



Dar Al Riyadh Insight #33

Stakeholder Management in Large Complex Programs – Sentry, Scout, Ambassador

Dar Al Riyadh Insights reflect the knowledge and experience of our Board, executives and staff in leading and providing PMC, design and construction management services. Dar Al Riyadh believes in the importance of broadly sharing knowledge with our clients and staff to improve project outcomes for the benefit of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Sentry, Scout, Ambassador

The nature of stakeholder engagement required by large complex projects requires three new management constructs. These can be described as sentries, scouts and ambassadors. Individually we can argue that we undertake one or more of these efforts today but collectively the combination of efforts and the degree of attention placed on them is inadequate for the level of stakeholder risks faced by large complex projects. Let's look at each in turn.

Sentries, are a description of a set of outward facing project management efforts that go well beyond environmental scans and stakeholder management. Sentries are on alert all the time, constantly scanning the horizon for new influencing flows and any changes in direction or strength. By their very nature sentries will be in the best position to see such flows as they are approaching the project boundary, well before such influences have crossed the boundary and begun wrecking havoc on the project activities within. The mere posting of sentries or, said another way, looking for impacting changes arising external to the project is in itself a significant first step. While some large complex projects do make efforts in this regard they often suffer from two shortcomings:

- Failing to post sentries along the entire border of the project, continuously. We prejudge what needs to be watched and when it should be watched and then are surprised when stakeholder driven changes emerge at a different place or at a different time.
- Being blinded by assumptions that cause us to not take notice of their gradual migration or even worse not even track.

Scouts, describe a set of management activities which drive us to become one with the territory and not merely a reader of maps. Scouts move about, observe, test, confirm and pay particular changes to perturbations in the broader stakeholder ecosystem. They provide both an earlier detection system as well as a feedback mechanism to allow prudent management planning for contingencies. As we have seen earlier contingent execution represents an important capability in the management of large complex projects.



Scouts allow us to translate contingency planning from a purely academic exercise to one founded on observation and suspicions. Finally, scouts provide that over the horizon observational capability that sentries alone cannot have. They offer hope in preparing the project to respond to upcoming changes driven by influencing flows rather than just recognizing the impacts of these flows after they have already set upon the project.

The third management construct essential in addressing an emergent stakeholder ecosystem is the concept of **Ambassadors**. In some ways this is an activity we see in most large complex projects and represent existing stakeholder engagement efforts. While these efforts are good they are not sufficient in many cases. Ambassadors must:

- Move beyond just a binary understanding of a binary relationship. They must understand all those acting upon the targeted stakeholder and the “regional” type issues this and other stakeholders face.
- Be part of the territory, not just periodically passing through. They need to live, breathe and feel the pains and anxieties of those affected by the project. In many ways they advocate not only for the project with sets of stakeholders but also advocate for the stakeholders with the project. This duality of role requires a level of organizational and management maturity and is associated with a high level of owner readiness and a long term commitment to the project’s setting and performance.

Together, sentries, scouts, and ambassadors provide a significant shift in project control efforts from primarily internal ones, underpinned by the notion of a bounded project associated with classical project management theory to a more balanced internal and external focus reflecting the semi-permeable project boundary we actually observe on large complex projects.