



## Manage stakeholders and beware of the wicked witch!

### Synopsis:

The common cry is that we simply cannot get those people on board. It is probably the 2<sup>nd</sup> most common problem faced by people on project management events we run.

Our researches show that by identifying and managing stakeholders projects stand a better chance of being delivered. But, how do you do this and what on earth has the wicked witch to do with this topic? Read on!

Forget stakeholders and they can fatally kill your project! Much has been written about why projects fail to deliver; no business case, poorly defined objectives, poor project scope alongside over-optimistic deadlines and no planned project budget! However, one area little talked about is the stakeholder - those with an interest and those who will be impacted by the project.

Research points to projects being derailed by poor management of stakeholders. From questionnaire results we have identified that 80% of project management problems are "people issues" with stakeholder management accounting for a substantial proportion of these issues.

How can you avoid falling into the traps others have done?

**STAGE 1:** Identify who the project stakeholders are. They can be individuals or organizations. Make a list. If in doubt, include them. You can always exclude them later on. Including them later on becomes more difficult

**STAGE 2:** Understand what their interest or requirements from the project are. You may not know this at the time you identify them to be a stakeholder but you need to find out. Produce a list of questions to ask the stakeholders. Clearly establish what their requirements are. Avoid second guessing and at the same time beware of raising expectations.

**STAGE 3:** Identify what the project needs from them. You may well need something from a stakeholder in order to progress the project. This could be information, someone to attend a meeting or something physical such as a computer programme. Ensure you mention the impact on the project of their non delivery to stakeholders. Our researches identify that project managers or teams do not say what they want as much as they should!

**STAGE 4:** Identify their attitudes and the possible risks. We always suggest that stakeholder management is the 1st stage of risk management. By identifying attitudes and the possible risks you are looking to prevent "issues" from arising. How many times have you been involved in a project and you know there are tensions but have done nothing? If you do speak to stakeholders in stage 2 it will help to identify attitudes and risks. Failure to carry out this stage can lead to major problems for your project

**STAGE 5:** Identify actions you need to take. This stage is interesting - it is a call to action by you to ensure you take management control of your stakeholders. Ensure you appoint a person to manage each action or series of actions,

We are seeing the growth of the relationship management approach in this area. For specific groups of stakeholders the project manager appoints a relationship manager - someone skilled in handling this aspect of communications and people. We have also seen organizations developing project protocols. This is a written document that identifies who plays which roles (including key stakeholders), what the communication channels are and who takes what types of decisions. You can include anything that is appropriate for effective management of the project. Transparency is the key aspect.

The stages mentioned need to be carried out throughout the life of a project. Someone or a group who is not a key stakeholder today, may become one tomorrow and you need to be prepared for them.

So, who is the wicked witch mentioned in this article? In the Disney cartoon of Sleeping Beauty, a Princess is born and everyone in the Kingdom, except the Wicked Witch, is invited to a party. What does she do? She invites herself and spoils the party by casting a spell on the child. The fairies save her from dying and you probably know the rest of the story. But, what is the connection with stakeholder management? Too often we find that someone or an organization should have been “involved” but was not. Without either party realizing it the Wicked Witch strikes! What is the end result? Bad relationships, project derailed/delayed and the need for new plans and more money.

So remember, manage stakeholders and beware of the wicked witch!

Ron Rosenhead helps people deliver projects. He is an author, consultant, coach professional speaker and trainer in the field of project management. To receive your free e-course on project management go to: <http://www.deliverthatproject.com>



**Reprinting this article.**

You have permission to publish this article electronically within free, non commercial) ezines, websites or blogs as long as you leave all ‘live@ hyperlinks in place, do not alter the content and include our resource box without modification.