

Who really matters? A stakeholder analysis tool

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Abstract. The implementation of any project requires clear thinking about the relative importance of stakeholders in achieving project outcomes. The Victorian Department of Primary Industries has a strong tradition in project planning. In our work, however, we found that few project teams looked systematically or strategically at the human and social capital resources required to deliver project goals. A literature search by the Practice Change Capacity Development Team revealed that many of the stakeholder analysis tools available focused on the target population for the project, not at the people resources required to implement the project. As a result we developed a stakeholder analysis tool better suited to project planning, which allows project teams to consider the important human and social capital resources required to improve project planning and implementation. The tool featured a 16 square matrix with two axes focussed on stakeholders who are:

- Influential – stakeholders who have power over the organisation, or management of the project (x-axis), and
- Important – stakeholders who have power over project implementation or outcome adoption (y-axis).

Since its development, the Stakeholder Analysis Tool has been used by a number of teams, including Fisheries Victoria and the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party. Upon evaluation, participants expressed an improved team understanding of their project and its outcomes and a greater understanding of stakeholder management. We will report on case examples in which the Stakeholder Analysis Tool was used to meet different team objectives, while maintaining the tool's integrity. We will also explain how these studies have helped us revise and improve the tool. Three key learnings:

- Doing a stakeholder analysis as a team allows everyone to understand the importance and influence of the project's stakeholders. This helps the team to focus on project direction and success.
- The conversation that happens between team members during the stakeholder analysis is just as important and insightful as the outcomes of the process.
- This Stakeholder Analysis Tool has been designed to be flexible in its application, allowing for continuous improvement of the process.

Keywords: stakeholder analysis, project planning, networks, networking.

Introduction

The success of a project can ultimately depend on your ability to develop the support of, and manage the expectations of, key people. The successful management of stakeholders can have a substantial and immediate impact – satisfied stakeholders can greatly improve the progress and relevance of a project and ultimately contribute significantly to its success. Undertaking a stakeholder analysis can be an important first step in managing the human and social capital resources in your project.

A stakeholder analysis is a process for providing insights into, and understanding of, the interactions between a project and its stakeholders (Grimble and Wellard 1996). It is a powerful tool to help project members identify and prioritise stakeholders who can have an impact on project success. It can prompt thinking about the type of influence individuals have and in what way they might be an asset (or hindrance) to achieving successful outcomes. It is an essential starting place for understanding critical stakeholders and is the first step for developing engagement strategies for building and maintaining the networks that are necessary for the delivery of successful project outcomes.

A major benefit for a team undertaking a stakeholder analysis during the planning and development stages of a project is the opportunity to have an insightful conversation about their project and stakeholders. This may result in the whole team developing a clearer understanding of the range of project stakeholders, thus helping to develop a more focused project strategy.

This paper presents a stakeholder analysis tool developed to help project teams to systematically and strategically look at the human and social capital resources required to deliver desired project goals. First we examine the reasoning behind incorporating a stakeholder analysis in project planning, development and implementation. We then discuss how the Stakeholder Analysis Tool was developed, utilised in three case examples and the lessons experienced by both the case example participants and our team. We then describe how the

tool was reassessed and improved. Finally, we conclude with remarks about incorporating a stakeholder analysis into project work.

Background

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Practice Change Capacity Development (PCCD) team was established in 2007 to support projects to achieve government policy outcomes. The primary function of PCCD is that of an enabling team, where social science expertise is sought by DPI project teams as an input into project design, development and/or implementation.

PCCD undertook an assessment of how DPI teams were designing, developing and implementing their projects. One of the key areas of investigation was how teams were managing their stakeholders. PCCD found that few project teams looked systematically or strategically at the human and social capital resources required to deliver project goals.

The majority of teams were working intuitively, especially in regards to how they engaged stakeholders who had influence over the delivery of project outcomes (see Lourey and Howden 2005). By intuitively we mean keeping note of everything in one's head and not maintaining a written record of their 'mental picture'.

Through our research we revealed that there were a number of risks in the ad-hoc way stakeholders were being managed in DPI.

1. Time and resources were being wasted.
2. Stakeholders were not being managed efficiently because project teams were not sharing their knowledge and understanding.
3. Important stakeholders were being neglected in the intuitive assessment of the project environment.
4. Project leaders and teams were working on untested assumptions about the relationship of stakeholders to their project.

As a result of our research we saw an opportunity to improve DPI project planning and outcomes and decrease the possibilities of surprise and/or outrage in 'neglected' stakeholders during project implementation. To overcome these issues PCCD undertook a literature search to investigate the stakeholder analysis tools already available. None of them met our purpose so we developed a stakeholder analysis tool focused on project planning, design and implementation.

This piece of work was never started as a formal project. It has been undertaken over a period of eight years and in essence is an action research project. First person action research processes were used to investigate how networking with stakeholders was being undertaken within DPI (Becker & Bryman, 2005). We then moved on to using Grundy's (1982) type 1: technical action research mode - PCCD introduced a variety of project teams to the Stakeholder Analysis Tool to help promote more efficient and effective project planning processes. The research was product directed, promoting personal participation by project team members resulting in an accumulation of individual predictive knowledge to produce a group understanding (Grundy 1982).

During the development of this work the Stakeholder Analysis Tool underwent numerous spirals of the action research steps; plan, act, observe and reflect. With each spiral the Stakeholder Analysis Tool was improved with the new information collected during that cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

This work was undertaken during wider research on policy and project design, and network management, within DPI's Our Rural Landscape initiative.

Research on network management

Over the past five years the Practice Change Portfolio (in which PCCD sits) has conducted research into network management in response to a perceived increase in the political complexity of the resource management environment (see Howden 2006, Howden 2007b).

This research was an important underpinning for the development of the Stakeholder Analysis Tool. The research provided a number of important insights into the importance of direct attention to the function of networks to the success of complex, multi-stakeholder, projects; as well as the significant consequences of neglecting them.

For example, a lot of research into social networks has revealed that a leading cause of the failure of some 'projects' (including businesses and organisations) has been the inability of leaders to effectively understand and manage their networks and their assumption that they

had an accurate perception of the important relationships in their networks (Borgatti and Foster 2003, Kilduff and Tsai 2003). Few (if any) people have the cognitive ability to accurately juggle the complex web of relationships with project stakeholders without spending some time on direct, front of mind, attention to the task (Lourey and Howden 2005).

A great deal of the literature on network approaches also focuses on their application to 'wicked problems' (e.g. Churchman 1967, Conklin 2001, Roberts 2000, Salwasser 2002). Wicked problems are those that are the focus of multiple stakeholders; are not easily defined, nor are they (easily) solvable; and tend to require joint action from government, industry, community and individuals (e.g. non-point source pollution). Networks, note Keast et al. (2004 p. 370), represent 'unique responses to very complex, messy, wicked problems that do not lend themselves to business as usual'. Wicked problems require a lot of attention to a range of stakeholders and their competing interests and divergent beliefs about potential causes and possible solutions to resource management problems.

Additionally, in the design and implementation of projects and extension activities, attention to networks contributes to:

- *Effectiveness*: Stakeholder networks provide a forum for diverse and fragmented groups to cooperate across gaps in constituency, culture, tradition and geography.
- *Efficiency*: Networks provide a way to pool resources and improve collective ability to solve problems (while still maintaining acceptable levels of organisational and professional autonomy).
- *Legitimacy*: Effective networks increase democratic legitimacy by giving voice to the range of critical interest groups with an interest in the issue you are addressing.
- *Innovation*: Schumpeter (in Ruef 2002 p. 430) describes innovative action as 'the novel combination of existing ideas and routines.' Effective networks can have access to information from a range of different perspectives which can be combined to address problems innovatively.
- *Diffusion*: They allow individuals, groups and organisations the chance to exchange knowledge and resources needed to increase their flexibility and collective ability to respond in a complex environment (Beacham et al. 2005).
- *Building Collaborative Infrastructure*: Through repeated interactions network members gain greater appreciation of the scope of their interdependence, and become engaged in a form of 'organisational learning' that Simonin (in Imperial 2005 p. 305) calls 'collaborative know how.'

Managing networks of stakeholders for these outcomes can be complex and considerable research and practical experience has demonstrated that there can be significant difficulty in effectively integrating the perspectives of people with different expertise, backgrounds and problem-solving styles (Cross et al. 2002).

Given the potential complexity of managing a network of stakeholders, we consider it crucial to first understand who is in your network, their role, their level of power and influence and the various resources they might provide. We thought it also critical to test assumptions about the relationship of stakeholders to you and your work, and to work with team members and peers to assess whether there were stakeholders you may not have considered who may emerge to either hinder or assist the progress of your work. A stakeholder analysis can be the first important step in this process.

Stakeholder Analysis Tool development

Preliminary work on the Stakeholder Analysis Tool began in 2001 when we undertook a literature search to investigate the stakeholder analysis processes available and their appropriateness for state government application. Little detailed work on stakeholder analysis was discovered. Perhaps the most useful and well developed process was Grimble and Wellard's (1996) stakeholder analysis tool, and this framework was the basis for early models of the PCCD process.

What was immediately obvious from the literature though, was that most stakeholder models focused heavily on improving the engagement of the target population of a program or project, and little on the people resources required to implement it. This is particularly important for government agencies which often have complex internal structures (including purchasers, researchers and extension staff) and/or work on multi-agency projects.

Over the past eight years, the original tool has been adapted to better suit the context of Victorian state government programs and projects. In 2007, staff in the newly formed PCCD team developed a revised stakeholder analysis tool with an accompanying explanatory booklet

(Howden 2007a). The Stakeholder Analysis Tool consists of five steps, resulting in a stakeholder matrix and a stakeholder analysis table.

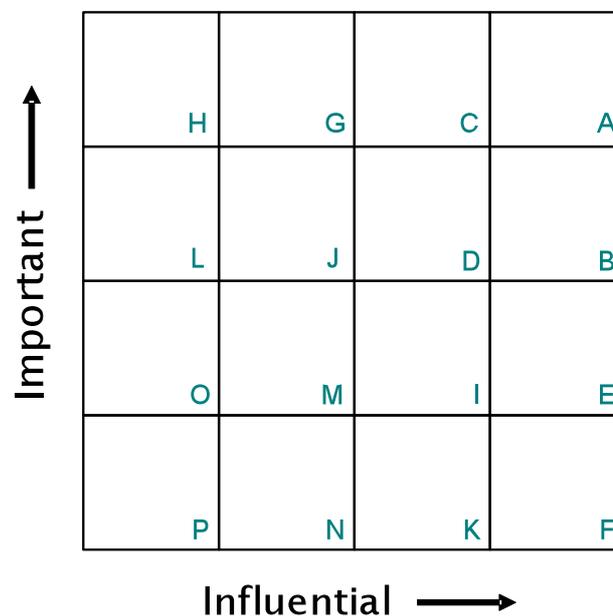
The process is very formal compared to what DPI is familiar with. It requires commitment to hard thinking and filling in completing all the associated tables and spreadsheets. It is most beneficial when completed as a team, rather than by individual team members acting alone.

The Stakeholder Analysis Tool

Step One. (Identify your stakeholders) involves identifying the project's stakeholders, and as a team discussing why they are critical for meeting project outcomes. It is important to focus primarily on the person and their role, not just an organisational group or a position title. This is because individuals will most likely have different levels of power or importance within an organisation, and will likely have different relationships (or none at all) with various team members. Importantly, people make up networks, not organisations.

Step Two. (Prioritise your stakeholders) requires the team to use a matrix (see Figure 1) to prioritise their list of stakeholders in terms of how critical they are in helping deliver on outcomes of the project. This will help prioritise communication and engagement activities with the people most likely to affect project success.

Figure 1. Stakeholder Matrix



The two axes of the matrix are labelled *influential* and *important*, with the difference being:

- *Influential* refers to people who have power (direct or indirect) over the success of the project, including financial, positional authority or persuasive power over key decision-makers.
- *Important* refers to those who have power over the delivery of project outcomes. These people may include opinion leaders (perhaps in the target population for the project), critical knowledge resources (e.g. scientific experts), and providers of enabling resources (e.g. mapping technology) or those critical in delivery of innovations produced by the project.

Step Three. (Understanding and managing your stakeholders) involves considering such items as the likely attitudes of the various stakeholders to the project, their attitude to the project team and any risks associated with their involvement in the project. It then asks you to consider what changes may be required in how you engage with them to minimise any risks and/or to increase their appreciation of, and commitment to, the project.

Step Four. (Setting goals and identifying costs of stakeholder analysis) requires the team to designate responsibilities for undertaking each communication task and to set appropriate timelines.

Step Five. (Evaluation and revision) is to be undertaken regularly throughout the life of the project. It is most beneficial when a stakeholder analysis is regularly updated to identify whether there are potential new stakeholders, changes in current stakeholder importance or influence, or if perceptions of the project have changed.

Throughout these steps participants are encouraged to fill in a stakeholder analysis table (Table 1).

Table 1. An abridged stakeholder analysis table (with examples)

Name	Role	Why are they important?	Rank (where in the matrix?)	Current attitude	What we would like them to do?	Key Messages	How (Tactics)	When	Who
Bob	Farmer	Influential at a political level. Farmer opinion leader	I	Does not understand our project	Advocate for our project to other farmers	There are benefits to him in working with us	Invite to project field day	12 th Nov	Ian

Case examples

The following three case examples demonstrate the application of the framework in different contexts. As was noted above, these case examples were not selected as part of a formal research project. Instead all applications of the framework were evaluated as part of an action learning approach and PCCD staff used what was learnt to continuously improve subsequent processes.

Case example one – Our Rural Landscape

Our Rural Landscape (ORL) was a four year \$50 million government initiative to develop innovative technologies for the sustainable development of Victoria's food and agriculture sector. The program included a wide range of programs from increasing market access for agricultural products and demonstrating food integrity, to better modelling of risks to agricultural landscapes and improving precision agriculture.

In 2007 there was increased pressure on DPI programs under the ORL initiative to provide a more rigorous documentation of stakeholders and their needs. Staff in PCCD were requested to provide support, including stakeholder analysis assistance, for the range of programs in the ORL initiative. Individual support was provided as needed, in addition to conducting one 'open call' workshop which attracted participants from a number of ORL projects. This provided somewhat of a challenge as PCCD had previously tailored support to the client's projects.

In order to introduce the principles of stakeholder analysis to a diverse audience, PCCD developed a 'neutral' project scenario based on characters from a well known cartoon program. In this scenario, a bar owner partnered with a scientist to develop and market a genetically modified beer with health benefits. Other characters were also given roles (partly based on their actual characters) with interests in, or opposition to, this project.

This process worked so well to engage participants in the relatively mundane nature of the theory underpinning stakeholder analysis, that PCCD have used this process to introduce the theory in other workshops. The success of the mock cartoon workshop highlighted the value of helping participants engage with difficult (or 'boring') processes using tools such as visualisations, humour and familiar examples.

Case example two – Inland Fisheries, Fisheries Victoria

Fisheries Victoria is a division of the Victorian Department of Primary Industries. Their business is to ensure an integrated and strategic approach to securing fisheries resources, sharing fisheries resources, and developing the value of the resource for the benefit of the community. Inland Fisheries is a unit of Fisheries Victoria and are mainly responsible for recreational fishing. The Inland Fisheries team requested PCCD run a stakeholder analysis workshop for them, focusing on one of their projects, 'Go Fishing'. Team Management suggested that the objective of the workshop was to improve the delivery of this project.

One innovation introduced in this workshop was the use of a post-it-note/pin boarding technique to help increase the participation of all team members in identifying stakeholders for their projects.

From a facilitator's point of view the most important part of this workshop were the conversations the team had around the stakeholders they thought were critical for project

success. At the beginning there were a variety of views and by the end of the session the team shared a common understanding. Particularly, the workshop involved people peripheral to the main Go Fishing team who provided context and information about stakeholders that otherwise might have been missing.

A critical turning point of this workshop was when the team were filling out the stakeholder matrix. When questioned by the PCCD facilitator why there were no people being placed in the top segments of the 'importance' section of the matrix, the team were forced to consider more closely the purpose of the analysis. Subsequent discussions revealed that the problem was less the delivery of the project – it was considered to be working quite well – than the need to consider how the project would retain funding in the long term (if government objectives shifted). This discovery confirmed for the PCCD team the value of the stakeholder analysis in helping project teams to appreciate the 'big picture' of their stakeholder and project environment.

Evaluation of the workshop using the Plus, Minus, Interesting tool indicated that the team wasn't able to get the full benefit out of the Stakeholder Analysis Tool, due to time constraints, other work commitments and the need for continued support from PCCD. Post-workshop, PCCD undertook a semi-structured interview with the Go Fishing project leader to discuss the workshop, the Stakeholder Analysis Tool and what the team had done with the analysis since the workshop.

PCCD revisited the Inland Fisheries Stakeholder Analysis a number of months after the initial workshop using the reassessed Stakeholder Analysis Tool (see below). This second workshop enabled the team to review and complete the Go Fishing stakeholder analysis. The team commented during this follow up workshop on the importance of reviewing the analysis. Even though only a short time had passed a number of changes were already required.

Case example three – Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party

Serrated tussock has been listed as one of the 20 Weeds of National Significance (WONS) under the National Weeds Program, due to its highly invasive characteristics, impacts on agricultural and environmental values and the high economic cost for its control. The Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Party (VSTWP) is currently implementing its strategy; *Intensifying the attack on serrated tussock: 2005 – 2010*.

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries hosts both the Executive and Partnerships Officers for the VSTWP. PCCD were commissioned by DPI to assist the development of: an implementation plan; a monitoring and evaluation plan; and a stakeholder and community engagement plan.

PCCD decided that undertaking a stakeholder analysis would be the logical first step in the development of the required plans. In this case, the mock cartoon workshop was not used as it was deemed not appropriate given the audience present. To maximise the relevance and effectiveness of these plans and to ensure ownership of plans by key stakeholders, a facilitated approach which drew on the knowledge of stakeholders – especially members of the working party – was utilised. The outcome of the workshop was a list of more than 70 stakeholders. Several follow up sessions were required with both the Executive Officer and Partnerships Officer to complete the stakeholder analysis process.

A key lesson from this case example was the need to ensure that the language and concepts in the Stakeholder Analysis Tool were consistent with the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Community Engagement Spectrum (IAP2 2003) so that community engagement plans could be more easily developed from the output of the process.

The identification of some new stakeholders who were a potential support for the project was seen as a very positive outcome of the process. During evaluation of the workshop using the Plus, Minus, Interesting tool one member of the working party commented: "... [I] now see just how large the job of the Partnerships Officer is, with 73 stakeholders identified."

Both the Executive and Partnerships Officers commented that due to the complexities of the Victorian Serrated Tussock Working Group project, having a third party work with them through their stakeholder analysis has helped them with their planning and prioritising into the future.

Reassessment of the Stakeholder Analysis Tool

The PCCD team has utilised the feedback from participants in the three case example projects, and other stakeholder analysis workshops conducted over the last five years, to review the Stakeholder Analysis Tool to see if and how improvements could be made.

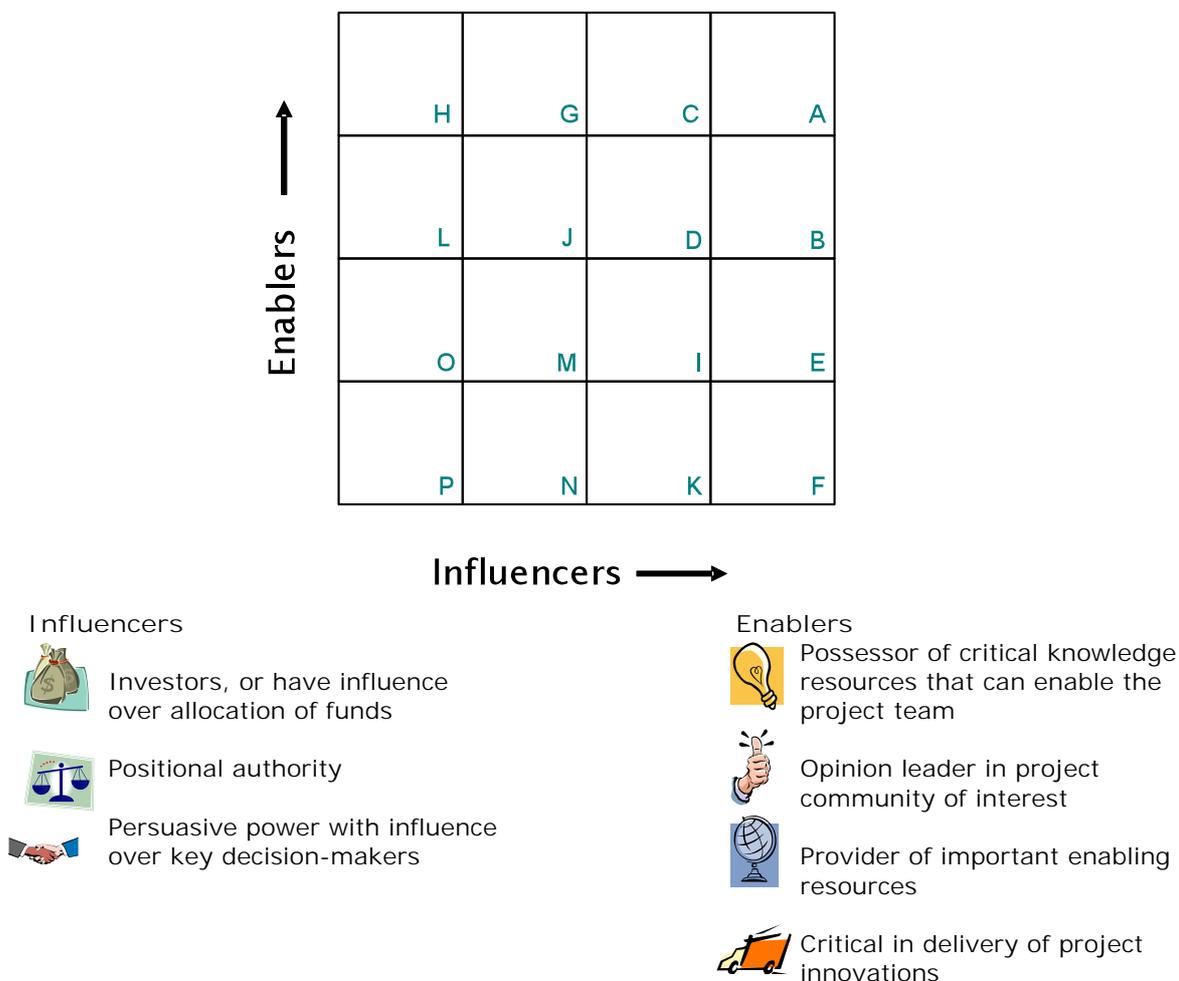
We believe that the Stakeholder Analysis Tool is on its way to meeting its desired purpose to help project teams manage their stakeholders more effectively and to improve project planning, design and implementation. There were, however, a number of difficulties experienced by workshop participants in their application of the tool.

Words and their meaning (and potential multiple meanings) are important and the PCCD team members soon discovered that they had some difficulty in explaining the definition of ‘important’ and ‘influential’ in the context of the stakeholder matrix – particularly as all stakeholders are generically ‘important’ to a project. Additionally, the term ‘important’ was an artefact of the origin of the PCCD matrix in the work of Grimble and Wellard (1996) and it does not adequately represent the stakeholders we thought more appropriate on that axis – individuals critical in the delivery of the project.

It is important to add at this stage that we believe that the target community for a government project are important stakeholders. We consider that these people are more likely to be represented through stakeholder bodies (e.g. Landcare, industry groups, conservation bodies), or by particular opinion leaders (e.g. charismatic individuals and/or community leaders), and that this should be captured in the stakeholder analysis process.

Changing the words on the axes of the matrix to ‘enablers’ and ‘influencers’ has significantly improved understanding of the two dimensions of the matrix and the difference between them, as has the addition of some more detailed explanation of the way stakeholders may enable or influence a project (see Figure 2) .

Figure 2. Stakeholder Matrix version 2 with *Enablers* and *Influencers* descriptors



Further, these discoveries have prompted us to emphasise to tool users that stakeholder analysis is not an exact science. Individuals will be variously influential or enabling depending on the context of the project; and this will change over time. Individuals will be variously influential or enabling in relationship to each other; and this will vary over time. Some individuals will not be easy to ‘categorise’ in terms of the value they provide to a project. More

important than placing them exactly on the matrix will be the conversation between team members as to why individuals are important to a project, and the shared understanding that often follows. These factors might not satisfy people who are more 'detail oriented'. This form of stakeholder analysis is not for everyone.

Because this is a new way of thinking and working for DPI, it is important also that PCCD provide continued support to teams who use the Stakeholder Analysis Tool. Otherwise the outcomes of the workshops will most likely sit on a shelf collecting dust. We suggest that the best way to incorporate the Stakeholder Analysis Tool into project work is to have a team 'champion' who will drive the process and keep in contact with PCCD for assistance.

Application of this framework and its predecessors over eight years has resulted in a number of lessons that have influenced the development of the Stakeholder Analysis Tool.

A second edition of the stakeholder analysis booklet has been produced (Howden 2009) incorporating a number of changes from our use of the process. These include:

- clearer descriptions and examples of *enablers* and *influencers*.
- more emphasis on *disablers* – people who can a negative influence on the design and delivery of a project (these people are often forgotten in stakeholder analysis).
- more emphasis on revision and evaluation in Step 4 (Revise, review, reconsider)
- revision of Step 3 to align the language better with the IAP2 community engagement spectrum.

Conclusion

In the case examples described above we have shown how this Stakeholder Analysis Tool can play an important role in helping all members of a project team understand the role their stakeholders play in the successful development and implementation of their projects. We believe that the tool can be quite flexible in how it is used to produce a variety of outcomes to suit a project team. Inland Fisheries, for example, had an unexpected outcome from their workshop which saw them switch the focus of their immediate priorities. The Serrated Tussock team were pleased that the process revealed the complexity of their stakeholder environment and new stakeholders that could support their goals.

The benefits of using the PCCD Stakeholder Analysis Tool include:

- Testing the project team's knowledge and *assumptions* about the relative value of stakeholders and drawing on their *diverse experience* for 'intelligence' on potential influencers and enablers.
- Identifying 'new' stakeholders who may not have been identified before, but who may become *disablers* if ignored or not managed appropriately, and developing an effective engagement and/or communication plan to manage these stakeholders.
- Saving the valuable *time* of project staff by identifying: 1) critical stakeholders who require more of your time to engage with; and, 2) those less critical stakeholders who may be using up your precious time and resources with limited benefit to your project.
- Increase the *innovativeness* of the project by better utilising the range of human and social capital resources available across all project staff.
- Improving the *efficiency* of the project by utilising individual team members' diverse networks to increase the 'reach' of the project, both to gather intelligence and to disperse knowledge about the project.

We recognise that this may be perceived by some as an overly-formal way to identify and record a project's stakeholder networks and relationships, and that it requires a high level of commitment by the project team. Some people would prefer a more relaxed or visual process and PCCD is also developing alternative processes for this purpose (e.g. Howden 2008). We believe, however, that the likely positive outcomes from this process are more than worth the effort put into it, and that stakeholder analysis is a critical resource in project planning.

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