THE EVOLUTION OF STAKEHOLDER SALIENCE:
A SINGLE STAKEHOLDER, SINGLE ISSUE MODEL

This paper addresses a gap in the literature by proposing a systematic evaluation of how stakeholder salience can change over time. To do so, we develop a typology of the evolution of stakeholder salience through the creation of a three dimensional typology based on Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997). We enumerate the different patterns of salience as a stakeholder gains or loses power, legitimacy, or urgency. To sharpen our theorizing, we limit our focus to one stakeholder in a relationship with one focal organization about a one issue. As a result, we identify six salience patterns that can develop for any given stakeholder for any one issue over time: accreting (stakeholders that can consistently become more salient); fading (becoming consistently less salient); stable (maintaining a constant level of salience); fluctuating (varying indeterminately); emerging (stakeholders that surface as the issue progresses); and departing (disappearing before the issue is resolved). Finally, because stakeholders can be present across multiple issues, we identify overlapping stakeholders that are involved in multiple issues across an organization’s operations, and discrete stakeholders, who are found exclusively in only one issue that an organization might face. We also suggest a series of propositions based on the six patterns and recognize that, in order to be successful, managers must (1) identify who all potential stakeholders are, (2) determine what are the stakeholders needs/interests; (3) determine what causes each stakeholder’s needs/interests to change over time; (4) determine stakeholder salience using power, legitimacy, and urgency for key points in time; (5) plot stakeholder salience over time to determine salience patterns; and (6) anticipate salience changes. We feel that our proposed model can greatly enhance our understanding of stakeholder salience, particularly as it relates to an organization over time.