

# Gaining Commitment to Large and Complex Internal Projects

Peter Floyd, SPE, Global Client Transformation Director, RWD Technologies

Every journey begins with one small, first step. You have probably heard that phrase or one like it before. Yet, quite often—and counter-intuitively—the second step is actually more difficult than the first.

We have all had that moment (that first step) where a fantastic idea or solution to a problem pops into our head from nowhere. Then we go and talk enthusiastically about it with our colleagues (that second step), often to be met with a disappointing and less than positive response. Dejected, we retreat back into our inner world, bemoaning the people we work with and also possibly the organization.

This scenario has strong parallels in the world of project proposals, where exactly the same process, and outcome, is regularly experienced. This is particularly true when considering the large-scale, strategic, and organizational-focused issues such as implementing processes around the big crew change, standardization, integration, or the implementation of new computer technologies. These types of project have a number of unique characteristics, when compared to more technical projects, which make the commitment-gaining process considerably more difficult.

So the big question for people wanting to get an idea off the ground is, “How

do I effectively initiate and gain commitment to such ideas and projects?” This article provides some answers and strategies for this challenge, which centers on a missing step—walking in other people’s shoes.

## Lower-Profile Projects

The oil and gas industry faces an increasingly wide range of technical challenges that are widely known and documented. These technical and capital projects are seen as the glamorous side of the business, typically at the cutting edge of technology, which after all, is what has made this industry successful. Hence, these projects are usually given greater prominence. But what about the more internal and organizational-related projects? These usually have a lower profile, and dare to say, often a lower success rate. Are these types of projects as important and challenging as the technical ones?

Important? Absolutely. Many of the strategic issues facing the industry are as much organizational as technical. Organizational productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness are becoming increasingly important and urgent topics within our industry. And the means of achieving these goals—standardization, integration, optimization, and leveraging the functionality of technology—are affected as well.

Challenging? Absolutely, but with very different challenges and for very different reasons. **Table 1** lists some of these major characteristic differences between projects of a primarily technical and organizational nature.

The unique characteristics of these internal and organizational projects have an impact on the commitment-gaining process. Experience suggests that it is far more challenging to gain commitment to organizational projects, irrespective of the governance processes used, for the reasons outlined. Yet the paradox is how strategically important these types of projects are for organizations, particularly given the current forces at work in our industry. Organizational effectiveness and efficiency must become increasingly important topics for management and executives.

Success in gaining commitment typically requires a slightly different mindset and skill set than that for technical and engineering processes. This is a factor that some people struggle with. Given the nature of their roles, training, background, expertise, and natural style, this is understandable, and yet it is critical.

The key to success is to understand and leverage these more subtle, less technical, and more social and political approaches, particularly when we come back to that second step—project proposal—gaining acceptance to and commitment for, these types of projects from senior organizational stakeholders. These challenges center around two main areas:

- The goals, benefits, value, and return on these projects, the cost of doing vs. not doing
- The form of solution and approach to be used

These can never be absolute; they will have shades of gray. They are more open



Floyd

**Peter Floyd, SPE**, is Global Client Transformation Director for RWD Technologies’ Energy Division. He specializes in addressing the organizational challenges associated with large and complex client programs. He started his career as a member of a seismic survey crew in Thailand and has since worked in a variety of projects in Kazakhstan, Alaska, and Colombia. Before joining RWD, he worked for IBM. Floyd is the author of the book *Organizational Change*. He earned a BSC degree with honors in physics and electronics from Exeter University, and an MBA and an MS degree in research methods from Open University.

to interpretation, and, therefore, rely more on subjective judgments made by key organizational stakeholders.

### Project, Organizational Stakeholder Alignment

The basis of the presented approach is to seek maximum alignment between three elements, illustrated in **Fig. 1**.

The first element is the key organizational stakeholders: who they are, the roles they fulfill, and the structure(s) in which they operate. The second element is the issues, needs, goals, and priorities of those stakeholders. The third element is the scope and solution of a potential project, and the resulting value and benefit that this will bring the stakeholders. Projects are invariably solutions to problems or needs, so the value is directly related to the extent to which the idea helps stakeholders' needs and pain points. We then come full circle back to element one.

### Who? Stakeholders and Structure

The first and foundation element is the organizational stakeholders. Stakeholders are defined as a single individual, or group of individuals that have a common connection and who are either impacted or have an interest or influence over a project. All organizations have a diverse range of stakeholders, often with conflicting or even opposing interests and agendas. This is an inherent and natural aspect of all organizations.

The basis of this whole approach is that it is primarily a political and social process, more than a generic and rationale approach. The solution is to win both hearts and minds.

First, list all the possible stakeholders, both those internal to and potentially those external to the organization. The second step is to identify the structural dynamics of the organization. The organizational structure and relative power of each function or role plays a critical part. Consider the example of the big crew change. One of the fundamental challenges in tackling the issues associated with this challenge is: who does, should, or could own this problem(s)? The potential internal stakeholders range from the human resources department, to training, unions, supervisors, the operations director, or right up to the company's executive committee. The relative powers of each function or role will vary considerably.

### Why? Needs, Issues, Goals, Priorities, and Styles

There are two main components to this element:

- The components dictated by each person's role
- The components dictated by each person's individual style, character, beliefs, and values

Consider the role of influence. Each stakeholder will have very different responsibilities, goals, tasks, and needs. An important associated factor is the varying time horizons associated with different roles and goals. There are no rules here; it is very much case-by-case. Some might be very short, and others might be much longer time horizons, and dependent on the specific issue or goal. This is an important consideration when wanting to get commitment to an idea.

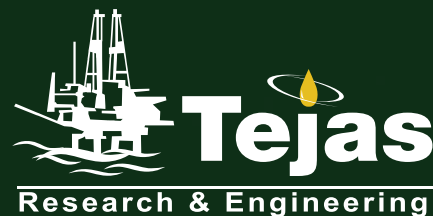
Consider the person's style—again this will be different for every person or stakeholder. Their levels of interest, behavior and actions will be determined by these two components. A tactic is to research these needs and goals as best you can, seeking validation wherever possible. Potentially, the only accurate validation is to go and talk to these people yourself.

There is a strong level of interdependence between the "who" and the "why."

Stakeholders can be assessed and categorized in multiple ways. Segmentation is a common approach with a range of options and variations. This is somewhat like psychological profiling, but at its heart is our initial precept of "walking in other people's shoes." One example of segmentation is considering the element's interest in an idea, combined with the level of power of the stakeholder. Both these are important, and related. This is illustrated in **Fig. 2** and is a critical consideration in gaining wide-scale commitment to a project or initiative.

Stakeholders are then mapped on these two dimensions in relation to the proposed project (Fig. 2). The strategies to gain commitment from different stakeholders will be different, based on their position in the box. The golden rule is "different strokes for different folks."

Sometimes simple information and education can be powerful levers to achieve higher levels of interest, awareness, and commitment. The ideal is total alignment; however, the organizational reality is that there may well be win-lose scenarios at play.



## SETTING A NEW STANDARD IN TESTING SERVICES



Let Tejas help you with your next equipment testing or analysis project

9185 Six Pines Drive  
The Woodlands, TX 77380

T. 281 466 8700

F. 281 466 8063

sales@tejasre.com

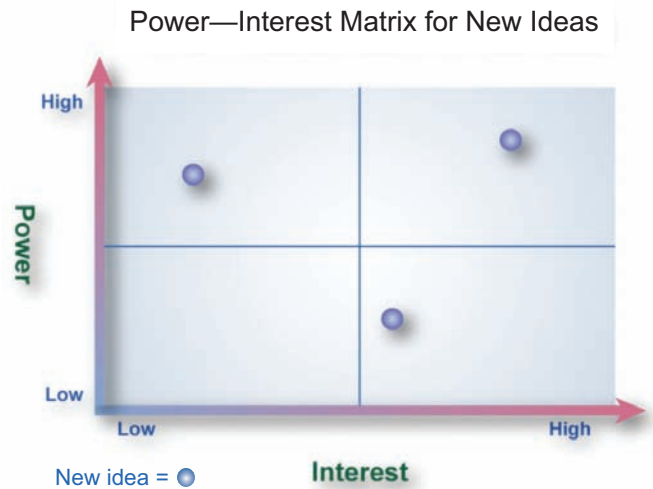
[www.tejasre.com/j109](http://www.tejasre.com/j109)

**TABLE 1—THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TECHNICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROJECTS**

Criteria	Technical project (e.g., facilities)	Organizational project (e.g., integrating the big crew change)
Main purpose of project	Build, develop, or change chemical processes and facilities to improve production effectiveness and/or efficiency	Build, develop, or change aspects of an organization, including ways of working, systems, and people to improve organizational effectiveness and/or efficiency
Nature of work	Engineering and science-based Objective, factual Easily quantified	More social and politically based Often subjective Less easy to quantify
Main parties involved Nature of relationship between main parties	Procurer (customer) and supplier organizations Highly formalized commercial and legal agreement between legal entities	Appropriate internal stakeholders Internal “contracting” agreement between internal stakeholders, guided by internal policies Based primarily on organizational roles, reporting, and personal styles and relationships
Design rules and principles	Based on undisputable science and engineering principles, fundamental natural laws, and rules	No clear, undisputable laws Based on more generalized and subjective laws, rules, and principles around human and organizational behavior More drive-by social/political rules and personal beliefs/values
Other influences	Commercial interests Strategic considerations	Greater influence of personal agendas Greater influence of relationships and from “indirect” stakeholders Resource considerations have greater influence More susceptible to impact of changing people in roles
Ease of transforming project deliverables	Straightforward, with simple causal model from facility built to production to revenues and profits	More complex and less certain causal model due to many interdependencies between achieving project deliverables and realizing business value Additional risk of unforeseen consequences
Quantification of return on investment (ROI)/benefit realization	Easily quantifiable Cost of doing vs. not doing is clear Relatively simple and clear ROI calculation	Typically more difficult to quantify ROI is less tangible, more complex, and harder to measure Cost of doing vs. cost of not doing is not always clear



**Fig. 1—Aligning the three elements.**



**Fig. 2—Mapping a stakeholder strategy.**

Consider again the big crew change and a possible, realistic scenario. The Operations Director may be facing increasing issues about resources in terms of numbers, level, and skills of the people required to maintain a project. However, the HR Director may be under pressure to cut resource costs. The Unit Superintendent may be attempting to safeguard his position by keeping all the knowledge to himself. The younger operators enjoy the overtime requirement and do not want to give this up, while the lead technical specialists do not want the overtime, preferring more time with their families. This makes for an interesting set of dynamics, with the positive and negative consequences of any proposed solution for the range of stakeholders and their interests. The challenges of change! Hence the importance of both understanding these dynamics, and the creativity required to develop an acceptable win-win-win solution, addressing the challenges, barriers, and relative power of the associated stakeholders.

#### **What? Project Scope, Boundaries, Deliverables**

The final element focuses on refining and clarifying details of the initial big idea. Would-be innovators and champions should translate their big idea into a project definition including scope, goals, and deliverables, and then compare this to the needs, issues, goals, priorities, and spheres of influence and personal styles of the organizational stakeholders. This step completes the circle by considering the value and benefits of the proposed project, given its scope and deliverables, to the key stakeholders. This is the creative element to ensure maximum, or at least acceptable, organizational alignment. This is the crucial second step, and there are a number of components to this.

Project scope is one of the most critical considerations as it defines the boundaries. Boundaries are multidimensional, and are usually the biggest source of problems, issues, and disagreement with stakeholders. Project scope boundaries are defined, including computer systems, functional processes, and workflow. However, a common mistake is ignoring role, location, and organizational boundaries, and yet these are often the most important boundary considerations.

The related element of project scope—the size and scale of the idea is another consideration—this could be huge, where the boundary is the whole organization, with re-engineering the business operations, massive recruiting and training, investment in automating technologies, etc. In the case of the big crew change, the scope could be all of these, meaning that possibly the whole of the executive board would have to sign up for it, which is probably not realistic, and the resources and complexity equally considerable. One possibility is that the initial “big project” aspiration be split into a number of separate projects that will be smaller scale, more feasible, and more aligned to the individual stakeholders, and hence easier to gain commitment.

Another of the alignment elements are the project deliverables, which are closely linked to the value issue. Initiators must take a hard look at how the proposed deliverables will really help each of the key stakeholders in addressing their needs and goals. Another factor is the nature of the solution to address the problem. Different stakeholders may believe in different solutions. In the case of the big crew change, the answer is training, process re-engineering, recruitment, or a mix of all these and more.

#### **Adding it All Together**

The solution is to define an optimal scope and set of deliverables that a particular set of stakeholders will all benefit from, and can therefore all agree on, and that is within their remit and sphere of influence. This alignment will lead to personal benefits and value to the key stakeholders. As a result, they will commit to the proposed project.

Internal organizational-based projects are becoming increasingly important given our industry's challenges. And yet, paradoxically, they are significantly harder to gain commitment and buy-in to. The solution is far greater planning and assessment work at the early stages of the project initiation, before “going public.” We all love traveling on new and exciting journeys, and you likely have many first steps already identified. The second step is probably the most critical one—to walk in other people's shoes. This should lead to many new, exciting, and valuable routes and journeys, with benefits for all. **JPT**



## **SETTING A NEW STANDARD IN CHOKE VALVE QUALITY**



**Visit our website to review the proven and enhanced Merla® Flow Control & Production Choke Valves**

**9185 Six Pines Drive  
The Woodlands, TX 77380**

**T. 281 466 8700**

**F. 281 466 8063**

**sales@tejasre.com**

**www.tejasre.com/j109**