

Herding cats!

Links to RICS/APM principles: Remember they're only human

Stakeholder terms: Managing expectations, overcoming concerns, influencing, agreeing

Context

All sectors. This is about the ongoing leadership of groups of stakeholders in the planning and delivery of a project. All stages of the life cycle but significantly the initial stage.

Problem

The project manager and members of the team, often need to engage with a variety of groups of stakeholders to:

Clarify understanding, flush out concerns, answer questions, solve issues, reach agreement and make and review decisions.

Groups of stakeholders often behave as a 'storming' team, with differing agendas, unclear roles, etc, etc. The problem this presents for the project manager is to identify quickly behaviours during a meeting that are (a) destructive or (b) constructive, and react accordingly.

Examples of positive and negative behaviours include:

| Positive | Negative |
|---|--|
| <p>Proposing - Putting forward an idea, suggestion, proposal</p> <p>Defending - Standing up for their idea or proposal</p> <p>Building - Building on someone else's proposal</p> <p>Encouraging - Praising, recognising others' ideas</p> <p>Seeking Information - Exploring facts, opinions, clarification voiced by others</p> <p>Supporting - Declaring their support for another stakeholder</p> <p>Giving information - Giving facts,</p> | <p>Undermining - Talking down someone else's proposal</p> <p>Blocking - Disagreeing without reasons. E.g. 'it won't work'</p> <p>Distracting - Moving the discussion off-topic</p> <p>Shutting out - Interrupting, ignoring, excluding others</p> <p>Withdrawal - Withdrawing from the group</p> <p>Seeking recognition - Wanting to be heard, trying to be clever</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>opinions, ideas</p> <p>Checking Understanding - Checking their understanding of a point made</p> <p>Summarising - Concisely capturing what is being just been discussed</p> <p>Bringing in - Asking the view of another stakeholder</p> <p>Disagreeing - Countering with evidence or reasoning</p> | |
|---|--|

Intervention(s)

In such *group sessions, the project manager as facilitator or chair aims to:

- encourage positive behaviours and control negative behaviours
- reach agreement (as far as possible) as to (e.g.) the scope and approach and expected benefits from the project.

**There is often insufficient time to manage all the key stakeholders on a 1:1 or 1:2 basis and group sessions can be often far more productive so long as they are well-led.*

Outcome(s)

Here are some tactics to managing stakeholders in group session:

Before:

- Set a clear agenda for each session. Do not include AOB! (All topics must be agreed with the chair beforehand.)
- Lobby for support. Have a conversation beforehand with those who are likely to be contentious and/or dominant so that you clearly understand their position and, if necessary, manage their expectations.

During:

- Agree the 'ground rules' of the meeting (i.e. state what you aim to achieve, expect in behaviours, and how you may need to control the group to keep on course and get the best contribution from everyone.
- Use focusing tools on flip chart/whiteboard such as: Benefits versus ease/costs graph, force field analysis, decision matrices.
- Use Post-Its to capture inputs from individuals or pairs, prior to discussion and evaluation.
- Control time assertively, bringing in the quiet stakeholders and closing down the verbose.
- Stop regularly to summarise, gain agreement and move on. Also ensure there are breaks, if a lengthy session.
- Use specific Project project management tools such as:

1. For agreeing the Scope: Moscow, Product breakdown structure.
2. For agreeing the Approach: Decision matrices - to evaluate the identified options, flow charts.

3. For agreeing the Expectations: Customers, benefits and measures (CTS Limited)

After:

- Within 12 hours, write to all who attended to thank them and include a summary of what was agreed plus any recorded actions (with agreed ownership and date for completion).

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

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