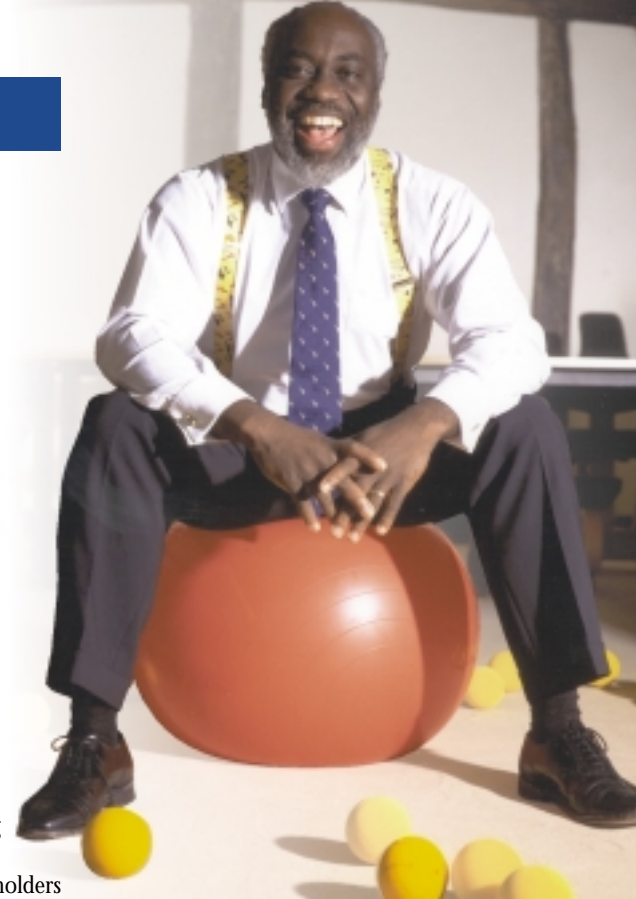# The compleat* stakeholder manager

With due acknowledgement to Isaak Walton, Eddie Obeng explains how to get your stakeholders under control. He even provides three mantras to repeat regularly to make sure you believe it!

You've been losing sleep for weeks. There are so many stakeholders. Everyday you seem to trip over another one. The last SMT meeting you attended you were embarrassed and stressed to discover that one of the key people that you will need for implementation and execution will actually lose half their department if the project is successful. How are you supposed to deal with that?

And it's so hard to know what they think of the project. Some of them seem committed but others…Well, others are either disinterested, or worse, they seem to disagree with what you are trying to do. You're smart, you don't like spending your time with negative people so you've been avoiding them. Yesterday you discovered that one of the two people who seem to have been telling you how much they are behind the project has actually been sneaking off trying to cancel your resources behind your back. Do you believe it! Sabotage. And after they told you that they were right behind you!

But the bit which is really worrying you is that the key person who is providing information which is central to the project doesn't seem to be too interested in coming up with anything. The last two emails you sent didn't even get a reply. This is a real risk and it could stop you hitting the deadline.

You need the 'Compleat Stakeholder Manager'

You can hire one - or better, and cheaper, you can become one yourself. To become a compleat stakeholder manager you need to learn the two five point mantras:
'I am a compleat stakeholder manager. Compleat stakeholder managers always:
   1. know who their stakeholders are
   2. get their stakeholders emotionally engaged
   3. have a clear map of the individual

positions of their stakeholders
   4. set up ways of communicating frequently
   5. agree ground rules with stakeholders for working together and always close their loops'
'I am a compleat stakeholder manager. Compleat stakeholder managers never:
   1. ignore their stakeholders
   2. make assumptions on their behalf
   3. surprise their stakeholders
   4. let their stakeholders' expectations go out of balance with reality
   5. ignore the stakeholders' hard and soft success criteria'
You need to repeat these mantras twice every morning and once every evening whilst sitting in a half lotus position with a pint of beer in your hand (or a glass of red wine - not white!)

Great, you now have better karma, but how do you solve the issues which are losing you sleep? I use four grids to map out the stakeholders.

Finding stakeholders: ' There are so many stakeholders. Everyday you seem to trip over another one. The last SMT meeting you attended you were embarrassed and stressed to discover that one of the key people you will need for implementation and execution will actually lose half their department if the project is successful.' How are you supposed to deal with that? Try the framework in figure 1. Which box is the 'hot' box, the box that should start your alarm bells ringing? Yes. Box 4.
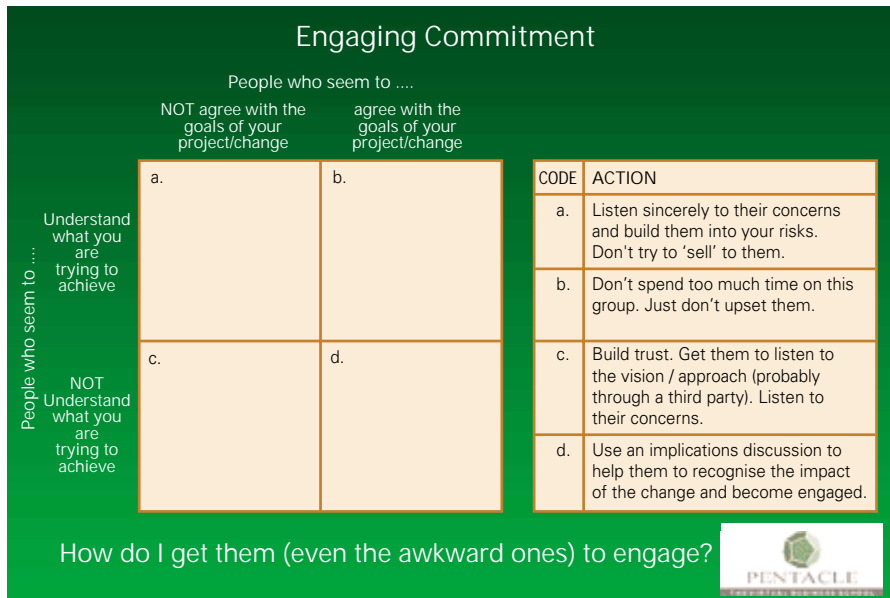
Engaging commitment: 'And it's so hard to know what they think of the project. Some of them seem committed but others. . . Well, others are either disinterested, or worse, they seem to disagree with what you are trying to do. You're smart, you don't like spending your time with negative people so you've been

Finding Stakeholders

People I can think of who will ....

People I can think of who	benefit from the change/project	be damaged as a result of the change/project	CODE	ACTION
are involved but the change/project could happen without them	1.	2.	1.	Ask these people up front to commit to support project/change. They will be a great invisible resource.
			2.	No need to create enemies. Use Issue-Data-Question-Build to emotionally engage.
the change/project could NOT happen without them	3.	4.	3.	Try to get strong sponsorship from these people. Enlist them as allies to help manage other stakeholders.
			4.	Approach with caution – you will need your antennae up and to excercise coution not to permanently alienate them.

How do I find out who my stakeholders are?

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Figure 1: Finding stakeholders

*As used by the 17th Century author Isaac Walton

Engaging Commitment

People who seem to ....

	NOT agree with the goals of your project/change	agree with the goals of your project/change
Understand what you are trying to achieve	a.	b.
NOT Understand what you are trying to achieve	c.	d.

People who seem to ....

CODE	ACTION
a.	Listen sincerely to their concerns and build them into your risks. Don't try to 'sell' to them.
b.	Don't spend too much time on this group. Just don't upset them.
c.	Build trust. Get them to listen to the vision / approach (probably through a third party). Listen to their concerns.
d.	Use an implications discussion to help them to recognise the impact of the change and become engaged.

How do I get them (even the awkward ones) to engage?

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avoiding them.' I guess you're thinking: 'how do I know what they are thinking?' I always recommend that first you use the direct approach - ask them. Then use the curve ball - ask someone who they are close to what they think. Then try the quiz - ask them questions to test their understanding and agreement. See Figure 2.

Guessing motivations and predicting behaviour: 'Yesterday you discovered that one of the two people who seem to have been telling you how much they are behind the project has actually been sneaking off trying to cancel your resources behind your back. Do you believe it! Sabotage. And after they told you that they were right behind you!' People stimulated by the same threats and opportunities tend to behave in the same ways. Think about what people say and do in each box. Box A 'I'm right behind you' - and they do things to help'. Box B 'Let me help you' - they then try to help steer you to success, and then when they decide you're a lost case they start up another project in

competition'. Box C 'It's *$£^&!' - and then you can get nothing out of them. Box D 'I'm right behind you' - and they do nothing -

they seem indistinguishable from Box A but they are dastardly devils determined to destroy you. To tell the difference between Box A and Box D you 'ping' people who offer help. Give them something to help you with and see if they do it. Here the hot box is D in figure 3.

Highlighting Risks: 'But the bit which is really worrying you is that the key person who is providing information which is central to the project doesn't seem to be too interested in coming up with anything. The last two emails you sent didn't even get a reply. This is a real risk, it could stop you hitting the deadline.' You can use the matrix in Figure 4.

It is in the fulfillment of stakeholder goals that true enlightenment is achieved! So there you have it. You are now an enlightened compleat stakeholder manager. You have a mantra to chant daily and you have some frameworks to help you focus. The only challenge you have now is to actually do it!.
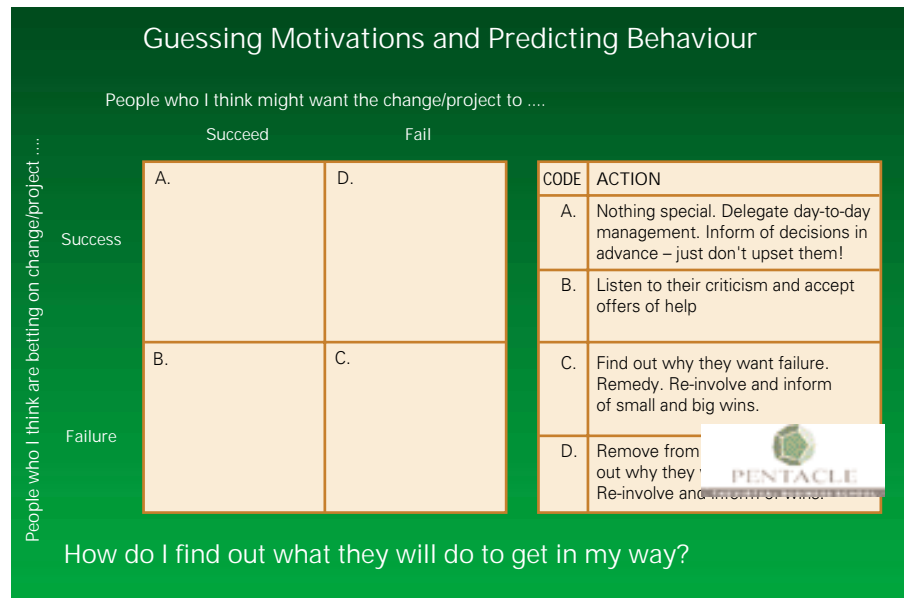
Guessing Motivations and Predicting Behaviour

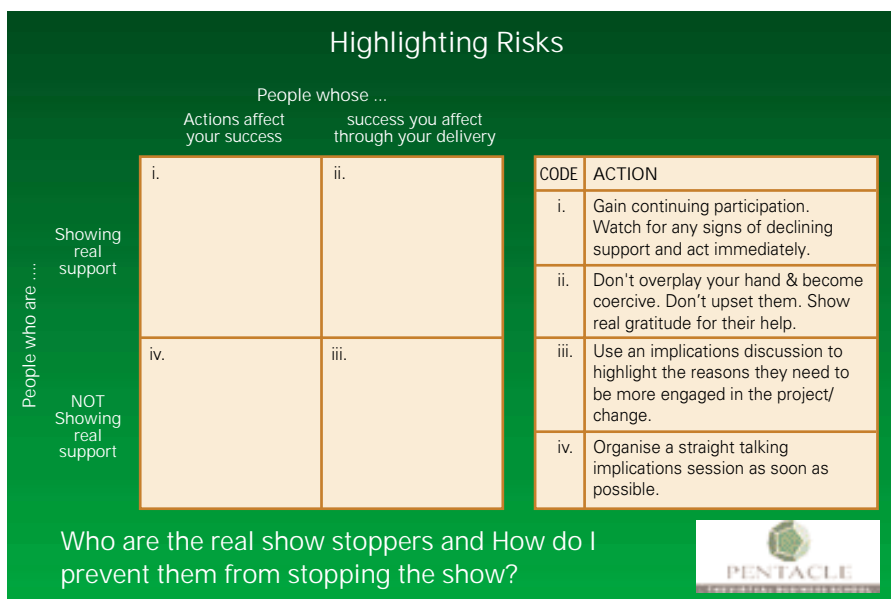People who I think might want the change/project to ....

	Succeed	Fail
Success	A.	D.
Failure	B.	C.

People who I think are betting on change/project ....

CODE	ACTION
A.	Nothing special. Delegate day-to-day management. Inform of decisions in advance – just don't upset them!
B.	Listen to their criticism and accept offers of help
C.	Find out why they want failure. Remedy. Re-involve and inform of small and big wins.
D.	Remove from ... out why they ... Re-involve and ... of wins.

How do I find out what they will do to get in my way?

Figure 3: Guessing motivations and predicting behaviour

Highlighting Risks

People whose ...

	Actions affect your success	success you affect through your delivery
Showing real support	i.	ii.
NOT Showing real support	iv.	iii.

People who are ....

CODE	ACTION
i.	Gain continuing participation. Watch for any signs of declining support and act immediately.
ii.	Don't overplay your hand & become coercive. Don't upset them. Show real gratitude for their help.
iii.	Use an implications discussion to highlight the reasons they need to be more engaged in the project/ change.
iv.	Organise a straight talking implications session as soon as possible.

Who are the real show stoppers and How do I prevent them from stopping the show?

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Figure 3: Highlighting risks