Identifying leaders

Leaders are the ultimate change champions. Identifying change leaders is one of the most important tasks for successful change management, and should be a cornerstone in your stakeholder analysis processes.

There are two useful ways of distinguishing leaders and considering how they can impact on your project:

- **Formal and informal** - informal leaders are just as important as formal leaders at embedding and socialising the new way of doing things.
- **Internal and external** - leaders that are both internal and external to your project team and its governance structure are also critical for the success of your project.

Naturally there is significant cross-over between the two categories. Leaders within your project team can be both formal (project sponsor, project manager, change manager) and informal. External leaders can also fall into either category.

Instructions for identifying change leaders
Read more about selecting your change team

Templates to help with identifying change leaders
Change impact assessment
Simple stakeholder engagement plan

How to do it

Internal leaders are, for obvious reasons, very easy to identify. These are the leaders specifically charged with ensuring the success of the change project.

You must ensure that internal leaders are empowered to influence external leaders. This means that reporting lines must be rigorously observed and transparent so that internal leaders have the most up-to-date information on the project.

Eternal formal leaders
External formal leaders occupy positions of authority sanctioned by the hierarchy. They may:

- have the ability to approve strategic direction, budgets, projects, resources, etc.
- have the capacity to directly impact your change project, including the capacity to stall or halt progress
- occupy leadership positions within your organisation, or in other organisations linked to yours
- have the capacity to boost the visibility of your project, or raise its credibility
- have the capacity to influence other formal leaders who can have a direct impact on your project.

These leaders should be identified through rigorous stakeholder analysis, particularly in large or complex projects. If you have already done this, it is likely that you have given them a high priority in your engagement plan.

External informal leaders

External informal leaders are often "elected" to that position from among their peers. As such they carry a great deal of influence, in both formal settings (such as team meetings) or informal settings. Their informal influence will likely, over time, turn to more formal influences, particularly if their leadership qualities are noticed and developed by the formal leadership.

You may have noted these informal leaders through an analysis of stakeholder networks. It is important to understand how they influence both laterally among their peers and hierarchically through formal leadership channels.

When identifying leaders you may find it revealing to consider Malcolm Gladwell's observation of three types of network influencers in his book, *The Tipping Point*:

- **Connectors:** People with an above average network of friends and associates, such as someone with many Facebook friends.
- **Mavens:** Those we intuitively trust in regard to their advice on ideas, products or services. They are generally accepted as experts on the topic.
- **Salesman**: People who can convince us that something *really* is worth doing.

You should encourage and support all leaders to embrace and model the public sector values and behaviours, to ensure that these are given clear validation to employees and act as motivators for change.

Your simple stakeholder engagement plan will need updating to reflect the role of your informal leaders.