ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS FOR PROJECT SUCCESS

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Introduction

There is a set of consistent statistics used to make the case that the majority of change projects fail to achieve their objectives. For example, statements such as, "companies fail to make the change they intend approximately 70 percent of the time" (APQC, 2014) are used frequently in conference presentations, blogs, articles, papers and books. The real challenge may be that C-suite executives, program directors, people impacted by the change and consulting firms often have very different views of the success or failure of major change projects. It's not just an issue between these groups, but often within groups. For example, within the C-suite, there are often different views as to what constitutes success or failure.

However, rather than complete failure, it may be that many projects are "installed" rather than "implemented," with the result that the potential benefits fail to be fully realized. For example, Gartner Research as cited by Miller (2002) released data that indicated that for major corporate systems investments, 80% were not used as intended—or not at all—six months after installation.

Installed means that the solution (this can be the latest technology, new organizational structures, recent acquisitions or redesigned processes) is often in place, but the recipients of the change—where recipients are defined as the people directly or indirectly impacted by the change—haven't changed their behaviors and habits sufficiently for the change to achieve the forecasted benefits. Implementation, on the other hand, is installation plus commitment and behavior change that is aligned to the new way of working. Stopping at installation rather than working toward implementation creates a value gap for the organization, since the benefit contribution from the project (and its inherent change) have not been fully realized, as depicted in **Figure 1**.
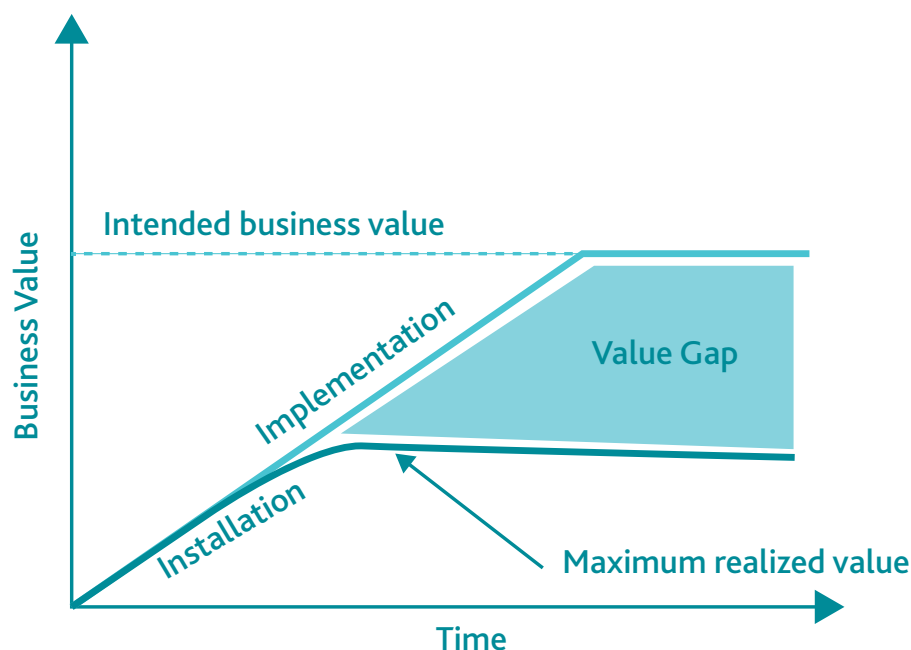

Figure 1: Installing versus implementing change.

This loss of value by the organization is a powerful case for better change management. If an organization cannot ensure recipients commit to the new way of working and change long established behaviors and habits, then nothing more than installation is inevitable. One of the drivers of building commitment to change is the ability to create meaningful engagement. Organizations that "under-engage" tend to see more of their recipients either resisting or accepting change, but not **committing** to the change without additional support from the organization. In fact, research shows that only 25% of recipients ever fully commit to a specific change, with the remaining 75% simply accepting or resisting the change, as shown in **Figure 2** (Changefirst, 2014).
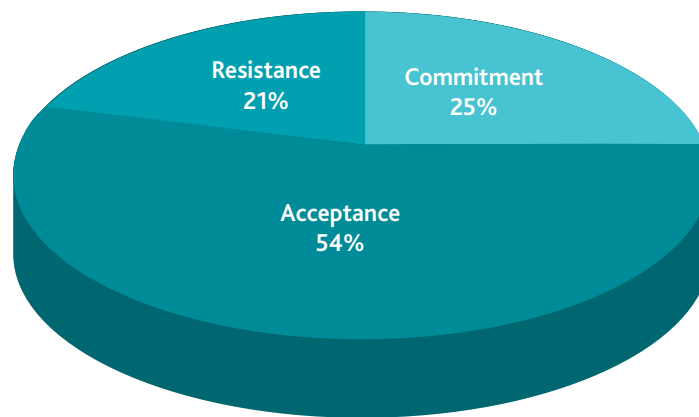

Figure 2: Recipient commitment levels.

There are a number of critical strategies that project teams need to implement if they are to create engagement on their projects and, therefore, commitment to the project output. This paper proposes that how project teams plan and implement the process of identifying and engaging with stakeholders from the start of the project determines the degree to which stakeholders commit to the project objective. There are many actions that may need to be taken once this is complete, but there are also many under-performing projects where this work simply has not been carried out or was done poorly.

Often stakeholder management processes rely on simply listing key players. These lists are usually made up of people with higher positional authority. There is then a set of actions built around a number of conversations with these players to assess commitment and a plan for remedial actions if they are not.

This paper proposes an approach to stakeholder management that is much broader in intent and scope. It identifies how engagement should work on projects and converts that new knowledge into realistic change management plans. This process is also a way of engaging people early on in any project. Project teams should be speaking with all stakeholders, obtaining viewpoints, and creating a set of actions as parts of the project plan that are informed by the true dynamics of the project.

Key Stakeholder Management Definitions

There is little agreement in the literature regarding the terms and definitions used for the various stakeholders associated with a project. The definitions used in this paper are taken from *Managing Change in Organizations: A Practice Guide* (PMI, 2013a), which include:

- **Stakeholder:** An individual, group, or organization who may affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by a decision, activity, or outcome of a project, program, or portfolio.

- **Stakeholder Management:** The stakeholder management plan is a subsidiary plan of the project management plan that defines the processes, procedures, tools, and techniques to effectively engage stakeholders in project decisions and execution based on the analysis of their needs, interests and potential impact.

- **Agent:** Active proponent(s) and driver(s) of the change.

- **Lead:** The lead function supports the overall change management process and implementation, including coordination of associated work streams within the scope of the project.

- **Recipient:** A person directly or indirectly impacted by a change.

- **Sponsor:** A person or group who provides resources and support for the project, program or portfolio, and is accountable for enabling success.

Additional terms used in the paper, but not found in *Managing Change in Organizations* (PMI, 2013a) or the *PMI Lexicon of Project Management Terms* (PMI, 2012) include:

- **Sustaining Sponsors:** In the paper *The Sponsor as the Face of Organizational* Change (Harrington & Nelson, 2013), the authors refer to the need for sustaining sponsors and state:

  A top-down change project begins with the executive sponsor promoting the project. Acceptance and support of the change by all of the stakeholders, including those who may not have direct contact with the executive sponsor, is important. To accomplish this, the executive sponsor should enlist the help of the mid-level managers who have the power to legitimize the change with first-level managers. Once the mid-level managers are on board, they engage the first-level managers and communicate the purpose and value of the change. The buy-in from first-level managers allows them to become sponsors of the change to their teams. Engaging lower-level managers does not transfer accountability, but is a delegation of responsibility for portions of the sponsorship activities … Accountability then flows up from the first-level managers through the mid-level managers with the executive sponsor retaining ultimate accountability for the project and benefits realization (pp. 6–7).

  In this paper the term "sponsor" refers to both the executive sponsor and all the sustaining sponsors, unless otherwise noted.

■ **Stakeholder Potential:** It is very important in stakeholder management to identify and help develop people to fulfill their specific stakeholder responsibilities. For example, many sustaining sponsors start out as recipients supporting the change and their sponsorship needs to be built over time. So, project teams should identify stakeholders for their potential rather than just their current pre-disposition.

■ **Change Networks:** Change networks (see **Figure 3**) represent the flow of power and communication through the organization. A stakeholder map describes the way in which stakeholders actually interact with each other.

This approach not only addresses the identification of key individuals and groups, but actively seeks to address relationships and roles within a project, recognizing the political landscape and identifying the natural lines of engagement that are needed for programs and projects to be successful. It shifts thinking away from understanding the formal, hierarchical organizational structures in which a program or project is taking place to understanding the informal, political flows of an organization where change really takes place (e.g., change network relationships). **Table 1** lists some of the differences between the organizational structure and the relationships that exist due to the change project.
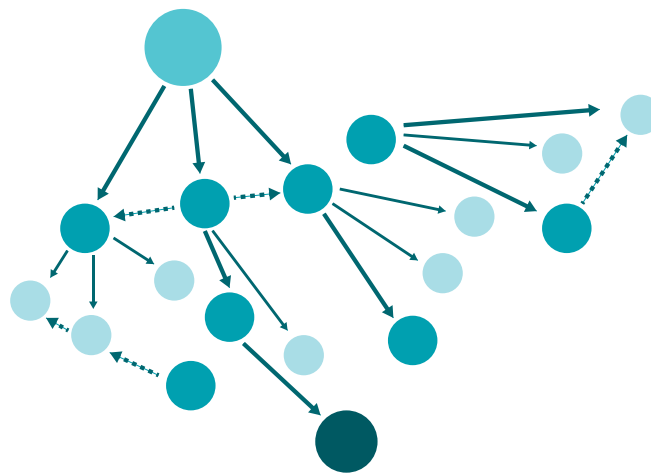

Figure 3: Change network representation.

Organizational Structure	Change Network Relationships
Roles and titles are formally assigned	Individuals may have more or less power than the formal roles indicate
Built in advance by corporate management	Evolves over time as people gain and lose influence
Visible to everyone in the organization	Discovered through a process of involving people who know the organization well
Clear levels of authority are assigned to individuals	Represents the reality of how power works in the organization

Table 1: Shifting focus from organizational structures to change network relationships.

■ **Program and Project Teams:** The process described here can be used by both program and project teams. It is likely that program teams will use it to identify important stakeholder views across the entire organization affected by the program. The focus inevitably will be hierarchical. This might involve the top two or three layers of the organization. Once this work is complete, project teams will then need to employ the process in their particular work stream within the program. This is likely to be more detailed and deeper than the program stakeholder management work. (This paper will focus on the project team, but much of the material is equally useful for the program team.)

The Three-Step Approach

Stakeholder management is a dynamic, three-step process:

1. **Build the Stakeholder Map:** Maintain it over the lifetime of the project

2. **Prioritize Key Stakeholders:** Frequently revisit assumptions about their levels of commitment and influence

3. **Develop Key Stakeholders:** Build their commitment to the change

There are four principles that should govern the project team's work when using this approach.

1. **Recipient-focused:** Project teams need to understand how the people who have to change the most can be influenced and engaged. So, they should start by identifying the recipients of change and not the senior sponsors. In other words, they should start from the bottom and work up. This allows project teams to put themselves in the shoes of the recipients.

2. **Living document:** Stakeholder mapping is not a one-off exercise. Project teams will need to revisit it as the project progresses. Triggers to update the stakeholder map and stakeholder management plan should include changes in project direction, unexpected difficulties emerging during the change, or when key players in the project are changing.

3. **Engaging process:** Project teams use it as way to engage the project team, steering group or sponsors. They may need to work with different people at various phases of the project. They should invite people to participate.

4. **Use sensitivity:** Project teams need to use professional judgment in sharing the information they generate. They should not leave information lying around or pinned on a wall. What makes perfect sense to someone at a workshop may not make sense to a passer-by who sees his or her name or team's name written down. The trick is to balance being over-sensitive about confidentiality with the need to engage with people. Only showing people information on certain portions of the organization can help maintain confidentiality.

Step 1: Build the stakeholder map

Stakeholder mapping should be a dynamic process that enables organizations to graphically represent all the stakeholders, the political environment in which the project operates and the relationships between stakeholders. Some of the key characteristics of effective mapping are:

■ Drawing the political rather than the organizational structure. This forces recognition of the unofficial relationships, which are critical to implementation and exposes gaps in commitment or influence.

■ Working back from those who must change the most, to those who have authority to make change happen. In other words, start with the most junior recipient and work back up the organization.

- Identifying stakeholder pressure points in a project, such as shortfalls in commitment, inadequate influence, lack of institutional power and poor communication.

- Providing an opportunity for multiple views and opinions within the project to be understood and evaluated.

- Predicting how potential recommendations would affect stakeholders and being very clear about who would be involved in implementing the project.

- Updating the map as the project develops and evolves. It is a living process and not a once-and-done activity at the start of a project.

- Engaging a wide set of project members and stakeholders to work together to map the true network of change.

Building the stakeholder map (see **Table 2**) is an interactive activity, typically in a workshop setting and best facilitated by someone with strong experience in mapping. One tactic that is strongly recommended is to draw the map on a large white board or flip-chart. Avoid using Post-it® notes or software packages. The use of these technologies tends to encourage participants to create very neat pictures of the organization, which don't represent reality, but look more like the organizational chart.

Analyzing a stakeholder map

Once the map is drawn, the following is a sample of the questions that the project team should be working through with the people attending a stakeholder mapping session:

- Who are the critical players from the network? For example, people can be critical if they control critical resources or if they are a core group of agents who have a dominant influence on people's decision making.

- Where are the key pressure points or gaps for this stage of the project? For example, parts of the organization where there is no lead presence.

- What are the key relationships within the network? For example, between certain groups of sponsors. Note: Project teams should be developing specific plans that aim to develop and maintain relationships rather than leave them to chance.

- How will the engagement and communication with sponsors and recipients be carried out?
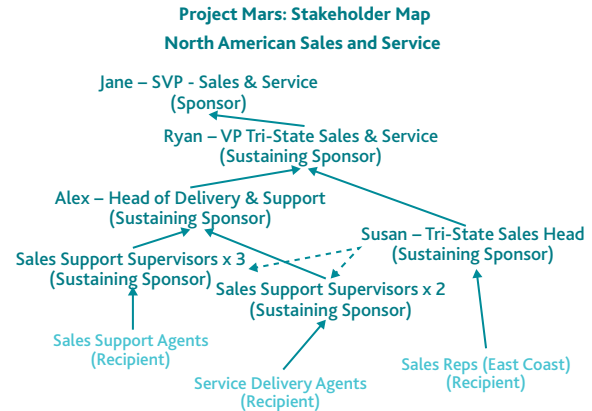
CASE**STUDY** Project Manager Facilitates a Stakeholder Map

A large utility company commenced the biggest enterprise-wide transformation in its history. The impact on roles across the entire organization was considerable, requiring new working practices, new reporting procedures and significant behavior change. The board of directors had sanctioned the largest investment in change activity ever experienced at this organization.
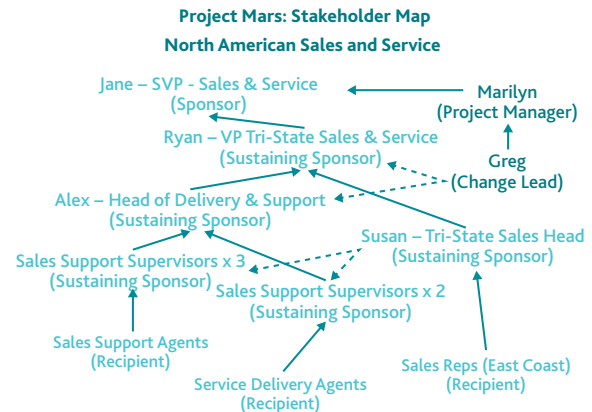
With tightly knit teams from the impacted areas of the organization, the project manager created a stakeholder map that revealed the far-reaching, people-centered consequences of the change. The map itself stretched the length of a wall and was from floor to ceiling in the "war-room" of the project. As members of the board—who had made big, professional commitments to the success of the project—saw the map, it emphasized to them the scope, scale and people impacts of the transformation. Despite the commitments and investments that they had already made, this activity allowed the project manager to work more closely with the sponsor to ensure that the scale of the change was fully appreciated.

Step	Example(s)[1]
Define the area of the change to be mapped. This could be a specific work stream, a particular geography or time period. When starting, use a relatively small area of the organization impacted by the change to practice the technique.	Supply Chain function Sales North America XYZ business unit
Identify the recipients, particularly those most affected by the change. This is not hierarchical, and does not necessarily imply front-line workers. For example, senior and middle managers can be the people most impacted by the project's deliverable.	**Project Mars: Stakeholder Map - North American Sales** **Service Delivery Agents (Recipient)** **Sales Support Agents (Recipient)** **Sales Reps (East Coast) (Recipient)**

Work back up the organization. Take each of the recipient groups or individuals and ask: "Who will they look to for authority and support?" Then continue that process until you reach the sponsor (the person or group who provides resources and support for the project and is accountable for enabling success). This is the person who has the ultimate "go/no-go" authority over the project.	**Project Mars: Stakeholder Map** **North American Sales and Service** Jane – SVP - Sales & Service (Sponsor) Ryan – VP Tri-State Sales & Service (Sustaining Sponsor) Alex – Head of Delivery & Support (Sustaining Sponsor) Susan – Tri-State Sales Head (Sustaining Sponsor) Sales Support Supervisors x 3 (Sustaining Sponsor) Sales Support Supervisors x 2 (Sustaining Sponsor) Sales Support Agents (Recipient) Service Delivery Agents (Recipient) Sales Reps (East Coast) (Recipient)
Identify the people who will enable the change by planning and executing implementation. These are the leads (they support the overall change management process and implementation, including coordination of associated work streams within the scope of the project). It is also useful to show who they work for and in what capacity.	**Project Mars: Stakeholder Map** **North American Sales and Service** Jane – SVP - Sales & Service (Sponsor) Marilyn (Project Manager) Ryan – VP Tri-State Sales & Service (Sustaining Sponsor) Greg (Change Lead) Alex – Head of Delivery & Support (Sustaining Sponsor) Susan – Tri-State Sales Head (Sustaining Sponsor) Sales Support Supervisors x 3 (Sustaining Sponsor) Sales Support Supervisors x 2 (Sustaining Sponsor) Sales Support Agents (Recipient) Service Delivery Agents (Recipient) Sales Reps (East Coast) (Recipient)

Identify the agents (active proponents and drivers of the change). Who are they able to influence? Who influences them? Remember: Not all these people will be supportive of the project. This is where stakeholders who are external to the organization can be mapped, although it is possible they may also be sponsors.	**Project Mars: Stakeholder Map** **North American Sales and Service**
As the map is drawn, it is important to begin to plot the types of relationships between individuals. These should be revisited once all stakeholders are drawn to ensure that key relationships are understood. Use dotted lines for informal relationships and unbroken lines for formal relationships. The use of different colors can be very helpful here. For example green could indicate all supportive people and relationships.	**Project Mars: Stakeholder Map** **North American Sales and Service**

Table 2: Process for drawing the stakeholder map.

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[1] Note these are only representative relationships to demonstrate the step being referred to. In most projects, there would be multiple stakeholders.

Step 2: Prioritize key stakeholders

Project teams need to ensure that each stakeholder is clearly identified, assigned a role and has a personal, specific plan to develop his or her visible commitment.

When undertaking change, it is important to understand how much power key political stakeholders have to either facilitate or hinder the change. Once the project team understands the power each stakeholder has, the next step is to understand their predisposition to the project. To achieve this, project teams can use the influence/commitment matrix shown in **Figure 4** to identify key stakeholders and prioritize them for specific action planning. Using "commitment to the change" as the x-axis and "influence" as the y-axis, this chart can

be used to facilitate discussion on how to manage important stakeholders. It may also be possible to group particular stakeholders and develop actions that are targeted at the group rather than specific individuals.
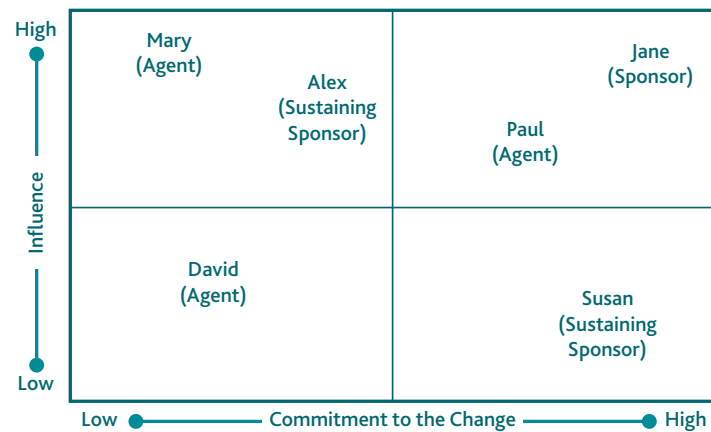

Figure 4: Example of an influence/commitment matrix.

Descriptions of quadrants

Some stakeholder management approaches give labels to the four quadrants of the matrix. Project teams should avoid using labels for stakeholders for three reasons:

1. It can be very disrespectful to stakeholders. The team may bond over putting labels on people—especially those they don't like—but, in reality, it models an inappropriate attitude that is not helpful in **any** change process.

2. Labeling tends to close the mind to a wider set of possibilities. By categorizing a stakeholder as a blocker it is very easy to create a negative mindset toward that person. Project teams should think about developing and supporting stakeholders, not criticizing them.

3. If negative stakeholders ever find out that the project team labeled them in this way, it will, at best, harden any resistance they may have and at worst derail the entire project.

Quadrants	Description
Low Influence/ Low Commitment	People in this quadrant basically need monitoring. They have little power to influence events. The danger is if the project team has misjudged their influence and they might be more resistant than one might think. People in this quadrant could begin to influence stakeholders with more power by, for example, drip-feeding them with negative information.
Low Influence/ High Commitment	Project teams want to encourage these people to stay supportive without expending too much energy. It is very easy to spend too much time with these people because they support the project; yet they have little power to move it along. Try and keep them informed and feed them with any "early win" good news about the project.
High Influence/ Low Commitment	These people need focused attention by the team. Project teams need very specific plans for these people. The intent should be to convert them to having more commitment to the change. There is a need to look at a range of tactics. These are the individuals that project teams want to involve in the planning process so that they have input to—and then hopefully ownership of—the project deliverable.
High Influence/ High Commitment	People in this quadrant are, of course, extremely valuable to the project. Project teams need to harness their support and do everything they can to make that support visible to other people. They should pay constant attention to make sure their commitment is maintained. It is very easy for people in this quadrant to get sidetracked by other issues or to believe that they have done enough to implement and sustain the change.

Table 3: Descriptions of the four quadrants of the influence/commitment matrix.

Project teams need to bear in mind two issues when completing the matrix:

1. Stakeholder management plans should not be static documents that are just created at the start of a project and never changed. Based on the quadrant into which each stakeholder has been placed, one needs to build plans to move or maintain the stakeholder's support. Revisiting their location on the matrix should be a regular activity that the project manager facilitates with the executive sponsor.

2. Given that some of the stakeholders on the matrix are likely to be extremely influential, discretion and diplomacy are required. This further emphasizes the importance of building a strong working relationship with the executive sponsor. Often knowing when not to approach a senior stakeholder or what not to say to him or her, can be as powerful as approaching him or her directly, even if it is done with the best of intentions.

CASE**STUDY** Prioritizing Key Stakeholders

A mobile communications company's organic and successful growth led to the need for an enterprise-wide supply chain IT system. The company decided on hardware and software that had been successfully used at a large number of other similar companies. The Supply Chain Director was put in the position of sponsor. After the system go-live, customers were not receiving products they had ordered, invoices were delayed or lost, sales employees were resisting the changes and, as a result, the company was losing credibility fast.

The project manager organized a stakeholder mapping exercise, which had not previously been undertaken. This soon highlighted the core issues. The Supply Chain Director, relatively new to the organization, lacked influence and credibility with the recipients in areas of the organization most impacted by the change—most notably, sales. The stakeholder map also allowed the leadership team to understand that the leads originally assigned to the project were not able to persuade the front-line sales force to attend training—never mind even consider using the new solution!

As a result of the insight gained from this activity, the decision was made to strengthen sustaining sponsorship in the sales function. In particular, the sales director was characterized as someone with high influence but low commitment. It was also decided to substitute some of the less credible leads with more influential people, particularly in the sales function. These two actions helped rescue a failing project.

Step 3: Develop key stakeholders

It is important to not only identify key stakeholders, but also to develop plans to ensure that they fulfill their functional position based on the project team's identification of their position and influence in the stakeholder map.

The recipient is in many ways the key stakeholder; but, in a change project, it is more common to use tools such as impact and readiness assessments to build actions for specific recipients or groups of recipients. As a general principle, project teams should always treat every stakeholder initially as a recipient of change. Every stakeholder management plan should have, as an end goal, to change recipients' habits or behaviors.

Sponsors

The sponsor role is the most critical leadership role in predicting the success of organizational change. When sponsorship is done well, organizations see:

- Clear accountability for, and line of sight to, the change benefits;

- Legitimate reasons for people to engage in change;

■ A clear sense of commitment to the new ways of working; and

■ Active support for difficult decisions that often need to be made during major change.

Sponsorship is most effective when executives and managers across the organization work together as a coordinated network ensuring that communication is clear and consistent, change decisions are reinforced at all levels and there is active role-modeling so people can see the behaviors required for success in the future. This is called "sustaining sponsorship." Conducting a stakeholder mapping session can assist in identifying all the sustaining sponsors.

Effective sponsorship is seen as absolutely critical for change success (PMI, 2014). While there is almost certainly no one person who is the perfect sponsor, the sponsor evaluation example shown in **Figure 5** proposed by Harrington and Nelson (2013) provides both a means for selecting a sponsor and measuring his or her performance once in that role. This checklist is best used by project managers as part of a discussion with sponsors, to "contract" for specific behaviors during the change. It can also be used to help leads during the planning phase of a project to assess a sponsor against specific dimensions and to determine where development or support would be needed during the change process.

Sponsor Commitment Analysis

Circle the number that matches your rating for each statement where 1 equals strongly disagree and 10 equals strongly agree

Statement	Strongly disagree.........................Strongly agree									
I believe that the project is worthwhile implementing for the business.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I have the professional competencies to add value to the project.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I am willing to be held accountable for the outcome from the project.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I believe that the project's goals and objectives can be met.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I will commit the time required to support the project.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I have the leadership traits to serve as the sponsor for the project.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I have the necessary organizational contacts to secure the project's resources and cooperation from the interfacing functions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I am in a position to influence the outcome of the project.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Name: _____   Sum: _____

Figure 5: Sponsor evaluation assessment.

Leads

Leads support the overall change management process and implementation, including coordination of associated work streams within the scope of the project. They are accountable to the project manager. Just as there are sustaining sponsors, it is possible to have sustaining change leads. There may be one overall lead, but specific regions or functions may have a more local lead responsible for the project in his or her area of responsibility.

Typical deliverables will include change risk assessments, engagement plans (including communications, involvement, training and rewards plans) and plans to direct the sponsor's and agents' behavior in support of the change. In addition to the creation of people-centered plans, the role of the lead is a mixture of dynamics that incorporate practical thinking and softer skills like coaching, mentoring and convincing (Changefirst, 2011).

The crucial role of the lead is to support sponsor intentions, but typically they do not have direct power over recipients and must rely on their credibility and ability to influence so that they can:

- Gain access to the right people,

- Have constructive dialogue with senior people,

- Get reasonable change requests agreed, and

- Input ideas and effect the way decisions are made.

It is vitally important to choose and train the right people in these skills. The role of a lead is crucial because these individuals, who should be highly credible in the organization, will be helping to manage the inevitable ambiguity and uncertainty that change brings. This puts them at the center of the organization's change agenda and dramatically increases their personal value. The organization benefits too. The organization can build the capability of its own people, creating a higher level of employee commitment to change, and is able to implement change more successfully.

The evaluation shown in **Figure 6** can be used to select and develop leads. The questions in the evaluation are designed to capture views about lead behavior in an organization in relation to a particular project. The purpose of such an assessment is to educate, develop and support leads to provide what is required to drive change implementation effectively.

The evaluation is best used by sponsors, as part of a discussion with leads, to "contract" for specific performance during the change, to assess a particular lead against specific dimensions and to determine where development or extra support would be needed during the change process. Leads looking to monitor and improve their own performance during change can also use the evaluation.

Change Lead Checklist

Circle the number that matches your rating for each statement where 1 equals strongly disagree and 10 equals strongly agree

Statement	Strongly disagree........................Strongly agree									
I believe that the project's goals and objectives can be met	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I have a track record of influencing people who don't report to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I have strong process facilitation skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I can coach others effectively	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I have experience in building change management plans	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I can work effectively with sponsors and influence their behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I can work effectively with all users and their managers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I know how to help people adapt to change	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I will role model the new ways of working	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Name: _____   Sum: _____

Figure 6: Lead capability assessment. (Based on *A Research-based Exploration of the Role of the Change Agent in Organisational Change,* Changefirst, 2011).

Agents

Agents use influence as the way to exercise their personal power. Change is much more likely to succeed when it is backed by clear, active support from other influential people in the organization. The role of influential people has always been important in change, but it has grown with the advancement of communications technology changes, including email, intranet sites and social networking and other new channels, which have made it far easier to network with others across the globe. As such, these individuals are wielding even more sway as their influence can be disseminated across an organization through a variety of new technological means.

During organizational change, agents can:

■ Provide additional organizational legitimacy to the change, particularly in the early stages when executive support may be underdeveloped;

■ Nurture relationships and broker alliances important to the success of the change;

- Provide sponsors with more objective and less threatening feedback and counsel on change progress and personal performance; and

- Help secure people's involvement in a change where sponsor or lead relationships are weak.

Not all agents will be supportive of the change. It is important to remember that agents can be positive or negative. A further breakdown of types of influence can help project teams focus their interactions with agents:

- **Advocates:** Persuade others about the benefits of the change. It is very important to work with them early in the process. Project teams need to plant ideas with them and try to turn them into early adopters.

- **Connectors:** Help project teams reach others in the network that they might want to influence. They help find allies and enlist support. They can also help develop a critical mass of key people in favor of the change.

- **Controllers:** Control access to people and information. They may not be very senior in the organization; in fact, many of them may be in mid-level staff roles, but they need cultivating and need to understand how they can help achieve the change.

- **Experts:** Recognized as being technically credible by others in the organization. They may not actually be technical experts; it's just that others regard them as being so.

It is important to identify and understand the role that each of these agents plays. All agents have influence, but you may need their influence at different times in the change process. The more project teams understand the organization and the people in it, the easier this becomes. Put simply, project teams have to pay more attention to some people in the change process than others.

So what can organizations do to harness the power of agents?

- Establish a network of agents early in the change process. Project teams need to talk to people during the initiation stage of the project before they become influenced by others.

- Where possible identify key agents to be on project teams and steering groups. People tend to buy into whatever they create unless there are significant personal consequences for themselves.

- Ask them "who is influential in their part of the business?" Project teams will not know everyone and others can help fill gaps in the team's networking.

- Make sure that project teams have the knowledge and information to deal with experts. Plan those meetings very carefully. Ensure all the information is at hand and it is convincing and credible. Bring others to the meeting if necessary. Experts can be very unforgiving of people they view as having poor technical knowledge.

- If the project team is more junior than the people they wish to influence, then they need to leverage their position by enrolling more senior people to help. If possible, ask a colleague to talk to them. It's not so much about seniority as it is about trust.

Development plans for stakeholders

As stated earlier, it is vital to have development plans for key stakeholders. They form an essential part of the stakeholder management plan. This is a subsidiary plan of the project management plan that defines the processes, procedures, tools and techniques to effectively engage stakeholders in project decisions and execution based on the analysis of their needs, interests and potential impact.

Stakeholder /Role	Issue	Action	Who	Timing
Alex—Head of Delivery and Support (Sustaining Sponsor)	Alex talks positively in public about the project but in private indicates that she is not sure it will work. If this continues, this could damage the credibility of the project.	John (project manager) will arrange a meeting with Alex to try and find out what her concerns are. He may need to more fully engage her in the project activities and solutions to ensure she is committed to the project.	John	End-July

Table 4: Sample development plan for a specific stakeholder.

A development plan is a specific individual plan that identifies steps that will be taken to help the stakeholder both commit to the project and to support it in particular ways. It is good practice to always treat every stakeholder as a recipient first. Assuming a certain level of commitment from a stakeholder is very risky and often makes assumptions that are far too positive. Use the various stakeholder assessments that are available to help pinpoint risks and specific personal issues.

These plans can be shared with the relevant stakeholders, but political judgment is required at this stage. They are more often used by project teams as a way of articulating the steps to building commitment and then supporting it in particular ways.

There are four strategies for building stakeholder commitment.

- **Engage:** The best way to engage stakeholders is through participation. If stakeholders feel part of the decision-making processes, their commitment to the change will quickly grow.

- **Persuade:** If engaging doesn't work or isn't possible, the next method is to try to influence the stakeholder regarding the merits, benefits and requirements of the change.

- **Reward:** If the previous two methods don't work well, the next option is reward. This means giving the stakeholder an incentive—financial or otherwise—to commit to the change.

- **Isolate:** If the above tactics fail, it may be necessary to work around those stakeholders who are working against the change. This may mean reassigning the stakeholder to another position or removing responsibilities and authority for the business outcomes affected by the change. Clearly, this has to be agreed to and implemented by the most senior sponsor.

CASE**STUDY** Developing Stakeholders

For some time, the project manager of an IT project in a distribution company had been speaking informally to the sponsor about demonstrating more overtly her commitment to the project. This had little effect on the behavior of the sponsor who believed that it wasn't necessary to do more because everyone knew what he or she had to do. Yet, key stakeholders interpreted this lack of action as meaning that the project was not important and their work on it was not a priority.

After about six months, it was clear that the project was falling behind schedule drastically. The project team decided to work over the weekend and see whether they could clear up some of the problems and issues. The project manager worked with the lead to use this as a way to build a case for the sponsor to show more active involvement. The sponsor listened to their case and decided to be more visible. She arrived on Saturday morning, along with the other members of the project team, and joined in with the testing and debugging of the system. Additionally, she called the team together the following Monday and, based on her observations from the weekend, helped the team build a more robust plan for dealing with the ongoing problems. Members of the project team reported being motivated to get the project back on track through these simple sponsor actions. More importantly, the rest of the organization took this as a signal of the importance of the project.

Conclusion

Stakeholder management needs to focus more on engagement in order to move projects from installation to implementation. Stakeholder management needs to be less hierarchically focused and, at the same time, needs to take into account the fluid political nature of organizations. Projects should start with the premise that identifying a range of stakeholders and engaging with them in a consistent and organized manner will improve project success.

Sometimes stakeholder management processes have failed to take into account the dynamic nature of the stakeholders' commitment to a project and the relationships between different stakeholders as a project progresses. By having project teams focused not only on their own stakeholder role, but also thinking about the other key stakeholders in a project and how they interact, project teams will find the edge they are looking for. There are three steps to achieving more effective stakeholder engagement:

1. Build the stakeholder map and maintain it as the project ebbs and flows.

2. Prioritize key stakeholders and frequently revisit assumptions about levels of commitment and influence.

3. Develop key stakeholders and build their commitment to the change.

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