

The effects of stakeholder's engagement and communication management on projects success

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Abstract. Managing stakeholders' expectations and interests is key to a project's success. So, identifying stakeholders at the beginning of the projects, recognizing and managing their needs and expectations will contribute to the creation of a suitable environment and be catalyst for success. This can be achieved through the establishment of appropriate and timely communication that meets the requirements of stakeholders. This includes providing the decision makers with the required data and receiving feedback to ensure alignment among project objectives and stakeholders expectations. This paper mentions one of the projects which neglected the proactive planning and management of stakeholder's requirements that causes waste in time and resources and many issues that appear as a result of poor planning, and the lessons learned from it.

Key words: Stakeholders, Stakeholder Register, Engagement, Expectation, Strategic Objectives, Communication.

1 Stakeholders

1.1 Stakeholder Definition

Stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organizations who may get affected by, or perceive themselves to be affected by a decision, activity, or outcome of a project (1). Stakeholders contribute in project process and activity, conceive the idea, develop project plans, execute the plans, make decisions, etc. So, the management of their requirements and expectations is critical to project success.

It is essential to identify key stakeholders at the start of the project and create the stakeholders register that will be updated throughout the life of the project. This register will contain information about stakeholders help in prioritizing them, prioritization is important because it is useless to devote the same time and effort to all stakeholder.

1.2 Stakeholder register

Stakeholder register is the central document for tracking project stakeholders' information and should contain as a minimum the following: -

1. Contact information like stakeholder name, location, job title....
2. Category: Stakeholders will be categorized according to their (power, interest, influence and impact)
3. Project Role
4. Status
5. Priority: based on prioritized rating the project manager will determine the amount of efforts and time that should be devoted to each stakeholder

The stakeholder register should be updated as an ongoing activity to add new stakeholder, remove disbanded stakeholder, updates, etc.

The stakeholder register will be the key input to stakeholder engagement plan and communication management plan.

Inputs to communication management plan include (2)

1. Contact information
2. Priority
3. Project role
4. Status

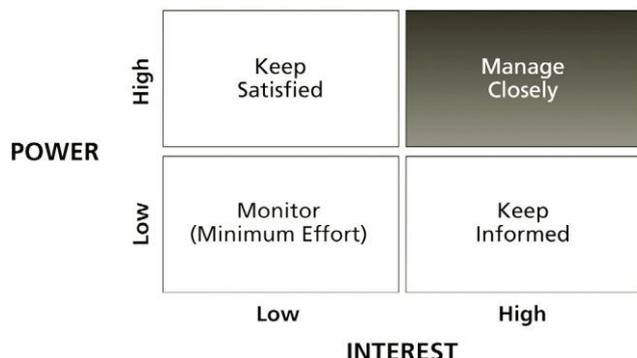


Fig. 1. Power and Interest Matrix (1)

Interest indicate the level of concern of stakeholder about project outcomes

Power is the stakeholder level of authority

1.3 Stakeholder Engagement Assessment Matrix

In this matrix the project manager identifies the current status of each stakeholder and the desired status, this information will be included in the stakeholder register. The matrix contains six columns (as shown in Table 1.)

Unaware: The stakeholder has no idea about the project and its outcomes.

Resistant: The stakeholder opposed to the project or its manager.

Neutral: The stakeholder neither resistant nor supportive to the project.

Supportive: -The stakeholder agrees with project goals and its outcomes.

Leading: The stakeholders actively support the project

Table 1. Stakeholder Engagement Assessment Matrix (1)

Stakeholder Name	Unaware	Resistant	Neutral	Supportive	Leading
Stakeholder	C			D	
Stakeholder			C	D	
Stakeholder				D C	

2 Stakeholders Groups

2.1 Project team stakeholder

Effective management of a project team starts with a kick off meeting. In this meeting, the project goals and deliverables and their importance to the organization will be clarified (2). In addition, kick off meeting helps in building team relationships and commitment to the project.

Later the project team member will be observed to address any issue that may occur due to poor performance, lack of proper direction or motivation...etc.

The project manager may use personal conversation with individual team member to reach the best solution.

2.2 Executive stakeholder

Executive stakeholders approve the projects, fund the projects, terminate the projects and decide if the projects are complete. They have the majority of power on project scope and deliverables. They include:

1. Customer
2. Sponsor
3. Executive council
4. Supplemental executive

Executive stakeholders have a lot to keep track of and some of them may have no experience in project terminology so the best approach is to convert project language into executive language (as shown in Table 2.).

Table 2. Convert Project Language into Executive Language (2)

Attribute	What It Means to the Project Manager	How to Describe It to an Executive
Work breakdown structure	A decomposition of the project into the smallest assignable tasks. The key document to feed the project management plan, budget, schedule, and so on.	A planning document that helps the project team ensure that all project work is accounted for and organized.
Project management plan	The primary document used for project planning and execution. Many sub plans, such as the quality plan and the scope management plan, feed into the project management plan.	The central document to integrate all aspects of project execution.
Earned value management	A technique to compare cost of performed work, cost of scheduled work, actual cost of work performed, and other key project metrics.	An early warning system to identify deviations from the planned time line and budget.
Project charter	A document that formally permits the project manager to perform certain tasks and make certain decisions. Typically, known as the primary document to launch a new project.	A document to ensure that everyone is in agreement about the project's expected direction and the role of the project manager.
Change request	A formal document that can be a corrective action, preventive action, defect repair, or other adjustment to scope, budget, and so on.	A form used to ensure that all the right people approve project changes and are aware of the changes.

It is critical to understand the important aspect and issue for each executive and this can be achieved through individual conversation to solicit feedback from stakeholders about questions asked by the project manager like:

- What is the most important aspect of this project for you?
- How often would you like to be updated?
- How much detail do you want in the project reports you receive?
- What is the best way to communicate with you (for example, e-mail, telephone, some sort of shared server)?
- What are the watch-outs the project team should be on the lookout for?
- What are your expectations from the project manager and the project team?
- Are there other executives we should talk to about this project?

2.3 Other stakeholders

Vendors

Consultants

Governmental agencies

3 Communication

Communication can be viewed as a metaphorical 'pipeline' along which information is transferred from one person to another (3). It is the lifeblood of any system of human interaction as without it, no meaningful or coherent activity can take place (4). Communication doesn't mean agreement to what has been said.

Consensus may be facilitated by a variety of communication-enhancing tools & forms of information. Several of the formal documents frequently discussed in project management include the following (5)

- Project charter.
- Communications management plan.
- Project stakeholder register.
- Organizational strategic plan.
- Project management plan.
- Gantt charts and other project time lines.

Each of these documents, and many other project documents like these, serves an important communication function. These documents communicate among the relevant stakeholders' important aspects of the project. Communication may be verbal, non-verbal, written and visual. Each type has its advantage and disadvantage.

3.1 verbal communication

While verbal communication (the use of spoken word to send and receive messages) is an important way to discuss difficult to understand issues, verbal communication may lead to misunderstanding of some phrases or words, especially in different culture.

In addition, verbal communication occurs in real time which may require immediate response and answer to questions being asked and the project manager may not be well prepared.

3.2 Non-verbal communication

Much of communication happen non-verbally. Non-verbal communication can reinforce the message and it includes tone of voice, facial expression, speed of speech, etc.

Non-verbal communication may be misunderstood due to incorrect interpret because many people do not have the required skill and experience to interpret the body language.

3.3 Written communication

Written communication helps to communicate ideas with proper time but if we desire to benefit from this type of communication, it requires from both parties to be engaged at the same time. Also, it is clear that non-verbal communication cannot be presented.

3.4 Visual communication

Visual communication includes images, charts, graphs, and a variety of tools used to visually display project information. Specific stakeholders are likely to understand visual communication better than other forms of communication, Visual imagery can communicate some information more concisely than words.

4 Managing difficult stakeholders

Projects almost handle difficult cases that should be dealt with but are not so easy. The kind of change can cause discomfort. The skilled project manager has awareness of this and consider project dispute and differences as opportunities to prove his or her excellent skills in project management which include the power of dealing with challenging issues.

So, it is important to know the groups that the stakeholder belongs to (2)

1. Stakeholder whose support is prefer to have.
2. Stakeholder whose support is a crucial for project success.

It is obvious that the support of the stakeholder who belongs to the first groups is not required for the project progress but it is better to gain their commitment and support. Whereas the stakeholder who belongs to the second groups is very important because of their ability to cancel or delay the project, and this make the project manager strive to build good relationship with this stakeholder no matter how complex. The first step is to understand the root cause of their disagreement, sometimes the cause is obvious and other times it requires deep investigation. The Project managers must put themselves in the stakeholder's situation, and he can do this by answering the following few questions

- What are the causes that make the stakeholder's argument valid if it valid?
- What facts and information the stakeholder points to that would support the position of his / her?
- What activities may increase the stakeholder's dispute—and make him or her even more opposed to the project's direction?
- Is there anything that can be done to fairly decrease the dispute?

Project manager can be benefit from engaging the executive sponsor in three ways:

First, the sponsor will be aware of the potential problem and can contribute with the project manager to manage the issue before it become complex.

Second, it is possible that the sponsor may have deferent preview on the project and this can put spot of light on the root causes.

Third, contribution work with the executive sponsor provides important support for the project manager because most of the time project managers do not have formal authority and working with the executive sponsors can make things happen easily if necessary. So, it is helpful to the project manager to involve someone with formal position authority when dealing with difficult stakeholders.

Each stakeholder dispute has unique characteristics. A plan should be developed in order to decrease each dispute. This plan should be developed with the engagement of the executive sponsor and it might include a wide range of choices such as the following:

- Conduct a meeting with each difficult stakeholder in order to reach an agreement.
- Try to find if there are any project details that may not be known by the difficult stakeholder and communicate it to him.
- If there are any project details that the stakeholder cannot understood when he previously informed it must be re-communicate.
- Engage the difficult stakeholder to provide input for resolving the disagreement.
- Engage a third party who have a good relationship to both the project manager and the difficult stakeholder, or one of the Executive Council members.
- Join additional stakeholders to the project who can make a balance against the difficult stakeholder.
- Tactically try to remove those difficult stakeholders from the project.

Finally, the best plan of action for each situation should be developed by the good contribution of the project manager and the executive sponsor using their creativity and awareness.

5 Obtaining stakeholders Buy-In

Earning stakeholder buy-in is a continuous process, not a single activity.

The steps as shown in the Circle of Support process is (6)

- Engage stakeholders in the process of the development and implementation of concepts and ideas. People are support what they contribute with.
- Observe stakeholder and recognize if there any different between the verbal and nonverbal signs project and this will help project manager to be aware of the best response.
- Respond to the concerns of the project stakeholder.

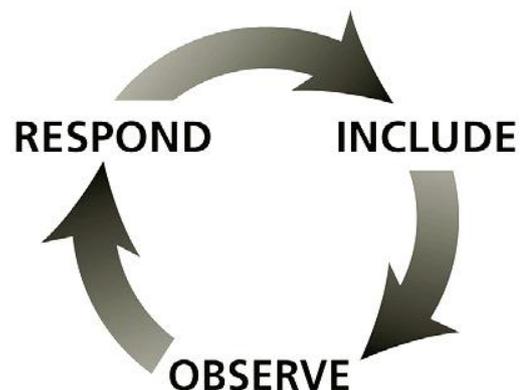


Fig. 2. Circle of Support Graphic (8)

5.1 Involving stakeholders

Two major benefits can be gained from engaging stakeholders in the project:

5.1.1 Personal Ownership

People in nature prefer their own ideas and concept. So, the stakeholders be able to insert their concept and ideas into the project by possibly modifying the project's planned direction, revising the way of the project execution, or providing input into the project issues and decisions when they involve in the project.

However, it is the project manager responsibility to clarify for each stakeholder the particular areas where their involvement is required and the domains where decisions have been taken. Stakeholders like to know how they can contribute to the project success, and this clarification will assist them focus their efforts on the domains that will be appraised by the project team.

5.1.2 Robust Ideas

Project feedback can be increased by including and engaging additional project stakeholders and this will make the project manager reach to the different viewpoints, cultural diversity, experiences and other assets that each stakeholder has it.

Through these diversity more stable project solutions are developed. On the other hand, there is a risk appear from including additional number of people because of the increasing of the number of communication channels also the complexity of managing the stakeholder's requirements may be increased. And to prevent the large number of stakeholders providing feedback and ideas on each domain of the project, the project manager should behave tactically to deploy each stakeholder.

To benefit from stakeholder's feedback, the project manager should engage individuals from a different background, field of skills and knowledge, and exercised experiences. Project managers should utilize their awareness and understanding of the project environment to make sure that a diverse and comprehensive group of individuals are engaged to be stakeholders of the project and included in the project activity. (7)

5.2 Observe Stakeholders

Observe the stakeholders is the second step in the Circle of Support process where the project manager tries to understand the level of support of each stakeholder for project goals and objectives. Observing stakeholders required effort and time which differ from one stakeholder to another depending on the criticality of them to the project support.

Observing should consider both verbal and nonverbal communication.

5.3 Respond to Stakeholders

In this final step in the Circle of Support process the project manager will respond depending on the observation result. It will be a big mistake if the project manager responds before including and observing stakeholder's trends and attitudes

Generally, People tend to show one of the three situations shown in Fig. (3) or some combination (e.g., individual may be unsure but tending toward resistance).

The project manager responds differently depending on the stakeholder position on the continuum of support. Also, responses differ within each spot on the scope.



Fig. 3. Resist/Unsure/Support Continuum (8)

Case study (1)

Poor communication and management of stakeholder expectations were identified in an important project and resulted in negative impacts.

The design and implementation work of an integrated residential complex have been assigned to one of the contracting companies and agreed on a fixed price per square meter based on technical specifications and drawings.

After months of effort, the final designs of the complex were completed (the work was done in the office only) a team of specialists go to the project site for the purpose of marketing products for the project and obtain the required revenue.

The surprise was the final beneficiary (residents of the area and neighboring) unwilling to buy these apartments because of their lack of compatibility with the culture of the region, so the decision is to re-designs to suit the requirements of the final beneficiary and to convert the complex to houses rather than apartments (the end user requirements had been neglected).

After the re-design and for the second time a team of specialists go to the project site for marketing and laying the foundation stone, a number of residents objected that this land belongs to them and the project cannot be started. (This time, the ownership of the planned land has been omitted).

Case study (2)

One of the projects for training in the field of design

1. The training needs of the design department were determined (in an engineering office (to be able to compete with similar companies and departments and to remain in the market

2. By analyzing these needs, priorities were determined and the initial plan was developed but we were not able to implement this plan because it has been rejected from senior management according to shortage in funding.

3. This plan was replaced with the alternative plan, so the work begins with the analysis of stakeholders who have the power and interest, and the development of the necessary plans and strategies for the purpose of

transferring them to support the implementation of the plan.

4. After implementing the plan and conducting the required contacts, a cooperative relationship was established and the trainers were obtained without charge to train the employees of the design department on the required program and implement the plan to the required extent.

6 CONCLUSIONS

1. Lack or weakness of effective planning for all aspects of the project, including managing the expectations of stakeholders and identifying ways of communicating with them, causes major problems in the project, which result into project closure sometimes

2. Due to the absence of an official authority for the project manager and for the purpose of being able to manage the project efficiently and effectively, the project manager should have soft skills in addition to knowledge in the field of project management processes and practices.

3. Working in the project as a team contributes to overcoming many of the obstacles. It is so important to take into account that some members may be from different geographical locations, which requires the development of plans for appropriate communications.

7 Recommendations

1. It is highly recommended to involve project managers in training courses in the field of body language as an important part of the communication process as incorrect interpreting may have negative effects on the course of the project.

2. Giving the appropriate importance to stakeholders' engagement as an important part of the project planning process, which starts with the early beginnings of the project and continues throughout the life of the project.

3. Based on the attitudes and status of stakeholders who have the power and influence and try to gain their support for the project and identify their requirements and expectations and work side by side to align them with the goals and objectives of the project.

4. Work on establishing a database of lessons learned for each project that is accessible to avoid falling in the same problems and try to follow successful experiences.

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