

## STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT – AM I BOVERED?

*You should be, says Rob Brickle.*



**Rob Brickle: different groups need to be accommodated**

We all know that running a successful CRM project requires a high degree of stakeholder management – but who are the stakeholders? The broad definition tends to be anyone who has an interest in your project or will be affected by its deliverables or output. In other words, it's the people who are affected by change or may even be influential in that change.

We all also know that for projects to be successful, it is vital to understand the stakeholders' values and issues, in order to address them and keep everyone on board for the duration of the project.

Back in January 1996, a Gartner Group report on project management identified insufficient involvement of stakeholders and infrequent communication with sponsors as leading causes of project failure.

These findings are still valid. Stakeholder groups often get relegated to the wastelands in the team's hot pursuit of the project tasks, yet these are the groups that can make or break sustained success.

Isn't it interesting, though, that we all know what should happen at a project management level and act accordingly. But why don't we apply the same philosophy to managing the business and engaging with our stakeholders? We get obsessed with technology, metrics, surveys and customer management but miss the bigger picture of integrated stakeholder management.

What do I mean exactly? Well, businesses spend a lot of time on tasks like financial, strategic and business planning and have a variety of tools and methodologies that enable them to do this. Often, however, these activities are inward driven and take a limited view of the external stakeholders and their input in terms of driving change and improvement in the business.

I saw a quote recently which highlights this point particularly well: "Unless a business truly engages its stakeholders it will be paying some of its employees to initiate change and the rest to resist it."

Good stakeholder management is fundamental to the ability of a business to deliver enduring change. But there are different groups that need to be accommodated in a stakeholder management plan – and you need to be clear how you will deal with them.

Many organisations will already have some mechanisms in place to deal with this. For example, at an operational level companies know that they need to manage and measure the operational interface with their customers and they do this through a variety of means.

This will include the use of technology such as CRM systems as well as metrics collected through call centres, helpdesks, customer surveys, etc.

At another level, your company may need to interface with industry groups, institutional advisors, investors, the media and others. Again there will be a variety of tools and processes used here, such as investor relations, communications strategies, market research. These are all fine but this group is a long way from the operational level I mentioned earlier.

What many organisations fail to recognise – even when they have such disciplines as key or strategic account management in place – is the gap that exists between the two groups mentioned earlier and the perceptions of the key relationships that have to be managed here.

Simply by virtue of where individuals sit in the customer environment in this tier, they will have significant influence over the future direction and profitability of your organisation. Their perceptions and how they have been formed will be the catalyst for major change and will need to be linked to what you do with your operational stakeholders and the institutional and external group.

Few businesses recognise the value of the kind of integrated and wider-reaching stakeholder management that I have touched on here – and it a rare business that equips the change initiators in the business to work effectively with their stakeholders.

Yet those who do, steal a march on their competitors, increase their market share and overall profitability, align their businesses with their customers for the future, and reduce waste.

Who wouldn't think about this more carefully when there is such a prize to be won?

● *CRM Software, Call Centre & Marketing Software Expert Rob Brickle is managing director of customer-driven change consultancy **Bsquared Consulting**. Tel: +44 (0)20 8939 3840. Email: [rob.brickle@bsquared-consulting.com](mailto:rob.brickle@bsquared-consulting.com).*