

Just how important is this project?

Links to RICS/APM principles: Remember they're only human; Relationships are key
Stakeholder terms: Sponsor prioritisation; importance urgency

Context

All sectors, minimal cost, short regular engagements with sponsor and key stakeholders. Notably during the initiation and planning phases of a project.

Problem

Project managers often find the importance and/or urgency of project work varies in the perception of the sponsor or other key stakeholders. This 'varying appetite for the project' can be rational, for example; based on research and a logical business case or a thorough assessment of the commitment and influence of the stakeholder community. Or irrational; based on whim and fancy or allowing more attractive ideas to take priority.

This pattern of behaviour can lead to (a) delay and wasted resource (b) ineffective business change due to poor prioritisation (c) lack of motivation on the part of project managers and the project team.

Intervention(s)

The effective project manager can 'manage' the sponsor or other key stakeholder without a great deal of effort. Some of the techniques are often in the form of questions:

Stage in the project lifecycle	Some key questions for the project sponsor/other key stakeholders
When the project brief has been received:	<p>"In your view, how urgent/Important is this work?"</p> <p>"What is the outcome you want to see and why?"</p> <p>"What is the most important deliverable and why?"</p> <p>"Can I seek the views of other stakeholders to verify this?"</p>
When the business case has been prepared:	<p>"In your view, where do you see a weakness in the link between value and costs?"</p> <p>"From whom do you expect resistance to this business case?"</p> <p>"What further research/consultation is needed to make this case more robust?"</p>
When funding has been	<p>"In your view, what could jeopardise funding?"</p> <p>"What other events and business needs do you</p>

agreed:	foresee changing the priority of this work?” “Are the go/no-go criteria for the (staged funding) clear enough?”
When the project plan has been agreed	“In your view, where is there risk in the project plan?”

Outcome(s)

Clearer lines of communication between the project manager and the sponsor/key stakeholders.

Reduced risk of delivering the wrong deliverables and outcome.

Reduced stress and greater motivation on those responsible for delivery and value for money.

This pattern was written by the APM Stakeholder Engagement Focus Group.

- *For more information on the group or stakeholder engagement, [click here](#).*