



Key Stakeholder Support

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Success from Key Stakeholders

The success of a project can be highly influenced by the support or otherwise of key stakeholders. If you don't get the support from the key stakeholders, you run a significant risk of the project falling apart. Other priorities cause people to be removed from the project for days, or often completely removed. Major issues are never addressed. The project doesn't get its share of 'brain space' with decision makers.

Two components of Support

There are two key factors or components in supporting a project. When looking at the people around the project, you need to look at them in light of two questions.

- How important is the person to the success of the project.
- How supportive is the person towards the success of the project.

There is a technique that is simple, and fast, by which you can look at this aspect prior to the start of the project. It is also useful to do the exercise during a longer project to check if the situation has changed.

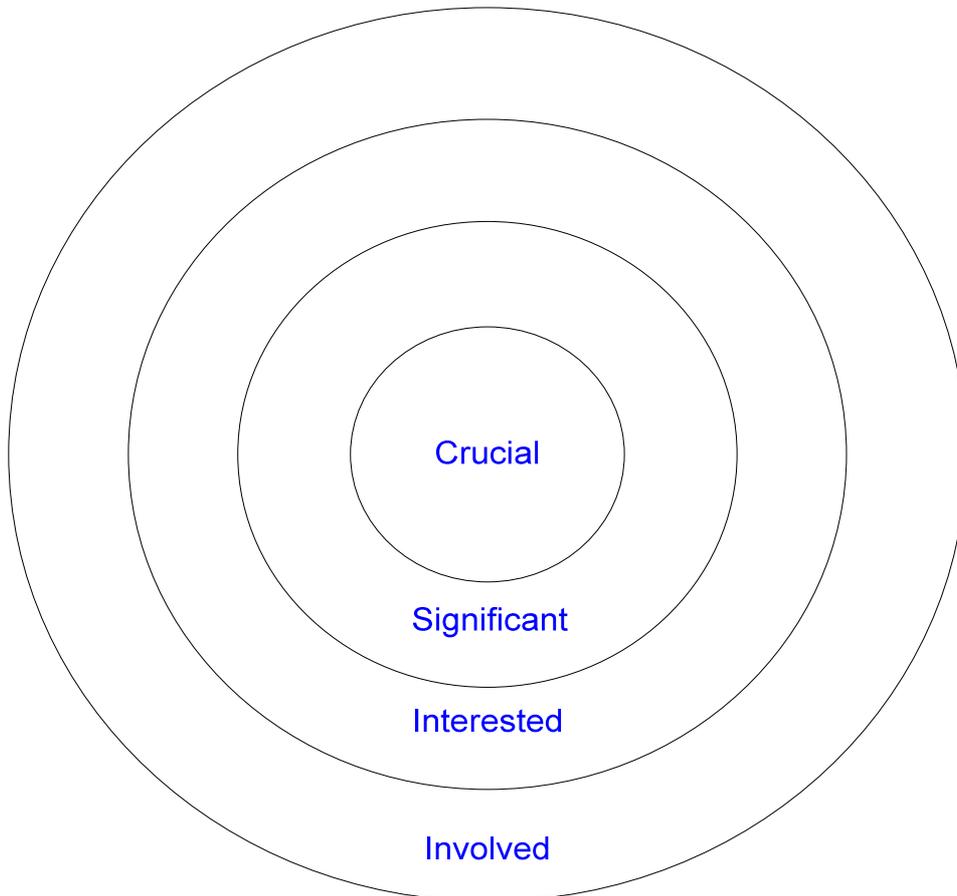
Importance of Stakeholders

Plot each stakeholder on a chart which has four concentric rings. The closer they are to the centre, the more important the person. As a guide see which of the categories they fit in to. They may not fit every criteria in each group, but they should fit at least some.

1. Inner Circle – Crucial. Stakeholder is critical to the success of the project. The project will fail unless this person pushes both up, down and across the management structure to get resources, funding, and the support of other areas. When the project goes live, this person may be one of those who will live with the outcome. Failure of the project will have a detrimental impact on their career. The Sponsor typically fits in this group.
2. Second Circle – Significant. These people have a significant impact on the project, and are probably full time, or nearly full time contributors. They might have specialist knowledge that would be difficult to obtain elsewhere. They could also be end users of the output of the project. If the project does not produce a successful outcome, their role may be adversely affected.
3. Third Circle - Interested. Stakeholders who have an interest in the project, but not a major contributor. They may have some input in the design or requirements, and may be users of the final product. Their role in the organisation is not one of decision maker in any major aspect of the project.
4. Fourth Circle - Involved. These are people who are involved on the periphery. They may have an interest in the project as someone who will be impacted

either upstream or downstream of the process which is the focus of the project. They might also be involved in aspects of the project such as a project office, or audit function. Their input is likely to be advisory rather than directive.

5. Outside the Circle. This area is for everyone else. That is, people who may be curious about the project, but who will not be impacted by the project. Their interest is just curiosity.



Importance

Supportive of the Project

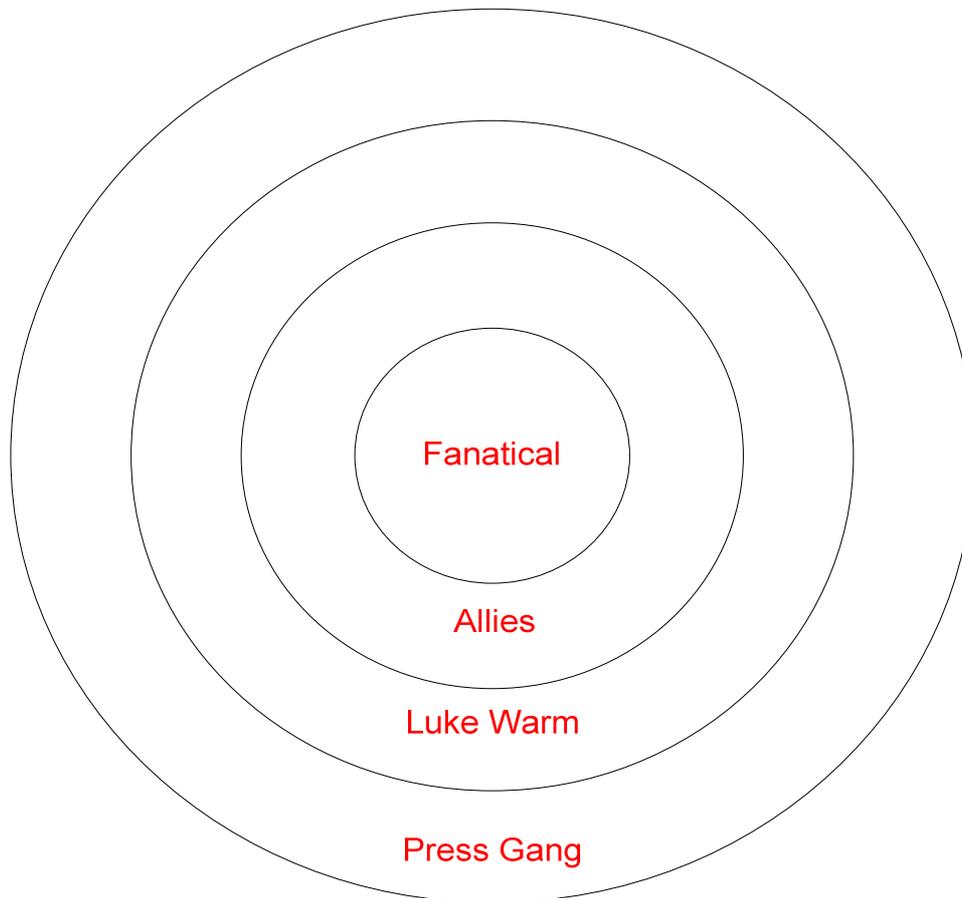
Once again, we will plot the people in terms of concentric circles.

1. Inner Circle - Fanatical. These people are almost fanatical about the project. They will do whatever they can do, or whatever they are asked to do. They promote the project at every opportunity, and are available on short notice to assist in any capacity. They see the project as a personal goal and no matter how big or small their role, they will give 110% to achieve success. Typically they are highly motivated within their job, and have a record of successfully completing tasks.
2. Second Circle – Allies. Allies are people who are not constantly and proactively supporting the project, but will support the project when needed. Typically they are willing to help when asked, but they do need to be asked.

They probably have competing demands on their time and will support this initiative when time permits, or when they are pressured to devote more than a fair share of their time to the project.

3. Third Circle – Luke Warm. Luke warm supporters will provide some support but are not enthusiastic about the project. At best they see it as a necessary evil which needs to be done, but which is a bit of a nuisance. If you really push them, they will support you but you need to be out making them feel comfortable or you will lose them. They are hard work but can usually be relied upon in the end to support you.
4. Fourth Circle - Press Gang. In the tradition of press ganging people to serve on sailing ships by getting them drunk and when they wake up they are at sea, these people are involuntary supporters. They have been dragged into the project, and consequently need to support it. They might rather be somewhere else, but will reluctantly give some support.

Those who are not supportive of the project are outside the fourth ring.

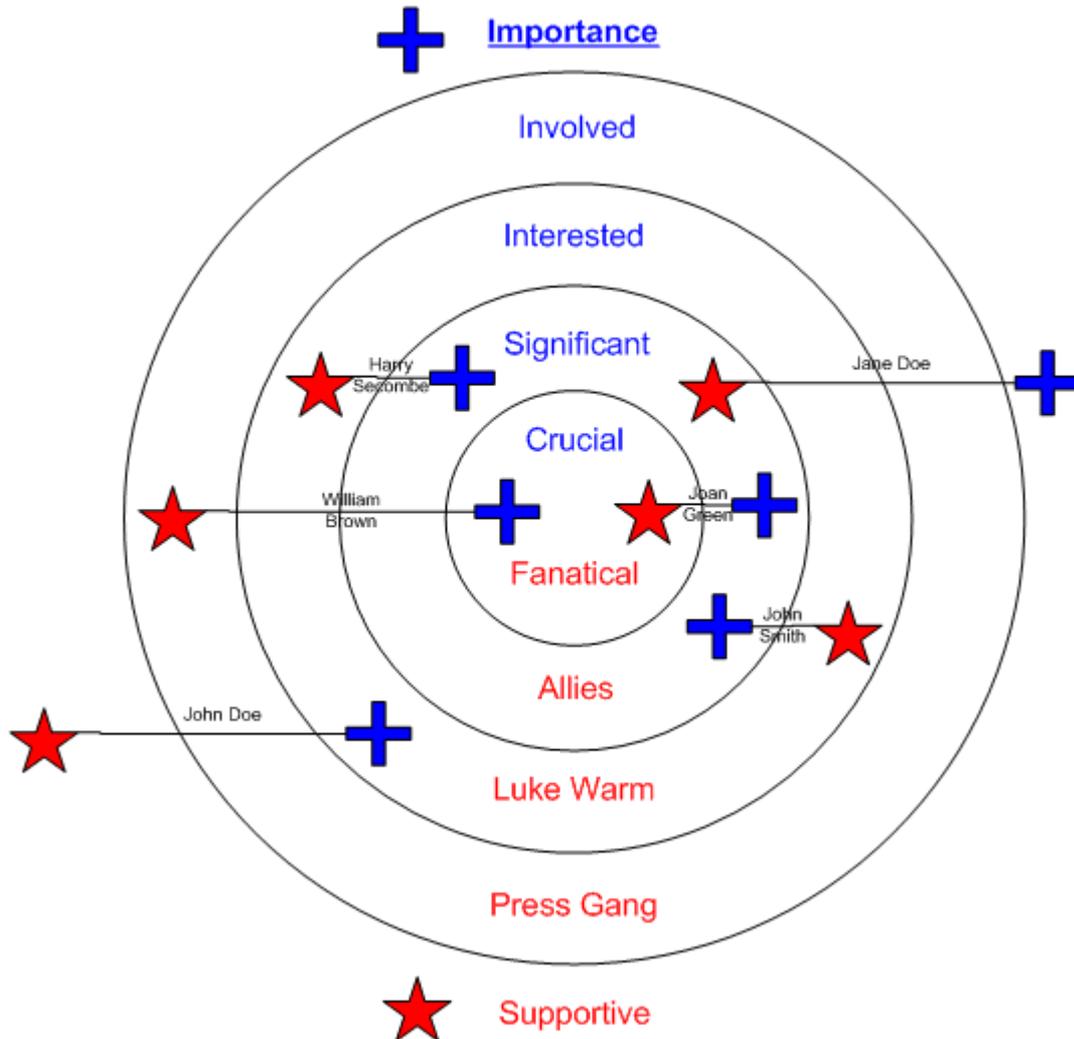


Supportive

Combine the Circles

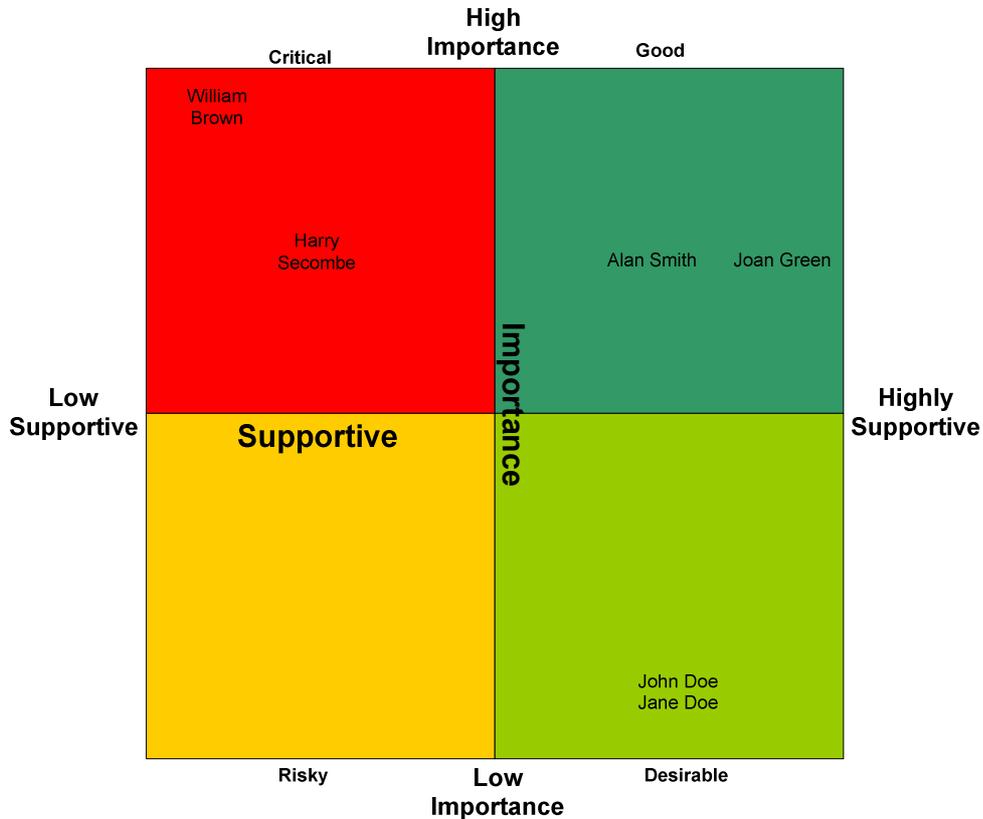
If you plot everyone on the circles, you start to see where your potential problems are. For example if someone is on the inner circle for importance and the fourth circle for

supportive, you have a problem. They are “Crucial” to the project but only “Press Gang” for support. The diagram below is a combined diagram that lets you see clearly where people sit.



Another View

Another way to look at this is to put it into a chart:



Drawing them into the Circle

Obviously the first set of circles will identify who the key stakeholders are. You can then see where your problems lie by overlaying them with the second set. But how do you change a crucial stakeholder who is on the outer rim of the circle. Here are some techniques.

Change Importance to the Project

To think laterally, if you can't change their support levels, perhaps you should change their importance. You may have the opportunity to move a player out of the game. For example if you have a key business user who is in the "Press Gang" category, can you have him replaced? Talk to the Sponsor and explain where you have placed the person on the diagram. See if the Sponsor agrees with your summation. If so, explain the potential difficulty and ask for a replacement.

Identify the Cause

Talk to the person and find out why they are not as supportive as you would like. Explain the risks to the project of not having their support. Show them where they sit in the circles and ask them what can be done to gain their support.

Pair them

If you have a fanatical supporter who is further out from the centre in importance, ask them to make it their job to bring a less enthusiastic, but crucial stakeholder into the centre. Often enthusiasm is contagious, or at least threatening. If your boss is enthusiastic for a project, you either get enthusiastic or fired.

Add Something

Ask yourself what could you add to the project to make the person enthusiastic? For example, by varying the scope to include a minor, but pet project of the crucial resource you may find they suddenly support the whole project. I did this on one project where the sponsor was doing it because he was told to do it. He had a problem with preparing ad hoc reports manually so as part of the project, we trained one of his staff to use Crystal Reportwriter. That person could then produce all the ad hoc reports he needed. We turned him around as a supporter of the project.

Fear

If all else fails there is always fear. If someone sees the failure of the project as a career limiting move, they can get supportive very quickly. A quiet word to their boss can give people a totally different perspective on the importance of the project. I must admit to having used this tactic to get the attention of a GM. Once he found his annual bonus had become tied to the success of the project, he jumped a few circles and reached the centre very quickly.

Go with the Flow

This is similar to pairing however you select people from the inner circle in terms of supporters and create a cohesive team of supporters. If you start exposing the “Press Gang” to them they often start to get swept along with the tide.

My recommendation is to do it one at a time as a few negative people together can have the opposite effect. They can do damage to your strongest supporters. By stage managing meetings where the person from the outer ring is the only “Press Gang” person present, you can often start to turn them around. Run around the table and ask people how the project is going. Leave the “Press Gang” person until last. They will not want to be seen to be the only negative person present – particularly if it starts to happen at every meeting. If they do remain negative, they will be shouted down by the rest.

Summary

Support is critical for a project. Not having support will cause much angst as you progress. In fact it can often stop progress. If you take a few minutes at the start to plot where everyone is, you will find that your focus changes to bring non-supporters into the fold. It won't work 100% but you can always make some progress if you consciously try.

In a large project, it is worth doing the exercise at regular intervals. People can wax and wane in their support, and it is good to identify where support is starting to slip. Once you identify the slipping support, you need to ask yourself why.

The circles are a good and quick technique which can be used to clearly display to management where you see problems. It can be sometimes interesting to let people rate themselves. They might identify the problem without you actually having to do it for them. If they do rate themselves as in the inner circles for both importance and

supportive, you can always use it as lever in the future to ensure they are still supportive when the chips are down.

Neville Turbit has had over 15 years experience as an IT consultant and almost an equal time working in Business. He is the principal of Project Perfect. Project Perfect is a project management software consulting and training organisation based in Sydney Australia. Their focus is to provide creative yet pragmatic solutions to Project Management issues.

Project Perfect sell “Project Administrator” software, which is a tool to assist organisations better manage project risks, issues, budgets, scope, documentation planning and scheduling. They also created a technique for gathering requirements called “Method H”™, and sell software to support the technique. For more information on Project tools or Project Management visit www.projectperfect.com.au