



How Creating Ownership for Your IT Project Can Lead to Success

A Two-stage Process to Gain and Maintain Buy-in and Commitment from Your Project Stakeholders

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All successful projects share an important and common element – strong buy-in and commitment from key stakeholders and project team members. These are key people who will be involved in your project or affected by its outcome. Their buy-in, throughout the entire lifespan of a project is critical to the project's success.

The question then becomes, "How do you marshal support for your IT project?" This article provides a two-stage approach to gaining critical buy-in and cultivating stakeholders' commitment to planning during the implementation of your project.

Stage 1: Critical Issues Sessions to Gain Initial Buy-in

Involving stakeholders and project team members from the beginning of your project increases your ability to maintain support throughout the life of the project. A critical issues session is one proven and effective tool that can engage stakeholders prior to the start of the project.

What is a critical issues session?

A critical issue session is a type of focus group that provides a vehicle for fostering involvement and

ownership among project stakeholders. The purpose of the session is to identify early on the key factors that the project team must consider to effectively plan and implement the project. Questions to consider may include the following:

- ◆ What **major tasks** will have to be accomplished?
- ◆ What **potential problems/risks** might we face?
- ◆ What **questions** need answers before we start?
- ◆ What **assumptions** are we making that should be documented and validated?

How do you run a critical issues session?

Prior to a critical issues session, participants are provided with high-level project scope information and a pre-work guide to help them prepare. *See our Critical Issues tool for a sample of the pre-work that can be sent to project stakeholder*

(www.collegiateproject.com/toolofthemonth).



Typically, these sessions involve 15-25 participants and last from two to three hours. A session facilitator uses a structured round-robin format to

gather input. All ideas are captured on flip charts and posted on the walls of the meeting room for the participants to view throughout the session.

The focus of the session is to gather data; not solve problems or address issues that may arise. This focus keeps the session moving and avoids getting bogged down in details.

What results from a critical issues session?

A typical critical issues session will generate as many as 150 critical issues. In a non-threatening environment, project stakeholders are able to share their ideas and hear the ideas of others before the detailed planning begins.

The results of the critical issues session lay the foundation for the project plan and represent the cross-functional thinking of stakeholders who will support and implement the project.

Major tasks identified are used during the development of the schedule.

Potential problems are formally reviewed in a risk analysis session to identify preventive measures and mitigation strategies.

Questions are clarified, answered, and communicated.

Assumptions are documented and validated.

Stakeholders feel a part of the process and are better prepared to participate in the identification and assignment of detailed project tasks.

Stage 2: Building Ongoing Commitment

Successful projects not only have stakeholders involved when they begin. Successful projects have stakeholders who are engaged throughout the life of the project.

By using proven tools and techniques, you can ensure you have ongoing commitment to your project.

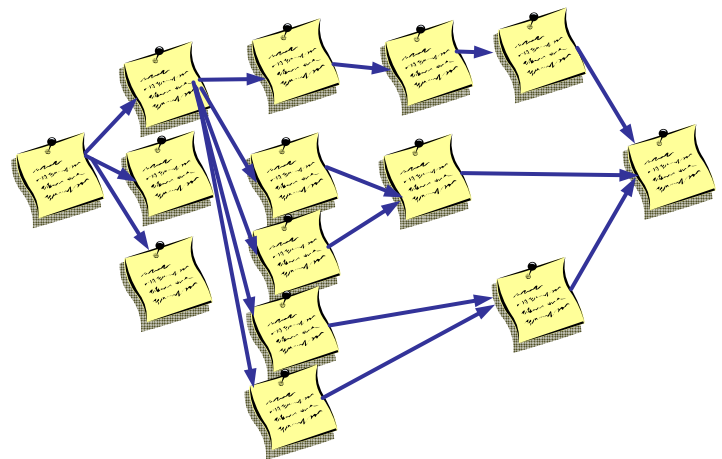
- **Task Ownership:** Once you have the high-level project plan and schedule, engage

stakeholders in identifying the details necessary to implement the project. This ensures ownership for task implementation.

- **Schedule Reporting:** Once the initial schedule is built, regular updating and reporting ensures that stakeholders are constantly involved in the management of the project.
- **Communications:** Ongoing communications ensure your stakeholders stay abreast of the project's progress and successes. Two-way communications ensure that you stay in touch with stakeholder issues and concerns.

How do you identify and ensure task ownership?

Who knows better what needs to be done than the people who will be doing the work? So involve them in identifying the detailed tasks for your project and in assigning ownership for implementing those tasks.



One way in which you can involve your project team members is to have them brainstorm a list of tasks necessary to create each project deliverable or to reach project milestones.

The team members then can identify the most appropriate resource to complete the tasks, determine the dependencies between tasks, and estimate durations.

These tasks are then put into a project schedule to manage and monitor project progress.

How do you maintain commitment throughout the project?

Schedule Reporting

Planning and managing your project is an iterative process that requires continuous involvement from your project team members and stakeholders. Regularly updating the project schedule and providing weekly and monthly status reporting throughout the project keeps these key resources involved and informed.

Ongoing Communications

A detailed communication plan (that includes schedule reporting) also helps ensure that your key stakeholders and project team members are informed of status, progress, issues, and milestones. *See our series of articles on “**Planning Your Project Communications**” at www.collegiateproject.com/pmarticles.*

Ownership and Commitment to Your Project

This two-stage approach helps increase the likelihood of success for your project. Stakeholders are involved from the beginning of your project by providing direct input. They remain involved and committed through initial and iterative task identification, detailed schedule development, ongoing status updates and reporting, and the implementation of a well-developed communications plan.

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