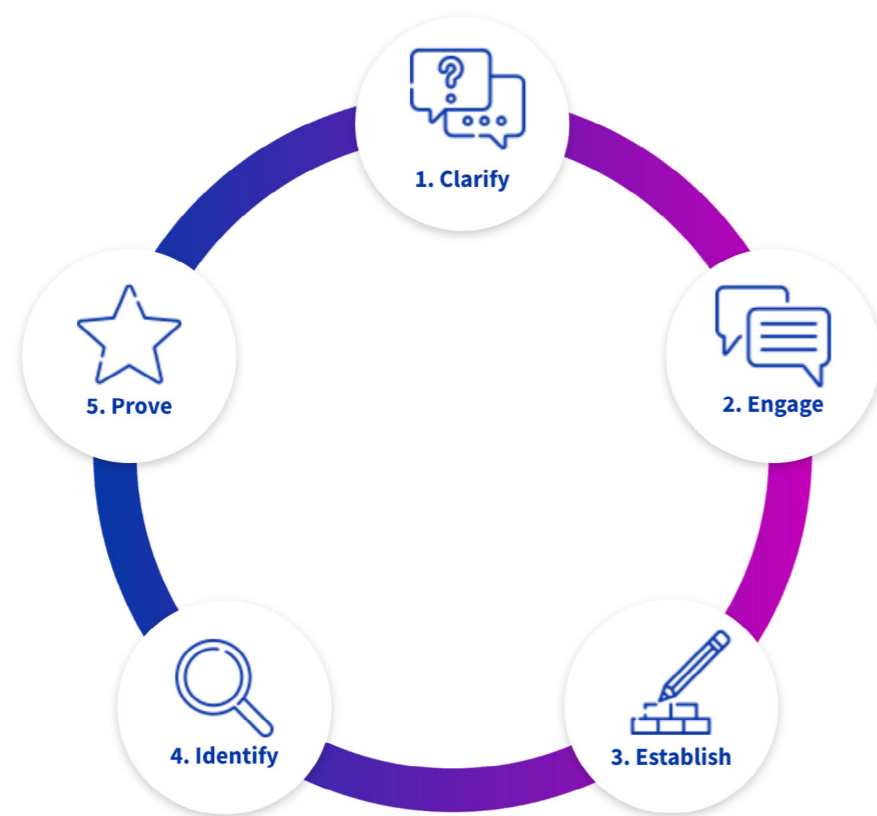


# Gain stakeholder buy-in to drive change and innovation

97% of organisations believe that project management is critical to business performance and organisational success<sup>1</sup>, yet 33% of projects fail because of a lack of involvement from senior management.<sup>2</sup>

Securing stakeholder buy-in is a critical first step in the effective execution of projects and the implementation of wider change management across organisations; L&D initiatives are no exception. However, gaining senior stakeholder buy-in and obtaining adequate resourcing and budgets for successful learning and development projects is often cited as a top barrier to success by professionals in the field.<sup>3</sup>

Ultimately, buy-in enables organisations to implement innovation across internal and external functions by ensuring the aims of both the learning team and the business units whose development they are supporting are met. It also helps to ensure impact across the business is maximised and disruptions are mitigated.



## So, how exactly do we gain stakeholder buy-in?

### Step 1: Clarify ownership of decision making and key milestones

Ascertain who owns the ultimate decision making responsibility on this project, as well as the factors that will determine a 'go/no-go' decision. On top of this, determine your project roadmap and define key touch points, milestones and success factors.

### Step 2: Engage all stakeholders as early as possible - and keep doing it

As tricky as it might be, ensure all stakeholders are involved and have oversight of the project, even if they are likely to put up barriers to the successful implementation of your strategy. Do this as early as possible and gain senior stakeholder buy-in to reduce and overcome any obstacles. Then keep on engaging - according to a recent survey, 60% of learning teams collaborate with other business functions less than four times a year.<sup>1</sup> Given the rapidly evolving nature of digital skills, is this enough?

**“Only 40 percent of companies say that their learning strategy is aligned with business goals.”<sup>1</sup>**

1. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/the-essential-components-of-a-successful-l-and-d-strategy#>

### Step 3: Establish mutually beneficial project goals and benefits

Speak the language of each stakeholder to ensure they understand the 'why'. Emphasise the benefits to the business and how your Learning and Development initiatives align with wider business goals. It may be helpful to consider co-ownership between L&D functions and other business units. Leverage collaborative goals between HR and senior management, in terms of both securing resources and ensuring mutually beneficial success metrics to enhance business performance.<sup>2</sup>

### Step 4: Identify risks and potential obstacles

Review all potential risks, barriers and obstacles, both internal and external, that may arise as a result of the project. Plan strategies for overcoming these to ensure you have sufficient time, budget and resources available.

### Step 5: Prove your concept

Make sure your project is capable of achieving the desired outcomes through the completion of preliminary tests that prove your concept. If required, involve external third parties to test, assess and iterate.

1. <https://www.pwc.com/ten/publications/arastirmalar/pages/pwc-global-project-management-report-small.pdf>  
2. <https://www.pmi.org/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/learning/thought-leadership/pulse/pulse-of-the-profession-2017.pdf>  
3. <https://act.cgsinc.com/cgs-enterprise-learning-2016-trends-report>

2. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/the-essential-components-of-a-successful-l-and-d-strategy#>



# The **types of stakeholder** you're likely to encounter

Identify the different types of stakeholder you're dealing with when gaining and sustaining buy-in - each type will require a slightly different approach, whether they're on your side or not.

**The supporter.** This stakeholder is aligned with the benefits of your project and keen to assist you in its successful delivery. A supporter could sit within a different department and job function.



**The influencer.** This stakeholder is able to implement changes and help you get things done. They are usually more senior in position and can influence the decision making process. Get them on side with your vision and ensure your goals are aligned.

**The advocate.** An evangelist of your project that will stand up and support it vocally. Turn supporters into advocates by proving your concept to them, gaining buy in and maintaining effective communication throughout the project.



**The blocker.** This stakeholder throws curve balls and creates obstacles for the successful delivery of your project. They could oppose your objectives, refuse tasks or object to the wider delivery. Gain buy-in early on at the very top to reduce obstacles.



**The delayer.** A stakeholder that slows down projects either deliberately or as a result of issues with time management or heavy workload. Overcome these obstacles by creating a clear project plan with buffers around milestones, and communicate this clearly across the business.

**The reverser.** Someone who agrees to a suggestion before later disagreeing or changing their mind. Communicate the 'why' and ensure you have reviewed all risks involved in order to set them at ease.



**The traditionalist.** A stakeholder who prefers a certain route because "it's what we've always done". Overcome this by showcasing proof of concept and wider business benefits.



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