

Week 3 - Communication

Peter Bruce, what do you do to communicate and involve stakeholders in your projects?

Bruce I think there are different things at different times in the project. At the start of the project it's more of an awareness of the methodology, how you are going to approach the work. So that's more of a presentation component. And then as the project goes along, depending on the stakeholders. The stakeholders in our business generally have an active involvement in the project, an awareness of the project, and are tied to the project in some manner so there's bi-weekly meetings with a representative from the client's side. Maybe one, maybe two, maybe several folks. And then information disseminates from them. We may have information sessions that they initiate and want us to participate in, but that is ongoing. And then towards the end of the project, and these are fairly large projects, and the handover is not, drop the keys and run, you know, there is a turning over process. And so that gets engagement from the group that's going to run that facility, so the various stakeholders.

In a hospital it might be the nurses, doctors, those folks or even the people who are just going to run the physical plant of the facility so there's training, orientation sessions, commissioning to say 'here's how the facility is to run' and so it really depends as you go through the process and then at the end of the day we continue to participate through a warranty period.

Peter Thank you. Helen, your stakeholders?

Helen Well, the first thing, Peter, we need to do is to identify who the particular stakeholders are per project because it would differ for us depending on what the project is. So, we identify who those people are. We have a variety of levels so we have the executive sponsor the project, we have a business owner, so that's a little lower, and then we have people who are impacted by the project so they are also stakeholders. And impacted is either the end result will impact them or they need to contribute resources to the project so they are impacted by a resource component. So they too are stakeholders in a project. And then, depending on the level of expertise of those stakeholders in participating in projects, because sometimes people participate in projects more than others so they already know what it means to be a stakeholder, what role do they play at steering committee meetings. So it depends if we need to do some education with some stakeholders to explain what it means to be a stakeholder and what their role is and what our expectations are of them, what their contributions need to be in the project.

So again, it's all about communicating, understanding roles and responsibilities and then the third piece is what we have talked about, is the meetings. We have a variety of different levels of meetings to ensure that the stakeholders are continually apprised of progress. If everything is going smoothly, they are probably monthly; if things are going not so smooth then we accelerate the frequency. But we do have a variety of methods to make sure that people are kept in the loop, and meetings is one of them and obviously reporting is a second one. But it's a pretty repetitive process, the project managers understand how to make that happen and following the rules of the game is what makes it successful.

Peter So Hao, how do you involve stakeholders in Toyota?

Hao Very similar to what my colleagues have said. Involving the stakeholders – we are talking about people who are directly impacted by the project or involved directly by the project so it's pretty well standard there. One thing I want to emphasize right up front is that without the involvement of those people we will not go ahead with the projects. We kind of draw the line in saying, what we faced in the past is when you approach the stakeholder and say you need to support this project, you need to be involved in this, they say “yeah, yeah, yeah, go for it” but when the meeting time comes or the issue that requires some action, they are not there. So we have formalized the process or that commitment right up front by signing your name on the dotted line that you will be involved in that. It's a commitment right up front. You shall do this. And similar to Helen's comment about making sure they understand their role, and have the agreement to perform that role before we proceed with anything so that's one thing we learned in the past.

And then we also make sure that it's become a requirement for them to participate on a regular basis on a steering committee where we ask them for guidance on how to proceed when there is an issue that comes up. And they will be the people that go and handle their own people. Very often we see in the past that the sponsor or stakeholder delegates that to the project manager who may come from a different organization that doesn't have the authority, that doesn't have maybe even the subject matter expertise to convince the impacted department to do things in a certain way. So we want the sponsor or the stakeholder of the department to communicate as opposed to the project [manager] and that has helped us go a long, long way.

And one point I want to make, regardless of all those weekly and monthly meetings that we defined up front, the key is how to strike a good communicating relationship with the stakeholder. And it always happens informally, it always happens behind the scenes in a 5 minute coffee break kind of thing. And if we can manage that, if the project

manager knows how to manage using those informal channels, it will be a lot more effective when it comes to formal meetings. Because everyone will not be surprised, they have heard about it, there has been some discussion of the issue and how to resolve it. And so when they come to a formal meeting, when we request their support, they tend to support a lot more.

Helen If I could just interject something, Peter.

Peter Certainly Helen.

Helen We have been talking a lot about meetings throughout the session and we haven't really commented on it, and I don't want to spend a lot of time but, there is also an art to running a meeting. And I think part of the expectation of my project managers are that they understand how to run a meeting. So when I say have a meeting there are certain expectations. We have been talking lots about communication and lots about meetings but we haven't really talked about that. There are a few steps that everyone needs to understand. Having an agenda for a meeting is so critical and sending it out in advance so everyone exactly knows what we are going to talk about – "what is expected from me in this meeting?"; follow up items from the previous meeting; keeping minutes at each meeting. So there are some rules of meetings that we haven't covered off but we've been talking a lot about it so I just wanted to interject that. That's a critical component also of any project is how to run those meetings because so much, as we have just heard, depends on what comes out of those meetings.

Peter Very important. Thank you.