

# **The Sonoma Developmental Center Redevelopment Project: A Stakeholder Salience and Conflict Analysis Case Study**

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This analytical case study is an experimental exploration into the utilization of stakeholder salience research to analyze land redevelopment projects from a managerial perspective. The study attempted to develop and apply a simple and approachable research model to a real redevelopment project. The research design is derived from an existing mathematical model designed to quantitatively measure stakeholder salience. Stakeholder salience theory and Pawlak's conflict theory are the fundamental concepts used to create the research design model. The objective of this research was to assess its effectiveness when applied to a rural land redevelopment setting in the United States. The Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) redevelopment project is the rural land redevelopment project that is the focus of the study. Stakeholders pertaining to the SDC redevelopment project were identified, grouped based on interest, and surveyed for data collection. Data that was gathered from stakeholder groups of the selected case was used with the developed model to determine the perceived salience value and attitudes toward project concerns of such groups. Data analysis draws comparable results between the case at hand and prior studies while also assessing the feasibility and robustness of the developed research model.

**Key Words:** Stakeholder Salience, Land Redevelopment, Pawlak's Conflict Theory, Conflict Analysis, Project Management

## **Introduction**

A relatively new addition to the field of managerial studies, stakeholder salience is a tool used to assess the interest and influence of various parties involved in a project, organization, or event. A stakeholder is an individual or group of individuals who are positioned to affect or be affected by the proceedings of such a project, organization, or event. (Freeman, 1984). Salience refers to the perceived importance or prominence of something. Under the context of assessing stakeholders, salience determines the ability to which stakeholders command attention. Three major attributes are advanced to describe stakeholders. Power, urgency, and legitimacy are the three pillars of stakeholder salience. (Currie et al., 2009). Power is the stakeholder's ability to influence a project and impose

their will despite resistance. Urgency is the degree to which the claims of a stakeholder call for immediate attention, where needs and issues are time sensitive or critical in nature. Legitimacy is how strong a stakeholder's claim on the project is, and how generally perceived it is that their actions are desirable and appropriate. Stakeholder groups have varying degrees of these three traits, and a definitive stakeholder, possessing undeniable influence, must carry all three (Mitchell et al., 1997).

Among other applications, stakeholder salience has emerged as a subject of analysis for land redevelopment projects. Stakeholder interests surface as points of conflict in the execution of all affairs, but the case is particularly true in land redevelopment. Land is a finite resource, and the need to prioritize the repurposing of previously developed land over undeveloped land satisfies sustainability interests and economic efficiency (Wu et al., 2020). Development factors including zoning, historical significance, environmental implications, and community displacement make the process of carrying out a land redevelopment project difficult (Wu et al., 2020). Disagreements arise over the appropriate utilization of land, and in many cases, there is no definitive answer. Salience is used as a tool to determine the validity behind various voices with the intention of mitigating tension and conflict.

The Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) was a California government-funded institution in Glen Ellen, CA dedicated to the aid and rehabilitation of the mentally feeble and trauma victims. The state government decided to discontinue funding the SDC, and after 127 years of operation, the campus closed at the end of 2018. Oversight of the property was transferred to the county level where the local government was tasked with determining the future of the property. A planning commission and various community coalitions were formed to allocate the attention of personnel to the project, as well as gather feedback from local residents to determine desired outcomes of the SDC redevelopment. Nearly 4 years later, in December of 2022, the Sonoma Developmental Center Specific Plan was accepted by the Board of Supervisors. The Specific Plan calls for the redevelopment of 180 acres of the 945-acre site shown in figure 1 into predominantly residential zoning. Space is also allocated for mixed-use, retail, commercial, and community purposes, as depicted in figure 2, with the remaining 765 acres of the property to be preserved. This project differs from most redevelopment projects due to the fact that there are no investors or property owners funding the project. Local governing bodies were tasked by the state to sell a portion of the property to a developer as long as said developer complied with the general guidelines of the Specific Plan. With such ambiguity shrouding what the actual finished product of development will look like, there is heightened attention from the local community and non-profit organizations to ensure common interests are met.



Figure 1: Sonoma Developmental Center Perimeter Map

Source: Sonoma Land Trust

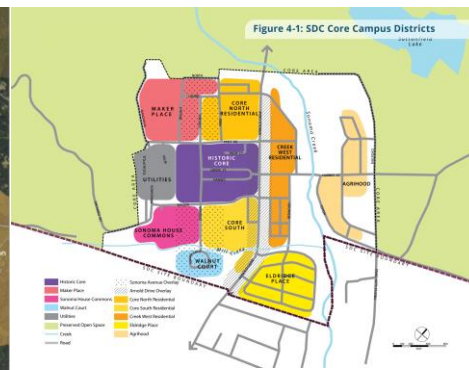


Figure 2: SDC Redevelopment Zoning Plan

Source: SDC Specific Plan

## Literature Review

The concept of stakeholder salience was first presented by Mitchell and colleagues (1997) in an Academy of Managerial Review article. The article is the first to propose the concept as it is accepted today, and it introduces the three defining attributes of power, urgency, and legitimacy. The theory suggests an explanation as to how clashing stakeholder claims are prioritized by managers through a dynamic model with flexible applications (Mitchell et al., 1997). Before delving into salience, the article makes a point to define what a stakeholder is to mitigate ambiguity when identifying stakeholders. The article and the development of stakeholder salience theory is a response to a vague definition of what a 'stakeholder' was at the time. The authors reference R. Edward Freeman's 'Stakeholder Theory', acknowledging it as the current precedent for how a stakeholder is described. Freeman defines a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of an organization's mission" (Freeman, 1984). Freeman's theory is expressed under the context of the U.S. corporation structure. Mitchell, Agle, and Wood aimed to expand on Freeman's theory by cultivating a proper way to identify stakeholders in any scenario whether stakeholders are actual or potential. The conclusion is stakeholder salience theory in which a group or individual with a claim or influence on something is a stakeholder if they possess power, urgency, or legitimacy (Mitchell et al., 1997). The degree to which a stakeholder's concerns call for attention is directly proportional to the degree of power, urgency, or legitimacy.

Further stakeholder salience research has since stemmed from the 1997 Academy of Managerial Review article. Project management in construction has recognized the importance of conflict mitigation and the degree to which the business aspect of the industry keeps companies afloat. Customer satisfaction remains a top priority for firms, and salience has proven to be an effective tool for balancing such satisfaction while delivering a quality product (Aapaoja & Haapasalo, 2014). Under the scope of land redevelopment, salience research has been accredited with assisting the management of various projects. When it comes to studying prior land redevelopment projects, China has become the largest source of land redevelopment projects to reference (Zhuang et al., 2019). Over the past three decades, the urban area of China has increased over 4-fold (Xu et al., 2016). While an increase in urban space was needed to satisfy the growing urban population, excessive urban sprawl and urban renewal have proven detrimental to cities entering a postindustrial stage. Many cities have been left to deal with inefficiently developed industrial land, excessive vacant land, and urban decay (Wu et al., 2020). Additional concerns arise from edge-expansion of cities into previously rural land suggesting increased city congestion alongside ecological and environmental harm (Xu et al., 2016). There is now a push for large-scale sustainable urban redevelopment and urban renewal of previous failed urban developments. The objective of achieving sustainability is at the forefront. The sustainable practice has elevated to incorporate a new dimension of social vitality alongside keeping up with the economy and preserving the environment. The new social dimension factors in ethical values and societal norms that are determined through the participation of all relevant stakeholders. (Vallance et al., 2011).

In the initial study, Mitchell and colleagues (1997) allude to stakeholder salience having magnitude, but there is no clear indication of how the three attributes are to be measured. Classifications are assigned to stakeholder groups based on which variation of the three attributes they possess. However, there is no stated objective way to determine power, urgency, and legitimacy beyond their definition. This was until a study was conducted on an urban redevelopment project (URP) in Wenzhou, China using stakeholder salience theory to analyze the project quantitatively. Through a series of interviews, researchers were able to assign a numerical value to each stakeholder group for each of the three core attributes of salience. This method created a definitive way to compare stakeholder groups. The

research was successful through the utilization of a research design model (see figure 3) that integrates Pawlak’s conflict theory with salience theory (Yu et al., 2019). Zdzislaw Pawlak’s conflict theory offers a model used to mathematically analyze situations of competing interests. The model operates on scenarios or ‘functions’ where the opinion of affected parties or ‘agents’ are assessed. The fundamental basis of this theory relies on assigning a numerical value to a point of conflict between agents. If both agents agree, they are *allied*, and the scenario is expressed through the number ‘1’. If agents disagree, they are *conflicting*, the scenario is conveyed by ‘-1’. Finally, if agents are indifferent, they are *neutral*, and the scenario is denoted by ‘0’ (Pawlak, 1984). Pawlak offers a means of numerically assessing conflict and a potential solution to the discrepancy of objectivity in stakeholder salience theory. The optimization model developed by Yu and colleagues (2019) utilizes both theories and is influential in this study to quantitatively analyze the SDC redevelopment project.

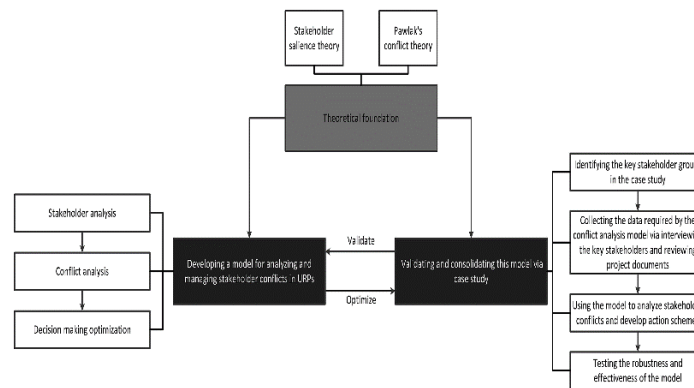


Figure 3: Research Design Referenced Optimization Model  
Source: (Yu et al., 2019).

## Methodology

The model developed by Yu and colleagues (2019), as seen in figure 3, uses stakeholder salience theory and Pawlak’s conflict theory to quantitatively measure the salience of stakeholder groups. However, the referenced model has only been applied to Chinese URPs, when the possibility of quantitatively measuring salience would prove valuable in any redevelopment project. The initial study acknowledges possible limitations of the model when applied outside of China. The greater community is considered the most important stakeholder group in a URP due to Chinese laws that prioritize the interest of the public, whereas private property protection may hold higher stipulations in other countries. (Yu et al., 2019).

The objective of this study was to develop and apply a similar model (see figure 4) that is derived from figure 3, to a rural land redevelopment in the U.S. The purpose of creating a new model from the existing model was to simplify the scope of the research to conform to the length constraints of the ASC research paper proceedings. The new model contains many of the same elements, and still offers an opportunity to test the effectiveness of the designed research under a completely different context. Research would hope to reveal if the model can be used to successfully assign a salience index value to each stakeholder group pertaining to the SDC redevelopment project. Various attitudes toward project concerns by stakeholder groups was also a topic of curiosity that this study focused on determining and organizing in a way that is easily read. Finally, to see if the greater public would also be recognized as holding the highest degree of salience in this case.

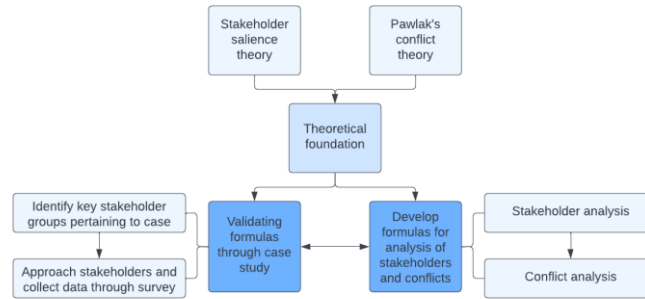


Figure 4: Research Design Model

### Research Design

The process of implementing the model begins by finding the salience index  $SI$  of every stakeholder group. The salience index is a concept proposed by Yu and colleagues (2019) that refers to the overall salience of a stakeholder group based on their salience attributes. The index is expressed by a number between 0 and 1 that reflects greater salience as the index approaches 1. The starting point of the model should be expressing the overall level of power, urgency, and legitimacy a stakeholder possesses through the value of their attributes. This is expressed by  $AV = \mu_1 \times P_i + \mu_2 \times U_i + \mu_3 \times L_i$ .  $\mu_i$  will indicate the weight of the three attributes as  $\mu_1 + \mu_2 + \mu_3 = 1$ , and  $P_i$ ,  $U_i$ , and  $L_i$  refer to the power, urgency, and legitimacy of stakeholder  $i$  (Li et al., 2016). Power, urgency, and legitimacy for each stakeholder are determined from survey data collection.

When determining the salience index equation, the model implements an additional fourth attribute. This fourth dimension of salience is vested interest (VI). In this context, vested interest is a substantial stake or involvement in the project. Vested interest has been suggested by other salience studies as an appropriate attribute to possibly deduce salience with greater accuracy (Bourne & Walker, 2005). Using a 5-point scale, all attributes for every stakeholder group receive a rating from 1 = 'lowest' to 5 = 'highest' based on survey results. The salience index is calculated using formula 1 which is synthesized from the original salience characteristics and the newly incorporated vested interest factor.  $VI_i$  is expressed as  $\sqrt{VI}/5$ ,  $VI$  is also determined from survey data collection (Yu et al., 2019).

$$SI_i = \frac{(\mu_1 \cdot P_i + \mu_2 \cdot U_i + \mu_3 \cdot L_i) \cdot VI_i}{5}$$

Formula 1

Pawlak's conflict theory is used to assess the attitudes of stakeholder groups toward scenarios or outcomes of the redevelopment project at hand. The method the research model uses to measure conflict does not change from the initial framework presented by Pawlak. Formula 2 presents an equation developed by Pawlak in a later study to refine his theory. The concern  $k$  of stakeholder group  $i$  is expressed as either -1, 0, or 1. -1 denotes a negative attitude, 0 a neutral attitude, and 1 as a positive attitude (Pawlak, 1998). To determine if the attitude of a stakeholder group is positive, negative, or neutral, over 50% of survey respondents from a stakeholder group must coincide (Yu et al., 2019). If the attitude  $a$  of stakeholder group  $j$  toward concern  $k$  is the same as that of stakeholder group  $i$ , the two groups are allied regarding this concern. If both groups have a neutral attitude, the

consensus is neutral. If there is a scenario where both groups have differing attitudes, they are in conflict for this stakeholder concern (Pawlak 1998).

$$sc(i, j)_k = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } a_{ik} \cdot a_{jk} = 1; \textit{alliance} \\ 0, & \text{if } a_{ik} \cdot a_{jk} = 0; \textit{neutrality} \\ -1, & \text{if } a_{ik} \cdot a_{jk} = -1; \textit{conflict} \end{cases}$$

*Formula 2*

### *Data Collection*

Determining how to collect data begins with identifying stakeholder groupings. This involved becoming familiar with the SDC project and understanding with groups possess salience attributes. It was also important to distinguish priorities of stakeholder groups as the interests and needs of organizations toward the SDC should be similar to belong to the same stakeholder group. The final stakeholder groups are as follows:

- Government Committees Agencies, or Boards (GCAB)
- Glen Ellen/Sonoma Valley Community (RES)
- Environmental Based Non-Profit Organizations (EBNP)
- Developers (DEV)
- The Glen Ellen Historical Society (GEHS)
- Eldridge For All (EFA)

The Government Committees, Agencies, or Boards (GCAB) stakeholder group is made up of the Sonoma Board of Supervisors and the Sonoma Planning Commission. The Board of Supervisors consists of five elected officials that represent the various districts of the county. The Planning Commission's interests are directly aligned with the interest of the board, but they directly oversee the project and report to the Board of Supervisors. The Planning Commission receives community insight from the North Sonoma Valley Municipal Advisory Committee (NSVMAC), the Sonoma Valley Citizens Advisory Commission (SVCAC), and the Springs Municipal Advisory Council (Springs MAC). These assemblies along with the Glen Ellen Forum, a public committee for Glen Ellen residents, represent the Glen Ellen/Sonoma Valley Community (RES) stakeholder group. The Environmental Based Non-Profit Organizations (EBNP) stakeholder group consists of the Sonoma Ecology Center, Sonoma Land Trust, and the Sonoma Mountain Preservation. Three organizations that operate within SDC grounds. The Developers (DEV) stakeholder group comprises of major property developers who bid on the project. The Glen Ellen Historical Society (GEHS) is another community group that notably prioritizes the preservation of historical features and usage of the site. A subgroup called The Next 100 Years Plan was formed from members of the society to bid on the project to uphold the interests of the GEHS. Eldridge For All (EFA) is a community group that is entirely interested in the property of the SDC that is also recognized as 'Eldridge,' and ensuring the property serves the community above all else.

Once stakeholders are identified and appropriately grouped, it is then appropriate to engage them for data collection. Representatives from every stakeholder group and the organizations that make up the stakeholder groups were contacted for survey participation. Representatives were requested to take the survey and distribute it to willing respondents from stakeholder groups involved in the SDC project. Outreach to community members also assisted in creating the list of stakeholder concerns. Survey questions were as follows:

1. Identify the stakeholder group from the list below with which you are most closely associated (select only one).
2. Please rank the groups listed below based on your perception of their **Vested Interest** in the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) redevelopment project from 1 being most invested to 6 being least invested.
3. Rank the groups listed below based on your perception of their **Power** in the SDC redevelopment project.
4. Rank the groups listed below based on your perception of their **Urgency** in the SDC redevelopment project.
5. Rank the groups listed below based on your perception of their **Legitimacy** in the SDC redevelopment project.
6. Please answer with the option that best describes your attitude toward the following concern. Attitude toward **ensuring sufficient points of egress in case of emergency.**
7. Attitude toward **preservation of historic sites and structures.**
8. Attitude toward **preservation of wildlife and ecosystems.**
9. Attitude toward **improving economic opportunities for Glen Ellen/Sonoma County.**
10. Attitude toward **providing affordable housing.**
11. Attitude toward **providing single-family housing.**
12. Attitude toward **providing retail/commercial space.**
13. Attitude toward **increasing renown of the area.**
14. Attitude toward **an increase in traffic density.**
15. Attitude toward **improvement of local infrastructure.**
16. Attitude toward **preservation of undeveloped land and open space.**
17. Attitude toward **avoidance of legal disputes.**
18. Attitude toward **degree of public participation.**
19. Attitude toward **control of project cost.**

The survey asks respondents to identify the stakeholder group they most associate with as some individuals may belong to two or more of the groups. The next four questions ask respondents to rank stakeholder groups by the four salience attributes used in the research model. The use of forced ranking questions in this instance is used to apply the 5-point scale to each of the four attributes for every stakeholder group (Li et al., 2012). The remaining fourteen questions ask survey takers to report their attitude to various concerns that have been expressed surrounding the SDC project. Respondents have the option to express a positive, neutral, or negative attitude toward concerns. The results from these questions are organized by stakeholder group and are used to realize the common attitudes of all groups toward every concern. (Yu et al, 2019).

## Results

Table 1 is generated from survey questions 2 through 5 where the salience attributes of every stakeholder is translated to a 5-point scale. The salience index was calculated using formula 1 with a higher value resulting in a higher perceived salience. Due to varying degrees of survey representation, as the RES stakeholder group received far more responses than any others, results from this group were weighted to not diminish results from the other groups.

**Table 1**  
Attributes of Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholder Group	Power ( $P_i$ )	Urgency ( $U_i$ )	Legitimacy ( $L_i$ )	Vested Interest ( $V_i$ )	Salience Index ( $SI_i$ )
RES	2	4	4	5	0.72
GCAB	5	3	1	2	0.49
EBNP	2	3	4	3	0.50
DEV	4	1	1	1	0.27
GEHS	1	2	3	3	0.36
EFA	1	2	2	3	0.28

Table 2 was developed from survey questions 6 through 19. The majority attitude of stakeholder groups was determined by finding the mode of answers from survey responses of a common stakeholder group. Values are assigned in accordance with Pawlak's conflict theory (Pawlak, 1984).

**Table 2****Major concerns and attitudes of stakeholder groups**

Stakeholder concerns	Stakeholder attitudes ( <i>α<sub>ik</sub></i> )						
	RES	GCAB	EBNP	DEV	GEHS	EFA	
1	Ensuring sufficient points of egress in case of emergency	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	Preservation of historic sites and structures	1	1	1	1	1	1
3	Preservation of wildlife and ecosystems	1	1	1	1	0	1
4	Improving economic opportunities for Glen Ellen/Sonoma County	1	0	0	1	0	1
5	Providing affordable housing	1	1	1	1	0	1
6	Providing single-family housing	0	0	0	1	0	-1
7	Providing retail/commercial space	0	-1	-1	1	-1	-1
8	Increasing renown of the area	0	-1	0	0	-1	0
9	An increase in traffic density	-1	-1	-1	0	-1	-1
10	Improvement of local infrastructure	1	-1	0	1	1	1
11	Preservation of undeveloped land and open space	1	1	1	1	1	1
12	Avoidance of legal disputes	0	0	0	0	0	1
13	Degree of public participation	1	1	0	0	1	1
14	Control of project costs	0	0	0	1	0	1

### *Discussion*

In an attempt to yield quantitative values to describe stakeholder groups, data collection provides numerical figures to measure such groups. Table 1 indicates the GCAB and the DEV stakeholder groups were generally considered as having the greatest degree of power. They are perceived as having the most authority and final say in decision making. The non-profit organizations are often distinguished as having legitimate claims and vested interest in the project. Most of these organizations have been around for decades and focus solely on the SDC property, this is recognized through survey data. Besides the power attribute, The RES stakeholder group leads every other group in every other attribute. It is recognized that the general populace of Sonoma and Glen Ellen are the most well-rounded group pertaining to the project despite not having the same influence on the project as some other groups. This stakeholder group has the highest salience according to the salience index suggesting claims and expressed concerns from this group are most impactful on the project (Yu et al., 2019).

Major concerns resulting from the SDC project, and attitudes of stakeholder groups toward these concerns are visualized in table 2. The concerns listed address a spectrum of environmental, economic, social and safety aspects of the project (Vallance et al., 2011). Some concerns encompass multiple aspects as a concern like historic preservation offers potential economic and social satisfaction. Environmental efforts that emphasize preservation of the natural space and its ecosystems are met with positive feedback by all groups. Additionally, safety measures to protect the health and wellbeing of the community also received favorable responses. Interests clash over economic concerns as contention surrounds various lucrative possibilities that could result from the SDC redevelopment. Growth of Sonoma is widely opposed as the possibility of population growth resulting from increased economic opportunities and reputation was negatively received by all groups except developers in surveys. However, a need for affordable housing is acknowledged and endorsed by most groups, but the line is drawn there. Multi-family housing and commercial zoning is resisted by most groups excluding the developers again. Social concerns seemingly depend on the concern with historic preservation and public participation receiving positive results while and increase in traffic density was heavily rejected. It is also noted that the possibility of legal disputes seems to not be a concern at all as most responses were neutral.



## **Conclusion**

The research objective was to test the viability of the developed research model in figure 4 on the SDC project. Data was collected and analyzed through the model with the intention of revealing the general attitudes of every stakeholder group toward project results and externalities, as well as quantitatively determining which groups possess the highest perceived salience. A research model designed for the assessment of large-scale Chinese URPs can be repurposed to analyze large-scale rural land redevelopment projects in the U.S. The SDC project offered a formidable case to draw results while remaining enthralling. Stakeholder group interests trended toward alignment on environmental and safety concerns, while attitudes clashed over economic and social concerns due to conflicting priorities. The residents of Glen Ellen and the greater Sonoma Valley surpassed all other stakeholder groups in perceived salience. This finding proved similar to prior Chinese URP research where the general populus is regarded as possessing the highest salience due to Chinese law (Yu et al., 2019). In a U.S. land redevelopment project that is the SDC redevelopment project, the general populus is considered the strongest stakeholder through stakeholder salience theory and Pawlak's conflict theory. Objective reasoning is only feasible through quantitative research. Definitive results that specify the recognized significance of involved parties in a project, as well as their attitudes toward project concerns, assist figures of authority in effectively managing such a project.

## *Limitations*

With such a case study, timing is influential on data collection results. While the SDC redevelopment remains far from a construction phase, developments in the project occurred as the study was active. The project was awarded to a developer just weeks prior to commencing data collection. This excluded many potential survey respondents from the DEV stakeholder group as there was a single firm to approach. Given the subjected scrutiny of the chosen developer, the firm declined to participate in the forced ranking of stakeholder groups while only offering the attitude of the firm toward concerns as a collective. Had the data collection transpired before a developer was selected, there would have been a diverse selection of survey responses from this stakeholder group, and firms may have felt comfortable participating in a forced ranking. Lack of representation was an issue for the DEV stakeholder group as well as the firm opted to provide only one representative response. This situation was not limited to this stakeholder group as the GCAB stakeholder group also offered a single response. While the single respondents from these groups were fitting representatives of their respective groups, survey responses from other stakeholder groups were weighted to not overshadow data from these groups.

## *Further Study*

Due to the exacted position of parties in large scale land redevelopment projects, as well as the nature of this research to promote conflict mitigation, it is seemingly more optimal to use Likert scale questions for data collection in place of forced ranking questions. The Likert scale is well suited for quantitative research and is especially symbiotic with the 5-point scale (Joshi et al., 2015). In the study by Yu and associates (2019), the initial research model delves further into quantifiable salience research. Further research into the SDC project or future projects can be done by developing the model to create action schemes of appropriate approaches to stakeholder concerns from the managerial standpoint. Stakeholder attitudes can be used in conjunction with stakeholder group salience indexes to identify optimal action schemes. These optimal action schemes offer an ideal attitude to concerns based on the common attitudes shared by stakeholder groups with the greatest perceived salience (Yu et al, 2019).

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