

# Communicative Channels of Stakeholder Interaction as an Element of Ensuring Sustainable Development of the Business Sector

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**Abstract.** Given the rapid globalization and intensive development of information and communication technologies, an increasing number of stakeholders are participating in various business processes. The paper aims to conduct a systematic structural analysis of trends and features of stakeholders' engagement and communication channels in companies' activity following implementation tasks of sustainable development. Analyzing the features, trends and priorities of implementing sustainable development goals for stakeholders will be provided based on the KPMG Survey of Sustainability Reporting. Analyzing countries' and companies' rates of sustainable development reporting illustrates the steadily growing dynamics of publicly available presentation of the results of environmental activities, which indicates the actualization of ensuring transparent and permissive relations among various subjects of economic activity. The structural analysis of the priority of the implementation of the goals of sustainable development for stakeholders shows the heterogeneity of preferences. The most urgent SDGs are SDG7, SDG8, SDG9, SDG12, and SDG13. Analyzing the results of Ukrainian implementation of requirements for the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making following EU policy and SDGs' testified compliance with the requirements of European legislation by indicators of stakeholders' obligations, responsibility for public consultation and information disclosure, consultation duration and complaint mechanism. At the same time, indicators that describe participants in the consultation process, communication, information disclosure, and reports to stakeholders were not well regulated. Building transparent and trusting relationships and involving stakeholders in consultations and decision-making will promote the formation of a positive green image and brand of the company and the growth of market capitalization.

## 1 Introduction

The study of substantive and structural features of the interaction of stakeholders in the organization and the conduct of environmentally oriented activities creates the basis for the sustainable development of enterprises. It provides opportunities to develop additional

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social [1–39], ecological [40–54] and economic [55–81] values and effects. The effective collaboration of stakeholders is vital in implementing ecologically oriented projects and programs and developing innovative, social, resource-saving and environmental policies for companies.

The study of the features of stakeholder interaction [82–89] made it possible to determine the key areas of analysis of the interaction features of interested parties in the context of their influence on enterprises' sustainable development. It is crucial to structural and essential identification of organizational and behavioral practices of stakeholders' communication in developing sustainable business practices, explanation approaches and ways of contact to encourage effective stakeholder involvement and interest. understanding of key stakeholders in the formation and development of companies' green competitive advantages and assessment of their interests; identification of the essential and meaningful basis of mutual coordination of intracorporate goals of companies, interests and motivation of interested parties; formation of tools for coordinating stakeholders' interests, preventing the occurrence of conflicts and contradictions; and formation of sustainable development tools based on constructive interaction of stakeholders [90–103].

Stakeholder theory investigates the nature, ways and motives of stakeholder interactions. However, scientists [104–118] consider that the ways of encouraging stakeholders to participate in the activities of modern enterprises are understudied. Therefore, understanding stakeholders' needs, expectations, analysis, and balanced consideration of these expectations is crucial for any enterprise's activity. The company's ability to build transparent and mutually beneficial relationships with various stakeholders is currently one of the key success factors and a guarantee for implementing sustainable development principles.

The comprehensive and systematic involvement of stakeholders in organizational and economic decision-making and the promotion of internal sustainable development processes encourages companies to close and transparently cooperate with other market stakeholders, government institutions and nongovernment organizations [119–123]. Systematic and continuous stakeholder and company cooperation will accelerate the information exchange and increase their awareness about processes and activities that facilitate the spread of green projects and practices, allowing enterprises to improve the procedures for conducting business activities and expand the implementation of green initiatives [19–29]. Stakeholder engagement is an ongoing company activity to create opportunities for dialog between the company and one or more stakeholders to provide an informed basis for the company's decisions [124–134]. In addition, when enterprises closely cooperate with external stakeholders, it contributes to the increase of internal self-control, the growth of the level of external observation, and, in some cases, the participation of stakeholders in intrabusiness operations [141–144]. The constant support and involvement of stakeholders by the enterprise are important because due to the lack of attention, stakeholders' behavior and relationship to the enterprise may change. The need for partnership between enterprises and their stakeholders is obvious, leading to achieving the goals of all sides of the communication process. The coordination of goals and interests, joint activities, and the absence of conflicts will contribute to companies' sustainable development [135–140]. Thus, the paper aims to conduct a systematic structural analysis of trends and features of stakeholders' engagement and communication channels in companies' activity following implementation tasks of sustainable development.

## **2 Materials and Methods**

The paper will use structural analysis to investigate the key trend in stakeholder behavior and communication considering sustainable development processes and practices in the business sector.

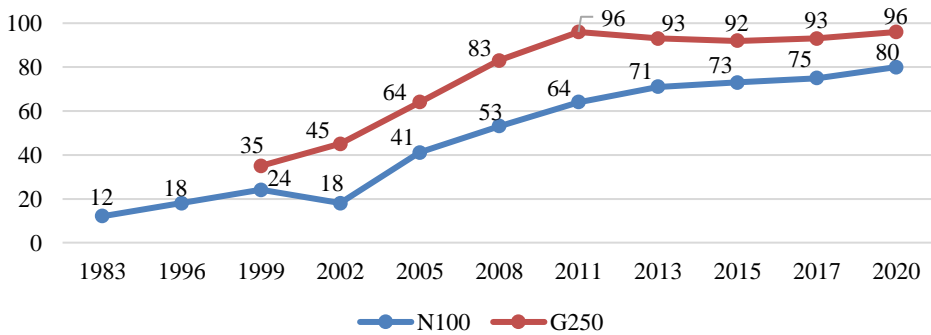
Analyzing the features, trends and priorities of implementing the sustainable development goals for stakeholders will be provided based on the KPMG Survey of Sustainability Reporting [145].

### 3 Results and discussion

A prerequisite for the constructive and effective collaboration of stakeholders to ensure sustainable development is factors related to the following components. Such as a desire to communicate and cooperate, managerial, professional and private leadership characteristics, joint goal-setting and common vision, transparency and trust, cooperation, openness and understanding of the activity goals.

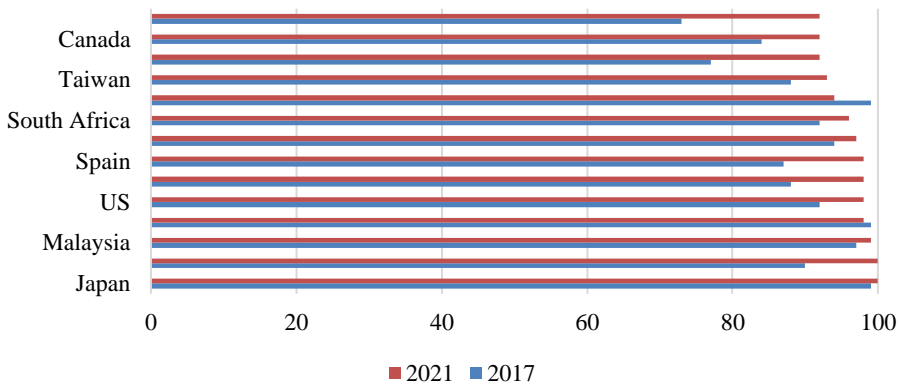
Depending on the group of interested parties, the relationship can take on an introverted or extroverted character. The introverted aspect of relations characterizes a largely controlled set of interconnected and interdependent acts of interaction between the personnel and shareholders of the enterprise owners, determined by internal communications, which indicate the available key opportunities of the enterprise to achieve the established goals of relationship marketing compared to competitors (internal communications). The extroverted aspect of relations is an uncontrolled set of acts of interaction of the enterprise with partners and the public, which characterize the willingness and ability of the enterprise to enter into relations with them, to influence them, and to encourage them to take action to achieve the desired goals of sustainable development (external relations).

Fig. 1 illustrates the steadily growing dynamics of publicly available presentation of the results of environmental activities, which indicates the actualization of ensuring transparent and permissive relations among various subjects of economic activity. Fig. 1 shows the results referring to N100 (a worldwide sample of the top 100 companies by revenue from 49 countries) and G250 (the world's 250 biggest companies considering revenues by Fortune 500 Ranking).



**Fig 1.** Companies' rates of sustainable development reporting, % (source: created by authors based on KPMG reports [145])

The growing dynamics presented in Fig. 1 show the readiness of large corporations to transparently position the results of their activities, including the specifics of the impact on the environment and issues of resource consumption and resource conservation. Fig. 2 shows the growing trend in forming and publishing reports on implementing sustainable development goals.



**Fig 2.** Countries' rates of sustainable development reporting, % (source: created by authors on the basis of KPMG reports [145])

The represented countries demonstrate a high level of transparency regarding displaying activity results and the implementation of sustainable development goals. Such behavior in the business environment contributes to transparent and competitive relations and forms a high level of trust among stakeholders.

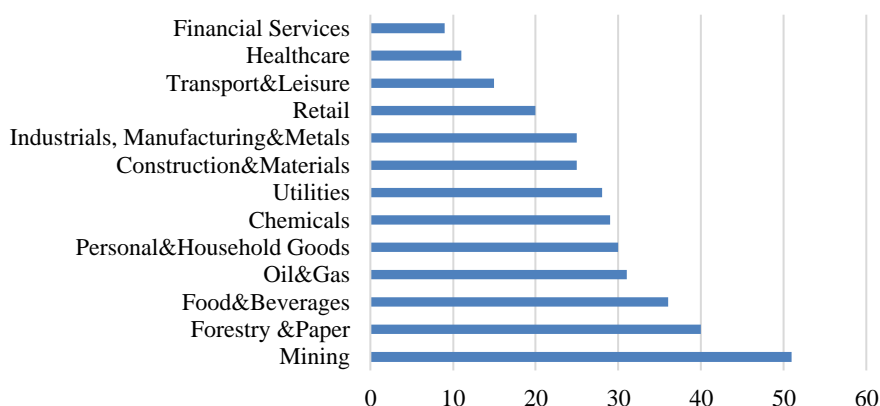
The Top 10 countries in Table 1 show the most significant scale of conveying information in annual reports about sustainable development.

**Table 1.** Top 10 countries where the business sector is transparent in representing sustainable activity information (source: created by authors based on KPMG reports [145])

Top 10 countries	% of representing information
India	98
Malaysia	97
South Africa	96
Japan	96
Taiwan	93
Pakistan	90
Great Britain	87
Finland	84
USA	82
France	80

Effective stakeholder interaction in sustainable development practices occurs through various forms of communication. Developing an effective model of interaction with stakeholders should ensure that the company has the conditions for creating long-term value and additional value, achieving strategic goals and forming a positive reputation. In general, to build effective, mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders that will allow the acquisition of the enterprise to have sustainable features, making the management of the company as a whole based on the principles of sustainable development expedient.

The sectoral companies' distribution characterizing their readiness to highlight the problems of the negative impact of activities on the environment is quite interesting. Fig. 3 shows the results referring to N100 (a worldwide sample of the top 100 companies by revenue from 49 countries).



**Fig 3.** Companies' rates of readiness to highlight the environmental problems, % (source: created by authors based on KPMG reports [145])

Fig. 3 illustrates the highest biodiversity risk rates of reporting on biodiversity risk for mining, forestry and paper industries. These sectors and companies were under stakeholder influence and pressure to disclose their environmental impacts and prevent damage. Such companies have a considerable advantage over investors and other stakeholders because they are transparent when identifying risks and potential damage impacts.

The structural analysis of the priority of the implementation of the goals of sustainable development for stakeholders shows the heterogeneity of preferences. The most urgent SDGs are SDG8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth" – more than 72% of companies put such a principle as a priority. SDG13 "Climate Action" – more than 63%, SDG12 "Responsible Consumption and Production" more than 58%, SDG7 "Affordable and Clean Energy" – more than 50%, SDG9 "Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure" – more than 50%.

Table 2 presents the research results on the implementation of requirements for the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making following EU policy and SDGs. At the same time, a comparison of European requirements and the practice of relations with stakeholders in Ukraine was conducted.

The following key indicators were defined as fundamental indicators: obligations to stakeholders (I1), responsibility for public consultation and information disclosure (I2), consultation duration (I3), participants in the consultation process (I4), communication (I5), information disclosure (I6), complaint mechanism (I7), and reports to stakeholders (I8).

**Table 2.** The results of a comparison of European requirements and the practice of relations with stakeholders in Ukraine (source: created by authors)

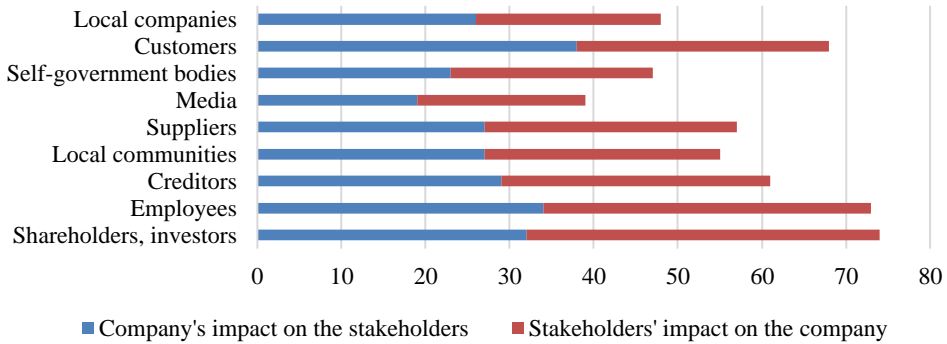
I	European Union requirements	Implementation practices in Ukraine
I <sub>1</sub>	<p>Ensuring open and transparent obligations between stakeholders as an element of modern corporate management.</p> <p><i>Result:</i> building strong, constructive and trusting relationships is crucial for successfully managing the project's environmental and social impacts and challenges.</p>	<p>The Aarhus Agreement was signed, which requires open access to environmental information and decision-making.</p> <p>The national legislation (the Law of Ukraine "On Environmental Protection") provides for broad public participation in the decision-making process.</p> <p><i>Result:</i> the right to participate in discussing the introduction of proposals and the development of laws, accommodation, construction and reconstruction projects, which may negatively affect the natural environment, is realized.</p> <p><i>Ways of communication:</i> discussion, consulting, and involvement in project development.</p>

I <sub>2</sub>	Facilitating the communication process with stakeholders. <i>Result:</i> in cases of discrepancies between local standard requirements and PR practices of European standards, the company determines step-by-step ways of establishing cooperation, considering stakeholders' wishes.	The primary involvement of stakeholders in project implementation has been determined. <i>Result:</i> the general public and stakeholders should be included in the discussion process. <i>Ways of communication:</i> public hearings, open meetings, speeches in the mass media, presentation of written comments, proposals and recommendations, inclusion in expert commissions, and groups for conducting public environmental expertise.
I <sub>3</sub>	Involvement of stakeholders at the initial stage of project design and implementation. <i>Result:</i> involvement during all stages of assessment, management and control over environmental and social impacts of project implementation.	The public is involved in the comprehensive examination of project documentation, and environmental expertise is conducted at the planning stage. <i>Result:</i> creation of a declaration on the environmental consequences of implementing the future project. <i>Communication:</i> after completing the environmental assessment, its findings are communicated through mass media.
I <sub>4</sub>	Involvement of all stakeholder groups. <i>Result:</i> all groups of society, from the government to institutions, institutions at national, local (sometimes international) levels, residents of the region, opinion leaders, etc., are involved in communication and discussion.	Ukrainian legislation does not require identifying all interested parties and ensuring they are included in the consultation process.
I <sub>5</sub>	Communication with the public should be constant and continuous. <i>Result:</i> regular meetings, conferences, negotiations, preparation and distribution of newsletters, press releases, leaflets, creation of websites, etc.	Ukrainian legislation does not require continuous support of public relations.
I <sub>6</sub>	Complete and transparent disclosure of information about all aspects of project implementation. <i>Result:</i> stakeholders' awareness and understanding of the project's risks, impacts and opportunities.	The unsystematic practice of discussion of public opinion. <i>Result:</i> consideration of public opinion after conducting an environmental examination of the project. <i>Communications:</i> public hearings or open meetings.
I <sub>7</sub>	The company's management must know and respond to the stakeholders' problems related to the project on time. <i>Result:</i> creating an effective complaint mechanism and agreed procedures for preventing and resolving problematic and conflicting issues.	The legislation provides for the procedure for submitting comments and complaints. <i>Result:</i> cooperation and communication regarding the exercise of one's rights. Contacts with bodies of state power, local self-government, citizens' associations, enterprises, institutions, and organizations regardless of the form of ownership, mass media, etc.
I <sub>8</sub>	The company must provide regular reports about its environmental and social consequences and impacts to stakeholders. <i>Result:</i> publication in open access of short and detailed reports on the activities and implementation of individual projects.	The systematic practice of presenting reports in public access is absent.

Determining critical guidelines for the main stakeholders will allow a targeted approach to forming various strategies and roadmaps for developing enterprises, considering and specifying sustainable development components.

Fig. 4 presents the results of the stakeholder ranking to determine the needs of each group and the form of contacts. An agro-industrial holding of Ukraine was chosen as an example. At the same time, the impact of the company on stakeholders and the impact of stakeholders on the company were evaluated. The ratings are in conditional points from 1 to 4, where 1 is the lowest degree and 4 is the most significant degree of influence. When ranking,

shareholders/investors, customers, employees, creditors and local communities have the most important results and are key stakeholders.



**Fig. 4.** Stakeholder ranking results (source: created by authors)

A transparent communication process requires determining the essential stakeholder functions and roles, where the most crucial are as follows:

- financial and economic, which ensures ecologically oriented companies' effective, profitable activity. Critical here is the assessment of green funding, the efficiency of renewable implementation, energy, material and resource use, and cost and revenue structure assessment;
- managerial, which consists of organizing the process of economic activity, implementing environmental protection issues in the company's strategy and policy, performing environmental management, and implementing internal and external environmental audits;
- marketing, determined by using a system of relevant tools for the formation and development of green competitiveness, analysis of existing and potential consumers of green goods and services, promotion of eco-products, construction of a green image and brand of the company, avoidance of greenwashing.

The experience of developed countries shows that the construction of effective mechanisms of interaction with stakeholders of green competitiveness ensures the competitive position of enterprises in the market environment. One of these mechanisms is creating the so-called profile of the company's stakeholders, which is appropriate information based on the circle of stakeholders, their interests and values, and interaction features.

Stakeholder interaction to strengthen sustainable development practices must be built based on the key principles: transparency, voluntariness; integration; joint goal-setting; mutually beneficial; environmental and economic efficiency; constructiveness; equality; responsibility; motivations of stakeholders' activities; and preventive measures.

The main task of forming a stakeholder profile is to create an information and analytical platform regarding the activities of enterprises and their stakeholders to build priorities in relations and form interaction sustainable strategies. Implementation of the specified task will ensure an understanding of the importance of each stakeholder group in sustainable development processes; implementation of the principles of comprehensiveness and completeness in interaction with green competitiveness stakeholders; knowledge of the problems, interests and expectations of stakeholders; identification of strategic important stakeholders; building a communication process with stakeholders following their

expectations; and development of strategic priorities in cooperation with green competitiveness stakeholders.

The stakeholders' profile should include the following components: 1. Definition of the group of stakeholders (social, institutional, international, market, state). At this stage, the circle of each group of stakeholders and their purpose and level of interaction are determined. 2. Identification of crucial representatives and contact persons from each group of green competitiveness stakeholders, specification of views and expectations of stakeholders regarding specific issues. Analysis of the experience of interaction with relevant groups of stakeholders. 3. Understanding the sources of stakeholder financing. 4. Specifying the features of interaction: analysis of the history of building relationships, the presence of conflicts and contradictions of stakeholders. 5. Determining the scale on which stakeholders operate (global, regional, national, subnational, local) and detailing the specifics of their influence. 6. Assessment of the existing and/or potential (latent) influence of stakeholders on activities, business, related risks and opportunities

## 4 Discussion and conclusion

Interacting with stakeholders based on the company's strategy and developing a clear communication strategy is necessary to implement sustainable development goals. Before building a detailed dialog with interested parties, it is necessary to analyze their main requirements for the company and the company's expectations from them and highlight the key stakeholders for the company. The effectiveness of the organization depends on the quality of interaction with stakeholders. Interaction with stakeholders helps the organization increase social capital, minimize environmental risks, and identify new opportunities for the company's development. The analysis results allow us to conclude the constantly growing trend of the relevance of the involvement of various groups of external and internal stakeholders in the activities of companies. It is a common practice to publish the results of enterprises' activities, including the consequences of environmental impacts. This allows you to build transparent and trusting relationships and involve stakeholders in consultations and decision-making. As a result, promoting the formation of a positive green image and brand of the company, the growth of market capitalization.

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