

PM World Today Tips and Techniques – November 2006 Making Sense of Stakeholder Mapping

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Considering and understanding stakeholders and then acting to engage them is generally agreed as being one of the most critical parts of any managed change initiative.

Initial consideration of stakeholders is often done using a technique based on some kind of stakeholder grid or map of which many versions exist. Some grids or maps are in one dimension for example showing stakeholders (individuals or groups) mapped against their area of interest in the project or programme. However, in our experience, most are in two dimensions where two axes are labelled with features of stakeholder status or behaviour and the area between the axes (the two dimensional grid) populated with the names of each individual or group.

Commonly used grids include:

- **Power vs. Interest** – easy to understand in concept but what's the point of knowing if someone is powerful and interested (will be active) if you have not considered whether they are for, or against the project i.e. have a positive or negative attitude.
- **Interest vs. Attitude** – again easy to understand but again what's the point of knowing someone is an active backer or active blocker without an assessment of whether they are powerful and therefore likely to be influential or not.

This Lucid Thought puts the case for including a third dimension in the stakeholder grid. This we believe will make the technique even better at stimulating thought and informing the project or programme manager in a truly meaningful way.

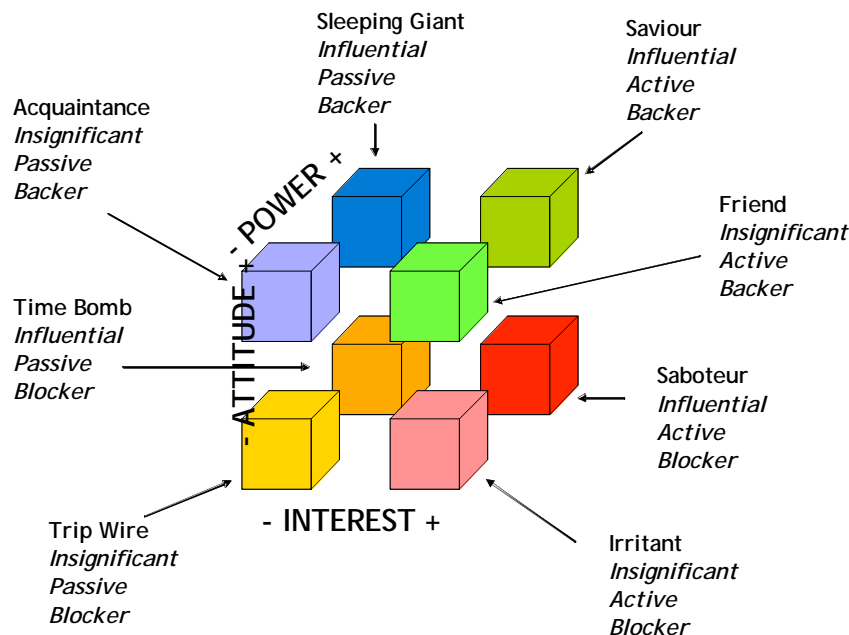
It seems to us that there are three basic things (dimensions) that are important to know when **initially** considering stakeholders and these are:

1. Their **power** or ability to influence in the organisation. This may be their potential to influence derived from their positional or resource power in the organisation, or may be their actual influence derived from their credibility as a leader or expert.
2. Their **interest** in the project or programme as measured by the extent to which they will be active or passive.
3. Their **attitude** to the project or programme as measured by the extent to which they will 'back' (support) or 'block' (resist).

Considering any two of the three dimensions only gives a partial and less than useful picture.

Using a three dimensional grid is certainly more difficult to draw but at least maps out all the things that need to be considered and gives some descriptive, and hopefully

useful, labels that can be checked out during the overall process of stakeholder analysis and subsequent ongoing stakeholder management.



Using this approach each of the eight labels can be summarised as shown:

- **Saviour** – powerful, high interest, positive attitude or alternatively influential, active, backer. They need to be paid attention to; you should do whatever necessary to keep them on your side – pander to their needs.
- **Friend** – low power, high interest, positive attitude or alternatively insignificant, active, backer. They should be used as a confidant or sounding board.
- **Saboteur** - powerful, high interest, negative attitude or alternatively influential, active, blocker. They need to be engaged in order to disengage. You should be prepared to 'clean-up after them'.
- **Irritant** – low power, high interest, negative attitude or alternatively insignificant, active, blocker. They need to be engaged so that they stop 'eating away' and then be 'put back in their box'.
- **Sleeping Giant** - powerful, low interest, positive attitude or alternatively influential, passive, backer. They need to be engaged in order to awaken them.
- **Acquaintance** –low power, low interest, positive attitude or alternatively insignificant, passive, backer. They need to be kept informed and communicated with on a 'transmit only' basis.
- **Time Bomb** - powerful, low interest, negative attitude or alternatively influential, passive, blocker. They need to be understood so they can be 'defused before the bomb goes off'.
- **Trip Wire** – low power, low interest, negative attitude or alternatively insignificant, passive, blocker. They need to be understood so you can 'watch your step' and avoid 'tripping up'.

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Any sort of stakeholder grid, even a three dimensional one, is only of any value if it can then be used sensibly. Establishing the positions of individuals and groups on the grid is of limited value if not followed up. Of course the positioning may be wrong with consequent risks to the project and to relationships. But for any stakeholder that you believe is going to be important to you, you can engage them in dialogue, check out your assumptions and find out their real drivers and concerns. This is the action that turns your stakeholder mapping into stakeholder analysis.

So how does all this come together? The obvious logic therefore is that a project or programme's communication strategy and plans are informed by stakeholder analysis.





...For communication strategy and plans to be effective they must be informed by stakeholder analysis that is accurate and complete.

...For stakeholder analysis to add value a meaningful three dimensional stakeholder grid provides a sensible basis on which to engage with stakeholders to find out their real drivers and concerns.

In the final analysis, stakeholder mapping is only a technique and a very simple one at that; but it is a technique that is the starting point for one of the most crucial activities when managing change.

***To make sense of stakeholder management,
start by making sense of stakeholder mapping.***

(See the author's bios on the following page.)

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