

Skillbook

Winning Support for Your Project

Project Management Skills



Mindtools

Winning Support for Your Project Skillbook

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1. Introduction

What is the most important skill that a project manager needs to have to be successful?

Is it a top-level Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) qualification? An in-depth understanding of project planning tools? What about time management and communication skills?

Really great project management relies on a number of different skills. But perhaps the most valuable one is the ability to win support for the project from key individuals inside and outside your organization.

In this **Skillbook**, we'll explore strategies for doing this, in an honest and straightforward way.

You will learn how to build support for your project by:

- Identifying your key stakeholders.
- Gaining an understanding of how your key stakeholders perceive your project.
- Increasing your project's importance to people.
- Using persuasion.
- Negotiating win-win solutions.

Once you have completed this Skillbook, you'll have all the tools you need to get the people who matter the most on board with your project.

2. Projects Are About People

When you manage a project, you spend a lot of time coordinating, communicating, negotiating, and motivating the members of your team. These will likely be the people who you will rely on the most to get your project “up and running.” So, it’s important to remember that the success of your project is intrinsically tied to their performance.

But, it can be easy to focus too much energy on managing your team, and not enough on the key stakeholders who sit outside it. In fact, this is one of the main reasons why projects fail.

So who do we mean when we talk about stakeholders? Well, they are people who have a legitimate interest in, and influence over, the outcome of your project. Common stakeholders include customers, suppliers, co-workers, and shareholders.

It’s crucial that you gain the support of all of the people involved in your project, especially those who you have no formal control over, such as peers, senior managers, and internal and external suppliers.

Winning these people’s support in the early stages of your project will ensure that you are all pulling together in the same direction. In addition, their assistance will help you to nip any potential problems in the bud, before they become serious.



Tip:

Think about a time when you felt frustrated or disempowered because your voice wasn’t heard. Why do you think you lacked influence? What did you do about it?

Before you can begin building support for your project, you’ll need to identify who your key stakeholders are. Think about all of the people who will likely be affected by your project, who will be influenced by it, and who will have an interest in its success or failure.

The table below shows some of the common stakeholders who might influence your project's outcome:

Your boss	Shareholders	Government
Senior executives	Alliance partners	Trade associations
Your co-workers	Suppliers	The press
Your team	Lenders	Interest groups
Customers	Analysts	The public
Prospective customers	Future recruits	The community
Your family	Key contributors	Key advisors

Note:

Just as some people will support your project willingly, others might try to hinder it or may even oppose it. It's therefore important that you spend some time identifying both groups, so that you can manage these people effectively.

Action:

Now, use the worksheet on the next page to brainstorm all of the stakeholders who will likely be involved in your project. Remember to include people who you think will have a positive influence on your project, as well as those who may have a negative impact on it.

List of Stakeholders:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

13.

14.

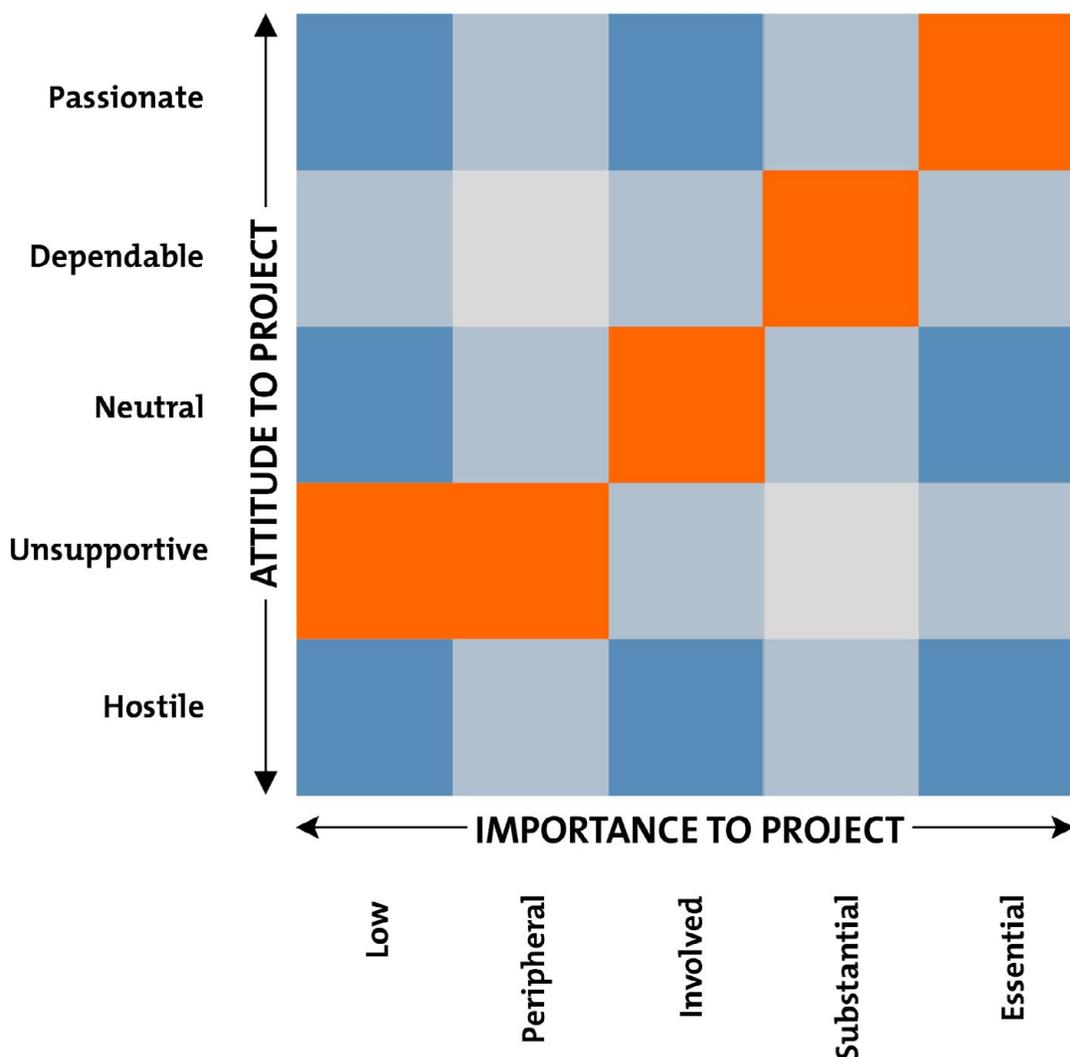
15.

3. Understanding Stakeholder Perspectives

Once you have identified all of your project’s key stakeholders, you will need to draw up a plan of action to win their support. It will likely take some time to build the support that you need. So, it pays to focus your efforts where they are needed the most.

In this chapter, we’ll explore how to prioritize each of your stakeholders by how important they are to your project’s success, using the Stakeholder Engagement Grid, shown below.

Figure 1: Stakeholder Engagement Grid



Level of Importance

The amount of support that you require from the stakeholders you have identified will depend on their importance to your project. Use the following criteria to identify each person's level of importance:

- **Essential** – this person has a crucial role in your project's success. They will likely hold a high-profile position inside or outside the project team, and they may be highly influential in shaping the project's direction. They have a vested interest in its success or failure – in fact, their reputation or livelihood may depend upon it.
- **Substantial Interest** – this stakeholder will play a significant role in how the project progresses day-to-day. They could help or hinder the project, and its outcome could directly affect them.
- **Involved** – this person won't be a major contributor to the project. However, they will still likely have some influence – either positive or negative – on its outcome. They may be a project team member, or an end user, and, while they can't decide what gets done, they will play a role in identifying any problems that the project causes.
- **Peripheral Interest** – this stakeholder is aware of the project and may be impacted by it at some point.
- **Low** – this stakeholder is not fully aware of the project, and they are unlikely to be impacted by its success or failure. However, they may still have an interest in the team's or organization's success.

Stakeholder Attitude

Assessing stakeholders' attitudes toward your project will give you a good indication of how much they care about its success, and whether they support it or are hostile to it.

Use the following criteria to identify each stakeholder's attitude toward the project:

- **Passionate** – this stakeholder is willing to do whatever is needed to make the project a success. They will make themselves available to you, and be highly motivated to do a fantastic job.
- **Dependable** – you can count this person as an ally. They will be supportive and willing to help out when asked. Although your project might not be their number one concern, they will set aside other responsibilities to support you when you need it.
- **Neutral** – this stakeholder is only involved because they have to be, and will only provide support when they feel that they have to. It is worth working on developing your relationship with them to encourage them to support you more enthusiastically.
- **Unsupportive** – this stakeholder is mildly opposed to the project and will likely need much “pushing and prodding” to give you their support. Unlike neutral people, they are not interested in the work being done, and, if they're a member of the project team, they will only be involved because someone else told them to be.

- **Hostile** – sometimes, a stakeholder may have a vested interest in a project failing. This person might actually put barriers in your way by being uncooperative, or by tying up other stakeholders or resources with tasks of their own. In extreme cases, they may even try to sabotage your project. This could be because it takes resources away from projects that they are interested in, or it makes it difficult for them to achieve their objectives.



Action:

Look at the list of stakeholders that you identified in Chapter 2 and grade them according to how important they are to the project and their attitude toward it. Then, plot them in the appropriate place on the Stakeholder Engagement Grid shown on page 5.

Importance Versus Attitude

Once you have plotted the positions of your project’s stakeholders on the grid, see whether there are any large discrepancies between how important they think your project is and their attitudes toward it.

Ideally, their attitudes should match, or exceed, the level of importance that they attach to it. A substantial stakeholder, for instance, needs to be offering no less than dependable support, although you should work hard to encourage her to become a passionate advocate of the project.

While it’s unlikely that a reluctant stakeholder with only peripheral or low importance will damage your project’s outcome, it’s still worth bearing in mind that making efforts to increase their level of support will ultimately improve your project’s chances of success.



Action:

Look at the list of stakeholders that you identified in Chapter 2 and grade them according to how important they are to the project and their attitude toward it. Then, plot them in the appropriate place on the Stakeholder Engagement Grid shown on page 5.

4. Building Support

Here are three important strategies that you can use to build support among your stakeholders:

1. Persuasion.
2. Increasing the project's importance to the stakeholder.
3. Negotiating for a win-win solution.

You can use these strategies individually, or in combination with one another, depending on the situation.

1. Persuasion

There are several benefits to persuading people to support you. These are:

- Saved time.
- Saved money.
- Easier work.
- More efficient work.
- Less stress.

The amount of support that you are able to win for your project will largely depend on your ability to persuade your stakeholders that it benefits them. So, good persuasion skills are a must if you want to really get your project up and running.

The ability to persuade depends on four key factors:

- Credibility.
- Common ground.
- Vivid evidence.
- Emotional connection.

We will look at these four factors in detail below.

Credibility

Not everyone can be persuasive in all contexts. A professor at a medical school might be able to persuade people to participate in a clinical study, for instance, but they will be less persuasive when talking about bridge design.

Credibility is based on expertise. When people perceive you as being knowledgeable in a particular subject, they will be more open to listening to you, and your arguments will be more persuasive and appealing.

Common Ground

If you want someone to cooperate, you need your project to appeal to her on some level.

Often, a stakeholder has been thrust into that position due to circumstances beyond her control. The person who is configuring your new IT system, for instance, may not feel enthusiastic about the amount of work that it entails, but you still need her support. Without it, you risk missed deadlines, poor attention to detail, and mistakes.

To create common ground, you need to step into the stakeholder's shoes and look at the project from her perspective. Think about how the project might benefit her, and emphasize this when you make your case for her support.

Vivid Evidence

Evidence is critical when you need to gain a stakeholder's support for your project. However, complicated spreadsheets, charts and reports can be difficult for most people to understand and are not always highly persuasive.

People will more likely respond to "vivid" evidence – that is, evidence that brings your concept or argument to life. For example:

- Metaphors that relate your concept to a shared reality.
- Examples and real life experiences that can supplement data.
- Analogies that make your project more tangible.

Vivid evidence can be key in helping people to "see" the project through your eyes.

Emotional Connection

A persuasive argument is one that will appeal to your stakeholders' emotions, and it shows that you are clearly "plugged in" to their needs and desires.

You can appeal to a stakeholder's emotions by:

- Using your own emotions, by showing your enthusiasm for your project, for instance, or suppressing emotions such as anger and frustration.
- Adjusting your emotions, as well as your tone and intensity, to suit your audience.

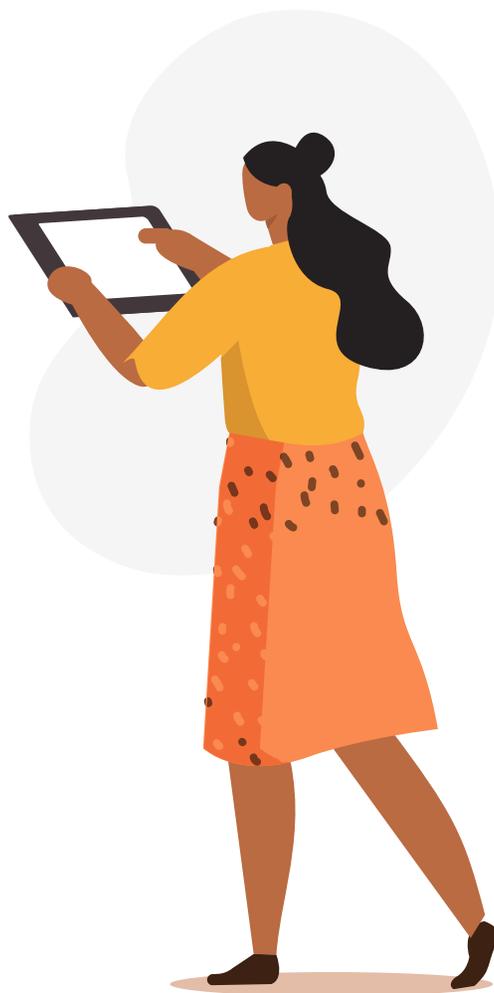
Emotions are key driving factors of motivation, so they will likely be vital in winning support for your project.

If you are concerned that appealing to your stakeholders' emotions is manipulative, don't worry – it's not. It's a basic part of persuasive communication, and can help you to gain a shared understanding of the issue.



Action:

List the stakeholders whose attitudes you want to change in the table on the following page. Then identify the benefits that your project will offer each of them. Make a note of any changes that you will need to make to the project to help you to deliver these benefits, and what action you will need to take to provide them.



Stakeholder	Benefit of Project	Project Modification	Action

2. Increasing the Project's Importance to the Stakeholder

The more important the success of your project is to the stakeholder, the greater their level of support will likely be. One way of making a project more important to them is to give them a personal stake in its outcome.

Here are some ways that you can do this:

- Highlight the project's importance to the overall organization and appeal to sense of professionalism.
- Clearly communicate the benefits of the project to him, and emphasize the positive impact that a successful outcome will have on him.
- If possible, focus on how the project could positively impact their day-to-day workload and tasks, and highlight how it could contribute to their own career objectives. For instance, it might speed up a process that they use to get their tasks done, which could help them to meet their deadlines more effectively.
- Expand the benefits that the project delivers to boost support from a neutral or reluctant stakeholder.
- Enthusiasm can be contagious! So try to find opportunities for a less supportive stakeholder to work closely with a strong supporter.



Action:

List the stakeholders who you want to gain additional support from in the table on the following page. Then, record one or two approaches next to each name that you can use to make your project more important to them.

3. Negotiating for a Win-Win Solution

If your project's goals are at odds with a key stakeholder's objectives, then you will need to work with her to find a way that you can both benefit from it.

Finding a "win-win" solution that is acceptable to everyone will encourage greater support from this kind of stakeholder, and improve your project's chances of success.

Negotiating for a win-win solution isn't about lowering your expectations or losing out. It means ensuring that both of you are happy with the project's outcome and that you can both get what you want from it.

Before negotiating with a stakeholder, make sure that you prepare thoroughly. First, decide which stakeholders you are willing to negotiate with. You'll also need to ensure that the benefit of the stakeholder's increased support justifies the cost of the solution – in terms of time and energy.

Here are eight key factors that you need to consider while you prepare:

1. **Goals** – What do you want, and what do you think the stakeholder wants?
2. **Trades** – What do you and the stakeholder have that you can trade?
3. **Alternatives** – If you don't reach an agreement with the stakeholder, what best alternatives do you have? How much does it matter if you don't agree?
4. **Relationships** – How important is preserving your relationship with the stakeholder to your project's success?
5. **Expected outcomes** – What outcome will other stakeholders expect from the negotiation? How will the decisions that you reach impact them?
6. **Consequences** – What are the consequences for your project if you fail to reach a solution and get the support that you need?
7. **Power** – Where does the power lie in the relationship? What power does the stakeholder have to determine your project's success?
8. **Possible solutions** – Thinking about all of these factors, what possible solutions might there be?



Action:

Identify a stakeholder from your list who is important to your project's success, but who is presently offering little support. Prepare a negotiation plan to help to get them on board. Prepare your plan by writing down what your position will be and what you think your stakeholder's position will be for each of the eight factors covered above, using the worksheet on the next page.

Making notes like this in advance will help you to decide what you are and are not prepared to offer to your stakeholder in exchange for their support. This will ensure that you avoid being taken advantage of, and will help you to enter the negotiation with a clear and set purpose.

Negotiation Planning Worksheet

	Your Position	Stakeholder's Position
Goals		
Trades		
Best Alternatives to a Negotiated Solution		
Relationship		
Expected Outcomes		
Consequences		
Power		
Possible Solutions		

5. Key Points

The ability to win the support of the people who will be involved in your project is one of the most important skills that you'll need to be a successful project manager.

Before you start planning your project, take some time to identify who these people will be. They are your key stakeholders. While some of these people will willingly provide a high level of support, others will need some extra encouragement to get on board.

Plot them on the Stakeholder Engagement Grid, according to their importance to the project and their attitude toward it.

Doing this will help you to focus your efforts on winning support from the stakeholders whose involvement is crucial to the project's success.

Once you have identified the stakeholders who will need some encouragement to support your project, it's time to think about how to win that support.

Use your powers of persuasion to boost their understanding of the project and its aims, seek out opportunities to give them more of a vested interest in the project's success, or, if necessary, negotiate for a win-win solution. If you do opt to negotiate, prepare to modify your project so that all parties can benefit from it.

The more support you are able to win from your stakeholders, the more likely it is that your project will be a success.