Excerpt from “Tips and Suggestions for Six Sigma Project Success” by Simon Bodie


Point 6
Managing stakeholders well, involving them and planning their involvement: A project’s stakeholder group will play a significant role in the success or failure of the project. Failure to manage the stakeholder group properly is the number one non-technical cause of project failure. Common mistakes include:

- Failing to identify a significant key stakeholder(s).
- Underestimating the power and influence of a stakeholder(s).
- Failing to identify a negative stakeholder(s). Failing to develop a proper management plan for stakeholders.
- Ignoring stakeholder issues.
- Doing whatever stakeholders want.

Avoid these mistakes by:

- Taking stakeholder management very seriously.
- Involving others to help identify stakeholders.
- Making stakeholder identification part of every meeting.
- Encouraging the project team to be frank about the nature of stakeholders.
- Treating stakeholders with respect, but not being driven by them.
- Developing individual management plans for key stakeholders that represent any type of risk or opportunity.

Point 7
Planning and executing implementation with great care: The implementation of change is often the most poorly managed phase of any project. This is clearly the most important phase as it is the phase where ideas come to life and the benefits start to be realized. Failure to implement an idea properly makes all prior work appear futile. It is irrelevant how good an idea is if it is not implemented properly.

Common mistakes here are:

- Attempting to implement fanciful solutions that cannot or do not work in the real world.
- Poor planning (e.g., failing to take into account that to train 1,000 call center staff might take many months and cost millions of dollars).
- Failing to understand the magnitude of the task.
- Avoiding consideration of details.

Avoid these mistakes by:

- Planning thoroughly and in great detail.
- Involving supervisors and line staff in the planning.
- Testing implementation methods and tools prior to implementation.
- Involving training, human resources and business leaders in support of the implementation.

Point 8
Ensuring that benefits are calculated and extracted: Understanding the benefits of a project improvement is extremely important. Apart from the obvious importance to the company’s financial performance, benefits also can be a powerful tool to use in stakeholder management. Understanding benefits can be difficult, extracting those benefits can be even more difficult. If the benefits of an improvement cannot be identified, then one can only conclude that the change being proposed is not an improvement at all. Therefore, do not implement it. It is worth remembering that it is impossible to have an improvement that does not have a financial benefit.
Common mistakes in this area include:
- Being unwilling to make estimates.
- Being unwilling to take on the hard tasks (manual counts, grunt work, etc.) that are required to gather the required statistics.
- Being unable to find the information required.
- Being unwilling to facilitate, encourage, coerce others to assist in these efforts.
- Calculating theoretical benefits but not having agreement about benefit extraction.
- Accepting stakeholders’ politically drive explanations regarding why a particular benefit is not achievable.

Avoid these mistakes by:
- Making estimates early. This is a good way of encouraging involvement and feedback. (It is interesting how enthusiastic people get about proving someone wrong.)
- Building time into the project plan to gather benefits information and to calculate benefits.
- Building time into the project plan to plan benefit extraction.
- Building milestones into the plan where benefit estimates will be updated – and keep to it.
- Attaching confidence levels (or ranges) to estimates (e.g., $100k per annum, +/- $60k).
- Making sure the sponsor and other key stakeholders know the level of confidence in all estimates.
- Working closely with stakeholders to develop benefit extraction plans.
- Challenging stakeholders when explanations do not make sense.
- Being creative about how benefits are accessed.
- Spending time identifying who has the information the project requires.
- Being prepared to manually take samples, gather information, etc.

**Point 9**
**Handing over a complete sustainable finished product to the business:** In order to close the project, the project team will need to have a finished product that can be sustained by the business without the special intervention of the project manager or project team.

Common mistakes here include:
- Handing over an incomplete product because the project budget has run out.
- Letting the project timeline slip, and therefore not allowing sufficient time for this part of the project.
- Not agreeing to handover the business.
- Failing to recognize the tasks involved.

Avoid these mistakes by:
- Following the Six Sigma DMAIC methodology for the Control phase.
- Ensuring the project meets its deadlines.
- Building into the plan sufficient time for this phase.
- Working closely with the managers and supervisors of the areas impacted by the project.