

Stakeholder Engagement Project Resource

Tool Ref. No. T004

The ASAP Way

<i>Our Tools are approaches, models and techniques for improving stakeholder engagement</i>	
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Linkages with SE Key Principles	Simple, but not easy
Key words	Assertive, Selective, Alternative, Proactive
Subject Terms	Engage, Approach, Pre-emptive.
Context	
Purpose and Benefits	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The ASAP Way is a step-method to help project managers and project team members become more alert to engagement opportunities that arise during the project.• The ASAP Way is also a healthy 'mindset' for the project team.• It enhances awareness and prompts thinking of often-simple actions that can have a significant positive impact on the project. Whilst this pre-emptive thinking can be 'second nature' to experienced project managers, the ASAP Way is made up of four key elements that a less experienced project manager can readily adopt with their team. The four elements are: being Assertive, Selective, Alternative and Proactive (ASAP)• The benefits of adopting this Way include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Building a team attitude that 'looks ahead' for threats▪ Developing team creativity towards problem solving and decision making▪ Increases the skills and self-esteem of team members▪ Savings time and resources in all stages of the project▪ Increasing the chance of project success	
Source: Davidson-Wright 2017	
Limitations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Although, on the face of it, many identified actions seem 'simple', they often require sensitive and carefully considered handling.• Some inexperienced project managers may find it difficult to carry out actions that demand a level of assertion with senior stakeholders. Hierarchy can be a formidable barrier but under certain circumstances it can be an opportunity to seek support, if approached in the right manner.	
Relevant bibliography	
A Primer to "Pre-emptive and Adaptive Project Management" http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/j.2334-5837.2012.tb01367.x/abstract	
What is proactive project management? https://www.apm.org.uk/news/what-is-proactive-project-management/	

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Approach

The four-steps are outlined below, together with three examples of each step. Project managers can use or adapt these examples to discuss with their project team members to illustrate the kind of situation they should all be looking out for.

Examples of being **Assertive**

In this context, Assertive means “Respecting the needs of the project stakeholders while standing up for the needs of the project”.

1. **Challenging the solution:** The solution for a project is often agreed without adequate evaluation of the possible options. Time invested in evaluation of options can save significant time later and improve the chance of project success. For example, this may involve blending traditional Waterfall practices with Agile practices along with other methods, to be appropriate for your unique project.
2. **Challenging the scope:** The scope of any project needs healthy debate, engaging the appropriate mix of stakeholders. At the outset of many projects, enthusiasm over requirements can result in too many deliverables being considered as ‘essential’. Challenge stakeholders as to what is in scope by applying ‘MoSCoW’ i.e. what Must, Should, Could and Won’t be delivered by the project.
3. **Negotiating resources:** Agreement with the Project Sponsor over the availability of subject matter experts (SMEs) and other people essential to plan and deliver your project is key. It is important to be assertive with your project sponsor on your project’s resource needs; if necessary seeking support from another influential stakeholder. Without adequate resource, all the effort in engagement and planning is futile!

Examples of being **Selective**

In this context, Selective means “Focusing on and prioritising the *more* important at the expense of the *less* important”.

1. **Risk Management:** Accept that you will not have time to engage stakeholders to do this comprehensively. Instead, identify the 5 or 6 main “pools of risks” that relate to your project (e.g. Suppliers, Technology, Buy-in, Customer) and prioritise these. These pools will differ from project to project. Then with the team, brainstorm the risks in each pool, evaluate them and manage the priority risks.
2. **Planning:** Accept that you will never have time to engage people to plan the whole project in detail. Wherever possible, agree with key stakeholders to ‘chunk’ the project and plan the first phase to *task* level, the second to *activity* level and remaining phases to *scope* (key output) level only.
3. **Communication:** Accept that you will never get stakeholder communication perfect but aim to the best we can. Being selective with communication might mean you:
For selected stakeholders and groups: Create a “push” approach in the form of a traditional Communication Plan to ensure clear messaging is well targeted and timed.
For other stakeholders: Create a “pull” approach to communication e.g. providing a local or online “Market place” where stakeholders can visit to find out about the project, progress being made and ask the specific questions *they* want answered.

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Examples of being Alternative	
In this context, Alternative means “Less obvious, sometimes obscure and unconventional”	
1.	Problem solving & decision-making: The solutions to project issues are not often straightforward and can be very time consuming. When you or your team member get stuck, engage alternative approaches to problem solving such as: Root Cause analysis, Decision matrices, Force Field analysis, Brainstorming, The Five Whys, The Twelve What Elses, Hurson's Productive Thinking model, De Bono's Six Thinking Hats. http://www.businessballs.com/dtiresources/TQM_process_improvement_tools.pdf
2.	Resource management: Alternatives to the familiar are often needed to provide resource at the right time and matched with the skills needed for the projects. These can include: Crowd Sourcing, Incentives, Interns and volunteers, Multi-disciplinary then Inter-disciplinary thinking, Reciprocity (doing a deal), Agile techniques such as Sprints, Skills library.
3.	Stakeholder commitment: Purely rational approaches to gain buy-in often fail. Persuading and Influencing by alternative methods include: Nudge, Amplification hypothesis, Conversion theory, Scarcity principle, Aristotle's 'Logos, Ethos & Pathos'.

Examples of being Proactive	
In this context, Proactive means “Recognising tipping points, anticipating threats and taking timely actions where uncertainty prevails”.	
1.	Fail fast, Learn Fast: Failure can mean allowing a project to continue to consume resources when it should be redirected or 'pulled'. Success can be engaging stakeholders to agree that the project is not viable and needs to be stopped. Success can also mean promptly adjusting an aspect of a project (e.g. the solution, scope, resource, plan) to save cost, reduce risk, better meet requirement, or speed delivery. https://www.apm.org.uk/blog/if-you-are-going-to-fail-fail-fast/
2.	Team Storming & Norming: A project manager needs to build a high performing project team as quickly as possible. Ideally this needs to be achieved in a week or two, at most. See an explanation of: Tuckman's team development model: “Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing”: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_86.htm One proactive approach is to accelerate the Storming and Norming stages of team development. This can be done by leading a high workshop in which the project team's concerns and questions are aired, captured and resolved (or 'off-lined'). This approach does require good facilitation skills but is a very effective intervention.
3.	Team Early Warning System: Project team members can be encouraged to be highly alert to potential threats (risks <i>and</i> opportunities), concerning stakeholders. Ideally, they are then expected to think through and propose strategies for managing identified risks or exploiting opportunities. See: http://www.pmi.org/learning/library/approaches-detecting-early-warning-signs-projects-2272