

The People side of Project Management

Jacqui Hogan



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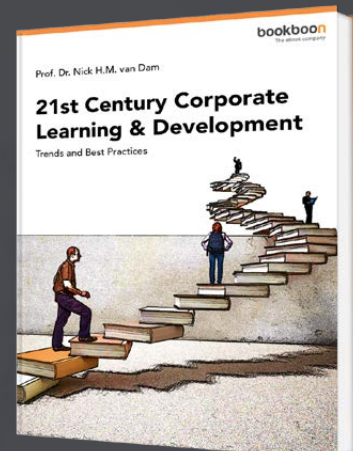
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1 Introduction

You would be forgiven for thinking that, because project usually involve managing a team of people to deliver something, that project managers are excellent people managers. Unfortunately, this is frequently not the case. There are many project management methodologies and approaches, for example Prince 2 (in the UK) or PMI (in the US), which provide an excellent framework for the process of project management, but which do not cover how to motivate or persuade people to do the tasks correctly or to the quality required. These describe frameworks, which enables a project manager to manage the project in a structured and logical way. They generally do not cover in any detail how to manage changing requirements and the people issues inherent upon making those changes. Even though all talk about the importance of stakeholders, coordination of the work of different people and planning who will do the work there is very little that addresses the needs of those people. Yet, without people, it would be impossible to actually deliver the results!



Figure 1 – seesaw of people v. process

I do not think anyone would disagree that the pace of change in all environments is increasing. You only have to open a newspaper, watch a news programme or view your iPad to hear about yet another project failure that did not take changing requirements into account. Poor change management and the consequences of poor people management account for much of this failure.

Some of the problems:

- Inadequate understanding and/or insufficient attention by project sponsors to the complex organisational environment they currently work in. This is especially a problem for longer projects, where the requirements can have significantly changed across the life of a project.
- Holding onto outdated organisational processes by individual stakeholder managers.
- General resistance to change by either or both of the stakeholders and the project team.

- Poor communication.
- Poor collaboration, resulting in re-work and duplication.
- Fear of blame, when something does not go according to plan.
- Confusing people on the project with their tasks. In other words, treating people like resources rather than people with feelings and insecurities!
- Relentlessly carrying on with delivering results that are no longer needed by the organisation.

1.1 Why are people important?

A large part of the success of a project relies on a group of people co-operating, collaborating and working together to achieve the desired result. Yet experience shows that, in spite of the widespread use of project management methodologies, projects are still failing. Why is this? We use the most extensive and project methodologies, which provide detailed processes for managing tasks and deliverables. It is my belief that these have become so detailed, that they no longer focus on the key element – the people responsible for delivering the project.

Before we look in more detail at how to manage people, we need to debunk several project management myths.

1.1.1 Myth 1 – Using a Project Management methodology is enough

If this were true, then all projects would succeed, when clearly they do not. Project management methodologies are excellent in what they cover. They are not enough.

1.1.2 Myth 2 – Projects aren't about change

If your project is not going to change something – what are you hoping to achieve? This raises a more fundamental question – if project management is the management of a project – what exactly is a project? Although there are many definitions of project management, there are actually very few definitions of what a project is. Here are some ideas:

“A project is a unique, transient endeavour, undertaken to achieve planned objectives, which could be defined in terms of outputs, outcomes or benefits. A project is usually deemed to be a success if it achieves the objectives according to their acceptance criteria, within an agreed timescale and budget.”
– APM association for project management

“what is a project? It's a temporary group activity designed to produce a unique product, service or result.”
– PMI Project Management Institute

There is a problem with both definitions, in that they assume that the objectives of the project neither create a change in state (an improvement) or that they will not change. People find this confusing, as they know that:

- There is no point doing something unless it improves what you already have (positive change)
- The world moves on, so the objectives, and thus the deliverables, will change too

The risk then is that people will never be 100% committed to a project that does not consider this.

1.1.3 Myth 3 – Strong organisation leadership isn't required if you have a Project Manager

In an ideal world, the organisation's manager would be the project manager, as they are likely to have the best idea of the desired result. This is rarely feasible. A project manager usually does not have the breadth of organisation understanding, or the 'clout' necessary to manage the requirements and changes required for a successful outcome. Often the project is managed in isolation from the organisation environment it is intended to benefit. Organisation/project boundaries need strong organisational leaders to manage them.

1.1.4 Myth 4 – Delivery of the original scope is the best measure of success

You only have to read the newspaper to see an article about yet another major project failure. The project team probably thought it was very successful. After all, they delivered what the organisation originally asked for. However, what they really needs now may be quite different.

The world is changing, and the project scope will change too. This requires good change management, which is not always present (methodologies do not cover this adequately). If the people involved in a project are not comfortable with those changes, the project is at risk.

1.1.5 Myth 5 – Project teams don't need to understand the business case

As in Myth 4, many project teams (and stakeholders) work on the principle that if it is not in the original scope, then it falls outside the boundary of the project. They also assume that if it falls outside the boundary of the project, the team does not need to know about it, as all they need to do is follow the plan and deliver their tasks according to the plan.

A consequence of this is that stakeholders can feel that they cannot make genuine and necessary changes because the project team do not understand the organisation context of why they need to make any changes. Often, the stakeholders do not understand their organisation at the level of detail that the project team does. Having a common understanding helps these discussions, and helps everyone to communicate more effectively.

A team that understands the business case and the environment will be less likely to focus just on the tasks, and more likely to focus on what the organisation really needs.

1.1.6 Myth 6 – All communication should go via the Project Manager

The project manager can rapidly become a bottleneck for communications. Open communication breeds trust, and trust breeds a better result. Sadly, the project management methodologies in use e.g. Prince 2 tend to assume a formal, hierarchical communications approach.

1.1.7 Myth 7 – Success is based on correct execution of tasks, not delivering business benefit

You read so often in the press about a project being successful (in the eyes of the project team) because the original scope was delivered when this is no longer fit-for-purpose. The tasks are only the means to the end, not the end in themselves.

1.1.8 Myth 8 – Project Managers don't need people skills

People are not just resources; they are complex beings with needs and aspirations of their own and need appropriate management to be effective. Project Management is about managing a team of people to deliver results, not about managing tasks. Anyone who aspires to achieve anything through people needs good people management skills. Sadly, though, many people assume that the primary skill of a project manager is to manage the process systematically.

1.1.9 Myth 9 – Stakeholders don't need to understand the details

While they certainly do not need to know all the details, they do need to know enough to have a meaningful discussion about change. Too often, stakeholders work on the basis of 'just make it happen' with no thought or consideration for what the impact might be or even whether the change is either appropriate or necessary.

1.2 A new breed of Project Managers

To achieve success today, a project manager needs the ability to motivate and mobilise their team. They must be knowledgeable about the organisation, proactive and adaptable. With these skills, they can then:

- Build flexible and agile plans that allow for change
- Create plans that motivate and develop the project team, increasing their commitment and future value
- Work with stakeholders and the project team to ensure change is managed effectively
- Identify how much and at what stage high levels of stakeholder involvement are needed
- Communicate effectively with senior management to ensure the project vision is understood and that the project is properly supported
- Increase the probability of a truly successful project

2 People hate Change

Until fairly recently, people were able to live out their lives, having just one job, perhaps living in the same place they were born. Over the last 50–100 years, this has changed dramatically. For most of us now, our lives are in a constant state of flux. Some of this change is external and over which we may feel we have very little control. Some of it is by choice, in response to these real or perceived external changes.

The problem is that change means either doing things differently or doing different things. Either way, we may feel a loss of certainty or control, which makes us feel less confident about what we are doing.

The irony is that projects are about change, so being able to manage it is rather crucial to your success.

2.1 Why we avoid Change

Everyone has a different response to change, depending on their position, level of control and preferred response. Here are some general concerns:

- **We like to feel comfortable.** Even if our current situation is not safe or enjoyable, it is at least comfortable and familiar.
- **The unknown is scary.** We are conditioned to believe that the unfamiliar is dangerous, so we become cautious. Not necessarily a bad thing, but you can become so cautious that you become unable to act or move forward.
- **Loss of control.** If you are a ‘control freak’, like me, you like to know that you have the power and autonomy to make things happen. Change interrupts this autonomy by taking away some of your ability for self-determination.
- **It will go away.** Because change seems to be constantly around us, it is easy to say to yourself ‘another change will be along in a minute’, so why bother with this one.
- **It is all different.** Some of this is, of course, the point! However, as humans, we are creatures of habit. New habits take time and effort to create and, until we form them, we will feel uncertain.
- **Loss of competence.** While you may be confident about your ability to deliver now, you may feel concerned that you may not be quite so competent after the change. Maybe your skills will become obsolete.
- **Rework.** We all hate to do excellent work and then have someone say ‘we don’t need that now’.
- **Skeletons in the Closet.** While the status quo is in place, we hide resentments and cover up old wounds. Change can expose dark recesses where skeletons lurk, only to reappear suddenly to disrupt and disturb the project.

2.2 Human behaviour and the different type of people on your project¹

Although it is very tempting to assume that everyone will respond to change in the same way, experience tells us that this is not the case. Each person will have their own way of working, and you need to respect each of them. What matters is whether they deliver.

Here are some of the different 'behaviours' you may experience and some tips for to managing them either as a project manager or a fellow project team member. You may like to try to identify your own preference!

2.2.1 Eager Beaver²

The Beaver wakes from his rest, consumes a good breakfast and prepares for the day. He is looking forward to an active day of cutting down trees using only his sharp teeth, floating the resultant logs along the river and then adding them to the carefully constructed dam. There he will carefully place them, crisis cross fashion to produce an intricate structure that is both strong and beautiful. He expects to be working diligently all day. That is, unless a threat appears in the form of a bear or other large animal appears. Then he will warn his beaver teammates by smacking his tail loudly and forcefully on the water surface before diving deeply to safety. He will stay in his chosen place of safety until he is sure the threat has gone, then return to his work and continuing where he left off, until it is time to rest and sleep.



Figure 2 – eager beaver

It is not even dawn, and the office is deserted except for the eager beaver. They are the first person in the office every morning and the last person to leave in the evening. If they are not there, it is only because they took the work home.

Eager beavers often form the quiet backbone of the project team, preferring action to talking. They do not seek accolades for what they do, so it is easy to overlook them. They are very task focussed, and pursue their tasks relentlessly. Sometimes they are over eager to get going, and forget that sometimes a little review before action is necessary.

They will respond just as efficiently to danger as they do to everything else. They will warn other members of the team and then go somewhere safe until the danger is past. Their major weakness however, is that they do not see the big picture and are blind to the impact their task has on other tasks by other people. This means that they do not take into consideration what the impact of their creative response may have on other tasks and activities.

Their problem is dealing with a major change, as they may not realise that they cannot just go back to the task. Their strength, and weakness, is that they are sufficiently creative that they will find a new route to complete their task. Unfortunately, if the outside change requires them to do a different task, they need someone to explain this to them. Once you assign them a new task however, they will pursue this as relentlessly as before.

An Eager Beaver is smart, creative (within a specific task), task focussed, good with deadlines but a bit of a loner.

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2.2.2 Work Horse

Work Horses rise every day on the dot of 7 a.m., ready to go. After consuming a hearty breakfast, they arrive exactly on time. The first thing they consult is their to-do-list, which they will work through diligently. It does not matter whether they get to the end of the list, they will complete each task in turn until it is time to go home. Not for them, the question of why this task, they trudge along, in accordance with the detailed plan.

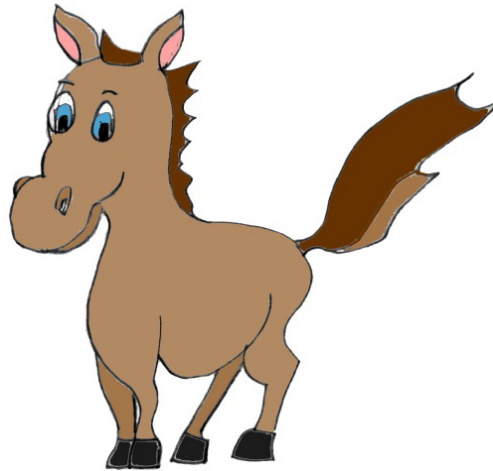


Figure 3 – work horse

A Work Horse will do any tasks suited to their skills, and do them well.

Capable of almost any load and provided they get clear instructions, they can do anything. They may not be particularly creative, but they are excellent at the mundane stuff that no one else wants to do. If you want a repetitive task done well – go to the workhorse.

Like the eager beaver, they do not have sense of the wider project but they do not mind change, as each day brings a new set of tasks for them. If this changes, they do not mind, as they will just start at the top and diligently continue down their to-do-list. They are not creative though, and will be stuck if there is not a process they can follow.

If threatened, a workhorse will wait out the danger patiently until they can continue with the task they were doing. Then they will carry on as if nothing had happened.

A Work Horse is systematic, task focussed, thorough but is not creative and will avoid responsibility.

2.2.3 Lazy Lizard

As a cold-blooded creature, the lizard is not able to moderate its temperature in the same way as us mammals. While its body temperature can rise alarmingly in the summer, it will fall sharply in line with the thermometer. As a result, it needs to keep its temperature stable by conserving energy as much as possible. Each day it must check the temperature and decide how lazy it needs to be.

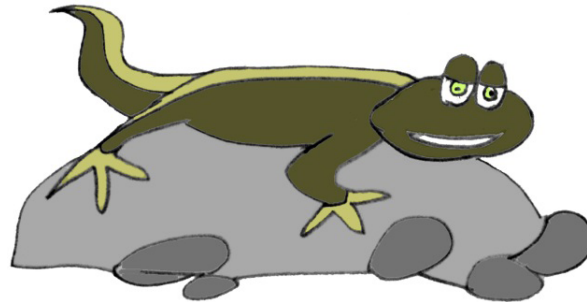


Figure 4- lazy lizard

There is no certain time for the lazy lizard to arrive to the project as they may have overslept that day, or perhaps have tried a new shortcut to work that didn't work as planned. Breakfast too, is a moveable feast, as they seek out quicker and less effortful ways to prepare and consume it. On a project, the lazy lizard will take shortcuts wherever they can, even at the cost of quality. They are friendly, especially to other lizards, and love to chat around the coffee machine.

While it can be very frustrating to have a lazy lizard in your project team, their knack for finding shortcuts can also be an asset. Although they are not generally creative, if it means saving them effort, they can sometimes be motivated into helping in this way.

When threatened, lazy lizards will try to make themselves look bigger and more important than they actually are. They will stand their ground until they very last minute, telling you everything is fine, when at last they will scamper off, leaving you with their 'tail' (e.g. incomplete task). Later, when the coast is clear, they will reappear with a new 'tail'.

Their attitude to change is to wait and see. They know that they cannot handle change well, so they will take no action until they have to.

A Lazy Lizard is creative at finding shortcuts, talkative but avoids work and responsibility.

2.2.4 Secret Squirrel

Squirrels are small and naturally shy animals. In the past, humans used to eat them, so Squirrels are naturally cautious of humans. Because they cannot digest cellulose and, although they store food ready for the hard times, are often hungry. You will probably have seen squirrels digging frantically for their stores of nuts from the previous year. They are also naturally quite clever at solving problems, adept at extracting nuts left for birds, regardless of how well we try to ‘Squirrel-proof’ the containers.



Figure 5 – secret squirrel

An advertisement for Alcatel-Lucent. The background is a night-time aerial view of a city skyline with lights reflecting on a river. A large yellow circle in the upper right contains the text "What if you could build your future and create the future?". Below this, the text reads "The innovation accelerator" and "One generation's transformation is the next's status quo. In the near future, people may soon think it's strange that devices ever had to be 'plugged in.' To obtain that status, there needs to be 'The Shift'." At the bottom, the Alcatel-Lucent logo and the website "www.alcatel-lucent.com/careers" are displayed.

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The Secret Squirrel will slip into the office unnoticed by the rest of the project team. Given the choice, they will position their desk carefully where they can protect it from 'attackers', and where they can work in quiet and uninterrupted solitude. Because Secret Squirrels work well on their own and are excellent problem solvers, they are good at investigating resources and finding out information on a project.

They adapt well to change too, using their considerable problem solving skills to find new solutions.

However, they are not team players or strong communicators, preferring to keep the information to themselves. They do not really know how to share, so need to be encouraged to present their information in a way that is clear, structured and non-threatening.

When threatened, they will hide away, alone. Often they will take their information with them, burying it somewhere safe until the danger is past.

A Secret Squirrel is a great resource investigator and researcher, smart, adaptable but a poor communicator.

2.2.5 Mischievous Monkey

You can almost hear Tarzan cry out as you watch the astonishing acrobatics of the Monkeys as they swing through the trees at dizzying heights. It is hard to tell if they are alone or part of a group, as they move so fast. Fearless and strong, they form alliances and teams according to what is required under the current circumstances. Territorial, they bicker and argue about who can do what, and have no compunction about stealing tit-bits from other Monkeys.

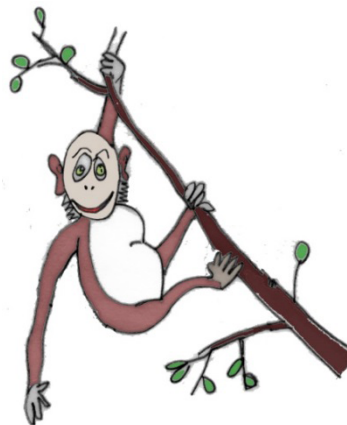


Figure 6 – mischievous monkey

You will almost certainly know when the Mischievous Monkey has arrived, as they are opinionated and not at all shy about sharing their opinion on any subject. Smart enough to grasp the big-picture; they will also have an opinion about how best they can help achieve it. A decided ally in times of change, they will quickly and creatively identify new options, often defying what is convention or the most cautious solution. Do not give the Mischievous Monkey the mundane tasks on the project, as they will become bored quickly and a bored Monkey is trouble! They need to be encouraged to give their attention to a complex task, with a large degree of freedom. However, at the same time you will need to monitor them discreetly, as they can be a little thoughtless and rough with less intelligent or quick thinking teammates. Even more so than the squirrel, they are consummate problem solvers and creative thinkers. You will have no trouble knowing what a Mischievous Monkey is doing though, because they will tell everyone!

A threat will make a monkey dangerous and even more erratic. However, they are also excellent at creating new solutions to overcome the threat.

A Mischievous Monkey is very smart, creative, adaptable, agile and a good communicator, but has a low boredom threshold and will challenge the status quo.

2.2.6 Perky Penguin

Contrary to popular belief, Penguins are as at home in the warm Tropical waters of the Galapagos Islands as they are at in the freezing waters of Antarctica. Naturally friendly, sociable and rather loveable, you will find them in almost every zoo across the world.

In their natural habitat, most Penguins form large mutually supportive groups, some as big as thousands of individuals. They share the responsibility of safeguarding the group, taking it in turns to take the risk of exposure on the outside and the safety of being in the protected centre of the group. Penguin parents share responsibility of care and raising their babies too. You might think that this group of large numbers of Penguins would result in attention to hygiene, but this is not the case. Penguins have developed a high tolerance for 'mess'.

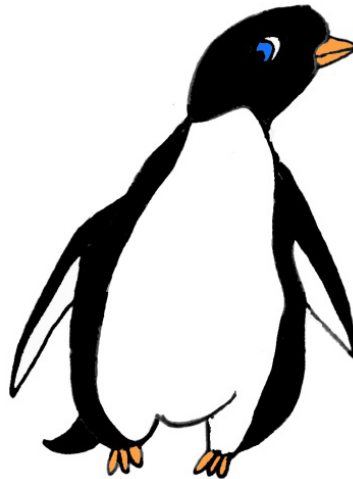


Figure 7 – perky penguin

Perky Penguins on a project are sharing and caring too. They are often the glue that holds the team together, as they notice when individuals are not participating. For them, the team is all-important, even beyond the individual tasks or sometimes the ultimate goal of the project. They are smart enough to grasp the big picture, but are unlikely to challenge it in the way a Monkey will.

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They like to have fun too, being naturally playful, so are ideally suited to taking the role of social secretary in the team. They have a natural sense of fair play, and expect everyone to share the good and bad tasks. As good communicators too, they can position the overall goals in terms each other member of the team will understand.

A threatened Penguin is not dangerous, but they can rally the team to face the danger together.

Unfortunately, they focus so much of their time on 'the team', they frequently forget to get on with own tasks or attend to the detail. This can result in many messes, as they leave tasks incomplete or not done well.

A Perky Penguin is caring, fun, will pull a team together and help motivate them but is rather slap-dash.

2.3 Trust versus Process

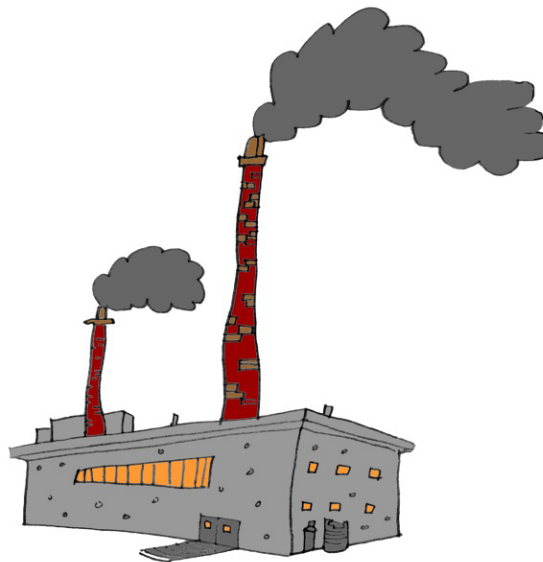


Figure 8 – old management factory

At the time of the Industrial Revolution when management, as we know it today, first appeared, the relationship was one of 'boss' and 'worker'. Workers would clock in at the beginning of the day, managers would instruct them exactly what to do, and they would clock off when they were finished. There was very little room for initiative or variance. They worked the specific hours managers told them to do, and their time was strictly controlled. Days were long and hard. The role of their manager, who often owned the business (or factory) they worked in, was to control their work rigidly, because 'The workers couldn't be trusted to do the work otherwise'; especially after the evolution of mass production and the tedium this introduced; and to avoid accidents and sabotage.

As organisations grew bigger, managers could no longer directly manage the workers, so started to implement clear detailed processes to ensure workers did as required when the manager was not present.

Roll the clock forward to today and the implementation of formal project management processes, and now, in the same way as workers, project managers are bound to work in certain prescribed ways.

Today, most people are articulate, well educated and well informed. They have a great deal to offer but they frequently feel 'underused'; they are constrained from adding all the value they could by 'The boss' model of project management together with the forest of complex politics and processes that comes with it. We measure project productivity, but still assume this means simply the number of tasks completed or the number of hours worked, or the delivery of the original and probably now outdated, objectives.

A lot of us talk quite glibly about 'empowerment' without really understanding what this really means. Empowerment means giving people the freedom to exercise assigned 'power' to make decisions and take actions when they feel comfortable, accountable and supported. It means taking a step back and not interfering even when the team is taking an approach that you would not take. It does not mean abdication, but facilitation. Therefore, even though you trust people to be progressing towards agreed goals, you should still ask questions about where they are. Perhaps they need your help, but are reluctant to ask. Maybe their culture makes it difficult to give you bad news about delays or problems.

Effective project management means that you must trust everyone in the team to be committed to the goals, and be truthful about progress. However, do not forget to verify!



The advertisement features a circular logo on the left with three stylized human figures in the center, surrounded by four interlocking gears and four curved arrows pointing clockwise. To the right of the logo, the text 'UNLEASHING CHANGE MANAGEMENT' is written in large, bold, blue capital letters. Below this, the dates 'OCTOBER 18 & 19, 2018' and the location 'DE RODE HOED AMSTERDAM' are listed in smaller blue capital letters. At the bottom, there is a silhouette of an Amsterdam skyline including a windmill, several buildings, and a bridge. In the bottom left corner, the text 'Global Executive Events' is written in a serif font.

3 People are not just resources

One of the key roles of a project manager is to manage the people resources across a project. You produce a beautiful project plan with lots of tasks neatly associated with the individuals who will be delivering those tasks. Perhaps you get past the first few milestones with just an occasional delay reported. Suddenly one of your team admits that progress has not been quite as good as they have said. You sit and scratch your head with puzzlement trying to work out what went wrong. Whatever the reason is, chances are that you have forgotten that those ‘people resources’ are really people.

The problem is that people do not always (hardly ever) behave in a way that is entirely predictable.

You may also think that, just because you are the project manager, and not their line manager, you do not have the responsibility to understand your team. It is easy to forget that your team members are an essential part of your project team, and that without them you will not be able to deliver a successful project. Getting them to work with you in the best way possible will make them happier to work with, your life easier and your project more likely to be successful.

3.1 Build the team

“Whatever we do must be in accord with human nature. We cannot drive people; we must direct their development. The general policy of the past has been to drive; but the era of force must give way to the era of knowledge, and the policy of the future will be to teach and lead, to the advantage of all concerned.”

– Henry L. Gantt

For some projects, the team will be just you. For others, you will involve other members of staff, suppliers, third parties with specialist skills, customers etc. There will be some people who already know each other well while others will be new and unfamiliar. There will be endless opportunities for misunderstandings, uncertainty and even suspicion. The certainty is that they will not all have worked together before.

The better these people all know each other – the better they will work together. Part of your job as the project manager is to mould this group of individuals into a fully functioning, performing team. Consider doing some team building, for example, a short project initiation meeting that everyone attends or a creative team building session. Ensure that everyone understands the brief, in particular the desired outcome of the project and their role. If you have key project milestones, get the key project team members together to review progress.

3.2 Strong Leadership

"[project] Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things." – Peter F. Drucker

Teams need strong leaders. To avoid having to fire fight when the unexpected happens, a strong leader will clarify the objectives and help the individual members of the project team to keep working in the same direction. Leaders know that every individual in the team is important and has an important contribution to make.

An effective project manager needs to be a strong leader – providing guidance, instruction, direction, leadership to the team and monitors the quantitative and qualitative results, thus freeing the project team to get on with delivering the results.

3.2.1 Clear Goals and objectives

"Of all the things I've done, the most vital is coordinating the talents of those who work for us and pointing them towards a certain goal." – Walt Disney

It does not matter whether you are implementing a new Computer system, moving office or organising an event – you need to be clear what the successful outcome i.e. the project's specific deliverables are from the organisation's perspective. This outcome should be measurable e.g. saving one hour a day on entering customer data, or creating space for an additional two members of staff, or having an uninterrupted office environment or raising your profile with fifty new potential customers.

It is not enough that *you* understand the goals and specific deliverables of the project – they must be clear to everyone and agreed by everyone in the team. The team should review the goals often. Otherwise, individuals will soon impose their own 'version' of the goals, and before you know it, the individuals will start working towards their own goals not the team goals.

As highlighted in the Change Management section, it is likely that the specific deliverables will change across the life of your project. One frequent consequence of this is that the project manager will know and understand the current goals and specific deliverables, but the project team will still be working to the original specific deliverables.

3.2.2 Beware of group think

"If everyone is thinking alike, someone isn't thinking." – General George Patton Jr.

While it is essential that the members of your team have a shared view of the common goal, where a project relies on highly skilled specialists, or is very large, the project team can become overly insular. While a common view of the project may be a good idea, when individuals become unwilling, or unable, to question the view that 'everything is going well' when they believe it is not, progress stops.

Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that happens when a group of people have such a strong desire for harmony or conformity, which the group endeavours to minimise conflict by becoming deaf to external influences. The group also tends to avoid controversial issues, alternative solutions and the illusion that they are making the right decisions.

3.2.3 Respect differences

"If, on your team, everyone's input is not encouraged, valued, and welcome, why call it a team?"

– Woody Williams

One of the great things about a team is that the individuals bring different skills to the team. But, perhaps you've had the experience where some team members didn't complete what you expected them to do, or maybe were not quite flexible enough, so things 'fell between the cracks' or someone valued for their attention to detail didn't see the wider picture. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, different people often approach tasks in different and often unexpected ways. To be effective, teams need a mix of different skills and with these come different ways of working. Be aware of this, and respect these differences. After all, someone who sees things differently from you may be able to solve a problem you cannot.

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3.3 Nurture your team

"[Project] Management is about arranging and telling. Leadership is about nurturing and enhancing."

– Tom Peters

Effective project managers seek to understand the motivation and skills of every individual in their team. They create project teams that make the most of these individuals and create an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding.

Projects are about change, but usually need a bunch of people to deliver them. People work faster and smarter if they feel that they are really part of a team. Effective project managers know that effective teams have:

- Strong but fair Leadership
- Overcome the need to blame each other
- Common Goals
- Time out together
- A shared Plan
- Respect for each other's differences
- Clear Roles and Responsibilities

Effective project managers actively create the environment where this happens.

3.4 Motivate your team

"Rewards and motivation are an oil change for project engines. Do it regularly and often." – Woody Williams

We live in hard times currently, with our teams of people struggling with no pay rises, limited bonuses (unless you are a banker) and longer hours – just to keep our project on track. If you are project manager of a team, you will know that a motivated team is a more productive team!

However, while most people start out motivated on a project, it does not take very much effort to destroy this. It is also easy to think that you can throw them a bit more money or promise that something wonderful will happen after the project is finished. This is both lazy thinking and quite unnecessary.

Motivation takes a bit of extra effort, but need not be expensive either in terms of time or expense. Here are five key ways you as the project manager can motivate your team.

- When individuals, or the team, do something well i.e. something beyond their normal responsibilities, find a way to congratulate them. This does not have to be in the form of extra cash – it could be a public thank you, a letter of thanks, a day off or even a voucher for a dinner etc. It *does* have to be immediate however, so that, psychologically, they connect the reward with the positive behaviour you want to encourage.
- Get to know everyone in your project team, and get to know, and respect, one special strength they each have. It may not be immediately obvious, but it will help you get to know them in a positive way, that will come over as an affirmation and encouragement. It will also make them feel appreciated as a person.
- Involve your project team in planning. This will help them understand the connection between their task success and the overall project success. You may also get some great ideas that you had not thought of.
- Be enthusiastic and excited about your project. If you are not, then your team will not be either.
- Be flexible. As long as your team members do the work on time, it may not matter if they have to work slightly different hours to suit their personal circumstances or work from home. Try to focus on the results, not on hours worked too.

3.5 Tips

Tip #1 Run an interactive project initiation meeting that everyone attends, or a creative team building session, to review and define the goals in terms everyone understands. Do this again at regular intervals throughout the project to ensure that everyone understands the current interpretation of the goals. Invite key stakeholders as well as the project team.

Tip #2 Spend time with each individual member of your team. Get to know what motivates each of them (this may surprise you), how they work and what their special skill is (everyone has one).

Tip #3 Be flexible. Better to have a motivated team that delivers late on one minor deliverable than a demotivated team that delivers late on a major deliverable when it really matters.

Tip #4 Do not play the blame game. Mistakes happen. Nothing demotivates an individual and a team faster. Take time to work out what went wrong and what you need to do to prevent it happening again.

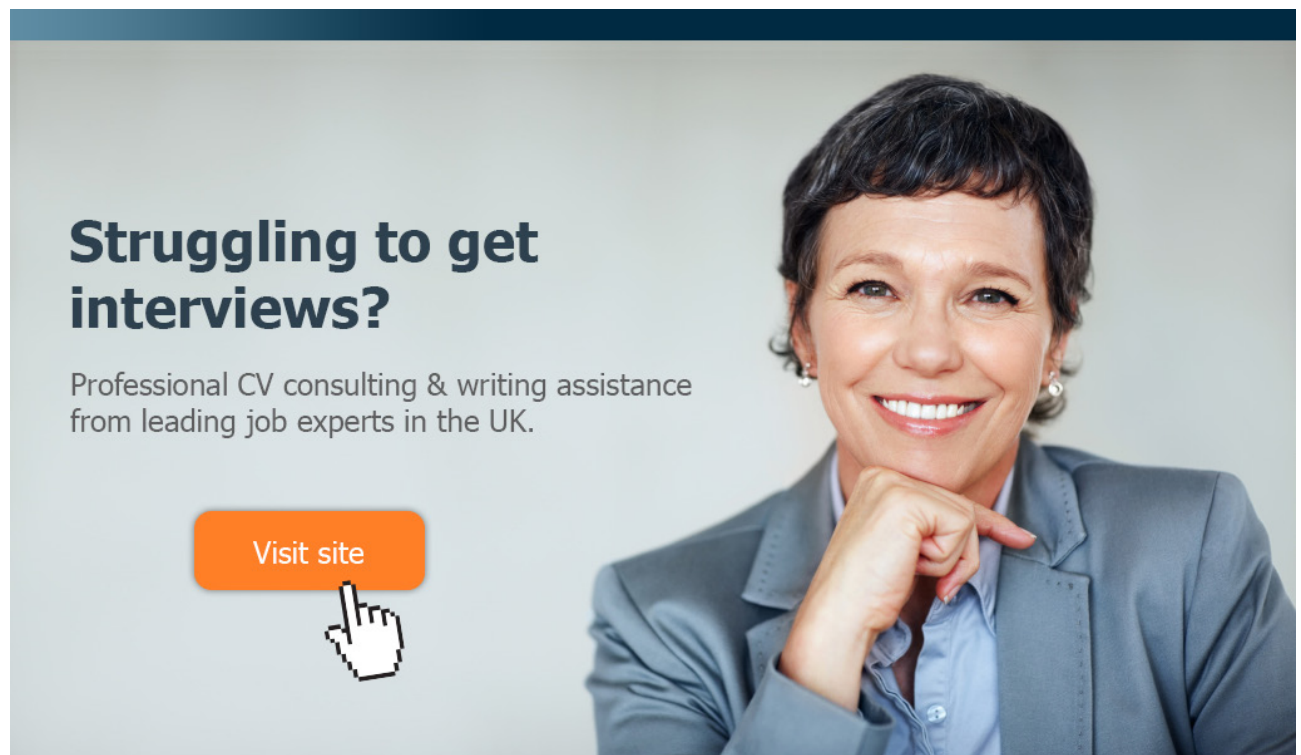
Tip #5 Say *thank you* often. Easily done – and equally easy to forget.

4 Empower your team

Empowerment creates a sense of ownership within your project team. This will make for a smoother project, a happier and more motivated team. It will also make your life as a project manager easier. Your aim should be to create a working environment in which people are well informed, trusted and able to contribute without your constant supervision.

This sounds easy, but requires stepping back from the command and control that many project management methodologies encourage. The basic principles:

- Share the goals. Do not just tell your team what they are, but discuss what this actually means in organisational terms and for them as individuals working on the project.
- Learn to Delegate properly
- Communicate effectively
- Share what you know, and facilitate your team to share what they know with each other
- Give your team your support and encouragement through mentoring
- Trust them



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4.1 Share the goals

Goals give you a clear long-term vision of what your stakeholders want your project to achieve.

The clearer they are, the better you are able to deal with proposed changes, as you will have a set of well-understood and defined criteria against which to measure the impact and relevance of changes. Moreover, there will be changes!

If you are unable to determine clear goals for your project, then go back to your Project Sponsor and find out.

Sharing these goals makes them visible to everyone and gives them a sense of the value their contribution to the project will have.

Here are some reasons you should share the goals with your project team:

- **Task context.** Sharing the goals helps team members keep focus and see a connection between what they do (tasks) and the required outcome (goals).
- **Clarity.** The more often you share the goals, the clearer they will become for you too.
- **Motivation.** It is very easy to get bogged down in tasks that appear to have no value. It is much more motivating to see a purpose in what you are doing.
- **Problem solving.** It is much easier to get the teams help to solve a problem e.g. arising from a change request, if everyone is clear about the overall goals.
- **Collaboration.** It is better to be seen as part of the overall organisational team, than to be regarded as a necessary evil that does not understand why we're doing this. The stakeholders will respect your contribution more, if they see you get the point of it all. See the section on Collaboration for more details.

4.2 Delegate

Picture the scene. You are still in the office fixing problems late into the evening. You took your mobile phone on holiday, even though your wife said 'no work this time darling or I'll leave you/go on my own next time/drop your phone in the swimming pool (you choose)'

You may like to think that you are the only person who can sort out the critical path of your project or prepare the end of stage report. You have not shared the way to do things because, let us face it; no one can do it quite like you do.

To delegate effectively:

- Identify what the goals for your project are, and share them with your team. Agree individual goals and focus on these rather than every task. Then, the only tasks you will need to focus on are those on your critical path.
- Accept that people will not do their tasks the same way you would. It will be maddening for you at first but, provided they deliver the goals, does it really matter how they do it?
- Give people authority that matches their responsibility. Be clear where their authority begins and ends, but do not limit it too much.
- Mentor rather than control.
- Recognise people's achievements and say thank you sincerely when they do well.
- Remember people have to learn to become competent. You were not born fully functional. Also, help people learn from failure as well as success.
- Give people more time if they are not as experienced as you are. Be prepared to stretch people – and give them support.
- Give people the information they need (or indicate where to get it).
- Do not make assumptions about people's potential without looking closely. However, look for competence and potential not just experience.

4.3 Communicate

Good communication is a key element of every project today. You need to engage well with your colleagues, team, customers and stakeholders to get your message across – whether proposals, plans, budgets, recovery actions, self-defence or purely dissemination of information. If you communicate well, then you are able to influence people effectively, motivate them towards their goals and inspire the confidence that you can achieve them. See the section on Communication for more details.

4.4 Encourage Knowledge sharing

Have you ever heard anyone say 'they can't fire me because I'm the only person who knows how to do this'? Perhaps you have said it yourself. Over the past few years there has been an explosion in the number of people whose jobs are directly related to their expertise and who guard 'what they know' as insurance against losing that job. The problem with this is that it creates knowledge silos, increases training costs and stifles creative problem solving. The impact of not sharing any information on a project can be substantial.

Do not just think of your team either. Knowledge sharing across your whole organisation, or at least your key stakeholders, can benefit you too. Increased understanding of how you manage a project will mean your stakeholders get a better understanding of how to manage a project and make your life as a project manager much easier.

4.4.1 Benefits of sharing your knowledge

As the project manager, you should show your team that knowledge sharing is essential by doing it yourself first.

- Increases the skills of your team
- Improves your ability to solve tricky problems
- Makes delegating easier
- Improves understanding of stakeholders
- Improves your understanding of your stakeholders

4.4.2 How to share knowledge

What is knowledge? Knowledge is a combination of know-how and know-why. Critical knowledge is the big-stuff like how you put the project plan together, the detailed scope etc. You will not be able to share all the knowledge, so focus on that which is most useful to share.

- Identify the 'big stuff' like how the plan is put together, project strategy, project management glossaries, detailed scope etc.
- Capture it in some form e.g. documents, a database etc. that can be shared
- Let people know how to access it
- Show them how to add their knowledge
- Reward people who share (a public thank you is often as effective as a monetary reward)
- Keep doing it

People will be motivated to share their knowledge for a variety of reasons. Often they will share because they like to help their teammates, or because they can see that when individuals in the team learn, the whole project benefits. Mostly they will share if they see other people sharing with them.

4.5 Be a Mentor

Mentoring is a powerful personal development and empowerment tool. Being a mentor gives you the opportunity to help individual project team members think about their options; set goals and support them to stay focused in the pursuit of those goals.

You will obviously not have time to mentor everyone in your project team! However, you can apply some of the key principle of mentoring to the way you manage your individual team members. You will also learn some key leadership skills, which, together with increasing their confidence will improve your ability to deliver a successful project.

Key principles of mentoring:

- Check for any conflict of interest
- Be empathic: see the world through their eyes
- Ask questions: open questions, probing questions, but not leading questions
- Listen Actively
- Suggest not tell
- Agree goals and objectives
- Boost their confidence
- Mentoring does not guarantee success. But it will certainly help towards achieving it
- Be a sounding board for new ideas
- Help them learn from your successes and mistakes.



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4.6 Trust

Trust is one of those funny things: it is hard to define, yet you know when you do not have it.

(Trust is) "the state of readiness for unguarded interaction with someone or something." – Dr. Duane C. Tway, Jr.

Trust is the foundation for good communication, effective delegation, motivation and the extra effort people are prepared to put in to get something done on time e.g. a milestone achieved or a quality project deliverable. With a good level of trust on a project, almost everything is easier to achieve.

Trust comes from your perception of someone's

- **Competence.** Are they sufficiently knowledgeable?
- **Consistency.** Will I know what to expect?
- **Integrity.** Are they honest?
- **Favourable intentions.** Will they look out for me?

Most people start out a new relationship wanting to trust and be trusted. On a project, where you may not know many of your team before you start, the ability to trust the other project team members, especially the project manager, can be crucial. Be aware that it is relatively easy to cause a loss of trust, and very hard to win trust back.

4.6.1 Competence

To establish perceived competence, be prepared to answer questions about your previous project success. If you have had some failures in the past, show that you have learnt from what went wrong and understand what works better.

If you make mistakes as a project manager, be honest about them and get help quickly.

You should also show confidence in your ability to manage the project team and the stakeholders.

4.6.2 Consistency

What people are looking for here is that you do what you said you would do. Remember that people generally do not like change, and they hate uncertainty. Uncertainty means they have to check what you might do, regardless of what you have said. They like to know that your communication will always be at the same level.

4.6.3 Integrity

Integrity is a combination of honesty and consistency of character. Let's face it; no one wants to work for a dishonest boss. If you make mistakes as a project manager, always own up and get it fixed.

Be aware that different people have differing levels of integrity, which will colour their perception of yours. The best approach is to be consistent and transparent in your actions.

4.6.4 Favourable Intentions

You can be competent, consistent and honest, yet if people do not believe you are looking out for their interests, they still will not trust you.

Because we are talking about perceptions rather than reality, this can be quite subjective. The most effective way to build this dimension of trust is to do something that has a positive outcome for your project team. Support them when faced with difficulties, even if it means a bit more work for you. Small successes, combined with public recognition of those involved, can build a sense of success in your project team that demonstrates your goodwill. You build and maintain trust through many small actions over time.

If you commit to them, they will commit to you.

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5 What Stakeholders really want

Project managers face the challenge of gaining buy-in and information from a variety of people who do not report directly to them. The ability to influence can have a significant impact on their ability to deliver a successful project. Many project managers make the mistake of ignoring what motivates their stakeholders and not understanding what those stakeholders really want from the project. You may have the most comprehensive scope document, full of technical and procedural detail, but without knowing what drives them, you only have half the picture.

Why is it important?

Think about your previous projects. How many times did a stakeholder spring an unexpected change on you, or act in a way that was contrary to what they said they would do? Alternatively, perhaps you heard someone say ‘I know that’s what I said, but what I meant was this...’ Alternatively, maybe you got all the way to the end of the project and found that, although you had delivered exactly what was in the specification, your stakeholders were not happy with it.

This is not because they have bad intentions. However, they may be subject to office politics or other pressures external to your project that you do not know about. These may lead to unexpected and inconsistent requests. Digging a little deeper can help you understand the background to some of these, helping you anticipate better and respond more effectively.

All projects rely on the support of a variety of stakeholders. Indeed the involvement of stakeholders is now so integral to business and projects that you would be forgiven for thinking that stakeholders have always been a consideration. Surprisingly, the modern concept of stakeholders really only emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

5.1 Who are your Stakeholders?

Today, the definition of stakeholders has expanded to include anyone who has a perceived ‘stake’ in the project. So who are they?

“Any individual, group or organization that can affect, be affected by, or perceive itself to be affected by, an initiative (programme, project, activity, risk).” – Prince 2 Glossary of Terms

In practical terms, they can include any or all of the following:

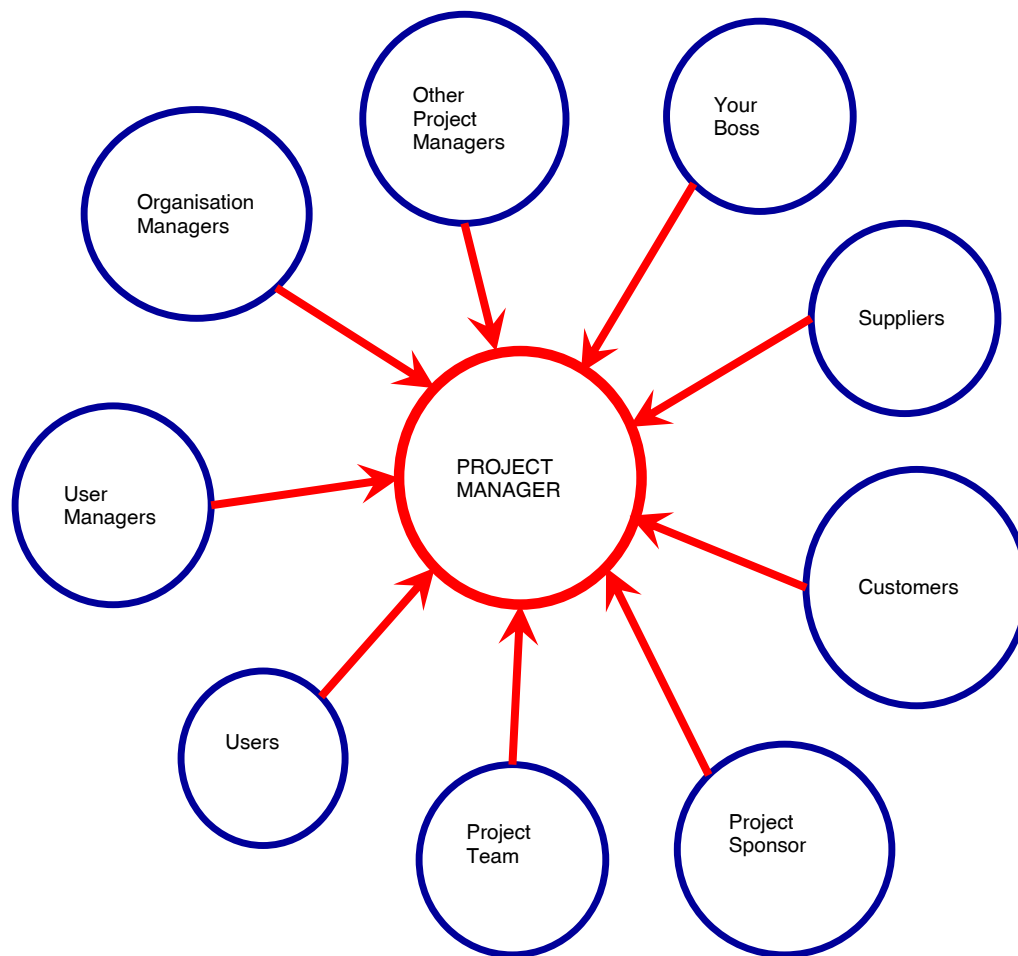


Figure 9 – Stakeholder map

It is easy to assume that Stakeholders all have the same, or similar, expectations. While this would be very convenient, unfortunately, this is just not true.

5.11 Project Sponsor

In theory at least, the project sponsor is the person who decided the project was necessary, and who will ultimately decide if it is successful. They rarely have experience or training in understanding how a project works. As the project manager, you will probably need to guide them in what is and is not possible and manage their expectations accordingly.

It is essential to have a thorough discussion about not just the actual deliverables, but what they really mean in organisational terms. Some tips:

- Ask them clearly how the decision making process will work. Some sponsors will want to delegate certain decision downwards, some will not.
- Agree how change management requests will work e.g. which will have to have the sponsors agreement, how you will amend the budget and project timescales etc.
- Do not bombard them with lots of information. Even if the project process you are using requires a detailed report to go to the project sponsor, make sure it includes a brief summary with no geek speak. They will thank you for it.
- Ensure that no major problem comes as a surprise to them. If it is organisation related or related to disagreement about scope, for example, they will almost certainly be able to clarify.
- Find a way to maintain regular contact with them. Perhaps by delivering your report in person or even catching them in the lift! The better you and they know each other, the easier it will make managing changes.
- Do not be afraid to enlist their help!



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5.1.2 Your boss

Your boss will be looking for a successful outcome and no major problems along the way! Some tips:

- Check how well they know the project sponsor. Your boss may be able to smooth relations. You also will need to know if any project discussions are happening outside the project, to stop you suddenly being presented with a change as a 'done deal'.
- Do not bombard them with lots of information. Even if the project process you are using requires a detailed report, make sure it includes a brief summary.
- Ensure that no major problem comes as a surprise to them
- Do not be afraid to enlist their help!

5.1.3 User Managers

User Managers can be your allies or they can become your sworn enemies. Sometimes both. They rarely understand project management in detail, and often do not see the 'big picture' with regard to the organisation and the change the project is intended to deliver. Some tips:

- Ask the project sponsor to brief the managers on the purpose and scope of the project, together with the decision making process before you start the project. Be there when they do this.
- Have an agreed change management process that includes cost and timescale management. Quite often, user managers have no idea what the impact of a change request actually is. They simply know that they would prefer something to work this way rather than that.
- Be patient. They will probably have to change how they work, and may not find this at all comfortable.
- Talk to them in organisational terms not geek speak.
- Do not be afraid to enlist their help!

5.1.4 Users

In many ways, users have similar requirements to their managers. The main difference is that they are likely to be the people who will actually have to use what you produce whether it is a new software package, a new building or a new business environment. Their main concerns are:

- Will it be hard to learn?
- Will I have to change what I do and how I do things?
- Can I get that thing I hate changed, while other stuff is changing?

Effective management of user input can make a huge difference to the success or failure of a project. If you deliver something that users feel they cannot use, then it is unlikely that they will use it. Ergo, the project will be a failure. Some tips:

- Ask them how they currently work – what is essential and what is not. You may get an avalanche of feedback, but they will thank you for asking.
- Discuss how change management requests will work e.g. which will have to have the sponsors agreement, how you will amend the budget and project timescales etc. They may identify ways to make this easier in practice, but they should be in no doubt that only approved changes will happen. Let them know that the fewer the change requests, the more likely they are to be approved quickly. Ideally, the users should review all change requests together as a team, so you can collectively assess the overall beneficial impact. No individual scope creeps allowed!
- Explain that what looks easy to change sometimes is not, as it may affect something else or require rework of something that have already completed. Explain that the earlier they request a change, the more likely it is that you will be able to incorporate it.
- Talk to them in business terms not geek speak.

5.1.5 Project Team

How to manage your project team is covered in more detail in a previous section, but here is a summary of tips from the stakeholder perspective:

- Make sure they know how change management requests will work e.g. which will have to have the sponsors agreement, how you will amend the budget and project timescales etc. It is easy for users to try an end run around the process with weaker team members!
- Get them to know who the other stakeholders are. Unless you want to be working 24/7, you will want them to be able to coordinate with other stakeholders too.
- Ensure that no major problem comes as a surprise to you. Walk the talk (spend a little informal time with each member of the team).
- Get to know what their strengths and weaknesses are, so you can build on the strengths and develop through their weaknesses.

5.1.6 Business Managers

Business managers may be the same as your user managers, or they may be managers in other parts of the organisation. They may be managers who, while not directly involved in the project, have an interest in the results. For example, if you are implementing a new software system in the customer service department, the new system will affect sales managers too.

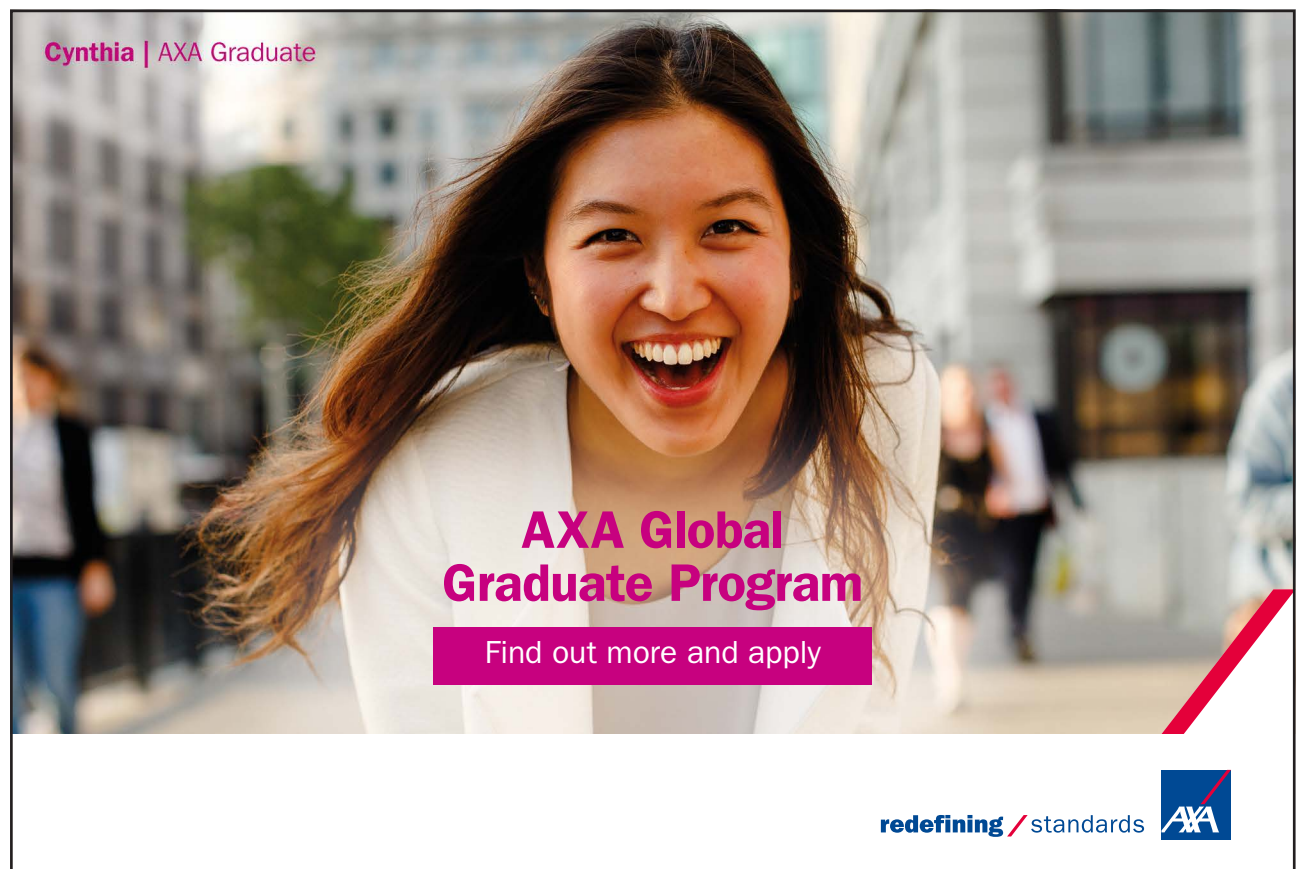
They rarely understand Project Management in detail, and often do not see the ‘big picture’ with regard to the business and the change the project is intended to deliver. Some tips:

- Ask the Project Sponsor to brief the managers on the purpose and scope of the project, together with the decision making process before you start the project.
- Talk to them in business terms not geek speak.
- Do not be afraid to enlist their help!

5.1.7 Customers

Customers can be internal or external. They may be your users, or they may be a separate group who have some vested interest in the outcome of your project. They will expect you to listen to them, even if the project does not directly affect them. Their primary concern will be the impact your project will have on other services they are already receiving. Some tips:

- Check what the impact of the changes your project will have on other services. In theory at least, your Project Sponsor is responsible for considering this, but having a good awareness of the wider environment will create confidence that you know what you are doing.
- Listen to any suggestions they might make.
- Talk to them in their terms not geek speak.



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5.1.8 Suppliers

Suppliers can be internal or external. Their primary concern will be keeping up to date with changes your project will have on products and services they are delivering to your project, other parts of the organisation and other customers. It is very easy to forget that you need to keep them well informed to ensure the interface between what you are delivering and what they are delivering does not cause additional work or costs.

- Agree how change management requests will work e.g., how will you manage the impact, amend the budget and project timescales etc.
- Keep them in the communications loop
- Ensure that no major change comes as a surprise to them
- Do not be afraid to enlist their help!

5.2 Managing the scope creep

Just as you get your project moving along nicely, along comes that nasty person called the scope creep. He (or she) is not happy with the project scope you painstakingly agreed at the start of the project, and now wants to change something substantial. Alternatively, he has a whole list of 'little changes' that he will keep presenting, even though it will delay the project while you review them all. He does not care that you might have to undo something you have already agreed to do, it's 'just a little change' they say.

The scope creep is not a stakeholder with a genuine and reasonable request; he is someone bent on increasing his powerbase at your expense or someone who wants to derail your project. Here are some tips for how to manage him; these tips apply equally well to anyone wanting to make changes on your project.

5.2.1 Clarify better

It is very easy to tell yourself, "I'll sort that out later", or "I don't want to upset my client by asking awkward questions at this point". Do not do it! The sooner you clarify the project scope the better. Ideally, you clarify the scope completely before you start, but if you are part way through the project, it is still worth clarifying as completely as you can then too.

If they do not know or cannot answer your questions, or if it is a big change, then you need to set their expectations as to the consequences.

5.2.2 Manage expectations (and risks)

Sometimes, there may well be very good reasons why a client cannot confirm details of the scope until the project unfolds. This is not necessarily a problem PROVIDED your client understands what the consequences are.

If you work with Innovators and Entrepreneurs on implementation projects, which involve many unknowns, there are bound to be changes along the way. The business environment is also becoming increasingly volatile, which means that what made sense at the start of the project, no longer does.

You did remember to do a risk analysis before you started the project, didn't you? If you have not done this, do it now with your client. That way, you can together understand the impact of changes in scope, and agree what you can do to mitigate them so you can stay within budget and timescales. Moreover, remember to do it before you start next time!

5.2.3 Have a good change management process

Sometimes the scope creep is just that – a creep. Perhaps they want to justify their role, assert control over you or just want to extract every ounce of value they can. On the other hand, maybe they just cannot make their mind up. This is particularly a problem when you have more than one client or stakeholder. I once managed a project where there were over 20 stakeholders at the weekly progress meeting; each competing to see who come up with the most changes! (Or so it seemed to us). Fortunately, we had a well-defined (and agreed) process for estimating the cost of each change (time and £), and agreeing the business justification for it with our chief client. This both slowed down the change requesting process and added some sanity into the decision to accept/not accept changes.

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5.3 Negotiate for Win-Win

Projects can often be a warzone as the project manager tries to hold onto the plan at all costs against the enemy project sponsors and scope creeps! Many of us derive our self-worth based on what we win. The trouble is that a winner means there is also a loser. It could be you.

"Here lies the body of William Jay, Who died maintaining his right of way – He was right, dead right, as he sped along, But he's just as dead as if he were wrong." – Dale Carnegie

However, thinking win-win does NOT mean being super nice NOR does it mean folding at the first sign of conflict. Win-win is about cooperation and sharing.

Effective project managers seek not just to deliver the defined objectives at any cost, but to gain the maximum mutual benefit to all involved. They know that in always keeping the desire for a mutually satisfactory solution in mind, they have a much greater chance of successfully completing the project. They know that this may mean sacrifices, but also that they must stand up for important issues too. They know that this means striking a balance between courage and consideration for the other position. Effective project managers also know that this may mean 'educating' the project sponsors that it is also in THEIR best interests to agree a solution to the problem or change that works for everyone.

When working with their team, Effective project managers know that it is essential to reward win/win behaviour.



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5.4 Influence your influencers

You will also need to identify who the key influencers on your project are. They may not be the most senior people. Careful observation will help you to identify them. Knowing who they are will help you to get support from them, and this may help should a problem arise.

Once you have some idea who they are, the next step is to identify whether they are supporters or blockers. You are likely to have both. In both cases, it is important to understand the scope of their influence. In other words – who, what and how strong their influence is. If you are inclined towards visual representation, you may find creating an influence map to be helpful.

Some of the skills you may find useful:

- Listening – hearing and retaining the meaning behind the words
- Open mindedness – not allowing your own assumptions to unduly influence you
- Empathy – seeing the position from their point of view
- Insightful questioning – probing beyond the superficial or emotional statement
- Relationship building – being friendly and appropriately sociable
- Creative problem solving – proposing ideas beyond the obvious or usual
- Logical reasoning – thinking through the path from start to finish
- Assertiveness – stating your ideas strongly and confidently
- Self-confidence – having faith in your own position
- Consensus building – identify a solution that is acceptable to everyone involved
- Conflict resolution – taking the emotion out of finding a solution that is Win-Win
- Negotiation – reaching agreement through exchanging value

Dale Carnegie said (paraphrased) that to win more people and influence them, you need a good array of interpersonal skills. Research has shown that people with above average interpersonal skills have substantially more influence.

Using your interpersonal skills to get to know your stakeholders, but especially your influencers, will increase the chances of your project being successful.

6 Managing Culture

6.1 What is culture?

Culture is an amalgamation of accepted norms, values and behaviours of any group of people. Culture influences how we manage, communicate and make decisions. Every nation, organisation, department and even project has its own culture. Knowing and understanding culture can help you understand and predict the response from both your team and your stakeholders. Culture affects how you negotiate, what people tell you and how you should respond.

6.2 Different types of culture

Every person you work with has been moulded by their own unique experiences and influences. Where they work and with whom, will also influence them, as will their age, their nationality, their position in the organisation or project team and their experience of other cultural influences.

Although it is often difficult to exactly understand a particular culture that is different to your own, here are some types of cultural difference that can help you be more aware of those differences.

6.2.1 National cultures

We now live and work in a multicultural working environment. Your project team may consist of people from a variety of different national backgrounds, as may your stakeholders.

Whilst this can add to the variety of skills and problem solving abilities of your team, it can also create variances with:

- **Communication preferences**, where some cultures prefer detailed rather than summary communications
- **Formality**, where some cultures have a strong preference for formal (or informal) management and communications
- **Hierarchy**, where some cultures are used to a hierarchical rather than a matrix approach to communication
- **Problem reporting styles**, where some cultures assign considerable guilt to admitting failure even on a small task
- **Openness**, where some cultures prefer to express disagreements outside of an open meeting

6.2.2 Organisational culture

When we spend so much of our time working closely with a group of other people within the workplace, it should come as no surprise that we create a culture there too. Its values, purpose, systems, processes, beliefs and habits define an organisation's culture. In the same way as national cultures form and change over time, so does an organisation's culture. You may think that an organisation works according to its written processes and procedures, but it applies these in the context of its culture. The processes may define what you should do in a particular circumstance, but the culture will define how you do it, and whether you do in fact do it as written. How many times have you heard someone say 'we don't do it like that round here'? Organisational culture is likely to manifest in:

- Quality of your scope
- Stakeholder commitment and availability
- Change requests
- Communication
- Meeting frequency and format
- Flexibility
- Financial management
- Problem management
- Work practices

As with national culture, it is important to be aware that people may act in a certain way that is inconsistent with what you expect. This applies in particular to your stakeholders, but may apply to your project team too.

Be aware that if your stakeholders are from different parts of a larger organisation or even, in some case, departments, they may not have the same cultural norms.

6.3 What to do about mismatches in culture

Often, the first sign that you have misread a culture is a strange experience in a meeting. Perhaps it was a stakeholder who suddenly criticises you in front of the other stakeholders for a problem you thought was resolved. Alternatively, a project team member finally admits that they will be several weeks late with their task, even though they assured you in last week's meeting that everything was on schedule.

As well as being aware of the potential differences in cultures, it is a good idea to get information about the cultures you might be dealing with. Look out for who attends the project meetings; observe how people are interacting and whether people share information freely or not. If it does not make sense, ask someone to explain. Your stakeholders will assume you understand their culture and will act accordingly.

Three areas of cultural difference are likely to affect your project:

- **Communications** – agree the details at the start of the project
- **Negotiations** – be aware of different styles and approaches
- **Decision making** – check how decisions will be made, who makes them and how firm they will be



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Jane, Chinese architect

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7 Communication is key

As seen in the Stakeholders section, you will need to communicate effectively with a wide range of people.

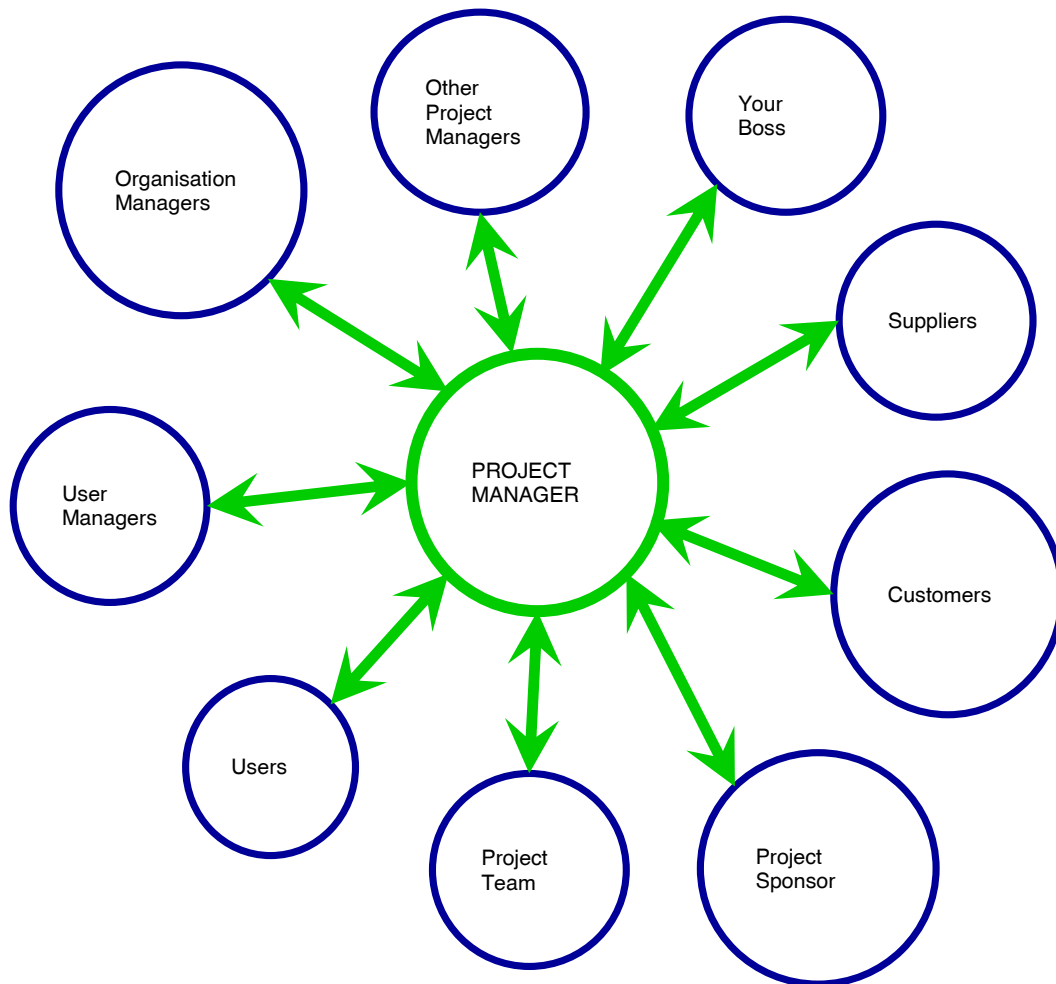


Figure 10 – Communications matrix

Good communication is a key element of business today. You need to engage well with your colleagues, team, customers and stakeholders to get your message across – whether proposals, plans, budgets, recovery actions, self-defence or purely dissemination of information. If you communicate well then you are able to influence people effectively, motivate them towards their goals and inspire the confidence that you can achieve them.

Unfortunately, while we might be very good at sending a message we are less good at ensuring that the recipient receives and understands the message in the way we intended. It is also very easy to assume that just because people are talking, that they are all communicating well too.

Perhaps you are having the requisite number of meetings, with the right topics but people are going away from those meetings uncertain about what was.

Some of the problems:

- People do not write well
- People do not know how to present their information in a format the audience will understand
- Your stakeholders do not understand your language, and you may not understand theirs. Even if your project is not a technical one, chances are that you will steeped in 'project-speak'.
- Underdeveloped listening skills.

In these days of remote working and ecollaboration, you may be reliant on technical tools for part of your communications, and not be able to get the richness of being regularly face-to-face with your stakeholders or project team. More IT tools are not always the answer.

7.1 Written communication

The ability to write clearly and unambiguously is a prize skill in all organisations. Poor writing results in loss of time and money as the reader struggles to make sense of the writer's intent and purpose. Too often, documents and reports on projects are overlong and poorly formatted, with incorrect grammar and punctuation.

7.1.1 What is the message?

Whether you are using a project management methodology like Prince 2, or not, you are likely to be asked to produce a number of documents detailing project progress. Keep in mind the following:

- Who will be reading the document and what will they want to know?
- What is the purpose?
- What main points must you address?

7.1.2 Format

Have you ever received a report with no headings or chapters – just a long, long, long pile of words that you got bored with after just a few lines? If you break up your words into interesting and meaningful ‘chunks’, it will make all the difference between your document being ignored, or being read and acted on. It is all about the readability. Some tips:

- Keep paragraphs short
- Use bullet points to emphasise lists (like this one)
- Use meaningful headings
- Be consistent
- Have a useful, but short summary if your document is more than 10 pages long

7.1.3 Style

The best documents are persuasive, informative and only as long as they need to be. Whether you are writing a brief email in response to a change request or an end of project report, it should be easy to follow your logic through to your conclusions.



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7.1.4 Grammar and Proofing

If you want people to perceive you as professional, you will proof read every document you produce – including emails. Poor grammar and spelling reflect poorly on you as a worker and make your stakeholders less likely to trust your ability to deliver. After all, poor work in one area suggests poor work in others. Do not rely on your spelling and grammar checker!

7.2 Spoken communication

There is a tendency in some quarters to assume that spoken communication can be largely adlibbed. Alternatively, that you can bung some words on a power point slide and read them as you go. However, if you want people to take you seriously, give some serious thought to the following:

At some point in your project, someone will likely ask you to make a presentation. It could be presenting the goals and scope to your team, the change management system to your stakeholders or detailing project progress. Keep in mind the following.

7.2.1 Preparation and practice

A little extra time spent preparing and practicing your presentation will make all the difference. Nothing is worse than sitting through an over-long, ill-prepared presentation. Nothing is more positively memorable than a well-prepared and succinct presentation.

- Who is your audience and what will they want to know?
- What is the purpose? (To inform or to persuade?)
- What main points must you address?
- How long do you have? Do not exceed this!

7.2.2 Format

You have probably heard the saying ‘say what you’re going to say, say it and finish with saying what you’ve said’. Take it to the next stage by not just repeating the key points, but building on them with a quote or summary.

Some tips:

- Make your opening memorable e.g. use a relevant statement, question or a quote
- Use pauses for emphasis
- Keep it short
- Finish on a positive e.g. a summary statement, call to action or a thank you

If you are really nervous or lacking confidence – get feedback or get help! There are many training courses for improving your speaking skills, including Toastmasters International.³

7.3 Jargon management

Almost all experts in every field have their own terms to describe what they do as a short cut to communication within their own expert group. Unfortunately, they often assume everyone else understands these terms, which they rarely do. No one will own up to it of course for fear of sounding stupid. No one will question a term or say “Sorry, I don’t understand”.

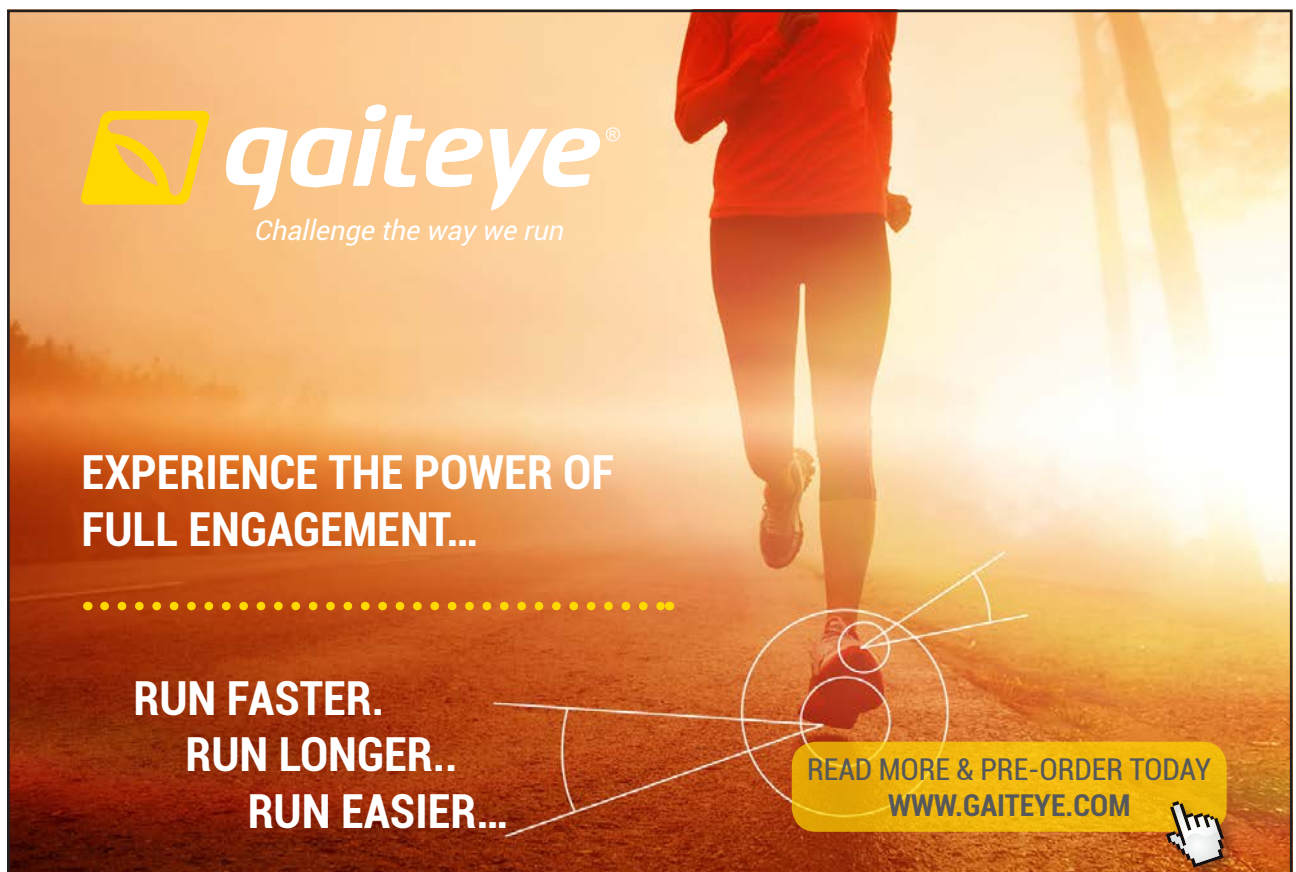
Project management is no different. Try not to use these terms in communication with non-project people or, if you must, be prepared to describe them further.

Project terms non-project people, e.g. stakeholders, may not understand, and how to describe them:

- **Baseline.** The initial project schedule before additional information became available and change requests were included
- **Change control.** Process used to ensure that you introduce changes in a controlled and coordinated manner
- **Constraints.** Factors that you cannot change. These may include deadlines, regulatory requirements and other projects
- **Critical path.** Sequence of tasks that you must complete on time for the entire project to finish on schedule. Tasks on the critical path have no float.
- **Dependency.** The link between tasks in a project, where one task will impact the execution of another task
- **Earned value management (EVM).** A project management technique for measuring project progress in an objective manner, with a combination of measuring scope, schedule, and cost in a single integrated system
- **Float.** The amount of time that a task in a project plan can be delayed without causing a delay to subsequent tasks and or the project completion date
- **Gantt chart.** A bar chart that tracks tasks across time, showing the interdependencies between tasks
- **Milestone.** A well-defined and significant step towards achieving a target, output, outcome or impact, allowing you to track progress
- **RAID.** A simple project management tool, often in the form of a spreadsheet, used to track Risks, Assumptions, Issues and Dependencies

Business Jargon you should know, and what it means:

- **Balanced scorecard.** A tool that measures financial, customer, internal business process and growth.
- **Cash flow forecast.** An assessment and understanding of the expected cash coming into and flowing out of the organisation in specific periods.
- **Competitive advantage.** The strategic development of more favourable benefits to enable customers to choose an organisation's product or service over its competitors.
- **Focus group.** Small groups of people, representing target audiences, that are brought together to discuss a topic that will offer insight for product development and/or marketing efforts.
- **Intrapreneurship.** Entrepreneurial-based activities within an organisation for the purpose of an innovative new activity within the organization itself.
- **Liabilities.** Debts that the organisation must pay.
- **Net Present Value (NPV).** A way of estimating cash shortfall on long term projects (or other business activities).
- **Payback period.** How long it takes to recoup an organisation's investment in a project or business operation.
- **Perceived risk.** The extent to which a stakeholder (or anyone else) is uncertain about the consequences of an action. This may not be the same as the actual risk.
- **Value Proposition.** Quantified review of benefits, costs and value.



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7.4 Listen first

Great project managers have effective listening skills. They know what is happening outside of their organisation, within their own business and within their own team.

A project manager's listening skills are essential to team building, motivation, creating enthusiasm and mutual respect. Through good listening skills, you acquire information, enabling you to identify and clarify issues, make decisions, resolve conflict and be creative.

To be effective, you will listen when:

- You want to resolve conflict
- You are giving performance feedback. Instead of telling your project team member what they did/didn't do, why not ask them for suggestions for improvement and then listen to the answer. People are often much more insightful than we think, and too often, feedback is just an opportunity to blame something for something that went wrong on the project.
- You want to *create* understanding. It is very easy to assume that everyone understands what they mean. However, it is important to remember that not everyone has the same core knowledge that you do, nor the same capability or experience to follow what may seem obvious to you. Time taken to ensure understanding will save more time later. So ask questions, listen to the answers, and then clarify where people have not understood.
- You want to increase innovation. Most projects are full of people with exciting ideas that they do not share for fear of being slapped down.
- You want to save time. Meetings are probably among the top resource drain on projects. Most people go to meetings to tell the other attendees stuff. Then have another meeting, because no one listened to the other people the first time etc. Why not go and listen instead; listening can transform an average meeting into a meaningful one. Better yet, just listen to the relevant people, and skip the meeting!

8 Collaborate

According to the dictionary, collaboration is where two or more people or organizations work together to realise shared goals. Collaboration on projects enables you to share skills, experience, tools, knowledge, 'clout', resources etc. Done well, it can save you time and money, and get you more business faster.

Most project teams are very good at what they do, but often do not have all the skills necessary to do all the things they would like to do. Perhaps you want to utilise technology you are not currently familiar with. Maybe you would like to work with someone who has a different perspective or greater knowledge. You could buy in these skills but it can often be more beneficial to share your own knowledge or activities with someone to your mutual benefit.

Collaboration relies on trust and openness, and works best when there is clear agreed goal or objective.

These days of course there are many tools to ease the process of project collaboration. Social Media has made it even easier to work this way, and we use it to collaborate with other people both locally and worldwide. If you don't want to risk exposing your own idea, why not pose a question about the problem you are trying to solve or the opportunity you are trying to exploit to a very wide audience via Social Media and get some diverse and interesting ideas. In the technical world, this is sometimes called 'crowd sourcing'.

8.1 Why Collaborate?

In the wider world, organisations are finding that they can have greater impact from collaborations than with the isolated intervention of individual organizations. In other words, collaboration may be the key to creating a better environment to do business in.

We live in an increasingly interconnected world, where business and other organisations are relying ever more closely on other people to deliver key parts of their projects. This places great pressure on organisations to understand how (and when) to collaborate.

Collaboration enables organisations to deliver more, and more effectively.

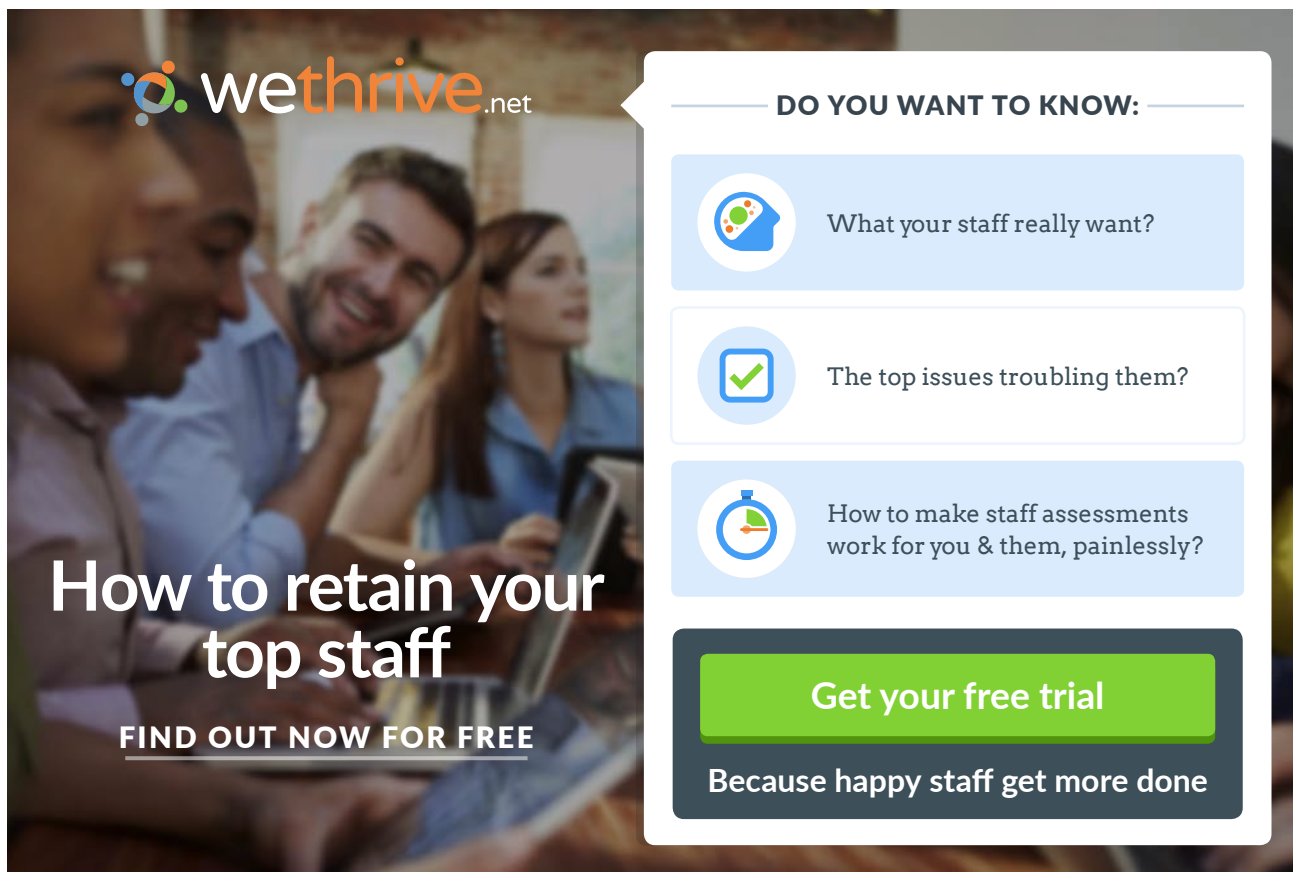
Many companies now collaborate with their customers about the definition and supply of products and services. Similarly, many companies collaborate with their suppliers about the definition and supply of products and services. There are also collaborations between companies that would previously have regarded themselves as competitors, where they work together to target a particular market opportunity.

Another example would be large construction projects, which require a significant degree of collaboration. Nuclear power stations are a good example.

At a more detailed level, there is plenty of evidence that suggests that people from different functions coming together to share their knowledge to solve problems is both a good route to good solutions and to innovations as well.

8.2 Who to collaborate with

- Project stakeholders – they know the business and can help you understand this better
- Other knowledge holders – may have skills you only need briefly
- Your professional institute and their members – detailed knowledge of standards and other projects
- Crowdsourcing – a pool of experienced people with ideas and solutions



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9 Meetings



Figure 11 – I have the detailed agenda Blah...blah...blah

Most of us would really rather not have to have meetings, but they are hard to avoid. Most of the project management methodologies require frequent meetings. Meetings between stakeholders, progress meetings, team meetings etc. etc. As a sociable species, people like to exchange information face to face.

If, like me, you attend many project meetings where you come away thinking ‘what was that for?’, then the following tips may help you to run your meetings more effectively.

9.1 Do you need to meet?

Be clear what the meeting is for. Meetings are for querying project information and then making decisions based on that information. Nothing else.

9.2 Who needs to be there?

Limit attendee numbers. Do not invite anyone (or attend) to a meeting if they are not crucial to the purpose. The effectiveness of a meeting will drop off rapidly beyond about 6–8 attendees.

9.3 Be prepared

Send out an agenda in advance of the meeting. How will people know how to prepare otherwise?

Ask people to send reports sufficiently in advance that everyone attending can read them before the meeting. Nothing is quite so time consuming as listening to people read their reports at the meeting. If it is important enough to know, it is important enough to read beforehand.

Set a time limit for the meeting. There is nothing worse than not knowing how long a meeting will last. Meetings generally should not last more than 2 hours – people will not stay focussed for longer. If you need to meet for longer – have two meetings. Long meetings also encourage wafflers, the complainers and the unprepared.

Set a rough time limit on individual agenda items. If one item is bogging you down, you probably need a separate meeting to sort it out.

Pick a location without interruptions. This might seem obvious, but it is surprising how often people do not do this.

9.4 Structure

Do not have AOB on your agenda. It just encourages the wafflers, the complainers and the unprepared. You can still allow anything that you need to deal with. Anything not important enough to be on the agenda can wait until another meeting.

Put agenda items in order of importance. That way you have a fighting chance of getting the most important stuff done.

9.5 At the meeting

The chair should chair. You cannot chair a meeting effectively if you get embroiled in the details of an agenda item. It is like trying to pat your head and rub your tummy at the same time. Some clever individuals can do it, but most of us end up looking foolish and doing neither well.

Do not allow anyone to have their mobile phone on. If they are waiting for a call, they will not focus on the meeting.

Get someone other than the chair to record decisions and actions. Do not note down all the waffle that led to the decision. If anyone wants this, they can either take their own notes, or attend the meeting in person (the usual reason for someone taking detailed notes).

Do not wait for the record for your actions. If you have agreed to do something, write it down yourself. You are much more likely to do it when you should that way.

Do not over-run without getting agreement from all attendees. Better yet, do not over-run!

Do not start late if not everyone is there yet. Most people will not be late more than once, if they know the meeting will start without them.

10 Learning from success and failure

The project is over. You have handed over the deliverables and you are ready for the next project.

On the other hand, perhaps it did not go well and you are now looking for someone to blame.

Stop!

Effective project managers take time at the end of the project to review what went well. They identify what to do better going forward without assigning blame. They know that assigning blame kills motivation and shuts down the improvement process. They also know that a simple and sincere ‘thank you’ to individuals in the project team makes all the difference.

Effective project managers also know that if the team really did not perform as they should, then the responsibility lies with them as the manager. By asking the team for suggestions on how to do differently next time, they know they personally will learn valuable lessons that will increase their success on the next project.

- **Be objective.** Use an outside facilitator if necessary.
- **Be inclusive.** Your team and stakeholders will all have something valuable to add.
- **Do not play the blame game.** Look for lessons learned and apply them next time.

Author Biography – Jacqui Hogan



Jacqui Hogan has been mentoring business owners, managers and directors to achieve their business goals since 2003. The combination of her technical IT background, empathy, people skills and systematic approach has delivered startling results for her clients.

Jacqui has wide experience in mentoring senior management and middle managers to be more effective. This includes both internal management responsibility, as well as practical experience managing difficult and challenging external client teams as an outsourced manager. Her experience is particularly strong in improving productivity, team building and developing managers within innovative IT companies, including those looking to improve their collaboration.

She has expertise in strategic planning and project management to deliver successful business solutions involving new ideas. She is particularly skilled in situations with a high degree of uncertainty or change: mentoring and motivating those involved and communicating effectively with stakeholders.

Jacqui is an experienced professional speaker on a wide range of management and non-management topics. She is also a regular blogger and you can share her management insights at <http://www.cocreative.co.uk> and on twitter [@CoCreative](https://twitter.com/CoCreative). As an author, she wrote the popular management book '7 Habits of a Great Manager', now available on Amazon and is co-author of 'Together Works' available on Amazon.

You can also find her on LinkedIn at <http://www.linkedin.com/in/jacquihogan>

Endnotes

1. With thanks to Ron McIntyre and Dr. David Avery, my co-authors of the book 'Together Works' in which we conceived the idea of translating animal behaviour to the workplace. Available on Amazon.
2. You should take these animal descriptions with a pinch of salt, as they are a generalisation of some of the more commonly recognised behaviour traits.
3. Toastmasters International is an international non-profit making organisation where you learn to improve your speaking skills in a supportive environment



The advertisement features a black header with the CMO Inspired Conference logo on the left, which consists of a green speech bubble containing the letters 'CMO'. To the right of the logo, the text reads 'INSPIRED CONFERENCE' in large white letters, followed by '25 OCTOBER | DE VERE BEAUMONT ESTATE | OLD WINDSOR UK' in smaller white letters. Below the header is a photograph of a large, white, classical-style building with a fountain in the foreground. At the bottom of the advertisement is a collage of four images: a panel discussion on a stage, a woman speaking into a microphone, a large audience seated in a conference room, and a man presenting at a podium. A black banner at the very bottom of the advertisement contains the text 'Join Over 100 Chief Marketing Officers & Digital Innovators' in green.

