

Stakeholder engagement for infrastructure projects webinar

Question and Answers

Friday 27 March 2020

Questions	Answers
Any top tips to deal with obstructive stakeholders, please (as in those who disrupt engagement)	I don't think that there is a silver bullet. It really depends on discovering the reasons why they are being disruptive. Often it is because they have a particular grievance or opinion which, they feel, is not being addressed. Perhaps taking them aside and dealing with their individual issue would help. If they continue to be disruptive with a view which is not held by the majority of stakeholders, then try making the others aware that progress on the majority-held views will be difficult. They may apply peer-pressure to the disruptors.
What is the best approach to deal with situations where senior management are failing to communicate adequately what is included in the project scope, and thus is restraining the capability of the project team to execute certain project phases?	I am not sure that there is a "best approach", so I would advise that the team take a proactive approach. Look to understand the CONTEXT of the project - what is the real purpose of it? What is it trying to achieve? Explain that unclear scope will impact on the ability to deliver on this purpose. Present the scope as understood by the project team and ask for confirmation or clarification. Take into account the other constraints (time and cost in particular) and raise the RISKS involved with a situation where there are misunderstandings regarding the scope and the expectations of these key stakeholders.
Do you recognise the Integrated Project Team and Contractor as being 'Stakeholders'?	Absolutely! The IPT, contractor and investors/sponsors are all stakeholders who should be engaged. There may be contractual requirements regarding some of the ways in which this engagement will be conducted. Outside of those, these groups could be identified as stakeholders who participate in problem solving/collaboration events in the same way as the public stakeholders.
Is Stakeholder Engagement more about getting them engaged than 'engaging' with them?	This is a very constructive way to view engagement. It is important that the stakeholders from the community are representative of that community and able to articulate their views and concerns. So, getting them engaged is likely to interest some who may not otherwise become involved. Some stakeholders may be daunted by the potential time commitments of becoming involved - there is an apparent apathy from stakeholders.
Do you think there is a benefit to paying stakeholders to participate in engagement? It has been said in events that the public can be the only people not being paid in the room!	There is often a significant commitment of time required to be fully engaged in a major infrastructure project, so reimbursing the participants for their time is a tempting way to encourage involvement. Generally, I do not think that this approach is likely to lead to a better situation. Passionate people will always find the time to contribute; paying people to be involved may attract unrepresentative stakeholders who do not represent the community view.
I recently came across relationship management in projects. Would you say it is different from stakeholder engagement?	I would define relationship management as a long term activity (possibly more appropriate at an organisational or portfolio level) to ensure that the connections between the key clients and the organisation are maintained as well as supply chain and key suppliers. Although there are commonalities between the two, they are different in their objectives and in the people who undertake the roles and activities. Part of my research is to look at how some of the principles of relationship management can be used within infrastructure projects.
What can you do to manage two conflicting interests of stakeholders at the same time?	Collaborative and problem-solving approaches may help to reach agreement or compromise. The first thing to do is recognise that both parties hold valid views and discuss the common elements to reduce the scale of the conflict. Ultimately, one party may need to be disappointed and a very important aspect of this is to clearly explain why the decisions have been made and how their views were taken into account in reaching it.
How important would you say taking a project management approach is when dealing in communications and engagement roles?	I think that the PM approach to communications and stakeholder engagement is very much focused on the analysis of stakeholders. There is a need to use other techniques and methods which are not generally seen as part of the Project Management Body of Knowledge. It is important that we use these other approaches by looking beyond what is currently seen as the PM approach.
What about income differentials - those with power/influence getting the CEO meeting, those without are ignored?	This is an important point. Not everyone will get the CEO meeting and that is reasonable, because there will be an engagement team who should have the resources to engage with a wider group of stakeholders. However, it is important that all stakeholders are treated fairly and are aware of the method of communication, complaints and escalation of issues. The example of Barendrecht highlights the importance of inclusion of stakeholders who do not have the power or influence.
Should a Comms plan (at whatever level of engagement) be subject to an Equalities assessment? And is there a need for guidance on this?	The short answer is yes, Comms Plans should be subject to equalities assessments. I know of no guidance that is widely available.

<p>Can you clarify how the statutory and non statutory stakeholders differ and how do we engage with them separately</p>	<p>Statutory stakeholders would include environmental, heritage bodies and regulators. They will often have a required process which must be adhered to. However, my advice would be to look longer term at this sort of relationship, if you are operating in a space where several projects will be dealing with these groups. The establishment of an ongoing (rather than a transactional project based approach) relationship is advantageous. The same can be said of non-statutory groups, if your organisation is developing a number of projects in one area. However, there is less formality required and the option to define the relationship as the proponent wishes. Often there is more focus on the statutory groups due to the legal nature of the relationship.</p>
<p>Should stakeholders be consulted about where they sit on your engagement plan?</p>	<p>Definitely, it is important for the community to understand how the engagement will be conducted so that their expectations are aligned to that.</p>
<p>If a project had been initiated without public sector engagement and thus halted by the government due to outrage, how can an organization divert those losses?</p>	<p>That will depend on the nature of the outrage and the funding of the project. If the outrage is the result of non-compliance with planning applications, for example, then the developer would need to change or re-apply. They would be responsible for those costs. The Skye Bridge is probably a good example whereby the government had to "buy out" the developers contract/agreement.</p>
<p>How do you engage/manage difficult stakeholders who don't want to engage, participate or get involved in the project delivery or business as usual activities? How do you change that mindset?</p>	<p>You need to communicate with these apathetic stakeholders in terms which are important to them. Perhaps, by discussing the problem which they encounter that will be solved by the project, or in terms of benefits. Discuss the time saving of travel which will result from the construction of the new bridge rather than the technical design.</p>

Management Authority is important. How do you overcome a lack of authority when engaging with Stakeholders.	This is something which I keep finding in my research. Stakeholders want to see, meet and talk to the people in authority - often the engagement team becomes a buffer between the communities and the proponents. There needs to be some opportunity for those in authority to address the stakeholders directly.
How would you treat difficult stakeholders & those stakeholders who can see a decision won't work who end up getting excluded, & have to sit back & watch things fall apart?	I would be direct and ask why they are not getting involved or are stepping back from a previous active role. They may have information or understanding which is not available to the project team; such as local issues or conditions which were not anticipated in the design. Especially, if they are sitting back, they probably know something that the team is unaware of - so treat them well and find out what they know.