

Stakeholders - PM Hut

September 17, 2007 | Author: PM Hut | Filed under: [Project Stakeholder Management](#)

Stakeholders

By [JISC infoNet](#)

A major issue for an organisation of our type is who to involve in any project. This may be glossed over in many commercial approaches on the assumption that it is generally obvious who should be allocated a particular job. Things aren't quite the same in the education world which is why we focus here on involvement rather than simply setting up a team. Most project methodologies will take you through identifying your key stakeholders, assessing their likely attitudes to the project and designing strategies to keep them on board. In education you ignore this at your peril. There are various approaches to involving stakeholders and you must think carefully about the best approach for your particular circumstances in order to get input from the right people at the right time.

Stakeholder Analysis

It is worth drawing up a list of stakeholders and their possible impact on and attitudes to the project. It is important that the analysis is shared with colleagues and preferably 'signed off' at project sponsor level to ensure that you do not get a 'rabbit-out-of-the-hat' stakeholder emerging unexpectedly in the middle of your project. This can de-rail a project. In drawing up this sort of schedule it sometimes helps to assess the 'Potential impact on the Project' heading if you consider the type of involvement various stakeholders have on complex projects. If the project has been set in a strategic context it will follow that most members of the organisation will be seen to some extent as stakeholders exercising some sort of influence or control as follows:

Strategic	Determining the strategy which this system underpins - may sponsor the project
Managerial	Executes managerial control over elements of the system being implemented
Operational	Is involved in operating the system or parts of it
Direct Influence	Is directly affected by outputs of the system but is not engaged in inputting to it
Indirect Influence	Is only indirectly affected by the system if at all

This is not an exhaustive list and you can create your own types to help you analyse your own organisation. However it is particularly important for you not to ignore the last two types of stakeholder. Although it could be argued that the last type is not a stakeholder at all, it is a particular characteristic of education organisations that particular interest groups have disproportionate negative power. You need to acknowledge this and devise a management strategy for it. Typically, this often involves large-scale communication exercises just to ensure that people remain 'onside'. This is another reason why systems implementation in an educational environment is often so complex. This covers organisational stakeholder analysis but you might ask 'What do I do about directly involving people?' There are two basic approaches to this which can be summed up as Representation v Delegation. Both have advantages and drawbacks.

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
Representation Attempts to take in the full range of views, interest groups and organisational units as	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Covers full range of views• An obvious route to gain widespread acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involves people who may have limited knowledge of the subject area

part of the full decision making process. Characterised by democratic, committee-type decision-making.	widespread acceptance of decisions (?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slows decision-making • Can result in compromises which don't really represent 'best fit' in any particular area
Delegation Delegates responsibility to those identified as being best suited to the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work carried out by those with appropriate skills and knowledge • Permits project to move forward more rapidly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance relies on trust in those delegated - may be an alien approach in the education culture • Needs care to ensure that all relevant issues are properly understood and covered

As time is particularly constraining in the education world, with processes and policy moving on rapidly, the suggested model is to follow a delegation route with a small team of committed subject experts empowered to undertake work on behalf of the wider community. The empowerment aspect is crucial, as is (under either approach) a robust communication strategy, devised in accordance with your stakeholder analysis as outlined above.

Influencing

This is a key skill that needs to be considered in the planning stages, when carrying out your stakeholder analysis, and needs to be taken forward in the project phases.

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