Managing Stakeholders

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Every team will have a number of groups with an interest in their work: their stakeholders. These can be senior leaders, funders, customers, colleagues, regulatory bodies and more. The success and perhaps continuation of the team can be dependant on managing these groups.

Stakeholder Analysis

To identify who your team's stakeholders are

To prioritise these and begin to understand how to manage them

While ideally all stakeholders would be managed equally, some by position of power or interest will naturally be more important than others. If the team's continuation or success is dependant on these then it makes sense to analyse which groups are the most important and then develop a strategy to ensure they support the team.

I. Ask the team to identify the stakeholders and define these as closely as possible—such as is it a particular person in a company?

II. Plot these stakeholders onto the grid shown and develop a plan for each category:

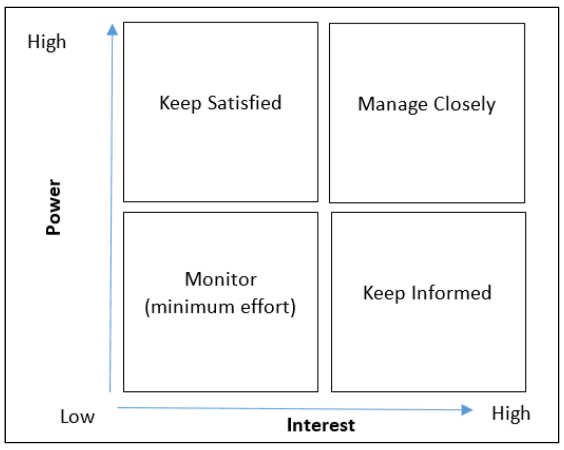
III. HP/HI—fully engage with these groups and make the greatest efforts to satisfy their demands.

IV. HP/LI—engage with these groups but at a level that reflects their interest.

V. LP/HI—keep these groups informed and check in from time to time.

VI. LP/LI—monitor these groups and decide the regularity of communication.

VII. From here decide what else you need to know about each stakeholder: What is their interest in your team? How are they likely to feel about the teams work? What is their primary motivator? How are they likely to react to any changes you propose? How can you win around any negative perceptions?



Things to think about: Understanding how to manage upwards is a skill that every manager needs to develop. It is not about "politics" but ensure you and your team's work is being understood.

Building Stakeholder Support

To build and maintain support from the most important stakeholders

The success of the team might be dependant on the support from stakeholders such as resources, access to information or approval. There therefore needs to be a plan to manage stakeholders. For real engagement and continued support, the plan can be based on creating personal relationships by the manager or their team members.

I. Introduce the concept of the ambassador to the team—someone who will promote the interests of the team to those stakeholders who have an influence or an interest in the team's progress.

II. Ask the team what this might involve in the context of the team and the key stakeholders. Identify their concerns and how they would best be continually informed of progress. To build the relationship though this should be initially face to face.

III. Ask the team assembled who would be best placed to build and maintain a relationship with the key stakeholders.

IV. Identify what information about the team and its progress should be provided to these stakeholders and how regularly. For example it might be important to regularly demonstrate to stakeholders the metrics around the team's key performance indicators, show the progress towards projects being made and/or the feedback the team has received.

V. The objective is to ensure that every key stakeholder becomes an active supporter of the team's work and goals. This is best done sincerely and in the spirit of building a professional relationship—your ambassador is not trying to be manipulative, but to develop a partnership with the stakeholder for the good of the team.

Things to think about: Being active in managing stakeholders is a necessity—if you are not demonstrating and promoting the team's value then the team might be seen as adding none.

Articulating Stakeholder Paradoxes

To provide a way to discuss conflicting stakeholder demands

To help define stakeholder "needs" and "wants" and set priorities

Each stakeholder will have their own requirements and it is entirely possible these are contradictory. A common response when faced with such requirements is for the team to move to a position of safety and low risk but this can also be a position of low effectiveness. This tool can find a stronger position to work from and manage expectations.

I. In preparation for the meeting, identify any demands that are contradictory being made by stakeholders.

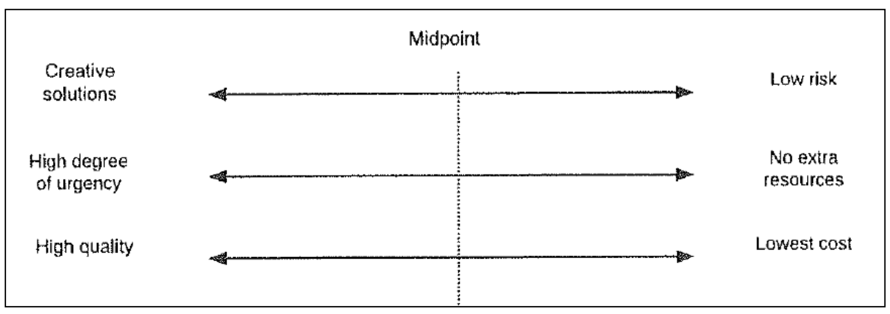
II. Consider the best composition for the meeting. should you invite stakeholders? Your managers or all your team? What information can be openly discussed and what is sensitive and should only be delivered to a select group?

III. Open the session by creating a continuum (as below) for each of the paradoxes setting out the contrasting objectives at each end.

IV. Describe the paradox as you see if from your perspective, explaining the practical barriers to achieving both objectives.

V. If present, ask stakeholders to mark on the continuum where they feel the priority needs to be placed and explain why.

VI. With the team discuss the likely consequences of having a greater emphasis on one objective over another and agree a strategy to best operate here.



Things to think about: This tool gets to the "why" of demands, which some stakeholders might find difficult to articulate or accept, such as creativity being linked to the tolerance of mistakes.

Perceptions from the Extra Chair

To provide an additional perspective on a problem or issue

To anticipate points of view or concerns from those not in the room

A problem, issue or decision to be made might benefit from insight from different stakeholders about how it will affect them, but this isn't always possible. One alternative is to ask someone in the team to play that role, taking on the mind-set of someone they know or can imagine and potentially bring a new insight to the matter at hand.

I. When planning for the use of this tool place an extra chair in the meeting room.

II. Explain to the team that whoever is sitting in the chair represents the stakeholder.

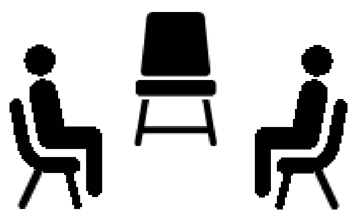
III. Ask someone to physically change seats to temporarily adopt the persona or group whose views would be useful.

IV. Ask them to then speak on the issue or discuss that person or group's perspective. The substitute will potentially find they can quickly tap into the primary perspectives relevant to the issue in question and can provide insight into the problem that had not previously been included in the discussion.

V. When they have finished, ask them to take their own seat again.

VI. Keep the chair at the table for the rest of the discussion so that it remains a reminder of the presence of the additional perspective.

VII. If needed then consider the use of another member of the team to represent a different stakeholder. Ensure that all the points of different perspective are captured in the meeting.



Things to think about: Although this may seem unusual, people can be surprisingly adaptable at taking on a different perspective—the physical act of changing seat helps to make this mental transition.

Manager Toolkits

more available at https://www.aston.ac.uk/staff-public/hr/organisational-development/leadership/managers-toolkits