

Stakeholders' Role in Federal Project Management

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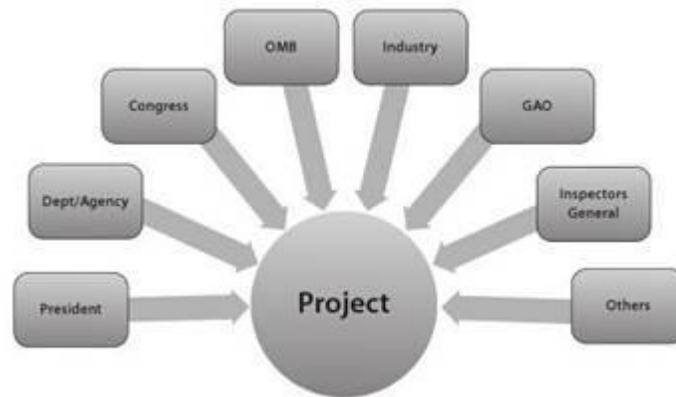
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The federal government actually lead the early development of modern project management, beginning with the example of Thaddeus Kosciuszko's defense planning and construction during the Revolutionary War, up to the first substantial evidence of government project management in 1956 – the Navy Polaris missile project (Weinstein, 2010: pp. 7,10). After adopting some of the private sector's project management principles in the 1980s, federal project management is “now reaching a new level of maturity and recognition as a skillset” (Weinstein, 2010: p. 13). Today, federal project managers play a major part in the success of projects and have begun to gain more recognition in the public sector.

One of the main differences between public and private sector project management involves the role of stakeholders. Just as project managers play a large role, stakeholders hold equally, if not more, significant worth in the lifecycle of a project. Private sector projects can affect a target audience, but in the case of public sector projects, the audience is much more generalized or widespread. More specifically, federal projects involve some of the most impactful stakeholders because these types of projects serve the national interest (Weinstein, 2010: p. 139).

By definition, stakeholders are “people are who are involved in the project and those who may be (or think themselves to be) affected by it (Keeling, 2000: 181).” A major difference that separates federal project management and private sector project management lies in the type of and involvement by stakeholders. In the federal space, stakeholders can include, but may not be limited to: Congress, high-ranking appointees, taxpayers, policy makers, special interest groups, and many more (Weinstein, 2010: 4). By contrast, in the private sector, stakeholders may include owners, shareholders, unions, and customers, to name a few. Federal projects are more likely to impact people on a larger-scale – as in a whole country or group of taxpayers – whereas private sector projects may just affect people of a certain market.

Managing stakeholders in the federal space is a challenging task that requires the project manager to carefully direct and facilitate both support and opposition from the key project players to achieve the greatest success in carrying out their goals. The federal project manager has a very important responsibility in handling stakeholders and must therefore keep a major focus on relationships with those involved in and affected by the project. Role of stakeholders is significantly instrumental in federal project management and requires paramount attention and consideration by the federal project manager as presented in Figure 1 below:



Federal Project Stakeholders

Figure 1

It is clear that when the stakeholders are on the side of the federal project manager, the probability of project success increases. Although critical analysis of project challenges and opportunities is necessary, it cannot go so far as to include fervent opposition. Constructive collaborative planning efforts and the fulfillment of the need for transdisciplinary project teams are imperative to the positive continuation of projects in the federal space. Similarly, the variant influence by the broad range of federal project stakeholders can also result in the disadvantages of conflicting risks. Egoism and ignorance can emerge as stakeholders try to assert their opposing views and opinions, which may be detrimental to projects. With the role of stakeholders weighing heavily on accomplishment, federal project managers must assert their own role in managing stakeholders. Through assessment tools and effective communication, they have the power to gain and maintain control of a project and use the stakeholders to their advantage and not succumb to their disadvantages.

The best way to approach a federal project would be with the following things in mind: know the project goals, possible issues, and risks; know your stakeholders – not just who they are, but what they represent to the project, what their views are, and what their strengths and weaknesses are; make sure your communication skills are top-notch. Project managers are known to be organized, task-driven, detail-oriented individuals, but in the federal space, it is even more imperative that project managers excel in these areas while keeping compliance at the forefront. It doesn't matter how organized you are if you aren't following a legal regulation. Federal project managers need to be as professional as possible in establishing and maintaining relationships with their stakeholders because chances are, their stakeholder could be deciding how much they are paying in taxes or how much social security they will receive. The work of federal project managers has strong potential for more direct effect on everyday life and therefore requires high-level management skills and sound perspective.

Keywords: project management; federal projects; stakeholder analysis; government agencies.