



Positive stakeholder engagement leadership

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Central to any successful business, organisation or project, is the need for strong leadership and communication. It is the basis upon which behaviour is shaped and it drives core business values such as integrity, performance, accountability and excellence.

Within an infrastructure context, effective stakeholder and community engagement is considered a key project deliverable. The ability to understand and be responsive is more than just an exercise, but both a quantitative and qualitative management trait that echoes in all directions and across all levels of the organisational spectrum. Leaders must not only engage, but be engaged. Strong and effective stakeholder engagement needs to be founded within the context of a new way of thinking.

Both private and public sector clients now consider stakeholder management to be fundamental to leadership and the basis of achieving:

- optimum outcomes
- an intelligent approach
- cost and time efficiency
- a positive legacy.

Throughout the project's life cycle, stakeholder assessment is now considered a risk management process in itself, with upfront assessments having a significant impact on performance, time and cost outcomes. Strong project leadership requires flexibility and adaptability.

The flexibility comes from an acute understanding of what is required to achieve positive outcomes while adaptability is reflective of being open to innovation, new ideas and approaches to communication and engagement. So, in this ever-changing world, what are some points that can be adopted to effectively adjust to this shifting style of stakeholder leadership?

1. Every project must have a compelling reason

Building a road, railway line, port



expansion or a mine must have a comprehensive narrative that can be understood and communicated at all levels.

Questions leadership teams must ask themselves include:

- What is the purpose?
- Why here and why now?
- What is the economic, social or community benefit?
- Does risk outweigh the benefit?

Within this stakeholder context, it is now increasingly important to define the negotiable and not-negotiable project elements. Which elements are set in stone and which are open to other options?

Stakeholders seek clarity. It is important to recognise in any given project that there are knowns and unknowns, and providing a level of transparency can support trust. Just as disunity is death in politics, a failure to proactively communicate can lead to disastrous results.

2. Emphasise values

The ability to model key values and transfer them practically is essential. A safety culture will not occur if it is not demonstrated at the highest levels. It must be recognised that while values can be internally developed, they often need to be externally recognised and reflected.

Active communities may have differences of opinion on issues, but respect transparency and openness. Regional centres throughout Queensland are becoming the focal points of new frontiers, but creating and sustaining a social licence to operate where there are often multiple parties requires sensitivity both in differentiation and approach.

3. The ability to communicate in depth

Project connectivity often needs to occur in a multifaceted way. A thorough stakeholder analysis that takes into account demographics, regional history, current issues and risk can provide a vital diagnosis and help shape project strategy.

A demographic review of a road planning project Phillips Group was involved in, highlighted a high percentage of elderly residents within the project area. While planning vision and objectives remained focussed, this valuable knowledge shaped the communication strategies that were to be implemented, including the need for project leaders to take the time to actively engage with individuals within small groups and on a one-to-one basis.

In another case that required communication to farming communities, information was distributed via CD and was downloadable in a podcast, with effective results. Knowledge shaped the communication strategies that were to be

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A risk management approach to stakeholder engagement can provide a practical benefit to the technical response. Being able to effectively define and respond to stakeholders and to do this in a way that is both flexible and adaptable to the region or communities of interest provides a valuable foundation for strong leadership and communication.



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