Influence Mapping And Power Distribution

Idea In Short

Even the most powerful people rarely act alone. The decisions they make are usually influenced by their coworkers and advisors. Understanding the nature and intensity of these changes can be vital to your project's success. Recognizing the stakeholders of your project is what influence mapping is all about.

Making change happen can be difficult. The larger the change the more difficult it can be to achieve. But, even in large organizations, there are usually just a few key people who play a disproportionate role in enabling a change to happen. The purpose of influence mapping is to identify these people. You can then take steps to get their support. This will give you a much greater chance making your change a success.

Influence mapping

Influence mapping identifies the individuals and groups with the power to affect a key decision. It further investigates the position and motives of each player and the best channels through which to communicate with them. The approach is also known as Stakeholder influence mapping, Power mapping or the Arena of influence. In the business sector it is similar to Market segmentation which analyses the structure of the market and details consumer interests and behaviors. By its careful application, think tanks can tune their messages and arguments to different audiences, and better understand how to channel their efforts.

True Stakeholders

- Usually, the CEO and the CFO have the biggest impact on organization-wide changes, but it is not always so; in some cases, the hierarchy doesn't reflect the amount of influence, so it's advisable to check everything carefully.
- Influence is not static. Relations are always changing. Making influence maps on

regular basis helps you monitor the situation and be aware of new circumstances.
- Stakeholders may be both organizations and people, so make sure you identify the correct individual stakeholders as well as organizational stakeholders

Stakeholder Relationships

Now you may have a long list of people who have an impact on your project. The next step is to gather as much information about your stakeholders and relations between them as possible. To do this you need to answer the following questions:

- Who do they influence, and who has impact on their decisions?
- What is the intensity of the influence?
- Why is the stakeholder interested/not interested in the success of your project?
- How well are they informed?
- What does the organization need from this particular stakeholder?

Stakeholder Groups

After you have found out who your true stakeholders are, you should divide them into groups:

1. Static / weak
2. Dynamic / weak
3. Static / strong, and
4. Dynamic / strong

Stakeholders in groups 1 and 2 are the easiest to deal with. Those in section 3 are powerful and can influence other people's decisions, but their reactions are predictable. Stakeholders in group 4 require the biggest amount of management attention as they are powerful and their reactions are difficult to predict. You should monitor their expectations for the project regularly and make sure they are well-informed.

Importance

Constructing influence maps regularly, you can become more effective and create an appropriate environment for developing your project. If you manage to get support from the most influential stakeholders, you will have more opportunities for reaching your goals. By

considering their opinion you not only gain their support, but improve the quality of your project as well. If the influence is not positive, you should create strategies to manage the opposition. Take time to uncover the root causes of the changes, so you can understand the underlying relations between your stakeholders and predict their reactions.

Process

Influence mapping builds naturally on Stakeholder analysis (and, to a degree, has similarities with the drivers or influences identified in Force field analysis). Be clear over the policy issue or change being analyzed and single out those in high positions of power. First, differentiate between the decision-makers who have the actual responsibility to make the decisions in a specific area, and their opinion-leaders who can influence them or lead their opinion, and who are generally more accessible. Remember, absolute power is a myth. Every executive depends on a group of advisors without whom they cannot operate. They are accountable to a wide group of interest groups, constituencies and lobbies. Further they may be influenced by the nature of the information and research they receive, how it is reported in the media, the political regime, not to mention their own beliefs and ideologies. It is often helpful to map the information as a pyramid of actors and influences. You can use the following process to create an influence map:

1. Start at the center
2. Identify and map key people
3. Add in key people influencers
4. Plan your influence strategy

The construction of this interest map or pyramid brings about rich discussion. The distance from the bottom represents how influential the factor is and, critically, the route by which this influence reaches the decision-maker. It is worth trying to detail the key individuals and institutions that carry the influence – whether they be specific people, newspapers, churches or so forth. This allows the group to analyze possible ‘influence channels' – entry points to effect change.

Start at the center

Place the change you're trying to make happen at the center of your diagram. If you're trying to get a project to happen then place that at the center, or if you're trying to get a

proposal approved then place that at the center.

Identify and map key people

The next step is to draw the people with an influence over what you want to achieve onto your diagram. At this point, you'll want to show:

- How important to success each person is. You do this by drawing a line between both elements and shading it more, the more important the person is
- Which way the influence flows. Use an arrow to do this. For example, if you had no influence over your boss then the arrow would go from them to you
- The quality of the relationship. To do this use proximity, so you place good relationships close together and poor ones far away

Add in key people influencers

In this step, we repeat the process adding in people with influence over the people we identified in step 2.

Plan your influence strategy

The final step is to rank the list of influencers based on a combination of how easy they are to reach and how important they are to the success of your change. From this, you can generate ways to reach and influence these key people you have identified. This will give you the greatest chance of reaching your goal.

Summary

Influence mapping allows us to identify the stakeholders who are central to a decision. More than this, it allows us to identify other actors who have influence over these key stakeholders. Influence mapping can help you to identify these key influencers. From there, you can create a plan to work with these key influencers (where you can reach them) to push your agenda. This will give you a much greater chance of success, whatever the change you are trying to make happen.