

Managing projects through people



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Introduction

The aim of Managing Projects through People is to demonstrate the importance of managing people for the success of a project, to identify groups and individuals whose appropriate involvement in a project is important for its success, and to consider ways in which their contribution might be maximised.

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Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- identify why managing people is an essential part of project management
- establish which people and groups of people are important for the success of a project and why
- explain what issues are at stake in managing them
- evaluate how particular groups of people involved in a project might best be handled
- recognise which skills are most important for managing people in projects.

1 Why people management matters to the successful delivery of projects

The importance of budget, time and quality to the success of projects means that they are often managed as technical systems rather than behavioural systems. Yet mismanagement of the 'people' aspects of projects is as likely to contribute to their failure as neglect of the 'hard' dimensions of project management. This is because the successful implementation of any kind of project requires the effective deployment of human as well as material resources. Indeed, without people, no project could exist in the first place.

People may be important to the success of a project as:

- project managers in charge of a project;
- members of a project team responsible for implementing a project;
- internal or external customers for whom the project is being conducted – 'end users';
- company 'sponsors' of a project, for example, senior management;
- stakeholders who may be affected by a project's outcome;
- external suppliers of goods and services on which the project's implementation depends.

In order to meet 'hard' criteria for a project's success, the contributions and responses to the project made by these individuals or groups are crucial. Managing these contributions and responses, as well as the relationships between parties with an interest in the project needs to be planned. For this reason, it is often argued that managing people is the most important aspect of project management.

The significance of stakeholders is well recognised and there are many ways of analysing the impact of their influence and needs. Either of two simple approaches will probably suffice in order that the project manager can recognise the implications of stakeholder influence:

(a) draw a 'star chart' showing the stakeholders around the project:

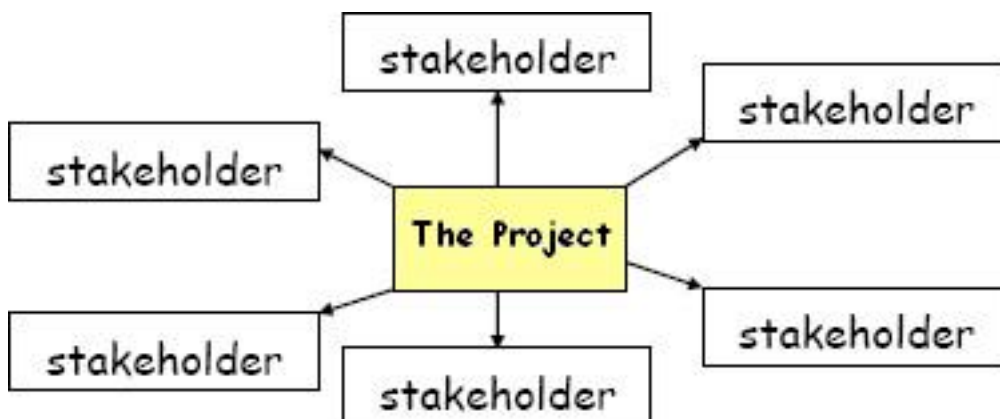


Figure 1: Stakeholder analysis, power and influence – a star chart

The arrows can be two-way as well as one-way and the expectations can be marked on the arrows, which can be of different thickness. Amend the chart as necessary in order to depict clearly the influences on the particular project.

or

(b) draw a matrix and locate stakeholders in it.

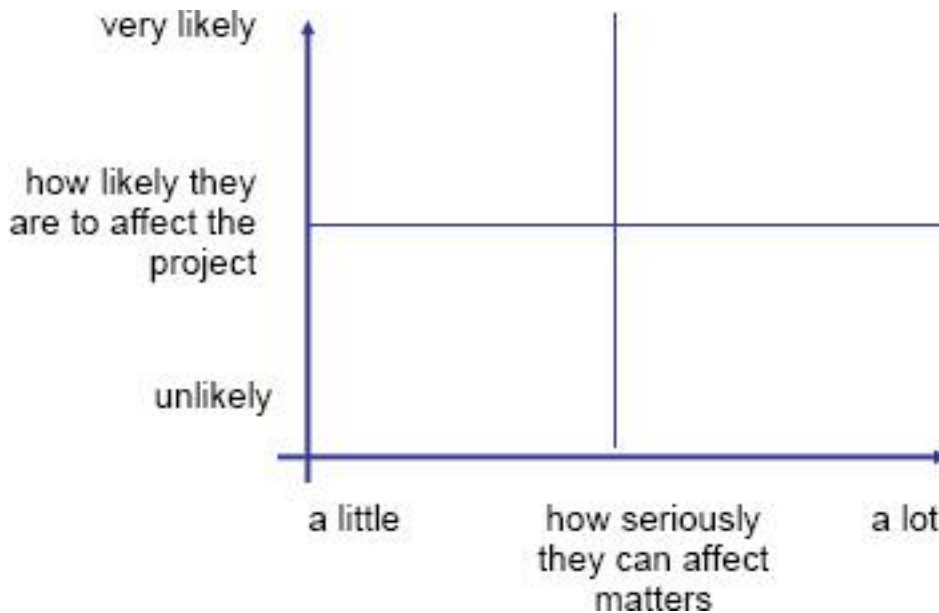


Figure 2 Stakeholder analysis, power and influence – a matrix

Managing people in a particular project will depend on its scope, the phase of the project, and the nature of the project. The impact of human resources on a project are likely to be greatest when it is large scale and loosely structured, involving large numbers of people, whose roles and relationships with regard to the project may not always be easy to determine or manage. The chance of success in projects is increased by paying more attention to issues such as

- relationship management;
- communication;
- influencing; and
- politics.

This means that individuals involved in managing projects will have to use a wide range of people-management roles and skills in order to achieve a satisfactory outcome. These will include:

- leadership;
- motivation;
- negotiation; and
- facilitation of team working.

2 Role of the project manager

2.1 What makes a good project manager?

The performance of the project manager is crucial to the success of any project, since he or she is the person responsible for ensuring that it reaches a successful conclusion. Although criteria for project success are likely to be expressed in terms of meeting deadlines, budgets and standards, much of the project manager's work will involve achieving these benchmarks through people involved in the project. While the role of the project manager has traditionally been powerful in professions such as construction and IT, project managers have become increasingly important in a range of businesses, as illustrated by the following extract from an article that appeared in *The Guardian*.

Holding hands on the brands

Project manager as a job description isn't going to have people flocking to you at parties. If you add in 'design' you may hold your audience for a split second longer, but it's not guaranteed. Yet in design business, the people who manage the daily crises and maintain the flow of constantly changing information between client and creative team are worth their weight in gold. 'The key to good project management in design is the ability to understand the intricacies of running a business,' says Professor Simon Majaro, co-director of the Centre for Creativity at Cranfield School of Management. 'You need to be able to deal with people in an organisation and to talk to them in their own language.'

'It's exciting to work within a creative environment,' admits Julie Oxberry, client director at 20/20, the design consultancy responsible for the new Sainsbury's identity. 'My job is to make sure that everything is "on brand", dealing with day-to-day client management and making sure that both the client and creative team are happy.' Project managers in design consultancies are often known as 'suits', but Julie Oxberry sees this as just a way to differentiate them from the designers. While 'project manager' has a nuts and bolts resonance, Ms Oxberry thinks that 'relationship manager' might be a more accurate job title.

After all, diplomacy is key to good project management – particularly when creative feathers are easily ruffled. 'You need a lot of patience and a good sense of humour,' says Ruth Somerfield, project manager at design consultancy Lewis Moberly. 'My background in public relations has helped,' she admits. 'You also have to have an appreciation of the process of design. Management and communication skills are incredibly important but you need an eye for design.'

At Major Players, a recruitment firm that places project managers in the top 100 design companies, there is a specific set of skills desirable for managing design projects. 'The people who do well are articulate, they can stand up and present,' explains Jacqueline Rose, who looks at potential candidates. 'In design the whole issue is about the personality of a brand. The design project manager has a more robust role than they would have if they worked in an advertising agency. They very often draw up guidelines for other agencies as the designers are the guardian of the brand.'

(Source: based on Deeble, S. (1999), 'Holding hands on the brands', *The Guardian*, 17th July 1999. Copyright Sandra Deeble. With permission of the author)

As the extract describes, key skills for project managers are **technical**, i.e. knowledge of the business sector in which the project is being conducted (in this case, the design industry) and **interpersonal** (i.e. communicating to and managing effectively the different parties with a stake in the project.)

In a study of UK project managers' experiences, Boddy and Buchanan (1992) identified six key activities of the project managers who took part in their research.

Shaping goals – The project managers are responsible for setting or receiving overall objectives and directions, interpreting them, reacting to changes in them, and clarifying any problems which arise with regard to these objectives.

Obtaining resources – The project managers identify the resources they needed for their project, negotiate for their release, retain them and manage their effective use in the context of the project.

Building roles and structures – The project managers clarified their own roles, those of members of their project team, and those of other relevant functions and individuals.

Establishing good communications – The project managers linked together the diverse groups and individuals contributing to the project, in order to obtain their support and commitment.

Seeing the whole picture – The project managers took a helicopter view of the project as a whole, managing time and other resources, anticipating reactions from stakeholders, identifying links with other relevant activities, and spotting unexpected events.

Moving things forward – The project managers took action and risks to keep the project going, especially through difficult phases.

Boddy and Buchanan (1992) concluded that these activities are largely concerned with influencing others in order to get them to work in a particular way. A project manager may have very little formal authority, yet a key part of their job is to **influence** others to do certain things. To be successful, they must draw on a wide range of methods, especially political and interpersonal skills.

In order to carry out the activities which their job requires, a project manager must perform a number of roles, including:

Leadership – A project manager needs to be able to communicate a vision of the project outcome and gain support for it from stakeholders within the project team and outside it.

Motivation – A project manager needs to be able to motivate individuals involved in the project, in particular the project team, to make the contribution required of them for the project to be completed successfully. Using expectancy theory, members of the project team will work well when they expect their efforts to produce good performance, they expect rewards for good performance, and they value these rewards. Rewards may be more difficult to achieve, since performance and rewards are often controlled by line managers who may not be directly involved in the project process or outcome.

Team building – The project team needs to have the right mix of skills to complete the project task and the project manager needs to manage this. He or she must also facilitate their productive co-operation. This is likely to involve the use of techniques to maximise participation and empowerment. The ability to handle conflict will be an important part of the project manager's team-building role.

Communication – communicating well about different aspects of the project to various individuals or groups with an interest in its outcome is important. The project manager must enable the flow of relevant information about the project to interested parties at various stages of a project. He or she must win support for the project and secure resources for it. He or she must keep the organisation and any external clients committed to the project. Communicating relevant information to and from the project team helps to maintain their motivation.

- Make sure that workable communication ‘links’ are created with those who will be involved in a project, for example, end users and the project team.
- Ensure that all interested parties understand a project's goals and objectives as clearly as possible. This avoids potential misunderstandings which could impede communication. It is important that this is achieved at a project's outset, before there is time for any alternative accounts of the project's purpose to emerge.
- Select the right medium for communicating important messages, e.g. face-to-face presentations, meetings or written documents. For example, it is not sufficient to assume that people understand and support a project's objectives, simply because they have been sent an email about it.
- Ensure that a sufficient amount of relevant and informative project documentation is produced. Producing too much information about a project's progress is as bad as producing too little. If people feel overloaded with detail, they are less likely to absorb any particularly important pieces of information.
- Hold timely and well-run meetings. Again, a proliferation of meetings or meetings that are too long and badly run are likely to inhibit, rather than facilitate, proper discussion about a project, since people will be deterred from attending.
- Actively resolve negative conflict between project participants, instead of simply allowing it to disperse. It is easy to ignore conflict between groups with different interests, but impossible to ignore its consequences, which are likely to have a profound impact on a project's outcome.

Activity 1: Thinking about effective communication

0 hour(s) 20 minutes(s)

Think about a recent conversation that you have had. This can be a work or personal conversation. Review the barriers to good communication and consider which of these might have hindered communication and what steps you might have taken to improve the communication?

Use a table to present your answers with the headings ‘What hindered communication?’ and ‘What might have improved communication?’.

Here is an example of how your table might look

What hindered communication?	What might have improved communication?
Working in different buildings	Having more frequent meetings
Limited IT facilities	Being able to share documents more easily

2.2 Effective communication

Whilst effective communication is an essential skill for the project manager, most people tend to be over-optimistic about the accuracy and efficacy of the communication process. Achieving understanding can be difficult, especially in the atmosphere of change and uncertainty generated by a major project. Verma (1996) identifies the following barriers to good communication.

'Noise' – Anything that distorts the message being transmitted, such as other conflicting messages, can interfere with its meaning. There should be a shared understanding of a project's actual objectives, in order to clarify what people think it *should* achieve. This avoids the persistence of 'alternative' accounts of its purpose and unmet expectations once it is complete.

Selective and biased perceptions – People tend to listen to what they want to listen to and read what they want to read into a message. Again, ensuring clarity of a project's objectives and the achievement of project milestones once they are reached will help to counteract 'subversive' accounts of its progress (or lack of it!).

Conflict – Conflict can act as a wall between individuals or groups, preventing communication between them. The most obvious situation for this to occur in a project is between different functional groups (who may have different agendas regarding the outcome and development of the project).

Language and tone – The intended meaning of a message can easily be missed by someone whose background is different from the sender's. This is likely to be an issue in a project when those responsible for it have specialist skills not shared by the project's clients or end users.

Lack of feedback – Receiving and listening to feedback, as well as imparting messages, is essential for effective communication. It is as important to seek feedback from interested parties throughout a project's lifetime, as it is to secure clarity about its objectives at the outset. Without appropriate feedback, it is easy for a project to drift off course.

A project manager can facilitate effective communication.

3 Identifying and involving stakeholders in a project

For every project, there will be a range of individuals or groups who have an interest in the different stages of the project. It could be the end users of an IT system, the line managers who will be expected to lead a restructuring initiative throughout the organisation, or the marketing department which will promote a new product. The support of these stakeholders is essential, if the project is to succeed. Therefore a key responsibility of the project manager will be to identify these stakeholders at an early stage of the project, anticipate their responses to it, and gain and maintain their support. Their involvement can be important to the project's success or failure, as illustrated in the following example.

Lives freed by water on tap

The British charity WaterAid co-operates with communities and non-governmental organisations to install and maintain simple water systems in developing countries. It began working with Ethiopian organisations in 1991 to devise water-provision schemes for areas of the country worst affected by shortages. Employing a philosophy of community empowerment and relying almost entirely on the skills and knowledge of local staff, WaterAid has provided funds for seven projects serving some 285,000 people.

Completed in 1994, the Hitosa project is one of WaterAid's more ambitious supply schemes, which it has carried out in conjunction with its local partner WaterAction. The project, involving 75 miles of piping carrying water by gravity from a mountain spring, cost only £10 per beneficiary, but has dramatically improved the lives of those whom it serves. Until the project was completed, Ayelu Nagash spent five hours every day walking to and from the nearest water source. 'I had to make do with whatever I could carry, which was about 25 litres. Now I have an unlimited supply five minutes' walk from my home,' she said.

'Our developmental philosophy is based on community empowerment,' said Girma Mengistu, director of WaterAction. 'We ask each household to contribute £5 toward the project and try to involve the community from the start.' The communities also provide labour for trench digging and pipe laying.

Eighty per cent of the funding for the Hitosa project came from WaterAid, three per cent from the Ethiopian government and the remainder from the communities that benefit from it. Once the projects are completed, a nominal charge is levied for the water, the proceeds of which are sufficient to maintain the scheme. 'Community involvement is the key to the success of our projects,' said Mengistu.

(Source: based on Gough, D. (1998), 'Lives freed by tap water', *The Guardian*, 30th December 1998. Copyright © Guardian News and Media Ltd)

It may not be immediately obvious who are the project stakeholders and what are their interests. For example, for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like WaterAid, a key group of stakeholders is those people who benefit from the aid that the NGO provides. As the extract suggests, involving the beneficiaries in a project means empowering them so that they can be involved in determining the outcome of the project (for example, where a

well or a water pump might most usefully be sited), so that they can get the most benefit from it.

To identify the stakeholders in a project and how their interests might best be managed, a stakeholder analysis is carried out. This will enable the project manager to anticipate potential points of resistance, as well as would-be allies and champions for the project. The first step in this process is to identify the project stakeholders. This can be done by preparing a stakeholder map – a diagram showing the main stakeholders likely to need attention. Next, their interests must be identified. Finally, the project manager together with other members of project team should generate ideas on how best to manage the stakeholders, given their interests.

Activity 2: Preparing a stakeholder map

0 hour(s) 20 minutes(s)

You will need a piece of paper to complete this exercise

Write the name of a project you have been involved with or which has taken place where you work in the centre of the paper.

Then around the project name write the names of individuals or groups whom you believe have or had a stake in this project.

Put the most important nearest the centre.

Now, for each stakeholder individual and group, identify the following:

1. What are their priorities, goals and interests?
2. What specific behaviour is expected of them in relation to the project?
3. What are their likely reactions to the project?
4. How can their support be gained?

The kinds of individual and group you are likely to have included in your stakeholder map are members of the project team, senior managers, colleagues in various parts of your organisation who have an interest in the project, staff in your organisation who are affected by its outcome and people in other organisations who contributed to or benefited from the project. You will probably have noted that many of their interests apparently conflict, e.g. in terms of what they want from the project, which complicates the business of securing their support. However, by identifying them on a stakeholder map, you can begin to formulate a strategy to achieve this – the stakeholder map provides a basis for managing everyone with an interest in a project. You will need to consider what relationships exist between the different stakeholders, since they may have to work together during the project or be likely to react to or influence each other's experience of the project. It is also important to realise that not all potential stakeholders are obvious at the beginning of the project; some may emerge as the project develops and they realise that their interests could be affected by its outcome. Stakeholder analysis therefore should also take into consideration the attitudes and actions of stakeholders at different phases of the project.

4 Project team

4.1 Introduction

Some projects, especially large-scale ones, will rely on a team, not just an individual, for their successful implementation. Unlike permanent work teams, a project team's objective is the achievement of a finite and specific task – the project. Its performance, especially its ability to perform effectively as a group, is therefore critical to a project's outcome.

However, it may prove relatively difficult for a project team to work well together at the outset, since its members are often drawn from different functions within the organisation, perhaps even from different organisations, and may include external representatives such as external consultants or representatives of the project's customers. This means that the group members' interests regarding the project are highly likely to differ at the outset.

Extract 1: Catalogue of errors at the British Library

Inspectors checking the British Library project found more than 230,000 defects between 1992 and 1996. As costs increased and delays lengthened, the Government even considered abandoning the project, the National Audit Office disclosed. But with more than £450 million already committed, the Treasury agreed to a further £46 million to allow the building, next to St Pancras Station in London, to be completed.

A National Audit Office report uncovered a saga of building errors, management failures and blurred responsibilities. Until 1992, when the Heritage Department was created, responsibility for managing the project rested with the Office of Arts and Libraries. Since 1989, the British Library has questioned how the specifications of the building have been implemented in design. The Audit Office said that concern was expressed in 1991 that the Library and the Department were behaving 'as opposing parties rather than as partners'. To this day, they have been unable to agree shared objectives largely because of the conflict between the Government's desires to reduce costs and the Library's pursuit of the highest quality.

There had been 'confusion, conflict and difficulty in determining liability' when things went wrong. Quality checks were 'weak and failed to detect major technical problems until they were hard or costly to rectify' and there was insufficient control over the budget on the first phase of the building.

The bureaucratic structure behind the British Library project is Byzantine. For the first phase until the end of 1992, there were three titular heads: the Property Services Agency, the Treasury and the National Heritage Department. At the strategic level, there was a project steering committee and a project director appointed by the Government. On the site, a construction professional was project manager. Below him was a superintending officer who administered the contract. Under him was a construction manager, appointed by the builders, Laing.

(Source: based on *The Daily Telegraph*, 1996)

The example shows that, in the case of the construction of the British Library, failure to establish a coherent and effective project team with clearly defined tasks meant that no

shared set of objectives was ever agreed by the parties involved. Thus no one group took responsibility for driving through the project. A direct consequence of this was that control over the project's progress was inadequate and technical problems proliferated.

For project teams to perform well, certain circumstances need to exist:

- members must feel personally involved in the project;
- members believe that they are serving the interests of those whom they represent who will benefit from the project outcome;
- a readiness to accept new ideas;
- a certain autonomy for project teams to determine their own goals and their approaches to achieving them if they are to work effectively. Not surprisingly, the ability of the project manager to expedite effective project team working is crucial.

While the diversity of a project team may sometimes detract from its effective working, especially at the beginning of a project, it is nevertheless essential that a range of skills and knowledge is represented within it if it is to perform efficiently. Boddy and Buchanan (1992) identify three aspects of a project for which a well-balanced project team will require appropriate skills: **process**, **content** and **control**.

To deal with the **content** agenda, a team may require:

- expertise in the skills which the project concerns, e.g. IT skills;
- awareness of the organisation's policies and strategies;
- operating knowledge of how the part of the organisation which will benefit from the project works.

To deal with the **process** agenda, a team may require:

- skills in team-building to help the members of the group work together;
- awareness that the process by which things are done are as important as what is done;
- willingness and ability to give time and commitment to the team.

To deal with the **control** agenda, a team may require:

- a helicopter view to set the project within a broader picture;
- deadline skills to ensure that the project is progressing satisfactorily;
- administration skills to ensure that appropriate and timely project documentation is maintained.

4.2 Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a project team

Those involved in a project may have skills that fulfil more than one aspect of the project agenda. This is likely to be particularly important in small-scale projects, where management of the content, process and control agendas are just as important to the project's success, but where fewer people are involved.

Activity 3: Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a project team

0 hour(s) 15 minutes(s)

Consider a project team you have worked on or with. This could be a team at work or a team out of work, for example, one which organised an event at a local school or church.

Note down the answers to the following questions.

1. Make a list of the skills and expertise of the team members.
2. Compare it with the ideal project team skills described above.
3. Which roles and expertise were well represented and which were missing?
4. How did this affect the way in which the team worked?

You may have found that your team had a surplus of content skills and not sufficient process and control skills. This is because project teams are often put together with a view to achieving the technical aspects of a project rather than anything else. This is a potentially dangerous approach to take to project team building, since people management and administration skills are also essential for a project's success. The project manager's skills may be crucial in this regard, since it is primarily their responsibility to get the project team to work together, whilst being mindful of both the wider organisational agenda and the project deadline.

Managing a project team is complicated by the fact that it is not a constant process, since the behaviour and tasks of the project team reflect the lifecycle of the project. It is argued that project teams go through four identifiable stages of development, at each of which it may be appropriate for the project manager to take particular actions to maximise their performance.

Undeveloped team – This is the stage at which people have been assembled to form a project team but have not yet given much thought about how they might work together. At this stage the project manager needs to be able to get team members to share any concerns and problems that they might have regarding the project. They can begin to develop team cohesion by explicitly identifying the strengths (and weaknesses) of the team.

Experimenting team – The main characteristic of this second stage is that the team makes a conscious effort to review the way in which it works in order to improve performance. The team begins to face problems more openly and consider options more widely. More listening takes place and a broader range of contributions is considered. At this stage the project manager needs to encourage team member openness and debate about ways of working, by inviting feedback on performance and process issues.

Consolidating team – In the third stage the team creates clearer and more methodical ways of working. Attention is given to matters such as clarifying the purpose of tasks and activities, deciding what will need to be done and how, and reviewing progress. At this stage the project manager needs to get the team to agree procedures and methods of working, and to facilitate performance reviews as a means of identifying ways of improving team methods.

Mature team – In the fourth stage the team becomes confident and outward looking, able and willing to take into consideration the wider aspects and implications of what it is doing. At this stage, while the project manager can in general allow the team the autonomy necessary to complete its allotted tasks, they must support any requirements to link up with

other teams and units and they must encourage external evaluation of the team's performance.

Team-management tasks remain constant throughout the lifetime of the project. These include continually ensuring that the project team has a shared understanding of the project's remit and objectives, effectively dealing with conflict and disagreement whenever it arises, and generating excitement and celebrating success, where appropriate, in order to maximise team motivation.

5 Dealing with senior management

5.1 The relationship with senior management

Senior management have a crucial sponsoring role to play both during the planning and the implementation of projects, in terms of establishing their legitimacy, making project resources available and endorsing project progress. For this reason, those involved in a project must be proactive about securing and maintaining senior management support throughout its lifetime. They need to be explicit with senior management that the project is both attractive and feasible. However, during a project, senior management sometimes behave in way likely to influence unduly or even undermine its outcome. They may attempt to:

- allow the client to dictate management of the project because of commercial pressure;
- sabotage the project because it is not fulfilling what they believe to be its aims or even because they wish to limit the influence of the project manager;
- micromanage the project – setting its agenda, handling its daily activities and usurping the project manager's power.

There are a number of actions the project manager can make in order to improve the project team's relationship with senior management and to deflect unnecessary and unhelpful involvement in the project.

- senior management may start to become too involved and the project manager needs to re-establish authority to avert a micromanagement situation;
- potential difficulties should be communicated to senior management clearly and honestly. If senior management lose touch with reality, they will begin to make unrealistic unfounded statements and promises about the project's progress and outcome.

5.2 Using political skills

In particular, a project manager needs to employ good political skills in order to maintain the support of senior management, without allowing them to undermine or take over the project. However, this can raise questions about the ethics of their behaviour. Read the following account that was given by a member of an external consulting team working on a project for a local authority in Scotland. The project's objective was to revamp the structure of the council which had operated in much the same style for the past 20 years. A new chief executive had recently been appointed; the leader of the consulting team was a long-standing personal friend of the chief executive.

Example 1: What the chief executive wants

'We were invited to a meeting with the chief executive to launch the project, agree our liaison mechanisms, find a room to work in, and so on. At the meeting the chief

executive produced a seven-page document. This set out what he wanted to see in our final report. Some of this had been in the original brief for the assignment, set out in general terms, and here it was again with some specific recommendations and markers for action concerning parts of the organisation structure and named individuals in specific posts, which were not expected to survive the review. We didn't have as much flexibility as we thought.

'The project rolled out over that year and our recommendations got firmed up as we collected more information. Basically, this was an autocratically managed, hierarchical, rigid, bureaucratic organisation, with lots of time and money wasted on unnecessary procedures and rule following, and with poor staff morale. So our recommendations were going to be about cutting hierarchy, empowering people, changing the management style, making procedures more flexible, getting decisions taken more quickly, and the chief executive was behind all this.

'The main client was a subcommittee, to which we reported about every quarter. But not before the chief executive had, at his request, seen an advance copy of the report, commented on it and suggested changes. This put us in an awkward position. We knew his thinking, and so when other managers asked us about that, we had to fudge our answers. This also meant that we had to build our ideas into our reports, finding some rationale for supporting them, which was important because, if questions came up in committee, we would have to explain and defend the point.

'If we hadn't handled the chief executive in this sort of way, the whole project could have been at risk, and the time and the contributions of a lot of other staff would have been wasted.'

Source: based on Buchanan and Badham, 1999

Activity 4

0 hour(s) 20 minutes(s)

1. Do you think the consultants' political behaviour was acceptable?
2. List the points for and against behaving this way.

The points you listed in favour of the consultants' behaviour may have included that it ensured that the project was a success, that the chief executive was best placed to know what needed to be done, that the consultants got to do what they wanted to do anyway, and that their actions maximised the staff's contributions to the project.

The points you listed against the consultants' behaviour may have included that the chief executive may have not been well placed to know what action was needed, that he may have been prejudiced against certain individuals in the organisation, that the consultants' behaviour was dishonest, that it may not have achieved the best possible outcome for the organisation, and that it compromised certain individuals.

6 Political behaviour

6.1 Introduction

Buchanan and Badham (1999) suggest that political behaviour can be usefully evaluated against four criteria to help determine whether it is acceptable or whether it is not:

Four criteria to determine whether political behaviour is acceptable

1. Is the behaviour ethically acceptable?
2. Does the initiator of the behaviour have a reasonable warrant for carrying it out?
3. Can a plausible account be constructed to justify the behaviour?
4. Is the initiator's reputation left intact?

In the case quoted in [Example 1](#), the benefits of the change project for the organisation as a whole seem to suggest that, on balance, the consultants' behaviour might be justified. It can certainly be argued that they had a reasonable warrant for behaving in this way, given the overwhelming necessity to bring about change, that a plausible account could be constructed to justify their behaviour in that it was necessary for the project to succeed, and that their reputation probably remained intact, given their close relationship with the chief executive. Whether you find their behaviour ethically acceptable is a matter of personal preference! Whatever your opinion is about this, it is difficult to imagine that a project of this kind could be managed successfully without some recourse to political behaviour.

6.2 Political skills

A project manager will encounter politics – the struggle to acquire and maintain power – on a daily basis, as he or she competes to secure resources and support for their project. This is inevitable, given the probable diversity of backgrounds and expectations of those with an interest in the project. Political skills will be necessary to make deals and resolve conflicts with stakeholders, over whom project managers may have little formal authority. Managing the following aspects needs to be addressed:

The political environment – The project manager keeps aware of perceptions about performance on the project, the reputation of project stakeholders, expectations of the project manager's role and key organisational values.

Power structures in an organisation – While an organisation's structure indicates the formal distribution of power in an organisation, it may conceal the true locus of power. Project managers need to ascertain who has informal status and power in an organisation, since their support may be vital.

Maintaining visibility – A project manager needs to maintain contact with the significant stakeholders on a project in order to demonstrate its significance to the organisation, especially to senior management. This can include having an influential senior sponsor which can be very helpful in this regard and drawing attention to project milestones and achievements.

Managing the perceptions of interested parties – Not only must a project be visible, but it must be seen to fulfil the perceptions that its stakeholders have been led to expect. This is especially true of the behaviour of the project manager and the project team, who must both be seen publicly to be performing the roles expected of them.

Giving the impression of success – A project manager should always try to give the impression of success, even if he or she believes the project to be close to failure. Constantly seeking help from management will give the impression that you are not in control. Showing signs of weakness lays both the project manager and the project open to attack from those who do not support it.

7 Building relationships across the organisation

7.1 Sharing the project

As we have seen, the execution of a project may depend on the involvement and co-operation of several departments or functions within an organisation. If this is the case, then, for it to succeed, they must be prepared to share ownership of the project, be willing to work together to help the project achieve its objectives and be happy to release adequate resources when appropriate. The project manager and their team therefore have to create and maintain good relationships with all interested parties across the organisation in order to get their support for the project. This may not be a straightforward issue, since each function will have its own priorities and interests; they may be indifferent or even downright hostile to the project. Not surprisingly, the larger the project task, the more difficult the job of maintaining good relationships with all interested parties, especially if the project involves more than one site. This is complicated by the fact that it may not be obvious at the outset who has an interest in a project or even what constitutes the organisation, as the following example illustrates.

Example 2

An RSPCA project to build Britain's biggest animal welfare complex using public donations of £1.5 million is in turmoil because of a feud involving volunteers.

The Charity Commission has intervened in a dispute between the society's senior officials and volunteers from Glamorgan West and Swansea over construction of a showpiece centre for 40 dogs and 20 cats. Volunteers, who raised £1 million in over 35 years, say the complex, to be built on 75 acres at Penllergaer, near Swansea, is too big and could be built for 30 per cent less. They accuse national officials of intimidating volunteers to get lavish plans agreed – accusations that are strongly denied.

However, after complaints from the national society, the commission has suspended the local volunteers and handed control of the project to Peter Wright, the society's national operations manager. RSPCA officials are planning to subject the volunteers to a disciplinary inquiry.

The branch, however, an independent charity in its own right, is preparing to sue the national RSPCA for negligence, alleging that it gave poor advice and failed to deliver grants on time. Joe Harris, 50, the chairman, said: 'The committee agreed to these plans, including an administration block the size of a school, because they were told that advice from headquarters was not to be questioned and that, if it was, they could be considered negligent and could lose their homes and businesses.'

The branch collected £1.09 million. It wanted to replace its old Swansea premises. Local members agreed a scheme, which included a headquarters grant of £360,000, but now say they had misgivings about some features, which included an Inglenook fireplace and a mower store worth £39,000. The branch produced more modest proposals which were rejected. It says that by the time it hit financial difficulties the

grant agreed by headquarters had not been paid and it was tied to a contract it could not pay.

Peter Davies, the society's director general, said: 'We just want to see the project completed.' The administration block would house a shop, education and meeting facilities, and premises for an inspector. 'It was a farm and we had to buy it all. We need an equine facility and that is part of the long-term plan.'

Source: based on *The Daily Telegraph*, 1996

The RSPCA example demonstrates how a project's success may be jeopardised if all interested parties across the organisation do not share an understanding of its purpose and proposed outcome. It illustrates that, especially in the voluntary sector, it may even be difficult to identify exactly what is the 'organisation'. It can be equally easy to ignore or sideline certain interest groups within a more conventional organisation too, because they may not have an obvious interest in a project, or even because their interest seems likely to undermine the aims of the project as understood by more powerful interest groups.

7.2 Negotiation skills

Negotiation skills are essential for the project manager to get individuals and groups to agree on a common approach to a project, despite their potentially conflicting interests and priorities. The project manager needs to be able to negotiate with suppliers and customers and individuals to adopt a particular course of action. It is also important that negotiation is conducted in a way that will build long-term relationships, rather than simply secure short-term gains.

Effective negotiation relies on identifying in advance what objectives need to be achieved and what behaviours might be necessary to achieve them. The following is a process that can be used in negotiating:

7.2.1 Labelling behaviour

Signalling that you are about to suggest a solution to a problem or to ask an important question is one way of drawing attention to this and puts pressure on the person or persons at whom your signal is directed to respond.

7.2.2 Summarising

During a long negotiation, summarising what has been proposed and the stage that the negotiations have reached helps both to clarify key points and to create mutual trust by indicating that all perspectives are being taken into consideration.

7.2.3 Sticking to one good argument

While it may seem better to use as many arguments as possible to support a case you are trying to make, skilled negotiators tend to rely on fewer stronger arguments. This is because a weak argument does not add to a strong one, but has the opposite effect of diluting and weakening it.

7.2.4 Using questions

Questions can be used as a means both of persuasion and of control. Repeatedly telling an individual something that they are unwilling to accept is unlikely to get them to change their mind. It is better instead to ask carefully constructed questions that will lead him or her to realise the strength of your case and the weakness of their own. Asking questions gives the questioner more control over the conversation, forcing the other side to respond. Writing down a list of appropriate questions before a meeting can help you direct them more effectively and use them to play for time if you get into difficulty.

Activity 5: Practising negotiation

0 hour(s) 15 minutes(s)

You will probably be going into a meeting soon where you will need to use your negotiation skills. Work through the behaviours that have been identified (labelling behaviours, summarising, sticking to one good argument and using questions) and plan your meeting.

8 Satisfying the client and end user

Most projects have an identifiable client or customer group which will benefit from or use the outcome of the project. The client may be external to the organisation which is implementing the project, for example, the customer for whom a new building is being constructed. Or the clients may be internal, for example, the users of a new IT system. As we have already seen, it is important that the client or end user shares and endorses the project's objectives and is actively involved in its development. If this does not happen, then the project is unlikely to be a success, as Example 3 demonstrates.

Example 3

Powerco, a major UK energy organisation, introduced a new management information system (MIS) which, while it was delivered on time, on budget and without major technical problems, failed to succeed, in that many end users were not satisfied with what was delivered. The company discovered that the primary cause of this dissatisfaction was a failure by the project team to engage properly and honestly with potential users at crucial stages of the project. Ironically, this failure of communication occurred despite the fact that user participation was given high priority in the project. Research conducted after the project was completed indicated that there were several crucial reasons for this mismatch between rhetoric and reality.

At the beginning of the project, its aims were not properly communicated to interested parties. While the primary aim of the project was to get business units to switch from site-based to business-based accounting, this was never made explicit outside the project team. In fact, at a series of MIS roadshows held to overcome potential end user resistance, promises were made to a wide range of potential users which suggested that the system's benefits would be far greater than this. It was positioned by a project team desperate to win support for a panacea that would meet everyone's needs. Inevitably, a strong feeling that the project had been oversold eventually surfaced and there was deep disappointment, especially amongst non-financial staff, once the system was installed. In fact, it later emerged that no definitive list of end users had ever been drawn up!

Given the lack of clarity at the outset, it is unsurprising that end users were not given appropriate feedback on how the project was progressing once it was underway. Nor were implementation responsibilities made clear at any stage, with the result that some business units ended up with unrealistically high expectations of the help they would be given in implementing the new system from the project team and the corporate centre. In these respects, the project team appears to have sacrificed effective user involvement for the need to meet deadlines as the project progressed.

Once the project was complete and the system 'successfully' installed, ownership of it inevitably remained a matter for debate, with some business units taking charge of its support and development, while others claimed that this was the responsibility of the corporate centre. The company was forced to conclude that, despite the avowed emphasis on user participation, end user consultation and involvement in the implementation process had not been effective. As a result, it incurred considerable

additional expense in terms of hardware, software and development time after the formal handover of the system in order to ensure the satisfaction of all end users.

Source: based on Fowler and Walsh, 1999

Activity 6: What are the client's expectations of the project manager?

0 hour(s) 10 minutes(s)

Make a list of what kind of behaviours you think that a project end user should realistically expect from the project manager and project.

Establishing an open, honest and co-operative relationship with the client should be priority for the project manager and project team if they want the project to succeed. Your list is therefore likely to include the following.

Honesty – Clients expect project managers to plan and report honestly about the project. In order to achieve this, they must brief clients frequently about the project's progress and be willing for the client to attend project meetings when appropriate.

Co-operation – Clients expect the project manager to demonstrate that he or she seeks a high level of co-operation with them. If indications of this are not forthcoming, then the relationship between the two parties is likely to deteriorate rapidly.

Communication – Clients expect meaningful communication from the project manager, which keeps them informed about the project's progress, any potential problems, and any clarification that they might require from the client.

It is also extremely important that the project manager strives to **provide the best output** for the client regarding schedule, budget and product or service. If the client's expectations in this regard are unrealistic, the project manager must correct these misunderstandings at an early stage.

Conclusion

This course has focused on managing projects through people and how important this is in relation to:

- managing the relationship with stakeholders;
- motivating the project team to get results;
- dealing with senior management;
- building relationships across the organisation in order to encourage co-operation;
- satisfying the client and end user.

Recapping on the learning objectives from the beginning of this course:

1. **Be able to identify why managing people is an essential part of project management** – we discussed how achieving project success depends on the effective use of human as well as material resources. We also examined how this is especially important in large-scale projects, which are becoming increasingly common in organisations today.
2. **Be able to establish which groups of people must be managed in a project and why and be able to explain what issues are at stake in managing them** – you were introduced to stakeholder analysis as a means of identifying interest groups and their issues, and as a vehicle for devising an effective strategy for managing the various stakeholders in a project.
3. **Be able to evaluate how particular groups of people involved in a project might best be handled** – this was addressed by examining how an effective project team might be built, discussing how senior management could best be handled, explaining the value of building relationships across the organisation and establishing the importance of satisfying the project client or end user.
4. **You are able to recognise which skills are most important for managing people in projects and know how to apply these skills where appropriate** – communication skills, negotiation skills and political skills are particularly important skills for the project manager to have, we then discussed strategies and techniques for effective application of these skills.

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