



## **Executive Interim Manager and Stakeholder Satisfaction: the Ninjas Return\***

*By Dr Alf Oldman FCA*

### **Introduction**

In my article "Interim Managers, Ninjas and a Road Map in a Downsized World, I introduced the terms "Ronin" and "Ninjas" in the context of the interim management industry. The Ronin were temporary soldiers, called in to bolster troop numbers, the Ninjas were highly skilled and professionally trained individuals, capable of exceptional specialist services. The Ninjas return!

Let us fast track to twenty-first century society, in which political pluralism has come of age, i.e. we recognise multiple and countervailing political interest groups. I would like to focus on how to achieve Stakeholder Satisfaction on a major change programme, in a complex, multi-cultural organisation, where we engage with all the stakeholders (political interest groups). This article is primarily focused on implementing a major change programme, i.e. with a series of inter-connecting projects but the principles apply to wider applications, e.g. environment management.

### **Stakeholder Management**

Stakeholder Management is now widely recognised within the academic and popular literature. A quick search will find much use in the areas of project management, public sector services and environmental management services e.g. ISO 14001. Key steps to Best Practice in Stakeholder Management typically include the following:

- Identifying key stakeholders and their needs
- Preparing stakeholder management plan
- Conducting stakeholder activities
- Testing stakeholder plan effectiveness
- Continuous improvement

Within the public sector the following developments are supporting the formalisation and pro-activity of the stakeholder management process, including:

- Appointing relationship managers
- Formalising relationships with other departments and agencies
- Establishing protocols to support representation from the public and special interest groups
- Active marketing of initiatives, raising awareness in the public at large
- Being flexible and adapting as stakeholders change, along with new issues

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### **Beyond Best Practice**

Speak to any experienced, top-tier, programme director or manager and he or she will tell you that in the real world, there is frequently not enough time to fully deploy best practice recommendations. Expediency, milestones and dominant stakeholders prevail, so it is almost impossible to give all stakeholders sufficient attention, let alone resources! Another way of expressing the same theme is to highlight that best practice models do not generally take account of context, for example, management style, organization and external market, technology and political dynamics. This is all a long way from recognizing, managing and satisfying both internal and external stakeholders.

### **From Stakeholder Management to Stakeholder Satisfaction**

Leading organizations around the World have been listening to their customers and employees for some years. Formal surveys, focus groups and other research methods have been deployed by outside consultants, with unbiased feedback to the some of the stakeholders, i.e. managers and their employees. On the other hand, the author is not aware of similar research methods being routinely used for the wider stakeholder community. Stakeholder management provides a normative model of good practice but does not actually focus upon achieving stakeholder satisfaction.

### **What Happens in a Typical IT or Process Improvement Programme?**

Most large programmes are led by people with an outstanding technical background. Sometimes they have a background in methodology craft, learned in one of the major consulting firms. Rarely are programmes led by skilled facilitators, with a formal background in research tools deployed in the Social Sciences, i.e. surveys, structured interviews, focus groups etc. The consequence is that in many major programmes, one or more stakeholder groups are frequently bitterly dissatisfied, frequently damaging the effectiveness of the programme and blocking the achievement of the benefit case, i.e. return on investment, improved customer satisfaction etc.

### **Personal Insights**

Because of my own formal background in research, I can readily identify three cases in demanding, very well-known organizations, where we have conducted stakeholder soundings, using state-of-the-art tools borrowed from the Social Sciences. This is the natural territory of the Organizational Development professional (OD). I am always on the look out for results-hardened, OD specialists, to add to my network of Master Ninjas!

### **The Financial Improvement Performance Programme (FPIP):**

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An Executive Interim Manager diagnostic tool is the first step in the Financial Performance Improvement Programme (FPIP). FPIPs deploy leading edge research tools to clarify stakeholder requirements and structured planning to achieve stakeholder satisfaction. The methodology includes iterative analysis and intervention.

FPIPs have been successfully deployed in some of the World's most complex organisations. Based upon research and successful deployment, I have developed a simple questionnaire to see whether an FPIP is appropriate to your organization:

1. Has there been a pan-functional or pan-organisational record of failure?
2. Have ten of millions of Dollars been invested without benefit realisation?
3. Have major consultancies been deployed and failed?
4. Is the situation potentially embarrassing to senior management?
5. Are reputations at risk?
6. Are there multiple stakeholders to satisfy?
7. Do line executives have conflicting views on solutions?
8. Is the issue multi-functional?
9. Is there a strong financial dimension?
10. Is there a critical IT or systems involvement?
11. Is there a need for change at the house-wide level?
12. Do other options not stack up?

If you have scored a yes to eight or more questions, you definitely need to contact me via [alf@alfoldman.com](mailto:alf@alfoldman.com).

Also, I am always on the look out for "Ninjas", too!

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