

Beyond Conventional Stakeholder Management

Developing PRIME Intelligence[®] on complex programmes

Programme Performance Leaders



moorhouse

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Developing PRIME Intelligence[®] on complex programmes

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abstract

Lack of effective engagement with stakeholders is a well acknowledged cause of programme failure and stakeholder management is increasingly, as such, recognised as a relevant discipline. There are many tools and techniques already available but they over emphasise a mechanistic, 'left brain' view of the world. What is really needed is something quite different. We call this PRIME Intelligence®. This paper discusses how programmes can develop PRIME Intelligence® to enthuse a successful attitude across a programme team. The paper also includes some useful 'top tips' to get you started.

acknowledgement

Thanks are given to Ben Plowden, Programme Director of Travel Demand Management at Transport for London (and formerly the Managing Director of their Group Communications Department). Ben co-hosted a breakfast seminar, with Moorhouse Consulting, that explored the topic of 'Stakeholder Management'. His insights, based on considerable expertise and practical experience, significantly influenced our development of this viewpoint.

stakeholder management

(blah, blah, blah)

Many of you will have not got beyond the heading, as the very phrase is in increasing danger of being one of those 'management topics' that is readily espoused but seldom taken beyond facile truism.

Notwithstanding, we know it warrants a degree of intellectual scrutiny beyond the thesis of 'people and communication are important'. As any practitioner will tell you, it is the real-world events, challenges, and intersections, the items that reside in this 'stakeholder management' category, that are the 'make or break' for any meaningful programme¹ of work.

Before we continue any further, let's agree a definition. They abound and they all largely say the same thing so we will not 'dance on the semantic pin' too much here. The following, from the Association for Project Management² is more than adequate:

Stakeholder Management is the systematic identification, analysis and planning of actions to communicate with, negotiate with and influence stakeholders. Stakeholders are all those who have an interest or role in the project or are impacted by the project.

Good. We can now move on but before we do, we should also agree that it is worth your effort to do so. Is this topic important enough to invest your time reading on? The answer has to be a resounding yes. Again, surveys and data samples are manifold and consistent in their observation that 'stakeholder management' is a pivotal aspect of programme delivery success.

Figure 1: The Office of Government Commerce's 'Common Causes of Project Failure'

1. Lack of clear links between the project and the organisation's key strategic priorities, including agreed measures of success.
2. Lack of clear senior management ownership and leadership.
3. **Lack of effective engagement with stakeholders.**
4. Lack of skills and proven approach to project management and risk management.
5. Too little attention to breaking development and implementation into manageable steps.
6. Evaluation of proposals driven by initial price rather than long-term value for money (especially securing delivery of business benefits).
7. Lack of understanding of, and contact with the supply industry at senior levels in the organisation.
8. Lack of effective project team integration between clients, the supplier team and the supply chain.

¹ For ease of reading, this article will use the term 'programme' as interchangeable with the term 'programme and project'.

² Body of Knowledge 5th edition.

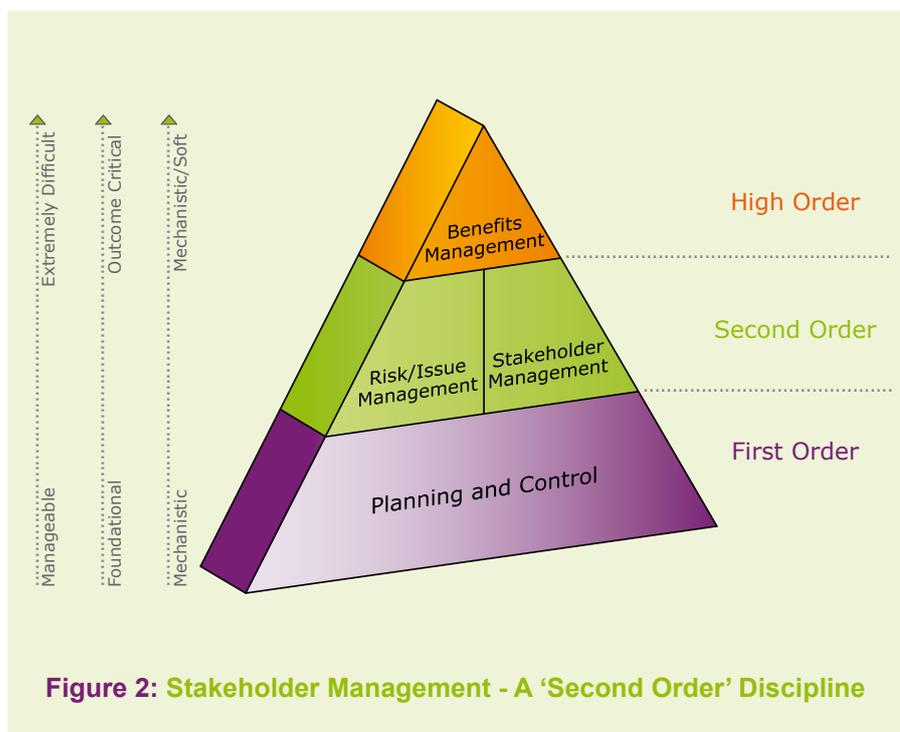


Figure 2: Stakeholder Management - A 'Second Order' Discipline

Any sentient programme manager would recognise the point as a prima facie statement of common sense, but for the sake of completeness, Figure 1 cites a credible authority on this point.

This point is not a contemporary revelation as Machiavelli will attest to:

There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than to initiate a new order of things. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old system, and merely lukewarm defenders in those who would gain by the new one

Niccolo Machiavelli

So, we have established at a high-level what is meant by stakeholder management and that it is an apposite topic for exploration in so much as it clearly impacts programme success. The next issue is whether current understanding

and practice within this area is sufficient. It is to this question we turn next.

Conventional 'stakeholder management' – is it enough?

Pick up any programme management methodology text and there will be a component on stakeholder management. Encouragingly, as programme management maturity improves in organisations, it is increasingly recognised as a relevant discipline.

Many organisations we work with have got a reasonable purchase on the foundations of 'planning and control' which includes, for example, planning, estimation, change control, configuration management and business case definition. Indeed, many have recognised that the second-order disciplines of 'risk and issue management' and 'stakeholder management' are the 'working lens' themes through which their world should be viewed.

Sadly, benefits management remains the final bastion of programme management; everyone knows the sound bite but it is a small minority of organisations that undertake this component with any tangible rigour.

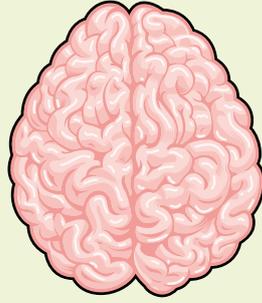
One of the failings of conventional programme management – that this diagram arguably compounds – is that these second-order disciplines get treated as stand-alone elements with their own separate body of knowledge and application. This leads to rather contrived practical treatment; on occasion, it is possible to witness well-intentioned programme managers allotting discrete time to each separate activity. The reality is that these are two facets of the same thing and that, rather than treating these aspects as isolated processes, they should be seen as all pervading approaches, attitudes and mentalities that need to be enthused across the programme team.

The optimal state is when this approach is ultimately driven by a benefits management focus.

To understand why this is such a difficult proposition, however, one needs to understand that the provenance of programme management hails from the hard-edged domains of engineering, construction and IT. In short, it is primarily a discipline body that has emerged from, and talks to, those whose key map of the world is mechanistic, reductionist and explainable in linear templates i.e. the 'left brains' of this world. Robust programme management provides assurance in messy situations because it facilitates a controllable route through the fog – at the very least, it provides this reassuring perception of control.

Conversely, the 'right brains' claim the world is never that simple and, as per a 'systems thinking' view, believe that complex systems – which includes all situations involving other human beings – require a fundamentally different approach.

- Logical
- Sequential
- Rational
- Analytical
- Objective
- Looks at parts



- Random
- Intuitive
- Holistic
- Synthesizing
- Subjective
- Looks at wholes

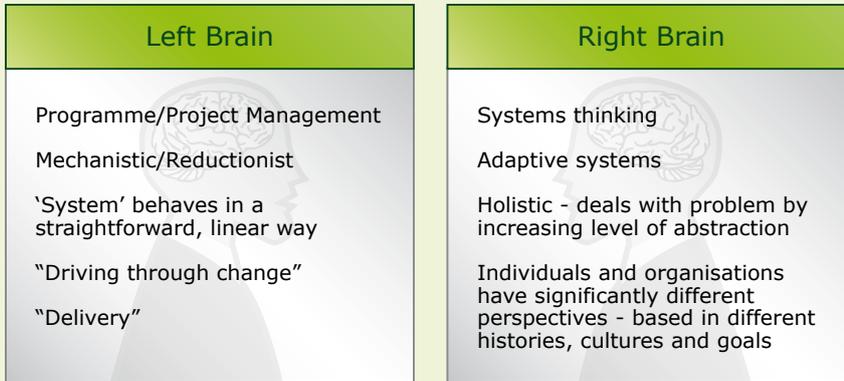


Figure 3: Left Brain vs. Right Brain

The situation can be parodied by the analogy of the stone and the bird. If you believe a programme's stakeholder challenges can be pre-empted and overcome by a deterministic logic and process - the qualities of the problem are akin to throwing a stone. Commensurate with the Newtonian characteristics of the stone - size, weight, surface area and so forth - you know that with a certain application of force it will land a predictable distance from your person. Conversely, if you hold the view that the system is made up of a complex array of stakeholders, each with their own personalities, histories, values and drivers, it is more akin to throwing a bird in the air. Predicting where it will land on any particular application of intent is a completely different proposition.

Whilst there is always a balance to be struck with this analogy, it is certainly the case that conventional stakeholder management, within the programme management context, suffers from a real skew to the left brain logic.

The same point at an individual level can be made in consideration of the most basic psychological view of humankind which goes back to the

Greeks, and possibly the Egyptians. This view states that there is an interaction between interdependent domains - behaviours (behavioural), emotions (affective) and thoughts (cognitive). Everything we do is driven by a combination of our head (cognitive) and heart (affective). This internal negotiation is such an integral component of what makes us work that, at a conscious level, we are no longer aware of it.

We all know head-type people who revel in the facts, principles, reality and logic of a situation and heart-type people who pay more attention to feelings and values. These two orientations compliment each other very well. There is clearly also a continuum between these two extremes and we all move about upon it - contingent on multiple factors; it is, however, widely accepted that most of us have a natural proclivity, or comfort, with one of these aspects over the other. Just acknowledging this simple model, relevant at the individual level, illustrates the complexity of the stakeholder management challenge in any aggregated situation.

In summary, conventional stakeholder management over emphasises the mechanistic, reductionist view of the world. It is also all too often a topic that abounds in content-free truism - 'communication is key' and so forth. In worst case, the theory is self-centric and patronising; like a cheap self-help book, it conveys the simple message that this technique will help you manage - or manipulate - this other person's viewpoint to your favour. OK, so we exaggerate for effect; but, what is really needed is something quite different. We call this PRIME Intelligence®.

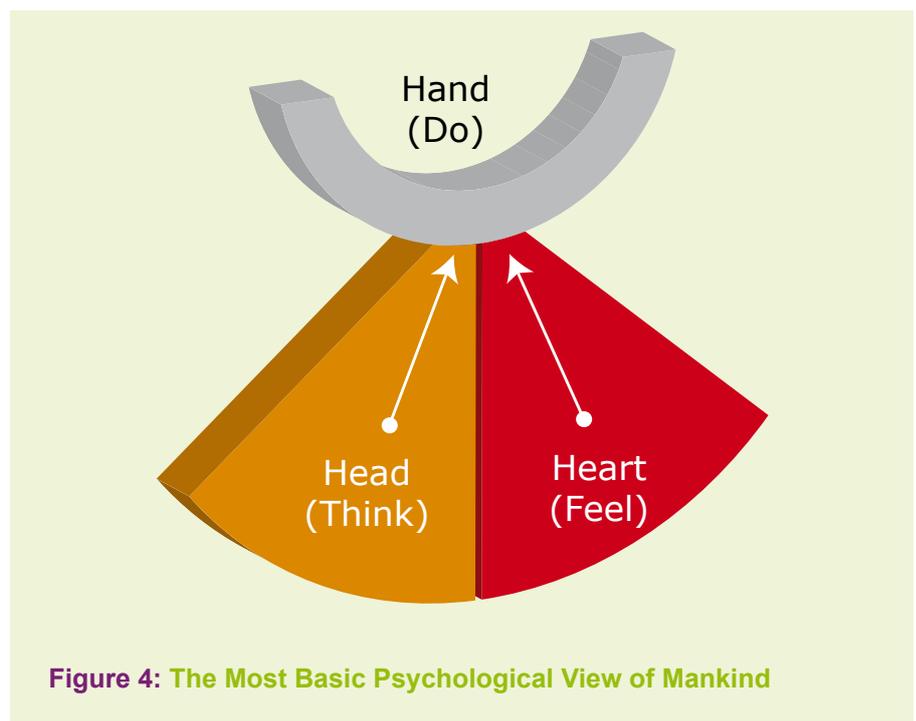


Figure 4: The Most Basic Psychological View of Mankind

developing PRIME Intelligence[©]

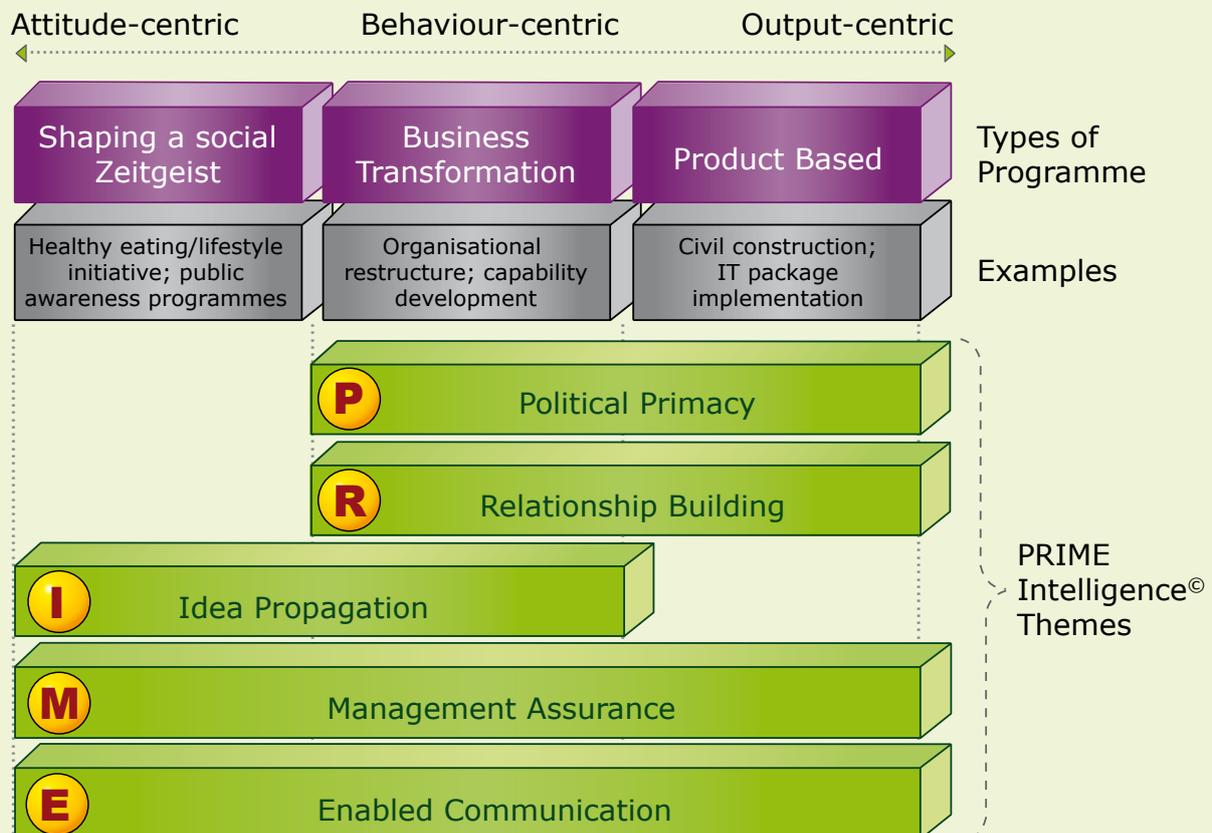
There is no panacea that will infer instant success on your programme in this regard – no magic framework, technique, tool or model. If anyone attempts to sell you one, we politely suggest they have never left the academic lab. What is required, conversely, is for a proactive attitude, or state of mind, to be enthused across the programme team. We refer to this attitude as 'PRIME Intelligence[©]'.

The Programme Manager has a real role, indeed responsibility, here. Developing PRIME Intelligence[©] is about engaging, enthusing and exciting the entire programme team as to the critical relevance of these aspects. It also involves undertaking a team-wide 'learning journey'. Reading this paper can take you from the 'unconscious incompetence' to the 'conscious incompetence' level. Traversing the 'conscious competence' to get to the ultimate 'unconscious competence' level, will, however, require enthused engagement from all team members.

There is no intent, however, for this to be cleverer than it sounds. We have simply identified five thematic viewpoints that have relevance contingent on the type of programme you are involved in (as per Figure 5).

Familiarity and experience with these themes, and the ideas characterised within them, will enhance the chances of successful stakeholder engagement and it is to each that we now turn.

Figure 5: PRIME Intelligence[©] Themes (and their relevance contingent on programme type)



PRIME - political primacy

This first theme is arguably the most important.

It was possibly Aristotle that first opined, in pre-Christian Greece, that 'man is a political animal'. By this he meant that human beings are intensely social, argumentative, opinionated, interested in power and influenced by emotional as well as intellectual considerations.

All decisions are ultimately a human or emotional response to a range of possible options. As such, not only can politics never be removed from the equation, we need to accept that all decisions will ultimately be political ones (whether taken at a team, organisation or state level).

Managing Stakeholders is primarily a social and, therefore, political act.

The frustrating corollary of this, for all rational programme managers, is the need to accept that all other cases being made – technical and economic – are ultimately secondary to this political process.

One only needs to look at a cross-section of current national issues to understand this. For example, technical arguments are clearly subordinate to the political in relation to determining the appropriate level of CO² emissions, whether a new generation of nuclear power plants gets constructed and whether Crossrail (proposed East-West rail link in London) ever gets approved. At a simpler level, it will be politics that ultimately decides whether you purchase a Prius or a Land Rover as the next family car.

This point shouldn't remove any of the focus on developing robust technical and business cases; it just demands recognition that these important elements are 'necessary but insufficient preconditions' of a successful programme.

Viewed in the context of the primacy of the political case, these other factors – technical, legal and institutional – should all be further interrogated in order to develop this 'whole picture' understanding.

What does this actually all mean for programme managers? Well, there are a number of considerations that stem from this observation:

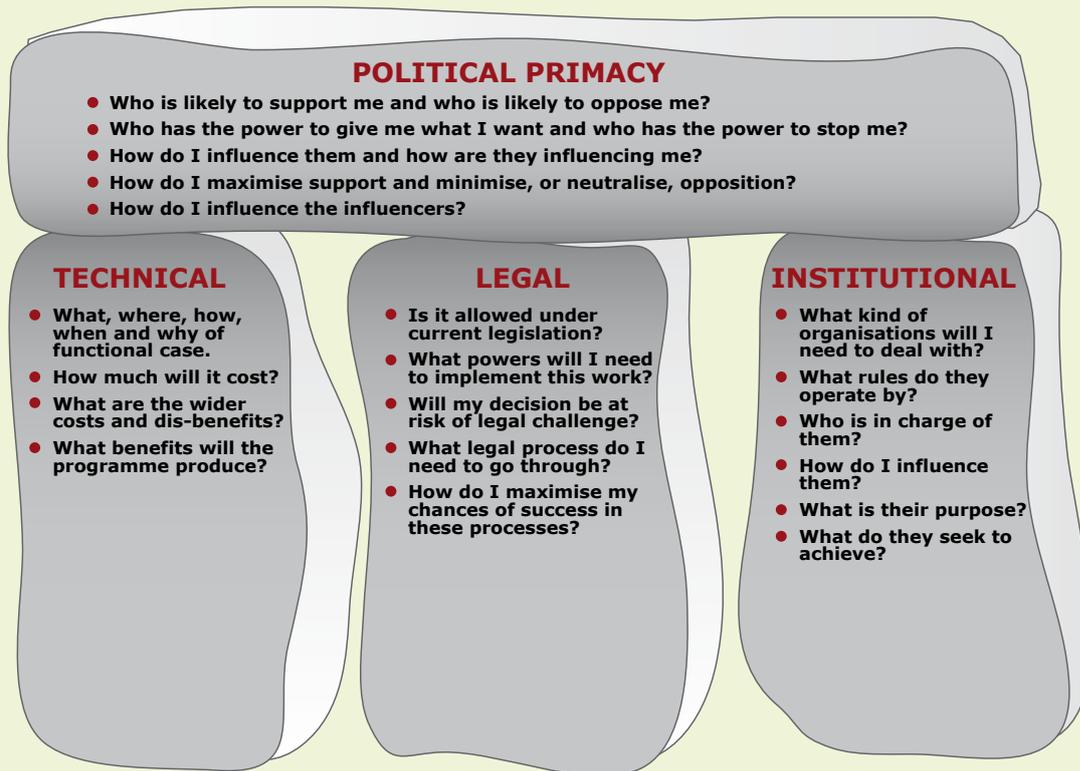
- Learning to live with this reality; if you continue to believe that important decisions are made wholly on technical grounds you will probably be unsuccessful and deeply frustrated.
- Applying equal, if not greater, attention to the political elements of the programme – especially during the early, initiation stages. When reviewing expensive failure, there is rarely any shortage of investment in developing the technical argument but often a paucity of investment in managing the political agenda. Intelligence in this theme requires due recognition of this aspect.

Real World Example:

One organisation we have worked with – responsible for multi-million pound transportation schemes – has this intelligence. Consultation with local residents is thought through down to the minutiae of conference room ergonomics – to ensure discussion is collaborative (using round tables as opposed to an adversarial front stage) from the off. Conversely, some organisations are not even aware they should be engaging affected stakeholders in the conversation.



Figure 6: The Pillars of Technical, Legal and Institutional Understanding



- Technical staff members are often not well suited to political communication. Accepted, this is a generalisation, but just because an individual has a detailed, esoteric command of a proposed 'solution' this does not make them automatically well-placed to successfully engage in a political dialogue. Indeed, the engineers, economists and IT technicians are often the last people you should put into this situation as their specialism often skews them towards the detail and not to an intuitive understanding of broader political implications and imperatives.
- An obvious 'so what' inference from this statement is the need to understand all the stakeholders within this 'political' space. We will talk more about stakeholder mapping in the following theme; suffice to say, once identified, appropriate resources should be assigned the task of stakeholder engagement. Such resources are always finite so hard

decisions will need to be made in this regard and innovation courted. An exemplar in this area is Transport for London's (TfL's) Docklands Light Railway (DLR) organisation. They have an enviable reputation for delivering their programmes of work to time and budget. Whilst the schemes they deliver are, arguably, more politically anodyne than comparable works in denser areas of the capital, they have an extremely savvy team in relation to fostering positive community relationships. One anecdotal example involves a DLR manager who pre-empted the perception of residents who lived in an old peoples' home adjacent to the site of a proposed new tunnel. He took them on a coach ride to a completed DLR tunnel site to explain how the scheme would look on completion and explained how disruption to their lives would be kept to a minimum. This proactive, considered, and very human, approach is at the heart of 'Political Primacy' intelligence.

PRIME - relationship building

This theme develops two key sub-themes that are integral to developing a relationship with any stakeholder.

Know Yourself

The first sub-theme is 'Know yourself'. Before you can meaningfully engage with others, you have to have a considered understanding of yourself at an individual, programme team and organisation level. This involves 'getting under the skin' of your programme scope and objectives as a necessary precursor to understanding the nature of any relationship you are likely to forge with stakeholders.

At an individual level, the benefit is often a tactical one. Personality inventories (e.g. Myers-Briggs, Belbin, KAI etc) have been around for some time now and many managers are familiar with them. Even so, it is worth revising yourself of your key personal drivers and traits – especially in the company of any newly formed programme team. Why is this important? Well, often the case for change is made verbally in a face-to-face situation and often it comes down not to brute logic but to establishing personal rapport. We all have traits that resonate with some, and irritate (hopefully a minority group of) others. The benefit of this self-intelligence is that you know who in the team is best placed to pair off against a stakeholder – particularly when the relationship is at a fraught stage.

The point is, however, more germane to the programme and organisation levels – where it is equally valid that a 'personality'

is formed and understood. Let's start with the organisation level as it is important that a programme 'personality' reflects that of its host. Companies are today judged more by image and reputation and business ethics than by economic or financial factors or size. Consumers agree that the goal of making a profit and obeying the law are necessary, but insufficient, for business success in this decade.

Shell experienced this quite painfully in the midst of the 1990s with the case of the Brent Spar oil platform that it planned to dispose of at sea. Shell firmly believed that its planned method for disposal satisfied all concerns, including the environmental ones. Greenpeace thought otherwise. Protesters occupied the platform and so successfully galvanized public opinion that senior politicians in several European countries publicly intervened. Soon, consumer boycotts hit Shell's retail business and, in Germany, Shell gasoline stations came under violent attack.

At that time, Shell had already embarked on a vast corporate transformation programme and was questioning all its fundamentals and its vision of the future. The Brent Spar case, as well as the human right discussion about Shells

Real World Example:

A good example of this is a high-performing programme team we were recently involved in that was delivering a complex national programme. The team had to deliver some difficult messages to senior staff members, in workshop forums, across the country. The programme team members recognised that different individual styles had varying effectiveness dependent on who they were trying to engage; as such, whilst the core message remained the same, they would 'tag team' between each other as suggested by this self-intelligence.



engagement in the Niger Delta, made it clear for the company that it had to commit itself to taking on new and sometimes unfamiliar roles and responsibilities, not only in its industry, but also in society at large. It sought the views of others through an extensive, worldwide programme of stakeholder consultations in an attempt to understand the changing responsibilities of multinational companies. Shell embodied these new responsibilities within all of its business frameworks and operating principles – that is, it went way beyond the espoused rhetoric of corporate responsibility but recognised these principles



Figure 7: Examples of Programme Logos

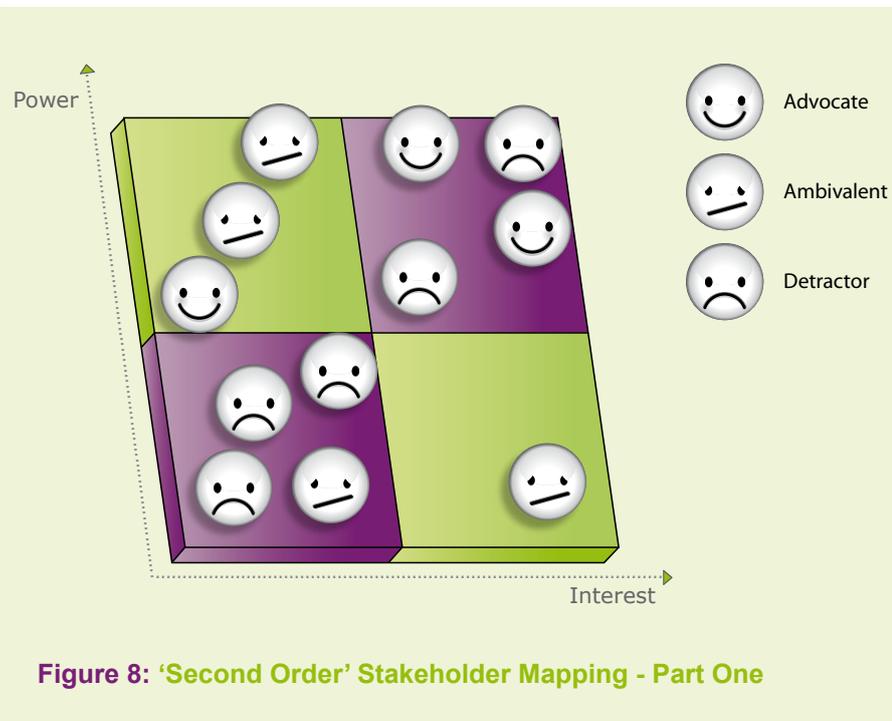


Figure 8: 'Second Order' Stakeholder Mapping - Part One

Most are familiar with the basics in this regard – that is the process of plotting stakeholder 'positions' on a two-by-two matrix – typically denoting power (influence) by interest (proximity to programme). At the very least, this exercise should then seek to understand whether each stakeholder (plotted as an individual or group) is an advocate or detractor of the proposed changes.

Aligned with this, it is important also to understand the type of power base each has – beyond the obvious hierarchal position as there are many other, often more material sources of influence, e.g. possession of critical skills and knowledge, resource controlling, charismatic leaders, coercive etc.

More important still, is the need to understand the respective levels of predictability.

This is essential as the overarching strategy is one of establishing who has high power and low predictability in order to wipe this section of the map out. Progress in this strategy is made by building rapport in order to build predictability.

had to be at the heart of its being. As their Chairman summarised it at the time - "My colleagues and I are totally committed to a business strategy that generates profits while contributing to the well being of the planet and its people".

In relation to the Brent Spar project their corporate personality or demeanour essentially moved from one of 'decide, announce and defend' to one of 'dialogue, decide and deliver'. This shift in their self-understanding led to genuine consultation with others.

Similarly, at a programme level, it is important to establish a personality or brand that others can really 'hang onto'. At the outset, programme leaders should focus on this element – establishing team rules and mutually accepted codes of behaviour. An experienced programme manager will often seek, for example, for his programme team to have active disagreement as required to formulate a 'common line' but once established a 'lets stand shoulder to shoulder' attitude about imparting it to the external world. Branding a programme should not be seen as a 'cosmetic aside' as, done well, it can give a real platform on which to build deeper messages and relationships. Programme names, logos, consistent email signatures

and programme communication templates all help establish this coherent presence.

Second Order Mapping

The second sub-theme is that of 'second order mapping'. By this, we mean that any stakeholder mapping activity, as described in all 'Training 101' stakeholder management texts, needs to be taken beyond the usual treatment if it is to be useful.

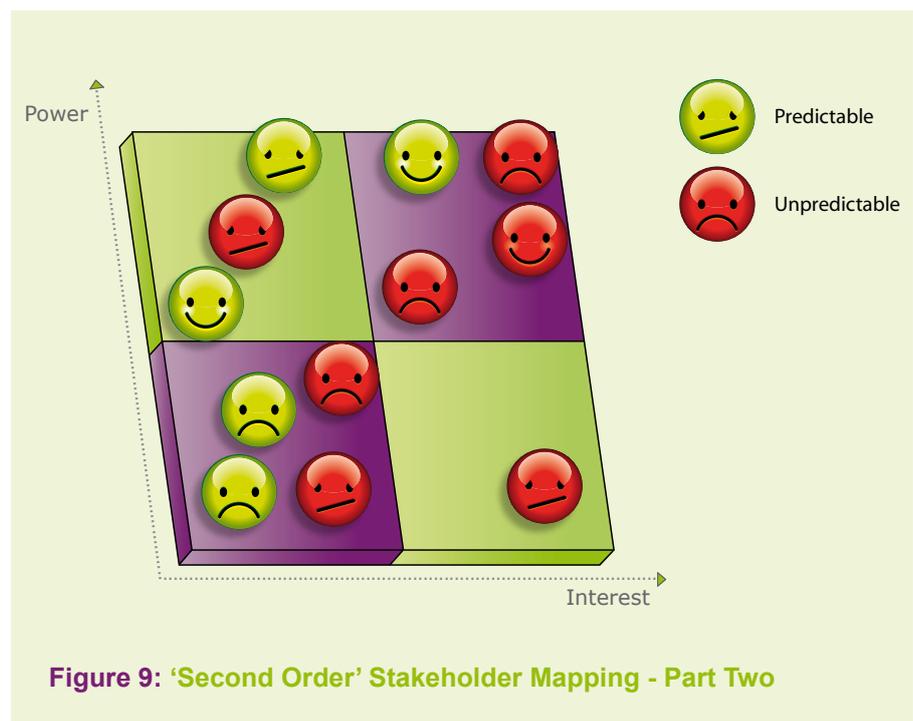


Figure 9: 'Second Order' Stakeholder Mapping - Part Two

The Stakeholder Circle™

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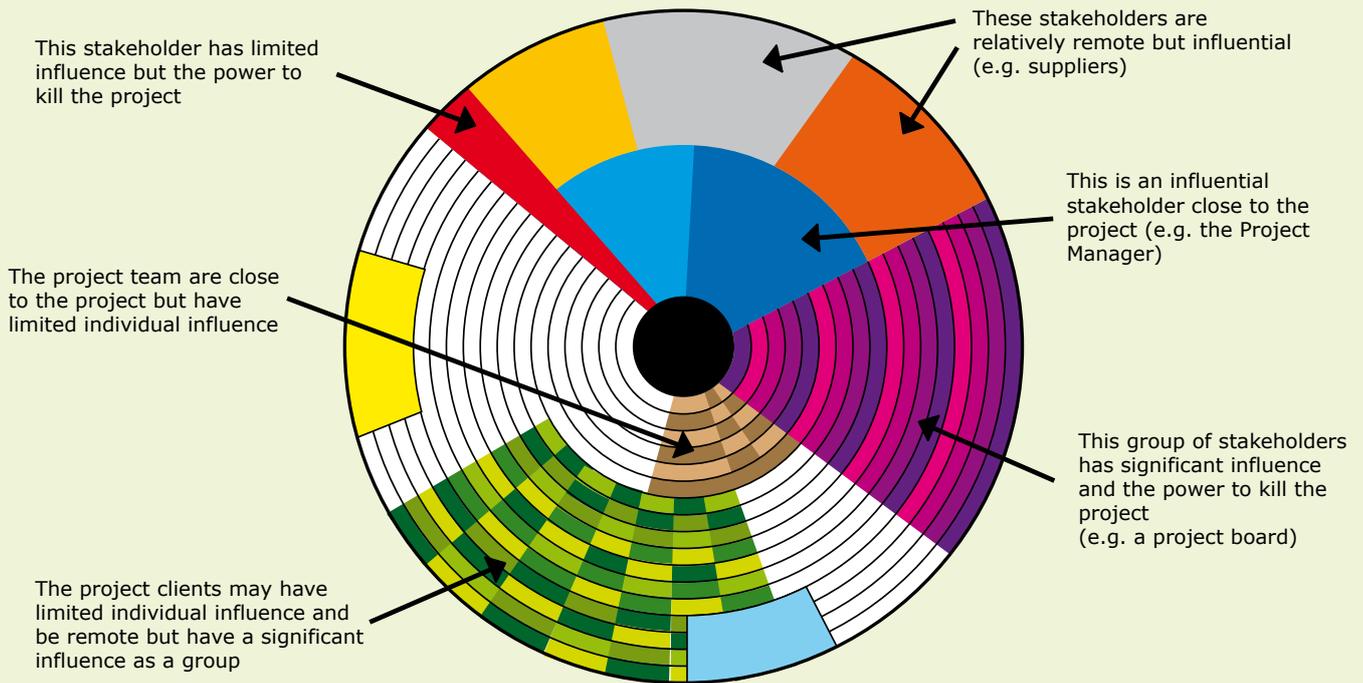


Figure 10: Example of a More Involved Stakeholder Mapping Tool

There is a great apocryphal story of a manufacturing plant undertaking wholesale changes to its production plant – necessary for company survival. The redesigns involved changes to surrounding road plans and, as such, were in the balance. The management team, rightly, invested huge amounts of effort in assuaging the planning authorities that all was in good order. Nonetheless, the decision to give planning consent remained a close call. It was fairly late in the day, when they realised that an old lady living closest to the proposed new entrance gate had not been considered. She was a complete unknown and, as such, a complete unpredictable. She also wielded considerable power as a letter of disapproval from her, whipped up by the local press, could easily be the death knell for the work. As soon as they got to this point of realisation, a programme member visited her with an offer to view the plant and proposed plans. She effectively became a ‘friend of the organisation’ and even contributed to road signage plans to mitigate disruption within the realm of her house. Her

gratitude at being brought into the process contributed to a successful planning process and programme of work. The moral of the story is to look far and wide when undertaking this exercise – and to focus on the high power, low predictables.

Tools are only ever a small component of the answer in such efforts – in the vast majority of cases a large piece of paper and an Excel spreadsheet will suffice. More involved tools can, however, help facilitate this deeper understanding (e.g. see Figure 10). For internal business transformation efforts, consideration should also be given to understanding relationships beyond those that can be gleaned from the conventional organisation chart.

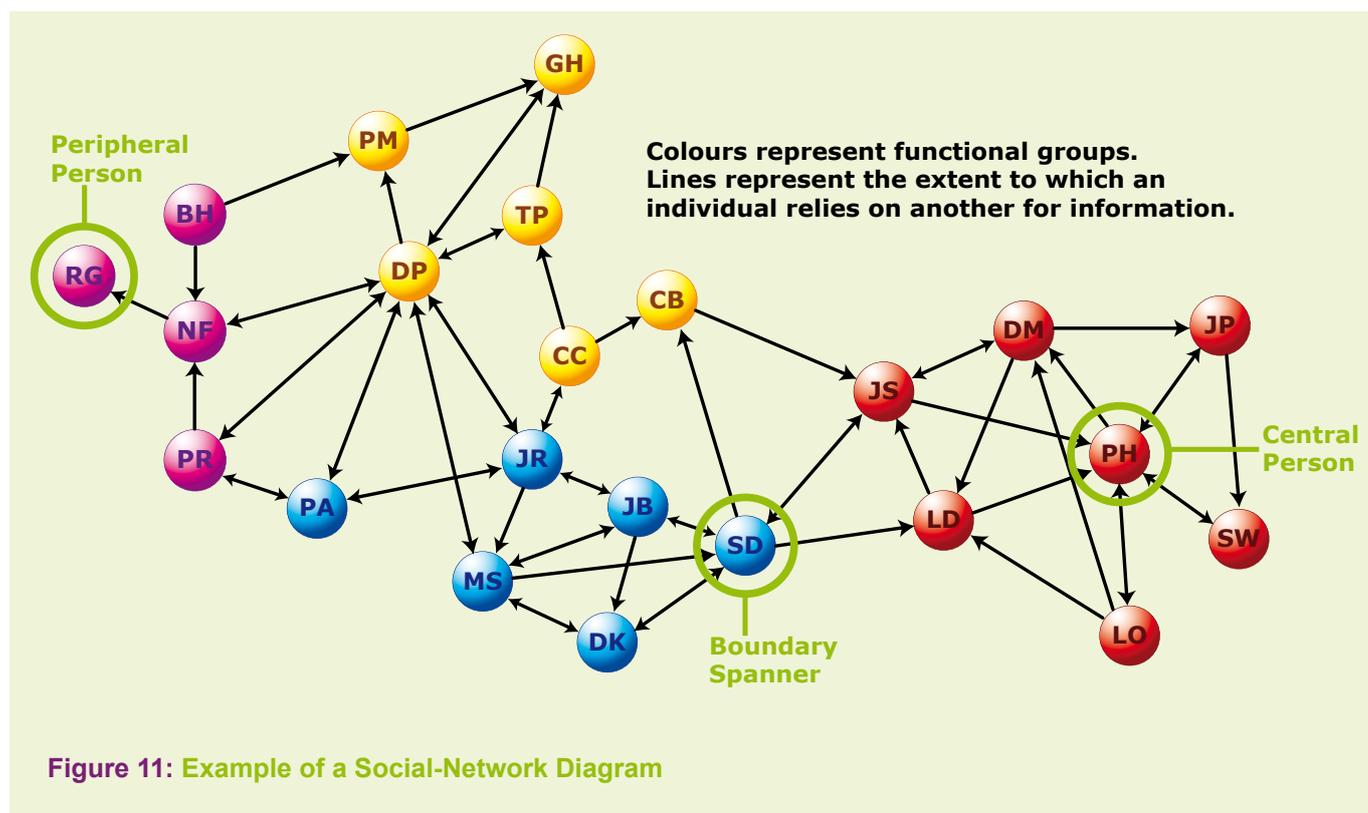
A far more insightful perspective can be gleaned from a social-network diagram where dots represent key individuals, colours represent functional groups and lines represent the extent to which an individual relies on another for information. With such a diagram, you can more readily see 'central people' and those that 'span boundaries'.

It is worth a few words about the classic stakeholder groupings of client, supplier and user (as extolled by PRINCE2). It is really important that expectations of these parties

are discussed and aligned with true candour beyond the 'theatre' of what everyone expects of each other at a superficial level. Getting to the real drivers (e.g. supplier needs to deliver to grow in the sector, user is fearful of change, client has personal career agenda etc) is the basis for genuine partnership working. If this relationship exploration isn't undertaken early on, one of two mutually-destructive scenarios will manifest once the first major issue point is reached – either all parties will go into 'fight mode' with each battling to assert authority over the situation; alternatively, one

party will adopt an apathetic stance, on a temporary basis, only to erode the programme downstream.

This isn't all just mealy-mouthed theory either. Our successful programme managers regularly facilitate such stakeholder mapping sessions. When they do, they focus on deriving focused action plans, for the programme team, that intelligently match individuals to stakeholders and agreed communication plans. They often then destroy the stakeholder maps used to build these plans!



PRIME - idea propagation

Contagiousness is a function of the messenger; stickiness is a function of the message

For those involved in efforts that seek to change behaviours on a social scale – to create a new Zeitgeist – there is a need to understand how ideas spread. This theme borrows heavily from Malcolm Gladwell's work – set out in 'The Tipping Point' – especially in relation to the 'The Law of the Few' and 'Stickiness' sub-themes. The first talks to the importance of the messenger, the second to the function of the message.

Gladwell's thesis explores the idea that in an epidemic there is often a moment when everything can change all at once. This is the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point, a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility - it is a certainty. What is more, it takes only the smallest of changes to shatter equilibrium and trigger such events.

The theory is primarily developed in the context of social change but any programme manager involved in behavioural change work will recognise the phenomenon at an organisational level.

When 'tipped', ideas, messages and behaviours spread just like viruses with geometric progression.

As such, it makes sense to explore the key characteristics of epidemics to better understand how we, as programme managers, can positively influence the propagation of ideas. Essentially, epidemics are a function of the people who transmit infectious agents, the infectious agent itself and the environment in which the agent is operating.

Contagiousness is in larger part a function of the messenger. Stickiness is primarily a property of the message.

The Law of the Few

In short, there are exceptional people out there – 'The Few' - who are capable of starting epidemics - all you have to do is find them. When searching for these people it is also worth remembering that word of mouth remains the most important form of human communication and rumours the most contagious of all social messages. The people you require will sit comfortably in this context.

There are three types of idea propagator you seek – the 'connectors', the 'mavens' and the 'salespeople'.

Connectors are those with a special gift for bringing the world together; they are people specialists, they know lots of them and have an extraordinary knack of making friends and acquaintances. The 'Rule of 150' states that most of us have approximately 150 social acquaintances – the number of people we would happily join, uninvited, for a bar-side chat. Connectors 'blow this rule out of the water' and have many 'weak tie' friendly, yet casual, social connections. They manage to occupy many different subcultures and niches and, by having a foot in so many camps, are able to bring them altogether. A modern day test would be to take a peek at someone's contacts list - if



voluminous, you will know instantly you have a connector.

Mavens are information specialists; once they figure out how to get that great deal they want to tell everybody else about it. They solve their own emotional needs by solving other peoples' problems and they have the knowledge, and the social skills, to start word-of-mouth epidemics. In a social epidemic, mavens are the 'data banks'; that is, they often provide the message.

Salespeople have the skills to persuade the unconvinced when little things can make as much of a difference as the big things. At this point of human dialogue, non-verbal clues are far more important than verbal clues and, as such, salespeople will seek 'interaction synchrony' – recognising that communication has a rhythmic, physical dimension. For example, we imitate each others emotions as a way of expressing support and caring. Emotion is contagious and salespeople have a deft intelligence in relation to expressing emotions and feelings; they recognise that persuasion works in ways well beyond verbal content per se.

If as a programme manager you need to seed a new idea into the social consciousness, the 'Law of the Few' intelligence would lean you towards locating these characteristics in your messenger community.

Stickiness

The 'Stickiness' sub-theme, however, is focused on the message. In simple terms, ideas have to be memorable to move people into action. This is a real challenge in the Information Age but, at its core, your change programme should have a simple, memorable mantra that is repeated over and over.

A related perspective on this social phenomenon is that of the concept of the 'meme' – coined in 1976 by the zoologist and evolutionary scientist – Richard Dawkins. By 'meme', Dawkins was referring to a unit of cultural information transferable from one mind to another. As a unit of cultural evolution, a meme displays the behaviours of the gene within the genetic context and, as such, the analogy is extended to observing how memes evolve via natural selection. Like biological evolution, ideas propagate because aspects such as variation, mutation, competition and inheritance positively influence their success at replicating. Whilst the theory is still relatively novel, the simple summary is that you can influence the propagation of ideas by seeding stories, and other such memes, that are loaded with your key messages and allow for easy adaptation and replication. You don't need to wade any further into this fascinating area of academic research, but, if engaged in change programmes, you do need to get this fundamental point.

PRIME - management assurance

The fourth theme of our PRIME Intelligence® can be similarly sub-divided into two messages – ‘lead and believe’ and the knowledge characterised by the expression ‘you can please some of the people, some of the time but not all of the people, all of the time.’ These messages are two grammatical takes on the term ‘management assurance’ – firstly, the definitive need for assurance or, more appositely, leadership and, secondly, treating it as a verb, the need to constantly assure progress through a careful assessment of progress.

The first is to a degree a truism but it is so important it warrants reinforcement. If you are involved in a material change effort, the programme leaders need to have a resolute belief that change is possible.

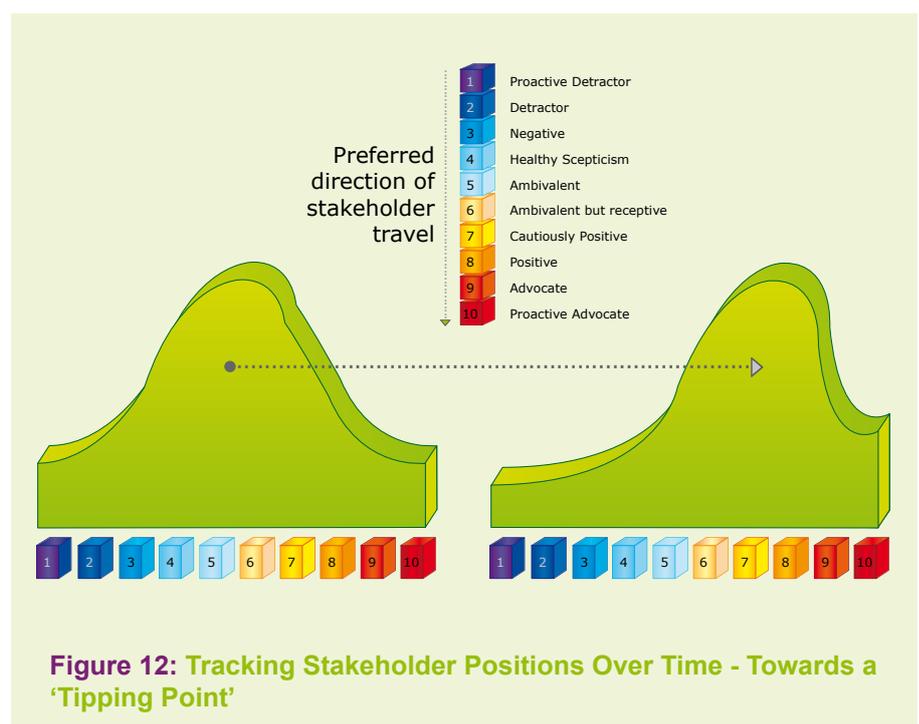
There will invariably be times when self-doubt encroaches but programme leaders need to contain such anxieties to themselves as doubt, like fear, is extremely contagious. On long haul programmes, leaders need to instil a ‘win often’ culture that celebrates all the mini successes en route.

In the vein of this comment, you should ban the word ‘sponsor’ as it infers a very distant, aloof relationship with the programme. The last thing a programme manager needs is a remote executive happy to operate as a figurehead with the occasional,

corridor catch-up. You need an active, vested senior executive who is willing to put some ‘skin in the game’; the Office of Government Commerce term is spot on – Senior Responsible Owner – as it gets closer to eliciting the behaviour described ‘on the tin’.

An exemplar case study in this regard is Ken Livingstone in relation to London’s Congestion Charging scheme. Regardless of personal politics, and your support of the scheme per se, one has to accept that in the face of a myriad of obstacles and doomsayers, Livingstone’s indefatigable political leadership, and personal confidence in the outcome, was a primary factor of this programme’s success.

The second aspect of the ‘Management Assurance’ theme is intelligent acknowledgement that in all complex programmes,





there will invariably be a 'zero sum' game somewhere i.e. there will invariably be some stakeholders who are (or who at least justifiably perceive themselves to be) worse off as a result of the endeavour. Whilst 'win win' should always be the aspiration, there is a danger that the sentiment gets a little woolly and new age. If this reality is accepted, then there is renewed confidence that the programme's position is not necessarily one of pleasing all stakeholders but, rather, proactively managing stakeholders to maximise programme benefits. The two points are subtly different.

In order to understand this dynamic, it is essential that some tracking of stakeholder receptiveness to change is undertaken. On large scale business transformation efforts, it is worth capturing each individual affected staff member's position on a simple 1-10 scale – seeking absolute candour – at every point of interaction. Over time, at an aggregated level, you can then monitor progress objectively – untainted by the programme team's bias as to what they want to see.

What should be witnessed on a successful programme is not a binary shift but rather a movement from normal distribution to a lopsided positive. As the sceptics and ambivalents move so you start to affect a really powerful 'tipping point' effect. It would be unrealistic to expect a mass

conversion to advocates in any significant change effort, but nor do you need drastic results to see real business improvement. Human nature dictates you won't win everyone round so focus energies in the middle ground. That said, this intelligence theme also recognises that the 1-3s in this scale, whilst not likely to have their minds changed, will invariably be the best source of information in terms of understanding real issues and concerns. Where this can feed back into enhancements to the programme, the opportunity should never be wasted.

PRIME - enabled communication

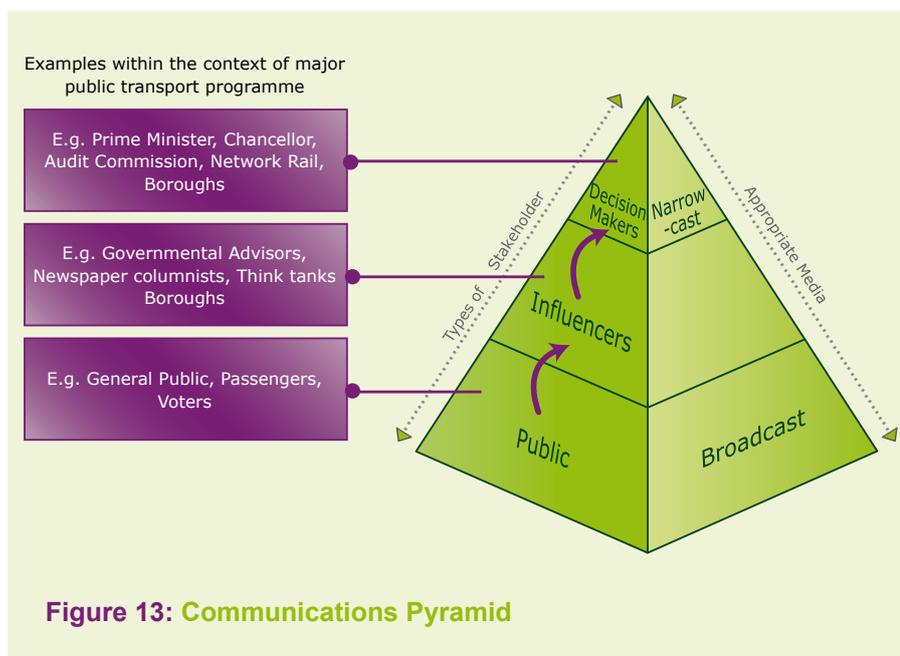
The final theme is that of enabling participatory communications with your programme and the vested stakeholders.

The power of active listening can never be understated. The Transport for London DLR team previously mentioned in this paper make the pivotal point that their successful rail projects are always founded on schemes that are actually requested by the local residents. This is self-evidently far more potent a starting point than a corporate position of 'we have the idea – how do we best sell it'. Information flow is one way whilst enabled communication is two-way and PRIME Intelligence® very much requires a facilitation of the latter. This is not a trite point as there remains a pervading mindset

of 'I have communicated with you' when often it is actually a case of 'I have communicated to you'. What is needed at the corporate level is a method and a set of tools that help ensure that the message has not just been delivered but understood. In order to establish this engagement – or rapport building – there clearly needs to be a feedback loop engendered by this approach.

At one of our recent seminars on this topic, a delegate presented a counter point that a foreign acquaintance had presented to him – that 'when you need to drain the





swamp, you don't consult the frogs'. The comment agitated an interesting discussion on the need also to situate consultation activity in the context of national characteristics; it is the case, for example, that the British public are less sanguine about state interventions than other European counterparts. The explanation is one of legal (common law) and democratic heritage as well as of broader cultural dynamics such as the role of the press. The complexity introduced when needing to consult at an international level is manifest.

Programme managers need to have a good understanding of the type of communications appropriate for the audience – broadcast versus narrowcast – as well as the need to pace communications messages contingent to lifecycle stage.

As per Figure 13, there is clearly the requirement for different communication techniques and channels dependent on the type of stakeholder being engaged. The diagram also emphasises a point about prioritisation of effort; communication resources will always be a programme constraint and, therefore, one hour spent with a decision-maker will be worth much more than one-hour fly tipping the public. Again, a truism but we often see communications efforts that lack this intelligent application of time and effort.

Notwithstanding, Programme Managers need, in this current age, to be minded of the pervasiveness of new broadcast media channels such as internet-enabled visual media, podcasts and blogs etc. The online world is a great communication facilitator and technology has an increasing role to play in this regard as long as it isn't used in isolation and doesn't omit the feedback loop.

In relation to 'pacing the message' it is impossible to be prescriptive but this intelligence theme demands that the type of communication is contingent on the lifecycle stage. For example, with major construction programmes – especially considering the national characteristic of the UK populace – it is extremely inadvisable to go out with an outset communication of 'we have carefully considered this problem and here is the answer – what do you think?'. This will be an affront to most peoples' sense of democratic individualism and will almost invariably stimulate an adverse reaction. Far better to go with a genuine 'we are currently considering these options – what do you think?'. Once a preferred option is progressed, then you need to ensure that communications adequately defend the technical case; if the argument is not robust, at levels tangibly deeper than those of the detractors, you can set your argument back aeons.

It is worth finally touching on a couple of perspectives that pertain to this theme – the role of the organisational communications team and the need for senior executives to manage internal programme teams.

This theme emphasises the point that enabled communications is key and that communications experts can support the development of PRIME Intelligence® in an organisation. Great care, however, needs to be taken here as simply locating the expertise in a communications department misses the point. At best case, it is as futile as trying to outsource leadership; at worst case, it can exacerbate the treatment of this topic as a programme 'bolt on'. The whole point of PRIME Intelligence® is that this attitude and capability needs to completely pervade the entire programme team's approach and behaviour. Well led corporate communications teams exist to encourage the diffusion of this message not to produce glossy newsletters.

Finally, a message for senior executives who have dedicated programme managers in their charge. Programme managers and committed programme teams quickly get to a point where their objectivity is tainted in relation to driving a programme forward – its success is inextricably intertwined with their own. This has many positive ramifications but also some negative ones; not least in enhancing the potential for the mental bias psychologists refer to as 'cognitive dissonance'. Simply put, the more effort you have personally invested into a plan, the less able you are to recognise changing environmental factors that potentially invalidate your original argument. Keep an eye out for it as PRIME Intelligence® is never about proceeding against the logic and objectivity of the day.

conclusion

Stakeholder management is important – critically so. There is no (left-brain) methodology, tool or technique that will magically guide you through the fog in this regard. Conversely, what is required is the development of an attitude and approach across a programme team; we call this PRIME Intelligence®.

PRIME Intelligence® is about understanding, first and foremost, that the political process dominates. It is about understanding that relationships are formed through self-awareness and ‘personality’ development and that ‘second order’ mapping facilitates a focus on developing rapport with those stakeholders who have high power and low predictability. It is about

understanding that ideas propagate when you have contagious messengers and a sticky message. It is about understanding that programmes need resolute leaders but do not need to please all the people all the time to maximise the intended benefits. Finally, it is about understanding that enabled communications require an active listener as well as the ability to

match communications to audience and to ‘pace the message’.

You should seek to expand this understanding – enriching it with your own programme team’s experiences and interpretations. The detail is less important than the observation that these thematic areas of understanding are fundamental to developing the required intelligence. This intelligence is what resides behind behaviours that increase the chances of respectful and successful stakeholder engagement and, by direct causation, programme success.

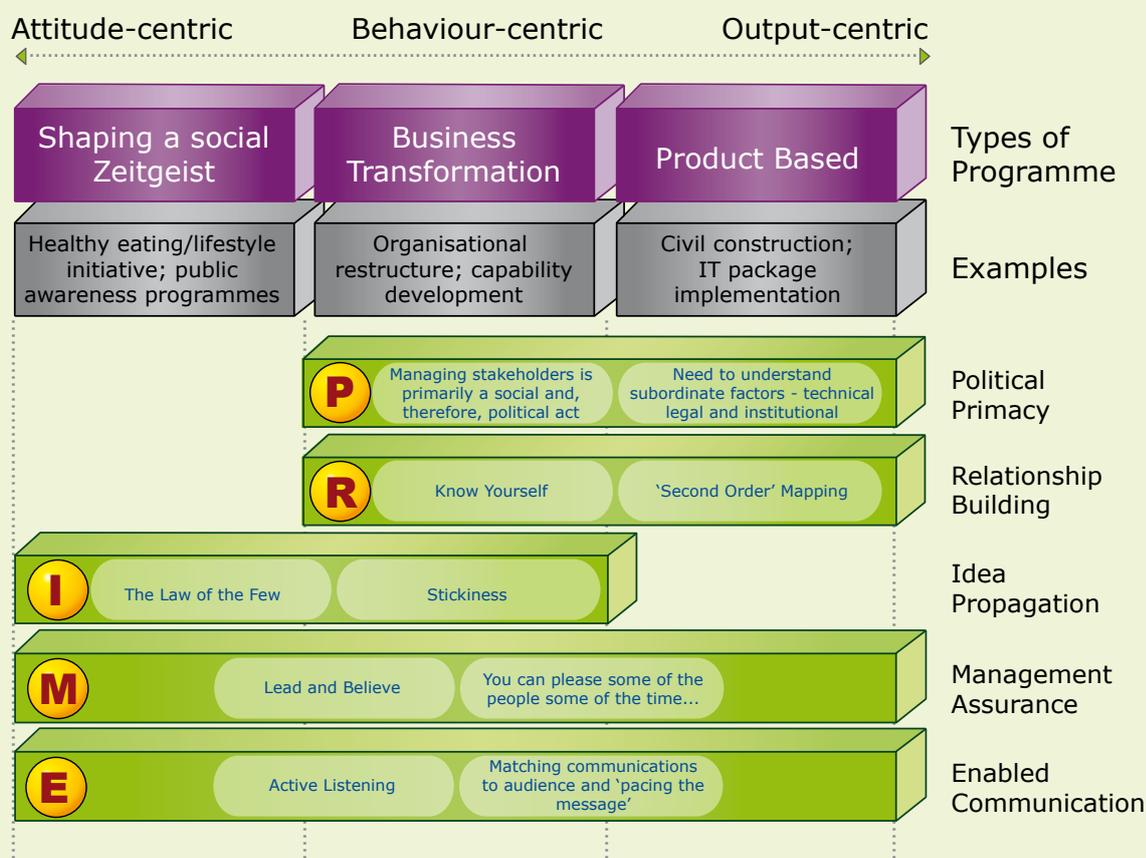


Figure 14: PRIME Intelligence® (including key sub-themes)

addendum : PRIME Intelligence[©]

- ten 'top tips' to get you started

Political Primacy

Top Tip 1 - Develop your team's 'whole picture' political understanding

Get your key programme team members together in a two-hour workshop. Using the 'Pillars' of technical, legal and institutional questions (Figure 6), facilitate a discussion in order to develop a team understanding of these aspects. Make a note as to who naturally contributes to this debate (remembering it is not expected for it to be everyone's natural area of interest or leaning). Be explicit – ask who in your team feels comfortable operating in the 'political' arena.

Top Tip 2 - Develop a 'second order' stakeholder map

Following on from the first session – but not immediately (this is tiring stuff!) – spend half a day with your key programme team members generating a 'Second Order' Stakeholder Map (as further described in the 'Relationship Building' intelligence theme). Large A0 pieces of paper and Post-It™ notes are ideal for this exercise. If the majority of your stakeholders are internal, develop a social-network diagram and take some time to talk through the implications of this picture to your programme.

Relationship Building

Top Tip 3 - Take some time out to 'know yourself'

With those programme team members you have identified as being interested, comfortable and capable in relation to stakeholder engagement – book another meeting. As a prelude, get each to undertake a personality inventory (Belbin etc) - these can now be typically done online for a reasonable charge. Bring the results together and discuss each other's differences and how this translates to optimal matching with key stakeholders (i.e. 'who gets on with who' and 'who clashes with who'). Use real examples to bring this conversation to life and seek candour in order to develop an optimal mapping of team members to key stakeholders. Finally discuss potential stakeholder engagement scenarios and how the different strengths of programme team members can be brought to bear.

Top Tip 4 - Audit your programme's 'personality'

Assign someone the task of critically reviewing whether your programme has a clear brand presence and 'personality'. Do you have an easily communicable programme name, logo and strap line? Are the team consistent with their communications (from email signature blocks to document formats)? Have you agreed the 'rules of the road' that define the programme team's expected values and behaviours? Develop and reinforce any missing elements of this presence. Do not seduce yourself into thinking this is all a cosmetic aside.

Idea Propagation

Top Tip 5 - Read Malcolm Gladwell's 'Tipping Point'

If the propagation of ideas is central to your challenge then order, distribute and read this book - or one similar - in order to stimulate your team's thinking around this aspect.

Top Tip 6 - Develop the programme's key change story (for mantra-like repetition)

Challenge yourself as to whether you have a simple message that compels others to accept the case for change. Remember that the technical or economic case is insufficient – it needs to appeal to people in order to pass their emotional filter also. Continue to deconstruct it until you get to a readily accessible message. Remember that humans love stories that they can add their own meaning to and pass on – is there a powerful anecdote that captures the programme's reason for being? Once you have it, lead by example, repeat it over and over and over.

Management Assurance

Top Tip 7 - Ban the term sponsor and find a leader

Ban the term sponsor from all documentation and indeed corporate language – a ‘sponsor’ is the last thing a programme needs. Ask yourself whether you have a clear, senior business leader who accepts – unequivocally – ultimate responsibility for delivering the programme and who has the capacity and authority to deal with the inevitable ‘blockers’. If the answer is no, have the moral courage and professional integrity to tenaciously pursue resolution of this aspect. This is absolutely fundamental as all programme activity is completely nugatory if a committed and capable senior responsible owner is not in place.

Top Tip 8 - Track stakeholder receptiveness

This tip is especially relevant to large internal change programmes. Design and introduce a simple tool (e.g. the 1-10 example referenced) that can be used to objectively measure collective sentiment through the programme’s life. Use it at every intervention with stakeholders and seek their candour. Monitor the results at an aggregate level to avoid any programme team ‘optimism bias’ in the progression towards a ‘tipping point’. Don’t avoid the detractors – seek to really understand their issues; even if their positions don’t change (it is unrealistic to expect this in all instances) the information they provide is of the utmost importance to the programme.

Enabled Communication

Top Tip 9 - ‘Pressure test’ the Communications Plan

Do you have a communications plan? If no, the action is obvious. If yes, kick the tyres a little. Your communication resources are finite and inevitably not as plentiful as you would ideally like. In this context, ask yourself whether it is a focused plan – are you concentrating your finite resources on those stakeholders with high power and low predictability?

Top Tip 10 - Use a variety of media

Don’t just send an email! Think about a new way to get your message across as your message will be influenced by the media you choose. Be flexible. Try new things. Use video and audio. Set up a programme online website or blog. Send a postcard. Run lunch-time ‘drop by’ presentations. Call by at desks unannounced. Put in place suggestion-boxes or even install a ‘Big Brother’ video diary room to elicit comment (it has been done!). Communicate by walking around. Experiment and keep on trying new ideas until you find out what works. Ask questions. Be open and always, always, always remember that communication is two-way - so get feedback!



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