about setting agreed timelines, maintaining product quality, and ensuring that clients are satisfied with both the implementation process and the final outcome. What I find important is flexibility in dealing with client requests and still delivering results.

Interviewer: What are the most common performance indicators your company uses?

Respondent: Performance is assessed differently, we use metrics like timely project completion, system stability, and adherence to quality standards. In addition, we monitor customer usage of software modules. It's monitored through internal dashboards, and looking at those dashboards we gain insights into whether clients are actively using the system after onboarding or not.

Interviewer: Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes, both internal and external?

Respondent: External stakeholders mainly include the client's project sponsor, marketing or loyalty managers, and IT teams who are responsible for technical integration. Internally, the key stakeholders are onboarding teams, customer success managers, account managers, developers, technical leads, and sales leadership. They're all important, and all of them play a specific role at different stages of the project.

Interviewer: How does your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: Openness and transparency are ensured through frequent and structured communication. For most projects, regular meetings are scheduled on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, depending on scope and complexity of the problems we're discussing. In addition, we use various collaboration tools like Slack channels, Jira tickets and… um… shared project spaces. Those are used to document progress, track issues, and keep stakeholders informed about changes throughout the project.

Interviewer: In what ways are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, or improvement initiatives?

Respondent: Stakeholders are actively involved in planning and decision-making processes. Internally, employees are encouraged to suggest improvements and bring forward initiatives. The company culture in general supports open feedback. Externally, clients influence project planning by shaping timelines, meeting structures, and implementation priorities based on their needs and constraints.

Interviewer: To what extent do they influence strategic or operational decisions?

Respondent: Stakeholders have a strong influence on operational decisions, especially at the project level. Client requirements often determine priorities, while internal stakeholders influence how resources are allocated and how processes are adjusted. Strategic decisions are less directly influenced, but recurring stakeholder feedback can shape longer-term improvements.

Interviewer: How does your organization build and maintain trust and commitment with stakeholders over time?

Respondent: Trust is built through clear expectations and consistent communication. At the beginning of each project, the way of working together, timelines, and responsibilities are agreed upon and documented. Over time, trust is maintained through regular updates, steering committee meetings, and open discussions about project status and challenges.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders?

Respondent: The dialogue is generally open, frequent, and constructive. Different internal stakeholders communicate with different client representatives, which allows for multiple perspectives and helps identify potential issues early in the process.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively does your organization respond to stakeholder concerns or requests?

Respondent: The organization responds very quickly to stakeholder concerns. Most issues are acknowledged and addressed within the same day. Even when a complete solution cannot be provided immediately, stakeholders are informed about the next steps, which helps maintain trust and transparency.

Interviewer: Can you share an example when a quick response led to a positive outcome?

Respondent: During onboarding projects, technical questions or issues often arise. In such cases, developers are involved immediately, sometimes through same-day meetings, which allows problems to be resolved quickly and leaves clients with a positive perception of responsiveness.

Interviewer: Which types of stakeholder feedback or signals most often trigger changes in processes, priorities, or workflows?

Respondent: Feedback collected during internal retrospectives and client project review meetings most often triggers changes. Issues related to communication, documentation, or coordination are frequently addressed and implemented quickly in subsequent projects.

Interviewer: How does your organization adapt or modify products or services when stakeholder needs or market conditions change?

Respondent: Adaptation can occur at different speeds. Some changes are implemented within one or two weeks, especially if they fit into an existing sprint. Other changes may take significantly longer, depending on complexity, priorities, and resource availability.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively can your team implement such changes when required?

Respondent: When priorities align and resources are available, changes can be implemented very efficiently. However, time constraints, competing projects, and limited resources can slow down the process.

Interviewer: How does your organization reallocate people, time, or financial resources when priorities shift?

Respondent: Resource reallocation happens frequently. Team members often work across multiple projects simultaneously. While this provides flexibility, it can also lead to conflicts when priorities compete, requiring internal decisions about impact and urgency.

Interviewer: In what ways can workflows or process routes be altered to handle unexpected events or urgent priorities?

Respondent: Workflows can be adjusted by postponing less critical tasks, reordering project activities, or temporarily shifting resources to address urgent issues without fully disrupting ongoing projects.

Interviewer: How flexible is your decision-making structure in urgent or unforeseen situations?

Respondent: Decision-making is highly flexible. Urgent issues are addressed quickly, and decisions are made without lengthy approval processes, allowing resources to be reassigned almost immediately.

Interviewer: What typically triggers the need to adjust products, services, resources, or processes?

Respondent: Both internal initiatives and stakeholder feedback can trigger adjustments, but urgent client needs and critical issues reported by stakeholders are usually the strongest drivers.

Interviewer: Are there areas in your processes that you find less flexible or more difficult to change? Why?

Respondent: Work culture and established working habits are the most difficult areas to change. Long-standing ways of working, especially among developers, can create resistance to changes in processes or tools.

Interviewer: How would you assess your organization's current financial health and stability?

Respondent: The organization is financially stable, although there is room for improvement and financial goals are not always fully achieved.

Interviewer: How effectively do your processes operate in terms of productivity, quality, and timeliness?

Respondent: Overall, processes operate effectively. Projects are generally completed on time, even when delays occur due to client-side constraints. Quality is supported by established testing procedures, and unresolved issues are often addressed in follow-up phases.

Interviewer: How does your organization measure and maintain customer satisfaction and loyalty?

Respondent: Customer satisfaction is maintained through continuous interaction by customer success managers and key account managers. Software usage is monitored through dashboards, which help identify engagement levels and potential issues.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate the organization's capacity for innovation?

Respondent: The organization demonstrates a strong capacity for innovation, largely due to its small size and open culture. Employees are encouraged to propose ideas, and product initiatives are regularly discussed and evaluated.

Interviewer: How do you assess the performance and engagement of internal teams or key stakeholders?

Respondent: Engagement is reflected in responsiveness, participation in meetings, and willingness to contribute ideas. Performance is mainly assessed through project outcomes and collaboration effectiveness.

Interviewer: Which process changes in the last one to two years have had the strongest impact on performance?

Respondent: Changes related to improved communication and documentation, often triggered by stakeholder feedback during retrospectives, have had a noticeable positive impact on performance.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder interactions or feedback influence adjustments in your processes or operations?

Respondent: Stakeholder feedback directly shapes how processes are adjusted. Frequent interaction allows issues to be identified early and addressed in a timely manner.

Interviewer: Can you share examples where process flexibility directly improved efficiency, innovation, or customer satisfaction?

Respondent: In one project, internal tasks were reorganized due to limited client availability. This flexibility allowed the project to be completed on time and resulted in high client satisfaction.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder relationships and engagement affect your organization's performance results?

Respondent: Strong stakeholder relationships improve communication and coordination, which reduces delays and supports better project outcomes.

Interviewer: How does business process flexibility help your organization translate stakeholder needs into measurable outcomes?

Respondent: Flexibility enables the organization to adapt priorities and resources to stakeholder needs, leading to timely project completion and higher customer satisfaction.

Interviewer: If stakeholder engagement had been lower, how do you think this would have affected your ability to adapt processes?

Respondent: Lower engagement would have reduced transparency and made it more difficult to identify issues early, limiting the organization's ability to adapt effectively.

Interviewer: When processes were not flexible enough, how did that impact stakeholder satisfaction or performance?

Respondent: Insufficient flexibility can slow responses and negatively affect stakeholder satisfaction, especially in urgent situations.

Interviewer: How would you describe the overall relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance?

Respondent: These elements are closely interconnected. Stakeholder engagement drives the need for flexibility, and flexibility enables the organization to achieve positive performance outcomes.

Interviewer: Which of these three elements tends to drive the others?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement is the primary driver, as it shapes both process flexibility and performance.

Interviewer: Looking back, how would you describe the role of stakeholder engagement and flexibility in your organization's success over time?

Respondent: Both have been critical in enabling the organization to adapt to changing conditions while maintaining strong relationships and delivering successful projects.

Interviewer: What practices would you recommend to organizations aiming to strengthen this balance?

Respondent: Organizations should encourage open communication, actively seek feedback, maintain flexible processes, and empower teams to make quick decisions.

Interviewer: How do you see these relationships evolving in the next few years?

Respondent: With increased use of AI and automation, processes may become more structured, but stakeholder engagement and flexibility will remain essential for effective adaptation.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: The interaction between stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and performance is dynamic. Maintaining balance among these elements is essential for long-term organizational success.

R9

Interviewer: Could you describe your area of responsibility and your role?

Respondent: I am a senior product manager responsible for… um… transferring investment products and the investment call center to a new… um… new CRM system. The company had an old system that couldn't function properly anymore, so we decided to develop our own platform. And regarding my role… My role is not only technical but also strongly operational. I had to adapt the new platform to customer needs and to the real working conditions of the… of the call center. From the very beginning, this work required close interaction with multiple stakeholders. The new platform introduced many improvements, especially process automation, which was essential for us as a big enterprise. We couldn't simply automate what… um… already existed. Yeah. We had to rethink and redesign processes together with stakeholders. And in practice, this turned my role into one of… um… process refactoring and… um… also coordination across teams. During the COVID period, I also had to manage the call center remotely. This situation clearly demonstrated how important stakeholder trust and fast coordination is, because decisions had to be made really quickly. And we also often had incomplete information. So, we needed to shoot in the dark, basically.

Interviewer: Who are the key stakeholders in this work?

Respondent: The key stakeholders include the service director, the CEO who is responsible for the investment product, the CTO, and one of the VPs overseeing the entire operational platform. Yes, these are the major stakeholders… Yeah. These stakeholders have direct influence on priorities, resources, strategic decisions, all of the decisions related to processes.

Interviewer: How do you ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: Openness is ensured primarily through regular communication, with clear structure, with clear expectations, what and when should be discussed. I hold recurring status meetings where I gather questions from stakeholders and share weekly updates. I mean what has been done, what was planned, current metrics, existing problems, open risks… everything. These meetings help us to get a shared understanding of priorities. And… When certain stakeholders try to slow down changes or… I don't know… push their own interests, I bring them into open discussions with the operational team. We explain why specific requests could not be implemented and… um… what trade-offs were involved. This transparency reduces resistance and helps to align our expectations. I also participate in strategic service-track calls to connect… um… operational realities with technical strategy. Um… There was initially a disconnect with the product team. They sometimes launched initiatives without operational alignment, and in this case the call center learned about changes only from customers. After I actively involved stakeholders in discussions with customers and shared this feedback internally, cooperation was significantly improved. As a result, operational teams were included in our… um… product pre-launches.

Interviewer: How are stakeholders involved in decision-making?

Respondent: Stakeholders are actively involved in both strategic and operational decisions. In most cases, I− I present several solution options, explain their implications, and discuss them with… with stakeholders. In situations where trust has already been established, decisions are made quite quickly. Yeah. There were also cases where stakeholders relied on my professional judgment and approved proposals without extensive discussion. And this level of trust significantly increased… um… decision-making speed and also process flexibility.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue with stakeholders?

Respondent: The quality of dialogue varies, yeah, but it clearly influences outcomes. With senior stakeholders, such as the executive director, communication is very direct and constructive, and we reach faster alignment and smoother implementation of changes. With lower-level or supporting stakeholders, communication is sometimes indirect and… um… less effective, I would say, which slows down processes. With technical stakeholders, discussions could be intense and emotional. But this intensity reflects strong engagement rather than… a conflict, you know. People really care about the product we create, about the speed of our work, which I find great. In my experience, such engagement often leads to better technical and process decisions because stakeholders genuinely care about the outcomes, about the customers.

Interviewer: How do you handle situations where collaboration was difficult?

Respondent: When direct collaboration isn't working, I… um… use escalation as a functional mechanism rather than a conflict tool. I involve higher-level managers… um… when I need to restore alignment and clarify our priorities. This helps keep working relationships intact and… um… allows decisions to move forward without damaging trust we had.

Interviewer: How do you build and maintain trust with stakeholders over time?

Respondent: Trust is built through consistent delivery and honest communication with them. The organizational culture supports openness, so trust often exists from the start. Over time, trust depends on several things. Of course stakeholders trust those who meet expectations and communicate transparently about delays or risks. When communication has better quality it directly strengthens trust, which in turn allows… um… greater autonomy and faster responses.

Interviewer: How quickly can your team respond to stakeholder requests?

Respondent: It depends. In high-priority situations, responses were immediate. For example, when a decision was made to urgently repay debts to a customer group, we understood that failure to act would lead to serious financial consequences. Stakeholders aligned quickly, resources were mobilized, and the process was implemented without delay. This demonstrated how stakeholder alignment directly enabled rapid process changes.

For less urgent initiatives, decisions were negotiated through roadmap discussions. This made trade-offs visible and prevented uncontrolled scope expansion.

Interviewer: How flexible is resource reallocation?

Respondent: Resource flexibility is relatively high. People can be reassigned across projects very quickly. During a hiring freeze, I reallocated call center staff and gradually retrained them as system analysts. It's an interesting experience. So, formally structures remained without any changes, but the functional flexibility allowed the company to continue critical work when we didn't have enough staff in very critical roles. This showed how informal stakeholder agreements supported process adaptability.

Interviewer: How flexible is decision-making outside strict hierarchies?

Respondent: In urgent situations, decision-making was highly flexible. Usually, only two or three key stakeholders were involved. This helps to reduce coordination costs and allows fast responses. But for… um… complex technical changes, we require more time and structured discussion.

Interviewer: How quickly can processes be adapted to market or stakeholder demands?

Respondent: Adaptation speed depends on the nature of the change. During COVID, processes were redesigned almost immediately to support remote work. In other cases, such as financial or regulatory changes, adaptation requires more effort but is still faster than in highly bureaucratic companies.

Interviewer: Which performance indicators are most important?

Respondent: We have two main indicators which help us to assess business performance. Yeah… It's primarily assessed through net profit and customer satisfaction. These metrics guided both strategic priorities and process improvement initiatives.

Interviewer: How does flexibility affect performance?

Respondent: Flexibility improves performance mostly by preventing delays, which can be caused by rigid procedures. I mean fast decisions sometimes can increase short-term risk, but, what I find important,iterative learning allows us to… um… stabilize processes over time, to understand what works and how. In this sense, flexibility supports both efficiency and long-term performance.

Interviewer: How does stakeholder engagement influence flexibility and performance?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement influences flexibility primarily through trust. While excessive involvement can lead to micromanagement in some cases, trust enables independent action and, as a result, it can bring faster decisions. Current market… You cannot survive without faster decisions. And faster decisions cannot be made without flexibility. So, strong stakeholder relationships also help… um… to unblock situations and directly improve performance outcomes.

Interviewer: Which element tends to drive the others?

Respondent: In my view, stakeholder engagement comes first. Engagement creates trust, trust enables flexibility, and flexibility leads to better business outcomes − quite easy. However, in practice, I would say these… um… elements are interdependent. For sure they reinforce each other.

Interviewer: How do you see these relationships evolving in the future?

Respondent: We work with AI a lot. I think personally that AI and automation will likely increase speed and data availability, but… um… there is no they will replace the role of stakeholders. Human engagement, trust, and… um… organizational culture will remain central to how flexibility and performance are achieved. I'm sure people will remain the core in any business process. AI will help us to be quicker, to be more flexible, I don't doubt it. But I know from my professional experience that the best decisions are always made by people for people.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: Yes. Corporate culture plays a critical role. All employees, and especially major stakeholders, should have a strong sense of shared responsibility and teamwork. This supports

stakeholder engagement, which, in its turn, supports process flexibility, and… um… ultimately business performance.

R10

Interviewer: Thank you for your time. Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your company?

Respondent: I thank you for interviewing me. I'm a director of engineering working in a big enterprise audio streaming company.

Interviewer: How long have you been working in this role or within this company?

Respondent: Within the company for eight years. Within this current role for a bit more than a year.

Interviewer: Could you describe the main business processes or projects you were involved in?

Respondent: All of them. I mean all the essential projects we- we had in the last few years. Mostly, I'm responsible for the content-related projects and operations and everything from content ingestion, content processing, storing and streaming. I've been dealing with projects related to those areas as well as content metadata as a data pipeline to process, harmonize it, to store it and then help others to consume it.

Interviewer: How would you define business performance in your particular company?

Respondent: The business performance is moderate to high.

Interviewer: But what exactly is it for your company? What would you consider to be business performance, probably business performance metric?

Respondent: The business performance, one of the business performance metrics is the profitability. Second, user experience and user satisfaction. Third, people satisfaction within the company and brand.

Interviewer: It's interesting that you mentioned the employee satisfaction because actually nobody else mentioned that.

Respondent: There are three important things in the business. One, caring about people. People care about ideas. Ideas bring profitability.

Interviewer: Okay, who are the primary stakeholders relevant for your business?

Respondent: The list is huge, to be honest. I've done this exercise recently during the on-site and they can divide them into external and internal. Internal stakeholders are other products, other teams such as search team, recommendation team, infrastructure team, even IT team. Every single

team within our company is an internal stakeholder. Externally, my stakeholders are vendors from whom I get the content and the content artifacts, so-called metadata, artworks, etc. And the users and users who both can upload their performances, their tracks into the system and the listeners who consume those tracks both coming from external labels and creators which are processed and then they can listen to it and interact with those tracks.

Interviewer: How does your company ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: We tend to believe we do openness. So, depending, again, if it's external or internal, let's take them one by one. If it's external, we have community operations which is customer care basically and we receive complaints, questions, feature requests and we try to transparently answer all of those inquiries. As well as we have a Reddit group where it's a recent thing where our social media team is trying to build this sense of community so people can jump in, ask questions at very low key, not officially and then if we see some problem that we need to address to the social team then knows to which team to go to and ask them to first verify if that's a problem and then act on it. We mostly get a lot of nice feature requests from the users like would have been nice if you had this or that which guides us further more into our roadmap and etc. That's for the external. We also have monthly meetings with the enterprise content providers, so-called labels, so we discuss, we are constantly discussing with them if there are any things, challenges to focus on. As far as it goes for the internal customers, things are a bit more complicated. We do this modular business process internally and we try to rely on Scrum which means that we have this, every team operates within their sprint, we do plan the sprint but then to interconnect within the rest of the company. With some we have Scrum of Scrums which is to get together and discuss impediments or achievements. We used to do OKR as a process to be in line and go through the same direction, however for the last two to three years we come up with something similar, we come up with programs. We will set five to seven programs or missions for the year and then every program will have a program manager and they will take care of the mission accomplishment and they will pull in the teams that need to be there and they will also organize meetings with those teams or representatives of the team. Those can be bi-weekly meetings or weekly meetings depending on which stage of the project we are, initially more, later less frequent. So program managers will try to make sure that the key people from different teams talk to each other and also they make sure that the roadmaps are structured in a way that no one will block the other. I will give you an example to make it a bit more clear. For example, let's say if I'm going to change the encodings for the audio track, player teams, so-called client teams who need to play that new

content, they need to change and adapt their side also, which means that the program manager will need to make sure that first we do the backend changes but also the client teams are informed and ready to act once the backend team finishes and gives them the MVP so they can start already implementing the change and all the rest of the client teams, because those are different teams, so they can release the new thing at the same time to not have inconsistency in user experience.

Interviewer: Yeah, I see, thank you. To what extent do your stakeholders influence some strategic or operational decisions in your company?

Respondent: Depending which stakeholder, I would say we pay very big attention, huge attention in fact, to our users and creators, we listen to them carefully and we try to implement what they want, hence our company is famous to be community-driven, the user base is not huge as in competitors, but they stick to us, they like us and our users retention rate is very high for our users, so we accept a lot of input from our external stakeholders. From business perspective, from the enterprise content providers, we have to listen to them because it's a legal obligation, etc, etc, things are contracted and those contracts are being changed and negotiated yearly, so we have to listen to them closely also. Internally, I would say it's also very open and they can influence the roadmaps if they bring in a very user-impacting positively project or idea, we might suddenly reprioritize things and include that into the roadmap or in the current work streams.

Interviewer: How does your company build and maintain trust and commitment with stakeholders over time?

Respondent: That's a very philosophical thing to answer, but I will try. Building trust in general is consistent of four things. First is the credibility, how much credit you have within a stakeholder, a set of things that have been done previously or a set of records that you accomplished. The second thing is the reliability, how reliable you are every time you are dealing with the stakeholder or stakeholder brings you a feedback, how reliably you act on it and then deliver a result. The third thing is of course the connection, building good human connection within the stakeholders, whether it's user base or internal stakeholders like product managers of other teams or client backend teams or even SRE team for example. Human connection is also very important and then it all comes to the self-position, how well you are positioned within each of these relationships, which can be tied back to the personal connection again. Are you acting on things? You're not talking about that arrogance level for example or the opposite, you take in everything and you never say no and then you're overwhelmed. So, those are the four key things I'm paying attention to, to have the ongoing trust with all the stakeholders.

Interviewer: Yeah, great. How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your company and key stakeholders? Probably between your department and key stakeholders.

Respondent: Do you want me to focus on the internal stakeholders or cover both?

Interviewer: Probably the second option, yeah.

Respondent: Yeah, I think it could have been a bit better in scope of the quality. The frequency is there, but the quality is missing because of not fully understanding their responsibilities. The company is competing with other big enterprises, but internally the resources are limited, which means that there are a lot of things that have to happen at the same time and a lot of important things get out of focus and then the loudest voice gets through and that's how the next thing to work on is happening, which is not a very good quality. Ideally, there should be more dialogue and more planning, which requires more discussions and requires more accountability, meaning that you can be in a meeting with your stakeholders where things are discussed, negotiated, agreed on, and then people could leave the room and two days later everything is forgotten, meaning that there is an accountability issue, which means that the expectations were not rightly set or which can mean that the roles were not clearly defined. Then if they were defined, they haven't been clearly accepted that yes, I will do this and at this time. So, I would say the quality is medium to high, but not perfect.

Interviewer: Okay, I see. How quickly and effectively does your company respond to stakeholder needs and concerns?

Respondent: As I already said, if the stakeholder is loud enough, things will always get through. However, if we take the ideal situation where the team has capacity not overloaded and stakeholder brings in a valuable input or a change of direction, then I would say we act quite quickly. We might even change the goal of the existing current sprint, jump right in and try to fix if it's a problem, fix the problem. If it's an opportunity, get the work done for that opportunity to enable external users or to enable internal teams.

Interviewer: What was the shortest period of time which you needed in order to react properly to stakeholder, I don't know, probably the change in stakeholder concerns?

Respondent: If it's an incident concerning to users, I would say it happens within hours. It might be even minutes. If we found a significant bug that introduces some issues for our creators or users or listeners, I mean, then we would jump on it right away, meaning that that will even go to the on-call person who is responsible for the bug. For fixing the bug. If it's not just a quick fix, but it's a project to fix it, then that gets prioritized over other project work or other feature work, because fixing the problem is more important. Consistency and reliability for the services provided

to users is more important than add-ons, adding more features for them to use. If it's a feature request, then it goes through the planning, project workflow, project lifecycle, where we gather the input for the project, meaning that in taking all the requirements, the ideas, then we set up the project goals and the KPIs to track how we are reaching the goals or to have that input focus. Then we will come up with the scope and then it will go into the sprint planning, into the backlog as committed project that we will be working on.

Interviewer: Great. Which types of stakeholder feedback or signals from their side most often trigger changes in processes or priorities? Which type of signals?

Respondent: Which type of signals, yeah, which types of feedback? We usually act with the user obsession in mind, so everything should come from there. We take the user needs and just to repeat myself, if they have a problem, that's a signal to action. We just act directly. If they ask and if a lot of them ask for a certain feature, then again, that's a signal to act.

Interviewer: Where exactly do you get to know what exactly your customers are interested in? Except this Reddit channel, all of this stuff, probably there is a team which is responsible for...

Respondent: UI/UX team, the design team also does surveys. So we used to do them yearly, now we do quarterly, where we get a group of people, both part of them are users, part of them not our users and we give them a set of questions. We check how satisfied are our users, the randomly chosen people, and why the other users haven't been using our systems or maybe they have but they left or they haven't learned about us yet. So we check those things to make sure that where we can focus on our attention. Like if people haven't heard about us, meaning that it's a reaching out problem, right? We need to cover wider audience with marketing moves, etc. And then we hear our current users who give us what they like, what they don't like. What they like, we double down on it. What they don't like, we try to fix or address with the projects.

Interviewer: So let's move on to business process flexibility and discuss the ways how your company adapts and modifies products or services when stakeholder needs or market conditions change. How does your company adapt or modify products or services you provide when market conditions change or stakeholder needs change?

Respondent: When the market conditions change and the stakeholder needs change. That's a good question. I think it all is being set as high goals. I can give an example and I will go through the example. For example, our company was for a while putting a big attention on one certain type of music genre. As an audio streaming company, that can be a very painful thing to do because then your brand gets associated with that type of genre, which means that you limit your user base. Techno, right? Is it techno? It used to be techno, but then it became rap. But they were focusing on a

small area of listeners. So what has been done during the yearly planning session, that was brought up as a critical issue. And as a company, we have decided to change the direction and make sure that we have coverage for all types of genres, not focus all our efforts into this type of genres only. Which meant that we started also doing podcasts, for example, podcast was added. Audiobooks, for example, also have been added. And that gave us a possibility to reach out to wider audience and hence the user base has been grown and hence partially our profitability, where the profitability came from. Because people started using it, people started subscribing because they could find more things that they like or everyone could find what they like, not just people who care. So that can be an example if that was showing enough.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, it's great. How quickly and effectively can your team implement such changes when required?

Respondent: Depending how big is the change or the idea. So throughout the year, there are projects that can be accomplished within a sprint.

Interviewer: So, two weeks?

Respondent: That's the shortest. The longest project that one of my teams have done is two years.

Interviewer: What was that?

Respondent: That was an internal migration project, which was involving a lot of other teams, because all the other teams, as I mentioned initially, are reliant on us. Meaning that every change we make to our systems is going to trigger a change in their systems as well. So that's why we have to go slow, we have to make sure that we are not introducing any service degradations to our customers or internal stakeholders or to the external users.

Interviewer: So I assume that other departments of your company used to be your direct stakeholders in this case.

Respondent: Yes, they are.

Interviewer: And how exactly did you manage to communicate with them? So communicate possible triggers which could arise in their work, for example.

Respondent: Either through the programs, as mentioned, program managers or directly speaking with their leadership, meaning the director of engineering for that department or the engineering manager or the project manager or all of them together. Meaning that the direct communication within the company is well established. So reaching out to them and informing that this is going to happen, get ready and get prepared that we need to do certain changes. And I always provide a set of requirements, what they need to change. For example, a big part of that project was

database migration and the API migration, which is connected to that database. And all the other users, internal teams are consuming that data through this API. And if we are changing the API, even from the data center, we move to cloud. And at least they have to change the DNS, the name, how they are reaching. So that might be like one ticket for some users, for others, it might be more changes coming.

Interviewer: So were there any situations when you were trying to adapt to this change and to migrate from one system to another? Were there any situations when another department could not work anymore, when they were not fully prepared, probably because of some lack of communication?

Respondent: Many. Because it's impossible to fully plan things and you will always miss out a team or a service that is sitting there, legacy, no one heard about it or teams forgot about it. So after the change, even though you have discussed and you try to involve all the other stakeholders in your planning, because the way it will take a bit longer to answer, the way we do those changes, we introduce an RFC, request for comments. And we start with the idea and we write down which systems can be potentially affected. And then we send it out to entire engineering, not just the management or leadership, but the entire engineering. And everyone has a right to comment. And we ask for the comment. So it will be like two weeks that everyone can read the change and add their comments and ideas, basically. And if we haven't taken a service or a system into consideration, that can be affected. That's the way we learn about them. However, even with that situation, there are some legacy systems which are not maintained and long forgotten, but they are still serving some non critical stuff to users. And those things can be broken and we hear about them from the monitoring systems or from the users. As I said, they can complain about a certain thing on the critical path. For example, like master and service can be down, which is not used by every user, but it's a specific feature that some users like to use. And we will either pick the issue with the monitoring systems or the users will complain that they cannot use the master and service, for example. And then the team will directly act, either roll back the change that caused the issue or roll forward, knowing if they can fix that for that system also.

Interviewer: Do you think that when there were some cases when other teams were not prepared for the change, it's a lack of communication or lack of something else? What exactly is the main reason?

Respondent: Most of the times it's lack of communication. Between my department and another, as I said, most of the time I try to inform or give them all the requirements or the change scope of action, but I might miss some important aspects of things which happen. But also

sometimes there is, for those leaders with whom it was communicated, let's say if it's not on RFC, then those leaders have to take it back to their teams and explain and prepare them. And sometimes that doesn't happen. Mostly I'm going to guess and assume that it was not accepted as something of high importance. And again, back to lack of accountability, promising things that then later cannot be delivered and might be forgotten or broken all the way and not be continuously said further.

Interviewer: Yeah, I see. How does your company reallocate people, time or financial resources when priorities shift?

Respondent: There might be full-time employees, for example contractors, who might join different departments even and help out to push a certain project forward and that will be the example for moving resources from a department to department or from a team to team, which means that there are financial implications also and each department has their own financial budget allocation and if a set group of contractors have to join that department which means that the financing will go out of that budget.

Interviewer: In what ways can workflows or process routines and roads be altered to handle unexpected events or urgent priorities?

Respondent: In what ways can workflows or process routes be altered to handle unexpected events or urgent priorities? Again a big question I will try to answer a bit locally for a team. Usually when my teams plan for the year, within the roadmap we will have a buffer or gap of 20% of the employee power, let's say, not the human power, meaning that 80% will be always fully dedicated to the set of the project which are agreed and committed to work on but also we will have 20% of free time, so to speak, so we can just act on incoming project requests or problem requests. We also have a first responder role which will be on the lookout for such requests incoming.

Interviewer: So, first responder is the same person who's on call?

Respondent: No. Those are different roles because if you're on call and you are aged and you are going to work on a problem and another request comes in and you cannot work on both. There are different severities of things. If we have four layers of severities, if it's a severity one then the on-call person will act on it. That's like user facing issue. Severity two is not yet an issue that user faces but if not acted on quickly it will become an issue. Severity three is an internal problem that is a slow-going problem and at some point you can just fix it. Each of those things have different priorities and also on-call is only acting on severity one. Severity two and three is first responder task.

Interviewer: How flexible is your decision-making structure in urgent situations? Say it again.

Respondent: I'd say it's very flexible.

Interviewer: Do you need any approvals from the upper management or I don't know maybe you do need a lot of approvals, a lot of documents from other teams? I don't know what it can be.

Respondent: If it is going to concern a lot of stakeholders then it's a bit less flexible. However, if explained right and as I said if it's any user need then it's easier to just take it on and have the others also take part or free up some room in the roadmaps to work on.

Interviewer: So let's imagine a situation for example you have an unforeseen situation in your company probably a problem on the side of your users and you need five major stakeholders to decide how exactly you will proceed with the problem. What exactly will you do?

Respondent: So first of all if it's a change that I want to introduce I will gather all the ideas and I will create an RFC which will be the first step to send out for everyone to get to know to understand the issue and then I will reach out either I or the program manager will reach out to those stakeholders and then we will have a call where we discuss everything in details and then we set next steps actions for us that might require frequent meetings etc.

Interviewer: That will be one thing. So it's always a call where everybody should be present?

Respondent: It starts with offline discussions within that document.

Interviewer: So just comments on the side within the document?

Respondent: Yeah it depends, it's not always a call depending on the complexity of the project.

Interviewer: So when something is really urgent so when you don't have time to create a document what will you do in this case or it can happen in your development?

Respondent: It happens often in that case it's certainly a call so maybe if it's a if it's an incident that needs to be acted on quicker and a lot of people will need to involve then we will do it in a Slack for example in the channel we will have all the discussions there then sometimes there is a for a call to jump on the call so-called forum and discuss and attack things quicker. So it depends it's not always a call it's a mix of communication online, communication in documents etc.

Interviewer: But in general you can gather all of the involved stakeholders immediately so within a couple of hours?

Respondent: Within minutes.

Interviewer: What typically triggers the need to adjust products? Internal initiatives or stakeholder feedback?

Respondent: So I assume external stakeholder feedback. Both are true. Internal initiatives are also very valuable because we have very informed and knowledgeable in the market that we

operate in people and they have a lot of great ideas which are influencing our projects or programs and as I mentioned also externally we constantly are in the communication with our users and creators and we try to gather their need so ideally our roadmap or company goals and missions are the mix of those things so top to down bottom we gather everything we tunnel it through our roadmaps and that's how it is being here.

Interviewer: Are there any areas in your processes or projects that you find more difficult to change and less flexible than the others and why?

Respondent: Processes that are difficult to change?

Interviewer: Yeah maybe some areas in your business processes. So I will help you a bit. Some people mentioned that legal stuff is difficult to change for example so that you understand that it can be a team probably or...

Respondent: Yeah I would say it used to be not anymore. There were a set of limitations artificially put on the teams. I will bring an example, it's always easier to explain on an example. For example as a company direction from top leadership it has been said that all the systems have to be migrated to the cloud, all the new systems have to be built in the cloud and as well as the only language to be used is Golang. Imagine a team that doesn't have experience with cloud systems, doesn't have experience with Golang and also cannot easily migrate isolated systems because they are all in interconnection so that is all bringing limitations or inflexibility into your processes and systems how you do things. As far as it goes for the business processes and team interactions I don't think so. Again a louder voice always gets in and it's a matter of how loud you are proving that given thing that you want to push forward is the right thing to do. But everyone will listen, everyone will be open to listen and make the changes.

Interviewer: Are you sure about everyone?

Respondent: Well, they will listen, sometimes they will not take it if you're not convincing enough. So the main thing is to be convincing.

Interviewer: Okay, let's discuss business performance. How will you assess your company's current financial health and stability?

Respondent: Just profitable which is a very rare thing for music or streaming company. There's a good amount of balance on the bank so it's very stable and profitable so for the years to come the company can protect itself.

Interviewer: How effectively do your processes operate in terms of productivity, quality and timeliness?

Respondent: I would say it's seven out of ten. We do produce a lot of things but the bigger features or things needed for users tend to take more time. More time that this thing can have been accomplished if planned and addressed properly. The reasons mostly are insufficient human power to work on things.

Interviewer: Human power in terms of motivation or just their professional skill set?

Respondent: In scope of having enough hands to work on all the projects because the company the skill set is right. The managing or directing the focus might be lacking a bit meaning that when you take on too many things then the blast radius is too big and engineers are getting into too many projects and too much content switching and cognitive overload and slowing down everything. If you want to do everything at once you might get everything out of the door released but it will take more time and the quality will suffer.

Interviewer: How do you evaluate your company's capacity for innovation?

Respondent: In recent years less than before I would say before we used to do this so-called SAT time meaning that one day in a week every engineer or every person in the company could have worked on a project or an idea that is not in the immediate roadmap of that thing. So 20% of your working time was an SAT self-allocated time where you can work on everything you want which have brought a lot of good features that are now used in production. However in the recent years there was a change of direction and there was a lot of things to work on and we decided to give up the self-allocated time and return this 20% workforce to work on the more targeted projects. So the innovation coming within the engineers or people have been reduced however the innovative ideas were more coming from a business direction from the user requests meaning that the amount of innovation haven't been changed but the source of the innovation has been changed.

Interviewer: Which process changes in the last one to two years have had the strongest impact on performance? How do you think?

Respondent: I would say introducing program managers, however not ideal but that helped a lot in the stakeholder management and productivity.

Interviewer: And now we are coming to integrative perspective of the three concepts. How do stakeholder interactions or feedback influence adjustments in your processes or operations?

Respondent: Those are very valuable things if you want to have high performance and work on the right things produce quality then stakeholders input is a critical thing to listen to meaning that the effectivity to hear what stakeholders have to say is very important.

Interviewer: If stakeholder engagement had been lower in your organization how do you think this would have affected your ability to adapt processes? To adapt processes? To change them to be flexible?

Respondent: It is a very subjective thing depending on the team or department. Some leaders can look out for the changes coming from the market standards from new inventions or ways to manage the teams so processes will continuously be changed and adapt even if you don't have input from the stakeholders and that most cases some or most cases that can really positively affect your performance or even will affect the lives of your stakeholders. But having combination of that two is much more beneficial meaning that without hearing your stakeholders input you will be shooting in the dark. It might be good or mostly it will be good because in the market it is a tested thing to use but you don't know you're just shooting in the dark. It's much better if you listen to the concerns or ideas of your stakeholders.

Interviewer: It sounds great. How would you describe the overall relationship between the three concepts? I mean stakeholder engagement, business process flexibility and business performance.

Respondent: It's a straight line.

Interviewer: Straight line from which one to which one?

Respondent: To come back now to my initial philosophical talk. People come first. You hear people. You hear their ideas, their concerns, their problems. That's the stakeholder engagement. Then it comes into the idea part. That's your flexibility to implement those ideas to address those things and if you do things right then the third thing is the performance. Then you perform well if you are high performance and you deliver great value to your stakeholders or to humanity in general.

Interviewer: Which practices would you recommend to companies aiming to strengthen the balance between the three concepts? You mentioned program managers for example and I understand that you think it's essential for the engagement within your particular company, right?

Respondent: It's not coming from our company. It's a concept that I think first was implemented in IBM. I would say the current best practice is a bit advanced version of that and instead of just program managers you have technical program managers who understand much more in depth. They can be hands-on even working on things or acting on things right away, checking some stuff, building some dashboards to track the things. So implementation of technical program managers is a very good thing. Continuing on the RFC, that's a very good way to gather input from all of your stakeholders. Doing the surveys, quarterly surveys ideally if not even yearly surveys is

very important for the temperature check what is happening within your user base or you can do internal surveys also which I have done multiple of asking other teams how they would grade the communication with our team, the support level, are they satisfied with the amount of support and the quality of support etc. So surveys are also a good thing to implement and building right bridges, adding human connection goes a very long way. Not just reaching out in scope of problem or stuff but also actively working on human connections. Those are team building opportunities and whenever you are doing you can do combined team events, going out for dinner and stuff that helps a lot depending on company size or team sizes, there are different ways to build those connections.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's a great answer.

Respondent: Those are some suggestions. There are a lot of things that get into the play but some important things that I find useful are those.

Respondent: Yeah, thank you.

Interviewer: How do you see this relationship evolving in the next few years with the development of AI for example or some automations?

Respondent: With the AI coming into play human connections will get much more important.

Interviewer: More important, not less important?

Respondent: Not less important, much more important because in my opinion AIs can replace a lot of automatic things that humans are doing. For example, the engineer writes a lot of code and in near future there won't be a need for a human being to write the code which means that that person's job will not disappear but that person needs to make sure that he or she can speak right with the AI to describe what needs to be done as well as that person needs to communicate with the stakeholders to get the requirement right meaning that the job becomes a translator. You basically gather the requirements, you then give it to the AI who will do all the stuff meaning that the good communication is going to be the highest valued skill in the future.

Interviewer: But if in the case when we are talking about external stakeholders including end users for example and in case when we are talking about internal stakeholders let's say some other departments of your company don't you think that probably in the future we will not need so many people, so many stakeholders? Will they be useless?

Respondent: I don't think so because the people will always be there just the type of the work that they are doing will change. Meaning that if we take the example of industrialization before that people would do things manually creating a jacket and doing it all by hand and then with the industrialization those people were not needed as much because the machine was doing it but

then there was a need to create so many machines and the workforce just shifted and then there will always be more work the higher productivity goes the more workplaces are being created. I don't think there will be less of a need for people but less of a need for certain tasks or for example the greatest example that I've read is the machinists, people that would type. Yeah, they were typers. And within one year with the computers coming into the play those people were not needed anymore but then the computers have created a big range of different professions and need and there were more workplaces created but the fear is correct and people fear the unknown or people fear the changes. I personally don't. I think there will be always a chance if people look out for those changes they will always find them.

Interviewer: Maybe there is anything else you would like to add in order for me to understand how these three elements interact in your company?

Respondent: What I would add is just maybe a summary of all things. The questions were right. They were very good questions. My answers might have been all over the place but I indeed find a big value in the interaction of these three big elements and those are good things to track. Open, trustworthy communication, reliability and accountability in changes in your processes or directions will always lead into better goods produced. Thank you very much for your time.

R11

Interviewer: Could you describe your role and main responsibilities?

Respondent: I work as a Product Manager. In simple terms, my job is to make sure that everyone in the team really understands the product: what it does, how exactly it works, what its key features are, and how we should position and sell the product. I'm also responsible for pricing-related things. I− I price lists, set discount rules, and approve discounts in specific situations. On top of that, I communicate a lot with partners. This includes promotions, special offers we currently have, and technical updates. For example, when the vendor releases a new feature or, I don't know, a new version of the product, I have to make sure that our partners understand what has changed and how it should be used in practice.

Interviewer: How long have you been working in this position?

Respondent: Almost two years now.

Interviewer: Could you describe the key projects or processes you are involved in?

Respondent: One of the biggest projects I've been working on is transferring part of our operational work to a new hub in another country. You could say it's an Eastern region with a different cultural background… um… if we compare it to Europe and to the way things usually

look like in European countries. My responsibility is to transfer knowledge from the existing teams to the new team, which is based in this new country. I train new employees and make sure that… um… they understand both the product and the way they're supposed to work as a part of our company. This is not only about training, but also about making sure that processes continues to work smoothly during the transition and that service quality doesn't drop.

Interviewer: How would you define business performance in your department or company?

Respondent: I will talk about my department, So, for my department, business performance is very closely linked to how successfully we manage this transition. If we take the full scope of work as 100%, then roughly 85% has already been transferred to the new hub. For us, this is… um… a very clear indicator that things are working and that the team is performing well despite major changes from the… from the organizational perspective.

Interviewer: Who are the key stakeholders involved in these processes?

Respondent: The main stakeholder is the person who initiated and owns this transfer project. It was her idea and her responsibility. Besides that, there are stakeholders from operations of course, colleagues from the business analyst team who work with our internal systems, and the head of the distribution team who oversees the overall setup.

Interviewer: How does your company ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: In general, communication is quite open, I think. Especially in the European part of the organization, the rule is simple: if something is written down, if it's… indicated in the rules, in some… um… documents, it's considered transparent and shareable. Of course, there is sensitive information, but for most topics transparency is ensured through emails, meetings, and written summaries after meetings. We usually try to invite all relevant stakeholders to meetings. If someone cannot join, which may happen sometimes, because we all have ongoing tasks and responsibilities, yeah… So, these colleagues either receive a recording or a written follow-up, depending on the topic. This helps avoid misunderstandings and the so-called "broken phone" effect. I think we do everything in order to keep everyone updated, even if they're not present in the meetings.

Interviewer: How are stakeholders involved in planning and decision-making?

Respondent: It really depends on the type of decision, you see. Strategic decisions related to the transfer project are made by the project owner. Decisions related to vendors, pricing, or product updates are usually handled by me together with the Business Development Manager. Ideas can come from many people, but in the end there is always a clear owner who gives the final approval.

Interviewer: How do you build and maintain trust with stakeholders?

Respondent: Trust builds over time through very practical things. First, there should be clear responsibilities: everyone should understand who decides what. Second, consistent communication is essential: if something changes, stakeholders should hear about it quickly, as quickly as possible. And third, delivery, yes. When people see that decisions are followed by action, trust grows naturally.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue with stakeholders?

Respondent: With stakeholders in Europe, communication is usually very straightforward and efficient. Very direct. With teams in the new hub, cultural differences matter a lot, they change even the structure of our work. In that culture, people are used to receiving tasks through a strict hierarchy. You can't just… um… come and ask someone directly to do something − it's never done like that, they often need confirmation from their team lead, who then needs confirmation from the next level. Because of this, some processes become slower. And it's not about unwillingness, it's just a different way of working, which we… um… should pay attention to. And yes, this definitely affects both communication quality and process flexibility. I mean if we're waiting for a lot of approvals, if we need a certain person who can contact a team, and all the other opinions are not as valuable − it takes much more time. And it's very important to think of cultural differences when we're talking about an international company. Cultural code is what defines how people work.

Interviewer: What kind of stakeholder feedback usually triggers changes in your processes?

Respondent: Very often it's signals from management that something needs to be "cleaned up" or simplified. Sometimes the challenge is that different managers send conflicting messages. In such situations, people don't always know whose priorities come first, and this slows things down. When stakeholders are not aligned, process flexibility immediately suffers.

Interviewer: How does your organization adapt when stakeholder needs or market conditions change?

Respondent: In IT in general, or in sales, you simply have to adapt − otherwise you become irrelevant really, really quickly. Changes don't usually happen overnight, it's a process, step by step. As new requests come in, we adjust discount rules, pricing policies, internal guidelines, depending on the partner and the situation.

Interviewer: How quickly can your team implement these changes?

Respondent: It's difficult to say immediately… On average, it takes about a week. Yeah, probably a week. Some things can be done very quickly, others take longer because of system

limitations or approval chains, which I mentioned. It really depends on what exactly needs to be changed and how many people are involved.

Interviewer: How flexible is your decision-making structure in unexpected situations?

Respondent: Overall, it's quite flexible. Interestingly, some system weaknesses actually make us more flexible. For example, our pricing and quota system is not fully automated, so many things are still done manually. This creates extra work of course, but it also gives us freedom to adjust prices and discounts in ways that fully automated systems would not allow us to do.

Interviewer: Are there processes that are less flexible than others?

Respondent: Yes, mainly the ones connected to old systems and large databases. These systems have been around for a long time, they store a lot of data, and they are very hard to change. Because of that, things can be slowed down. But it also takes time to come up with a different way how and where to store… um… old data.

Interviewer: How would you describe the current financial health of the company?

Respondent: Overall, the company is financially stable. Targets are being met, I've recently seen the report. Management regularly reviews team structures and staffing, but there are no major issues.

Interviewer: How effectively do your processes work in terms of productivity and timeliness?

Respondent: In my department, things generally work well and on time. That said, working through partners adds complexity. Because, as you can see, we depend on both partners and the vendor, which sometimes causes delays, because there are so many people involved. At the same time, this setup also gives us more options, because we can escalate issues either to the partner side or to the vendor side. I mean when something is urgent.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance relate to each other in your view?

Respondent: For me, process flexibility is the key element, it defines everything else. If processes are flexible, you can work around stakeholder constraints. For example, if one stakeholder is unavailable, a flexible process allows you to reach out to someone else − maybe a colleague, or a manager. And this way you can still move forward. This saves time and directly improves performance.

Interviewer: Can you give a concrete example where flexibility improved business results?

Respondent: We once needed to urgently adjust partner discounts, but the responsible account manager was unavailable. Instead of waiting and delaying offers, I… um… contacted

colleagues, learned how to make the changes myself, got approval from the manager, and implemented the discounts directly. As a result, offers went out faster, partners placed orders sooner, and the deal was closed successfully. If I waited, there are a probability that we didn't close the deal.

Interviewer: Can you give an example where stakeholder engagement made processes more flexible?

Respondent: There was a case where margins were very low, and offers required additional approval from me. One stakeholder actively engaged with another department responsible for margin rules and negotiated different thresholds for a specific partner. This reduced manual approvals and sped up the process. In general it made life easier for both our team and the partner.

Interviewer: What would happen if stakeholder engagement were lower?

Respondent: Honestly, flexibility would drop immediately. I already mentioned that in IT and sales, flexibility is critical. If people are not engaged and not willing to compromise, many deals simply won't go through.

Interviewer: What practices would you recommend to organizations that want to balance engagement, flexibility, and performance?

Respondent: The most important thing is to listen to each other and remember that everyone is on the same side. It's not about fighting each other, it's about solving the problem together. Being open to other people's ideas, even if you don't like them at first, often leads to better results.

Interviewer: How do you see the role of AI and automation in the future?

Respondent: AI can really help by offering different perspectives and ideas. But in the end, people still need to choose what works best in a specific context. You have to consider the client, the partner, and the history of the relationship. AI supports decisions, but it doesn't replace human judgment.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: One thing I've noticed is that too many stakeholders can actually make things worse. When there are too many people involved, decision-making usually slows down and good ideas get lost… I mean can get lost. And I see that splitting stakeholders into smaller groups… um… would work much better − more people will be able to speak up, engagement will increase, and decisions will become both faster and better. Because there are a lot of situations when some employees may have wonderful ideas what to improve and how to do it, but in the meetings we have so many people from different departments that… um… those people with ideas don't get a chance to speak up. They feel they don't have space to express what could be better for the company, for the business. And splitting all stakeholders into groups for a brainstorming at first

feels like a very… um… very natural way to encourage more people to share their ideas, and possibly the business will win from such a practice. And stakeholder engagement will win for sure. I mean can you imagine how responsible everyone will get when they know that they really can influence the final choice of their stakeholder group? When there is no way to just sit in the corner, people tend to pay more attention to their personal contribution. And I think it's what matters.

R12

Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your organization?

Respondent: I work as a Platform Engineering Manager in a technology company, which is quite large. My team is responsible for building and maintaining shared technical infrastructure that is used by multiple product teams across the company. We work with authentication services, internal APIs, developer tooling, deployment pipelines, and data access layers. What makes this role quite specific is that we don't directly deliver features to end users. Instead, we enable other teams to deliver value faster and more reliably. That means a significant part of my work is not only technical leadership but also coordination, expectation management, and process design across teams with very different goals and pressures. In practice, I spend a lot of time aligning roadmaps, negotiating priorities, explaining constraints, and balancing flexibility with stability. So, my role sits very clearly at the intersection of stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business outcomes.

Interviewer: How long have you been working in this role or within this organization?

Respondent: I've been with the company for about six years in total. I joined as a senior engineer, then became a tech lead, and for the past two years I've been working as an Engineering Manager. This progression is important, because it gave me a very hands-on understanding of how platform decisions affect product teams on a day-to-day level. I've personally experienced frustration when platforms are too rigid or too chaotic, and that strongly shapes how I approach my current role.

Interviewer: Could you describe the main business processes or projects you are involved in?

Respondent: The core processes I'm involved in are platform development, platform adoption, and cross-team coordination. On the development side, we design and evolve shared services that need to be stable, scalable, and secure. On the adoption side, we support teams in migrating to these services and integrating them into their workflows. Equally important are

coordination processes. Here I'm talking about planning cycles, architectural reviews, dependency management, and incident handling. Platform work is highly interdependent, so poorly designed processes can quickly lead to bottlenecks, duplicated work, or even production incidents that affect the entire company.

Interviewer: How would you define "business performance" in your department or company?

Respondent: At the company level, business performance is fairly traditional: we track revenue growth, customer retention, market expansion. At the platform level, performance is more indirect and sometimes harder to articulate. We don't generate revenue ourselves, but our effectiveness has a strong multiplier effect. If our platform is reliable and easy to use, product teams move faster, they're able to deliver higher-quality features, and this ultimately contributes to better business results. So for us, business performance is strongly linked to enablement and. It's rather about long-term efficiency than short-term output.

Interviewer: What are the most common performance indicators your company uses?

Respondent: It depends. Company-wide, we use OKRs, revenue metrics, customer engagement indicators, and growth KPIs. For platform teams, we rely on a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. I can list them. There are system uptime, incident frequency, mean time to recovery, adoption rates of platform services, and feedback from internal teams. Interestingly, some of the most important signals are qualitative − for example, whether teams proactively come to us with ideas or try to bypass the platform entirely. That says a lot about perceived value.

Interviewer: Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes?

Respondent: For us, for Data Platform? Well, our primary stakeholders are internal product teams, solution architects, because all of them are dependent on the quality of our work. Then of course security and compliance teams, and engineering leadership. Product teams are our main customers, if I can call them that, but they are not all the same. Some teams value speed above everything, others are very risk-averse, it's important for them to avoid any possible difficulties. Security and compliance stakeholders often have a very different mindset, focusing on long-term risk and regulatory exposure. Leadership, on the other hand, is usually concerned with predictability, cost efficiency, and strategic alignment. Balancing these perspectives is one of the core challenges of my role.

Interviewer: How does your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: Transparency is something we actively work on, because without it platform teams are quickly perceived as blockers. There are different ways to communicate what we're working on. For example, we use open Slack channels, shared roadmaps, public documentation, and recorded design reviews. We also try to explain not only what decisions are made, but why. For example, when we say no to a request, we clearly articulate the trade-offs and risks involved. Over time, this reduces frustration and builds understanding.

Interviewer: In what ways are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making or improvement initiatives?

Respondent: Stakeholders are involved mainly through quarterly planning sessions. Then we also have roadmap reviews and feedback loops for such purposes. Product teams can propose initiatives, challenge priorities, or suggest improvements to the processes that… um… that already are established. We also regularly collect feedback after major platform changes or incidents. These discussions often reveal structural issues that wouldn't be visible from a purely technical perspective.

Interviewer: To what extent do they influence strategic or operational decisions?

Respondent: Their influence is significant, but not absolute. Individual urgent requests don't automatically change our priorities, because that would lead to constant firefighting. But when multiple teams raise similar concerns, or when feedback aligns with business risks, it strongly influences our decisions. In that sense, stakeholder influence is very… how to call it… very pattern-based. Very cumulative.

Interviewer: How does your organization build and maintain trust and commitment with stakeholders over time?

Respondent: When there is consistency and predictability, there is always trust. If we commit to something, we deliver. If we can't, we communicate early and explain why. Another important factor is fairness. Even when stakeholders don't get what they want, they accept decisions more easily when they see that the same rules apply to everyone.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders?

Respondent: Well, I've already told you that the dialogue is frequent, but its quality… It varies. Technically, there is no lack of meetings or communication channels. The real challenge is alignment − making sure that everyone understands dependencies and implications. What is very common, discussions are dominated by the most vocal stakeholders, you know, and part of my role is to bring the conversation back to business impact rather than urgency or emotion.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively does your organization respond to stakeholder concerns or requests?

Respondent: We usually respond very quickly in terms of acknowledgement. Critical issues like incidents are handled immediately. And for feature requests… In this regard we are more cautious. We've learned that reacting too quickly to every request increases complexity and decreases overall performance. So speed is balanced with prioritization.

Interviewer: Can you share an example when a quick response led to a positive outcome?

Respondent: Yes… We once had a severe incident affecting multiple teams shortly before a major release. Instead of assigning blame, we immediately formed a cross-functional task force, paused non-critical work, and focused entirely on resolution. In the end the issue was fixed quickly, literally within hours, and the way it was handled significantly improved trust. Teams felt supported rather than judged, and that had a lasting positive effect on collaboration.

Interviewer: Which types of stakeholder feedback most often trigger changes in processes or workflows?

Respondent: Repeated feedback about friction − onboarding difficulties, unclear ownership, unstable interfaces… Different things. When the same pain point is raised independently by different teams, it's a very strong signal that a process needs to change.

Interviewer: How does your organization adapt or modify products or services when stakeholder needs or market conditions change?

Respondent: Adaptation usually happens through controlled changes rather than constant adjustments. Stakeholder engagement helps us understand which needs are structural and which are situational. Without this engagement, flexibility becomes reactive and chaotic. With engagement, we can apply flexibility selectively and intentionally.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively can your team implement such changes?

Respondent: Small changes can be implemented within days or weeks. Larger architectural changes can take months. And effectiveness always depends on how early stakeholders are involved and how clearly priorities are defined.

Interviewer: How does your organization reallocate people, time, or financial resources when priorities shift?

Respondent: I'd say time is the most flexible resource − we can pause or deprioritize work relatively quickly. People can be temporarily reassigned, but headcount changes are slow and constrained by budgets.

Interviewer: In what ways can workflows be altered to handle unexpected events?

Respondent: In urgent situations, workflows become more centralized. I mean one person or a small group takes charge, so that decisions are faster and the response is coordinated.

Interviewer: Are there areas that are less flexible or difficult to change?

Respondent: Yes, shared and legacy systems. Changes there affect many teams, so flexibility is limited.

Interviewer: How would you assess your organization's current financial health and stability?

Respondent: The company is financially stable and growing. The competition is increasing, too. So, margins are under pressure.

Interviewer: How effectively do your processes operate?

Respondent: Productivity is high, but coordination costs are significant. Process improvements in the platform area reduced incidents and improved delivery predictability.

Interviewer: Which process changes in the last 1–2 years had the strongest impact on performance?

Respondent: Introducing structured quarterly planning with stakeholders. It reduced firefighting and improved outcomes in the long term.

Interviewer: How would you describe the relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance?

Respondent: They're all connected. Stakeholder engagement determines where flexibility should be applied. Process flexibility determines how engagement translates into outcomes. Together, they shape business performance. Without engagement, flexibility is blind. Without flexibility, engagement becomes just… just symbolic.

Interviewer: Looking back, how would you describe the role of engagement and flexibility in your organization's success?

Respondent: It's critical. Critical role.. Technical excellence alone wouldn't have been enough.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: Let me think… Yes. Flexibility is not about moving fast in every direction. It's about consciously choosing what to do and where to move together with stakeholders.

R13

Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your organization?

Respondent: Sure. I'm a Data Product Manager at B2B SaaS. Simply put, I make sure the company's data is understandable and useful. I make sure people can open a report or dashboard and immediately see what's going on and what to do with it. Numbers are a tool. And my job is to get everyone to agree on which metrics are important, what they mean, how we calculate them, and then to ensure they're actually used.

Interviewer: How long have you been working in this role or within this organization?

Respondent: I've been with the company for almost five years. I started as a business analyst and transitioned to a product role about three years ago, when our data stopped being just reporting and began to be truly perceived as a strategic asset. The transition was fairly natural, as I was already the bridge between the business and technical teams.

Interviewer: Could you describe the main business processes or projects you are involved in?

Respondent: It usually goes like this: I understand what people really need, decide what's most important to do first, build it together with the engineers, and then ensure that people actually use it. Because creating a dashboard is only half the battle. If it's not trusted or no one opens it, consider our time wasted.

Interviewer: How would you define business performance in your department or company?

Respondent: At the company level, business performance is measured in a very traditional way — revenue, growth, churn, customer retention. From a data perspective, performance looks different. For me, good performance means that decisions are made faster, with less confusion and fewer emotional debates about numbers. When people spend meetings arguing about which metric is correct, that's already a performance problem, even if revenue looks good.

Interviewer: What are the most common performance indicators your company uses?

Respondent: We use standard business KPIs like MRR, conversion rates, churn, and expansion. On top of that, different teams track their own operational metrics. For data products specifically, we look at adoption rates, how often dashboards are accessed, and whether stakeholders actually reference data in decision-making. Interestingly, one of the best indicators is when people stop asking where the numbers come from — that means trust has been established.

Interviewer: Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes?

Respondent: The main stakeholders are sales, marketing, customer success, finance, and senior leadership. Externally, large customers also influence our data requirements, especially when reporting is part of the product offering. Each stakeholder group has very different expectations. Sales wants forward-looking metrics and optimistic forecasts, marketing wants attribution and

experimentation data, finance wants consistency and auditability, and leadership wants a simple high-level overview. These expectations often conflict, which directly affects how flexible our processes can be.

Interviewer: How does your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: We try to ensure transparency through shared documentation, open dashboards, and regular alignment meetings. Metric definitions are documented and accessible to everyone. In theory, everything is transparent. In practice, transparency alone is not enough. People may see the same dashboard but interpret it in completely different ways, especially when performance pressure is high. That's why communication and explanation are just as important as visibility.

Interviewer: In what ways are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, or improvement initiatives?

Respondent: Stakeholders are involved mainly through requirement workshops and prioritization discussions. Before building or changing a data product, we try to understand how stakeholders plan to use the data in real decisions. Over time, we learned that asking "what decision will this metric support?" is much more effective than asking "what do you want to see on the dashboard?"

Interviewer: To what extent do they influence strategic or operational decisions?

Respondent: They have a strong influence, especially on prioritization. However, one of the biggest mistakes we made in the past was being too flexible and trying to satisfy every request. That led to dozens of slightly different metrics, inconsistencies, and ultimately loss of trust. Now, stakeholder influence is moderated. We listen carefully, but we also challenge requests and look for shared solutions instead of customization for each group.

Interviewer: How does your organization build and maintain trust and commitment with stakeholders over time?

Respondent: Trust in data is built through consistency and predictability. If numbers change, we explain why. If assumptions change, we communicate it openly. One thing we learned the hard way is that silent changes completely destroy trust. Even if the new data is "more correct," people will stop using it if they feel surprised or manipulated.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders?

Respondent: The dialogue is frequent but often emotionally charged. Data directly affects bonuses, performance evaluations, and strategic decisions, so discussions can quickly become

political. What improved the quality of dialogue was shifting the focus from "who owns the metric" to "what decision we're trying to make." That reframing reduced tension and made discussions more constructive.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively does your organization respond to stakeholder concerns or requests?

Respondent: We respond very quickly in terms of discussion. Implementation is intentionally slower. Data is an area where quick fixes often create long-term damage. So responsiveness for us means engaging quickly, not necessarily delivering immediately.

Interviewer: Can you share an example when a quick response led to a positive outcome?

Respondent: Before an important board meeting, leadership noticed a sudden drop in conversion rates and assumed there was a serious business problem. We immediately assembled a small cross-functional group, validated the data, and discovered a tracking issue rather than an actual performance decline. Fixing this quickly prevented incorrect strategic conclusions and reinforced trust in the data team.

Interviewer: Which types of stakeholder feedback most often trigger changes in processes or workflows?

Respondent: Signals of confusion. When different teams interpret the same numbers differently or stop trusting dashboards, that's a strong signal that definitions or processes need to change.

Interviewer: How does your organization adapt or modify products or services when stakeholder needs or market conditions change?

Respondent: Adaptation often means redefining metrics, adjusting data models, or restructuring dashboards. Technically, these changes are easy. Organizationally, they are complex.

Stakeholder engagement is critical here. Without alignment, changes feel arbitrary and reduce trust, even if they are technically correct.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively can your team implement such changes?

Respondent: From a technical perspective, quite fast. From an organizational perspective, slower by design. We intentionally slow down changes that affect many stakeholders to ensure alignment.

Interviewer: How does your organization reallocate people, time, or resources when priorities shift?

Respondent: High-impact data initiatives can temporarily pull engineers and analysts from other tasks. This usually happens when leadership sees a direct link to business performance.

Interviewer: Are there areas in your processes that are less flexible or more difficult to change?

Respondent: Yes − metrics tied to compensation, contracts, or external reporting. Changes there require extensive stakeholder engagement and are often slow.

Interviewer: Looking at outcomes, how would you assess your organization's current performance?

Respondent: Overall performance is strong. Decision-making improved significantly after we reduced metric fragmentation and introduced a clearer governance model.

Interviewer: Which process changes in the last one or two years had the strongest impact?

Respondent: Establishing a single source of truth for core KPIs. This was driven directly by stakeholder frustration and had a very clear positive impact on alignment and speed of decisions.

Interviewer: How would you describe the relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance in your organization?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement defines what kind of flexibility is acceptable. Process flexibility determines whether engagement leads to alignment or chaos. Together, they shape business performance by influencing decision quality.

Interviewer: Which of these elements tends to drive the others?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement. Without it, flexibility in data becomes dangerous rather than helpful.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: Yes. In data work, saying no to certain forms of flexibility is sometimes the most responsible choice for long-term performance. Flexibility only creates value when it's guided by shared understanding.

R14

Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your organization?

Respondent: I work as a Security and Compliance Lead in a global tech company that operates a cloud-based platform used by enterprise customers in different regions. My main responsibility is to ensure that our products and internal processes comply with security standards, regulatory requirements, and contractual obligations, while at the same time not blocking product development and innovation. In practice, this means I'm constantly balancing risk and speed. I work closely with engineering teams, product managers, legal, and external auditors. My role is often

perceived as restrictive, but in reality a lot of my work is about enabling teams to move fast in a safe and predictable way.

Interviewer: How long have you been working in this role or within this organization?

Respondent: I've been with the company for about four years. I joined when the company was scaling rapidly and starting to work more with enterprise customers. That shift dramatically increased the importance of security and compliance, and many of our existing processes were simply not mature enough for that stage.

Interviewer: Could you describe the main business processes or projects you are involved in?

Respondent: I'm involved in security architecture reviews, compliance audits, incident response, and the design of internal controls. I also work on process design − defining how security requirements are integrated into development workflows, procurement, and vendor management. A significant part of my work is educational. Many issues arise not because people want to ignore security, but because they don't fully understand the risks or the rationale behind certain requirements.

Interviewer: How would you define business performance in your organization?

Respondent: From a security perspective, business performance is strongly linked to risk avoidance. Preventing data breaches, avoiding regulatory fines, and maintaining customer trust are critical. However, I also see performance in terms of enablement. If our security processes are too rigid, we slow down product delivery and lose competitive advantage. So performance is about finding the right balance between protection and agility.

Interviewer: What are the most common performance indicators your company uses?

Respondent: At the company level, we track revenue, growth, and customer retention. From a security perspective, we look at audit results, number of incidents, time to remediate vulnerabilities, and compliance coverage across systems. Interestingly, one of the most important indicators is the absence of issues. That makes security performance harder to communicate, because success often means "nothing happened."

Interviewer: Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes?

Respondent: Internally, my main stakeholders are engineering teams, product managers, legal, procurement, and leadership. Externally, we work with auditors, regulators, and sometimes customers' security teams. Each stakeholder group has very different priorities. Engineering wants speed, product wants flexibility, legal wants certainty, and auditors want formal evidence. Aligning these perspectives is one of the hardest parts of my job.

Interviewer: How does your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: We try to be as transparent as possible. Security guidelines are documented and accessible, and we communicate openly about incidents and risks. However, transparency is a double-edged sword. If you expose too many risks without context, people panic or disengage. So transparency needs to be paired with explanation and prioritization.

Interviewer: In what ways are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, or improvement initiatives?

Respondent: We involve stakeholders early through security reviews and planning sessions. Instead of reviewing products at the end, we try to be part of the design phase. We also run post-incident reviews where all affected teams participate. These sessions are not about blame, but about understanding systemic issues and improving processes together.

Interviewer: To what extent do stakeholders influence strategic or operational decisions?

Respondent: They have significant influence, especially when security risks intersect with business impact. For example, customer security requirements can directly affect product roadmaps and architectural decisions. At the same time, I often have to push back on requests that prioritize short-term speed over long-term risk. This is where trust and credibility become crucial.

Interviewer: How does your organization build and maintain trust and commitment with stakeholders over time?

Respondent: Trust is built through consistency and fairness. If security rules apply to everyone and decisions are predictable, teams are more willing to accept constraints. Another key factor is responsiveness. When teams come to us with questions or concerns, we engage quickly. Even if the answer is no, the way we communicate matters a lot.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders?

Respondent: The dialogue has improved significantly over time. In the beginning, security was seen purely as a blocker. Today, discussions are more nuanced and collaborative. That said, tensions still exist, especially under time pressure. When deadlines are tight, security requirements are often perceived as obstacles, even if everyone understands their importance in theory.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively does your organization respond to stakeholder concerns or requests?

Respondent: We respond very quickly in urgent situations, such as incidents or critical vulnerabilities. In those cases, decision-making becomes very centralized and fast. For less urgent

requests, we take more time to evaluate impact and risks. This sometimes frustrates teams, but it prevents bigger problems later.

Interviewer: Can you share an example when a quick response led to a positive outcome?

Respondent: We once identified a potential vulnerability shortly before a major release. Instead of stopping the release entirely, we quickly assembled a cross-functional team, assessed the real risk, and implemented a targeted mitigation. The release went live on time, without compromising security, and the way this was handled significantly improved trust between security and engineering.

Interviewer: Which types of stakeholder feedback most often trigger changes in processes, priorities, or workflows?

Respondent: Repeated feedback that security processes are unclear or too late in the workflow. When teams consistently report that requirements appear "out of nowhere," it's a signal that our engagement model needs to change.

Interviewer: How does your organization adapt or modify products or services when stakeholder needs or market conditions change?

Respondent: Adaptation often involves redesigning security controls to fit new architectures or usage patterns. For example, moving to cloud-native services required a completely different security model. Stakeholder engagement is essential here. Without early involvement, security changes feel imposed and reduce flexibility instead of enabling it.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively can your team implement such changes?

Respondent: Technically, we can move quite fast. Organizationally, changes take time because they require training, documentation, and alignment across teams.

Interviewer: How does your organization reallocate people, time, or resources when priorities shift?

Respondent: In critical situations, security resources are reallocated immediately. Other work is paused. This flexibility is accepted because potential security failures have a huge impact on business, and everyone understands that.

Interviewer: Are there areas in your processes that are less flexible or more difficult to change?

Respondent: Yes, regulatory requirements and contractual obligations. These areas have very limited flexibility, and no amount of internal alignment can change that. The challenge is designing flexible processes around these fixed constraints.

Interviewer: How would you assess your organization's current performance and stability?

Respondent:

Overall, performance is strong. We have passed several major audits and avoided serious incidents, while still supporting rapid product growth.

Interviewer: Which process changes in the last one or two years had the strongest impact on performance?

Respondent: Shifting security engagement from late-stage reviews to early collaboration. This change was driven by stakeholder frustration and had a clear positive impact on delivery speed and quality.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder interactions influence adjustments in your processes or operations?

Respondent: They determine where flexibility is possible. Stakeholder input helps us distinguish between areas where we can adapt and areas where strict controls are non-negotiable.

Interviewer: Can you share an example where process flexibility directly improved efficiency or outcomes?

Respondent: By introducing risk-based reviews instead of uniform controls, we reduced approval times significantly while maintaining security standards.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder relationships affect performance results?

Respondent: Good relationships reduce resistance and rework. When teams trust security, they involve us earlier, which leads to better and faster outcomes.

Interviewer: How would you describe the relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance in your organization?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement defines the boundaries of acceptable risk. Process flexibility allows us to operate effectively within those boundaries. Together, they shape business performance by balancing speed and protection.

Interviewer: Which of these three elements tends to drive the others?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement. Without it, security processes become rigid and performance suffers.

Interviewer: Looking back, how would you describe the role of stakeholder engagement and flexibility in your organization's success?

Respondent: They were crucial. Without them, we would either be too slow to compete or too risky to scale.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: Yes. Security is often seen as the opposite of flexibility, but in reality, good security creates the conditions for sustainable flexibility and long-term performance.

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Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your role and main responsibilities in your organization?

Respondent: I work as a Customer Success Lead in a B2B tech company. My responsibility is to make sure that customers actually get value from the product after the sale. At first my team organizes onboarding for new clients, after that follows, hopefully, successful, adoption, then renewals, and expansion. And we also work with feedback loops into product, sales, and marketing. In practice, my role is very cross-functional. I work closely with sales, product management, engineering, and support. I often describe Customer Success as the place where strategy meets reality. Whatever we promise in sales or design in product eventually shows up in customer conversations.

Interviewer: How long have you been working in this role or within this organization?

Respondent: I've been with the company for almost four years, and in this role for a little over two years. I joined when the company was transitioning from early growth to a more structured scale-up phase. At that point, churn started to matter much more, and we realized that growth alone was not a sufficient performance indicator.

Interviewer: Could you describe the main business processes or projects you are involved in?

Respondent: The core processes include customer onboarding, success planning, health monitoring, renewals, and expansion. But beyond that, a large part of my work is internal alignment. I translate customer feedback into structured input which can be used by product and engineering teams, and I also help sales understand where flexibility is realistic and where it may create problems, problems in the long term. Many of our internal processes are shaped by what we learn from customers in very concrete, sometimes uncomfortable situations.

Interviewer: How would you define business performance in your department or company?

Respondent: For Customer Success, business performance is primarily retention, expansion, and customer lifetime value. If customers leave or don't adopt the product, revenue projections become meaningless. At the company level, performance is still often discussed in terms of growth and new sales, but over time we've seen that sustainable performance depends much more on long-term customer relationships than on short-term wins.

Interviewer: What are the most common performance indicators your company uses?

Respondent: We track churn, renewal rates, expansion revenue, customer health scores, and product adoption metrics. We also use qualitative indicators like customer sentiment and feedback from success reviews. One important learning was that purely quantitative metrics can hide problems for a long time. By the time churn shows up in numbers, it's often too late to fix the underlying issue.

Interviewer: Who are the primary stakeholders relevant to your business processes?

Respondent: Externally, our main stakeholders are customers – especially decision-makers and power users. Internally, it's sales, product management, engineering, and leadership. The challenge is that these stakeholders often have conflicting expectations. Sales wants to close deals, product wants standardization, engineering wants technical clarity, and customers want solutions tailored to their specific context.

Interviewer: How does your organization ensure openness and transparency in communication with stakeholders?

Respondent: With customers, transparency is critical. We are very open about what the product can and cannot do, especially after some early mistakes where we overpromised flexibility.

Internally, we share customer feedback widely through regular updates, documented insights, and joint meetings. This helps avoid situations where customer reality is filtered or softened.

Interviewer: In what ways are stakeholders involved in planning, decision-making, or improvement initiatives?

Respondent: Customers are involved through feedback sessions, success reviews, and sometimes beta programs. Internally, customer insights are discussed in roadmap planning and prioritization meetings.

However, involvement doesn't mean that every request is implemented. One of the biggest shifts we made was moving from reactive customization to structured feedback aggregation.

Interviewer: To what extent do stakeholders influence strategic or operational decisions?

Respondent: Customer input has a strong influence, especially when patterns emerge across multiple accounts. Single loud customers don't drive strategy, but repeated signals from different segments do. Internally, Customer Success often acts as an advocate for customers, but we also have to protect the organization from unsustainable flexibility.

Interviewer: How does your organization build and maintain trust and commitment with stakeholders over time?

Respondent: Trust with customers is built through honesty and consistency. Saying no, when done transparently, often builds more trust than saying yes and failing later.ьInternally, trust grows when teams see that customer feedback is not just collected, but actually influences decisions in a structured way.

Interviewer: How would you describe the quality of dialogue between your organization and key stakeholders?

Respondent: The quality of dialogue with customers varies. With mature customers, conversations are strategic and collaborative. With newer customers, discussions are often more tactical and emotional, especially during onboarding.ьInternally, dialogue improved significantly once we introduced shared definitions of customer health and success. That created a common language.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively does your organization respond to stakeholder concerns or requests?

Respondent: We respond very quickly in terms of communication. Implementation speed depends on the nature of the request. Critical issues affecting customer operations are addressed immediately. For feature requests, we deliberately slow down and route them through structured evaluation. This avoids creating exceptions that later hurt performance.

Interviewer: Can you share an example when a quick response led to a positive outcome?

Respondent: A large customer once experienced a serious onboarding issue that put the renewal at risk. We immediately escalated the issue, reallocated internal resources, and provided hands-on support. The problem was resolved quickly, and the customer not only renewed but later expanded. That situation clearly showed how process flexibility, enabled by strong stakeholder engagement, directly affected business performance.

Interviewer: Which types of stakeholder feedback most often trigger changes in processes, priorities, or workflows?

Respondent: Feedback related to adoption friction and unmet expectations. When customers struggle to use the product in the way they expected, it's a strong signal that either the product or our internal processes need adjustment.

Interviewer: How does your organization adapt or modify products or services when stakeholder needs or market conditions change?

Respondent: Adaptation happens mainly through roadmap changes and process improvements. We try to separate core product evolution from customer-specific workarounds. Stakeholder engagement helps us understand which needs are scalable and which are exceptions.

Interviewer: How quickly and effectively can your team implement such changes?

Respondent: Process changes in Customer Success can be implemented relatively quickly. Product changes take longer and require stronger prioritization.

Interviewer: How does your organization reallocate people, time, or resources when priorities shift?

Respondent: In high-risk customer situations, resources are reallocated immediately. Other initiatives are paused. This flexibility is accepted because leadership understands the revenue impact.

Interviewer: Are there areas in your processes that are less flexible or more difficult to change?

Respondent: Yes, those are pricing models, contractual terms, and core architecture. Flexibility there is limited, and pushing it too far creates issues.

Interviewer: How would you assess your organization's current performance and stability?

Respondent: Overall performance is strong and more stable than in earlier phases. And what makes me happy professionally, we've seen improvements in retention and expansion since we introduced more structured Customer Success processes.

Interviewer: Which process changes in the last one or two years had the strongest impact on performance?

Respondent: Previously, we worked with clients on an ad hoc basis, I mean we reacted to their issues when they have already happened and it was all quite random, there was no unified strategy. Then we introduced a clear Customer Success system, which was based on customer feedback, and after that, renewals increased.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder interactions influence adjustments in your processes or operations?

Respondent: They determine priorities. Without direct customer interaction, many internal problems would remain invisible until they affected revenue.

Interviewer: Can you share an example where process flexibility directly improved efficiency or customer satisfaction?

Respondent: For example, when we introduced flexible onboarding paths for different segments of our customers. That clearly had a positive impact on overall customer experience because it helped to reduce time-to-value and increase early adoption.

Interviewer: How do stakeholder relationships and engagement affect performance results?

Respondent: Strong relationships create early warning signals. When customers trust us, they raise issues earlier, giving us time to react before performance suffers.

Interviewer: How would you describe the relationship among stakeholder engagement, process flexibility, and business performance in your organization?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement provides insight − what to do and why we should do it at all. Then comes process flexibility. And it provides options. Business performance comes after the first two elements because it reflects how well we translate insight into action.

Interviewer: Which of these elements tends to drive the others?

Respondent: Stakeholder engagement. Without direct contact with customers, flexibility becomes just… just guesswork. I mean we can be flexible, we can change our processes as many times as we want but what for, if the main people who should profit from the processes are not really satisfied? And performance becomes unstable too, if there is not enough stakeholder engagement. Not enough insights from them.

Interviewer: Looking back, how would you describe the role of stakeholder engagement and flexibility in your organization's success?

Respondent: Growth without engagement would have been unsustainable. And flexibility is also essential because it helps to deliver good results when something unpredictable happens.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent: Yes. Probably about my team from the perspective of… of the topic we discuss. Customer Success is often seen as reactive, but in reality it's one of the strongest strategic levers when we're talking about aligning stakeholder needs, flexible processes, and company's performance. And I can provide reasons why I think so. First, Customer Success is the best at listening to the customer: what's bothering them, what's missing, where the product isn't meeting expectations. And if this information is properly collected and communicated internally, it becomes more than just feedback, because it influences prioritization. Which team can continue their work successfully when they're not sure what their main stakeholder wants, right? I mean the customer. I think in general that Customer Success is not just something like "after-sales support", it's rather a very, very important mechanism that helps a company to grow, and grow steadily. Because our work

makes sure there are no surprises from the side of the main external stakeholder. They are satisfied − then the revenue increases, very simply.