

Successful stakeholder management

Good internal and external stakeholder management is key to making service redesign projects a success. It allows interested parties to be involved to help shape an effective solution, their skills and influence to be used to remove roadblocks and everyone's expectations to be managed if the scope or timescales of the project change.

Digital Channel Shift Programme

The Digital Channel Shift Programme was set up to help councils and their partners to promote greater use of online tools and technologies for the benefit of both their customers and staff.

The aim is for the digital tools and solutions created through the programme to be reused by other councils and contribute to the wider work to transform local public services.

Engage and manage your stakeholders

No project is an island. To be successful all service redesign projects must seek to engage, and build relationships, with a multitude of touchpoints internally and externally. It is the relationships built from conception through to delivery and transition into business as usual that will ensure the approach taken is appropriate and the project has impact.

From service users, staff, senior management, councillors, other council services, partner organisations and suppliers it is essential to reach out both from the outset and throughout the project lifecycle to ensure buy-in.

Councils involved in the Channel Shift Programme understood the importance of involving all internal and external stakeholders. Their investment of time up front with staff and the related service areas paid dividends – and helped to deliver redesigned services that worked, were adopted by customers and had strong support from staff.

Internal stakeholders

All service users, influencers and staff with touchpoints to the project need to be engaged from the outset in order to take everyone on the same transformation journey, and to ensure that the user needs, insights, expertise and perspectives from across the whole system are considered at the early stages.

Typically, stakeholders break down into the following groups:

- **Strategic leaders and decision makers:** senior officers and councillors, who need to be engaged to ensure that the project gets the necessary resources, the support to unblock issues in specific service areas or other departments (eg IT) and any help required to ensure that external suppliers deliver as agreed.
- **Frontline staff:** work directly with the customer and so have valuable insights plus know the problems with the current working arrangements – they will need to buy into the new process/system and any changes required to their working lives, so you need to work closely with them from the start.
- **Service specialists and back-office staff:** involved in processing the requested transactions, will be invaluable in understanding how and where improvements can be made.
- **IT department:** who may be required to ensure that the transformation is supported by, and integrated with, corporate systems and networks, need to understand the project and the implications on their resources from the outset.
- **Web team:** who can provide insight and analytics on customer journeys and need to translate new processes into clear and simple processes.
- **Communications team:** will help you promote new services to customers and help drive adoption of the new services.

Gaining high-level support for the project from both senior management and councillors is important in any redesign that involves changes to the way in which people currently work. Their support and leadership will help allay concerns regarding fears about job losses and will help gain staff buy-in to the transition process.

Meanwhile, identifying potential project champions and influencers within all groups is also a good way to help promote the benefits of change, gain 'hearts and minds', and build buy-in across the organisation.

Failure to engage can lead to unexpected consequences. For example, one project encountered delays as it had failed to take account of the corporate learning and development team's highly structured approach to training – a scheduled deployment of the new system to the customer centre therefore had to be delayed by a number of months.

On the other hand, successful engagement can result in stakeholders helping to drive the project forwards. Whether that be due to a positive relationship with suppliers or concerns by staff being raised early and openly so that they can be incorporated into the project at the design phase.

Get imaginative with stakeholder engagement

Some staff worry that changes to the way in which they work is a precursor to job losses. However, according to Lincoln, the aim should be for staff to see the project as an opportunity, not a threat: “There was initial resistance in some teams but delivering the evidence that technology can reduce admin time and let them keep up with demand and release capacity was important.”

In some cases it may also be an opportunity to open a conversation about the potential for jobs to change and as a result create more value and become more satisfying when aided by technology.

One of the project teams pointed out that transformation teams should never assume that all services within a council are run in the same way. The transformation team should therefore be prepared to engage with each of the specialist service areas. This should always be a two-way learning process in order to better understand the perspective of each service’s users.

Again, good stakeholder engagement affords the opportunity to break down misconceptions and silos and understand the different systems, processes and cultures operating within an organisation. This can aid collaboration, both on the project directly, but also in the future and can help colleagues problem solve effectively together.

Listen to and value your stakeholders. In Sunderland the team met with key people in the service so that they owned the content and felt valued in the process. “So we weren’t doing something to them, but we were actually asking them what services were important to their customers.” Exploring the perspectives and expertise of colleagues is not only an opportunity to make others feel valued, but can enrich the project and ensure any potential issues are flagged early and can be resolved before they become showstoppers further down the line.

Setting deadlines and managing expectations with internal customers is key, according to Waverley. Everyone needs to understand the processes and timescales involved in setting up and testing new solutions and the time commitment they are expected to give to the project in order to get the right end result: “Agree this process at the outset in order to keep delivery on track.” Continued engagement throughout the project, including when delays are encountered, heightens awareness around resource planning that may impact on touchpoints of the service. It also provides different levers that you may be able to use to get a project back on track, using key individuals or the ecosystem of related projects to understand and sometimes unblock issues.

Be sensitive to the political environment

By nature, local government operates in a political environment and all council officers must take account of local democracy and localism in project plans.

Bins, for example, are a sensitive local political issue across the country. In Sunderland the planned change from weekly to alternate weekly collection required regular engagement with councillors to ensure that they were on board with the changes.

Political change can also provide opportunities. For example, in Rochdale a change in political leadership during the project provided a new opportunity to hold engagement sessions with members and the newly appointed leader of the council. This resulted in support from the leader encouraging both members and staff to use the online services themselves, and to spread the word in their communities.

Engage broadly

Continuous and broad engagement across stakeholder groups can bring out unexpected user champions.

For example, in both Cheltenham and Calderdale, enthusiastic early adopter taxi drivers helped to spread the word about the benefits of using the new service and drive adoption by their peers.

In addition, as noted previously, finding a senior champion or member can help drive buy-in and adoption faster internally.

External stakeholders

The best laid plans can always be subject to external impact and unexpected events, and the overwhelming advice from projects in the Digital Channel Shift Programme was to proactively manage the supplier relationship. Having clear, agreed deliverables and timescales as well as regular and ongoing communication with a supplier, and an agreed process for resolving issues, reduces the potential for misunderstanding at early stages and also can help smooth the way as issues do arise.

Suppliers

A range of issues were encountered in the supplier relationships, including:

- products not functioning as expected
- delays in product development, upgrade, and/or delivery
- delays in fixing reported bugs
- unexpected impact of upgrades on existing systems – including bugs introduced by supplier upgrades and being charged to fix them
- lack of documentation, eg on APIs
- unexpected charges, eg for skills transfer
- conflicting priorities causing delay
- churn of key contacts within supplier project management and technical support teams.

To counter these issues, projects shared a number of key learning points, including engaging with both sales and technical staff during the procurement phase, agreeing expectations on support and response timescales in advance, and engaging with supplier user groups where these exist. For example, the Lincoln team used the supplier's user group network to enhance its own knowledge base and use of XML during the project.

Other external stakeholders

A number of the projects had non-customer stakeholders external to their organisations. For example, Citizens Advice and other voluntary sector organisations, other parts of the public sector involved in delivering a service, and public sector bodies.

Where available and appropriate, a number of projects engaged with the third sector and other partners at the research stage and to help drive take-up. For example, Harlow reached out to Citizens Advice, a local advice centre, HarlowSave, and Streets to Homes organisations, to encourage them to both spread the word and help customers to self-serve.

West Sussex County Council, meanwhile, gained significant user research and support from the local parent-carer forum – which helped to shape and fine-tune the direction of the project at the outset.

Top tips

- Map out your stakeholders – internal and external – at the outset.
- Start stakeholder engagement early.
- Be aware of political sensitivities.
- Be imaginative in how you engage.
- Identify and foster potential project champions within all the different groups.
- Member and senior management support will help with stakeholder and internal engagement.
- Build and nurture strong relationships.
- Be ready to listen and learn, rather than broadcast your project benefits.
- Give stakeholders ownership of key elements.
- Tackle concerns, such as fear of job losses, head-on.
- Agree mutual deadlines for support, delivery and testing.
- Manage stakeholder expectations about target outcomes.



Local Government Association

18 Smith Square
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000

Fax 020 7664 3030

Email info@local.gov.uk

www.local.gov.uk

© Local Government Association, September 2019

For a copy in Braille, larger print or audio,
please contact us on 020 7664 3000.
We consider requests on an individual basis.