



Agile communication - the key to successful change

People skills are essential to success in change management projects, particularly the ability to communicate effectively, says Mark Hubbard

There are times throughout the year when many of us look back at the projects we have completed and gauge their success.

For those of us involved in strategic sourcing it is clear that a structured, systematic approach to procurement offers many potential benefits including improved processes, more clearly defined specifications and new sources of supply. And, of course, substantial cash savings.

But the question is how to maximise those benefits. What is it that makes for a really successful strategic sourcing project?

It is increasingly clear that, while process, technology and other factors are crucial, the really decisive ingredient is on the “soft” side of the skillset. Being able to deal effectively with the people management involved in a transformation project makes the real difference.

For a procurement professional the first step in ensuring successful change management is to identify the various stakeholders involved. It is worth spending some time analysing the groups of people who may be affected in some way by the changes you wish to make.

Stakeholder groups are likely to include buyers in the organisation’s business units who will be concerned about the possibility, for example, of having to switch suppliers.

They may also include the finance people who keep an eye on the numbers or the legal team who need to ensure

compliance. They may even include, for example, environmental specialists who are charged with reaching green targets. Top management is a stakeholder group you will need to keep onside throughout the process.

Once it is clear who your stakeholders are, it is imperative that they understand and support your project’s objectives, and that is down to effective communication.

Things often fail or take much longer than planned or deliver sub-optimum results because of poor communication. So it is worth considering how you can communicate most effectively with the people who you depend on to make your project successful.

There are three main points to bear in mind. First, your message must be clear and straightforward. You need a good story to tell about the benefits to your stakeholders of seeing strategic sourcing through to completion. Like any good story, it needs a good title - a “headline” summarising the point of the project.

Then it needs to set out clearly what the project is all about and, most importantly, the benefits it will deliver.

However – and this is the second point to remember - the message must be tailored to each stakeholder group to reflect their particular interests and concerns.

“Selling” your project to the buyer who has used the same supplier for several years and may be very reluctant to change will be

a different task to persuading the finance director that you can deliver savings.

Finally, your approach to communicating with your stakeholders should be agile. In many organisations communication is carried out through a system of emails, meetings and reports.

While all these have their place, the day-to-day business of implementing change usually benefits from a pragmatic, personal approach.

A direct phone call or popping your head round someone's office door – including everyone from the most junior buyer to the CEO - is very often more likely to produce quick results than an email suggesting a meeting.

Agile communication is the art of making sure the way you communicate is the quickest and simplest, appropriate to the circumstances.

Some may find this way of working unusual, but if you have a good story to tell and you can tell it convincingly, it is much more likely they will welcome your approach because they can see the benefits you can bring them.

Effective, agile communication enables all those involved to work quickly and reap the rewards of a well-planned change management project.

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