# STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT, AND HERDING BUTTERFLIES

**The new mantra: "We must manage our Stakeholders more efficiently".**

What nonsense! The term "Stakeholder Management" is as unhelpful and misleading as "Human Resources" and "Work/Life Balance". Last time I checked, our staff were people not resources, and when did work become more important than life?

Stakeholders are people. They are not inventory, tasks or units of production to be managed. I suggest, that in your dealings with stakeholders, you do not talk about "managing" them, especially "efficiently".

This might seem a little pedantic, but I think there is a broader mindset issue here. "Stakeholder Management" seems to be looking at the scenario from the service providers point of view; the outcomes that we want with little regard for the stakeholder's needs. A service mentality puts the stakeholders requirements first, and only then will we get the cooperation, access and forgiveness we need for mutual outcomes

**The good news is that we have moved out of the dark ages of service provision.**

The days when internal service departments (IT, Finance, HR, Shared Services, Risk and Audit) viewed themselves as the definitive authority on how the business should be run. These groups now recognise that they are here to support the business. They now understand that they have customers, clients and stakeholders.

> **Stakeholders are looking to us for solutions...there is no such thing as a solution without a problem**

> **The term "Stakeholder Management" is as unhelpful and misleading as "Human Resources" and "Work/Life Balance".**

As service providers it is our role to provide Stakeholders with outcomes that they see as valuable. It may be convenient, from a delivery perspective, to do that in a well managed, efficient way. This is not the message that the stakeholder wants to hear. It will not win the co-operation and engagement required to build a productive working relationship.

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders are looking to us for solutions. Since there is no such thing as a solution without a problem or requirement, it would seem critical that we take the time to understand their needs. Proposing solutions, and ways forward, without taking the time to listen to their requirements, will appear at best superficial, and at worst arrogant. Not a great starting point.

Stakeholders, like the rest of us, are not keen to share their problems with strangers. Unless we build some form of engagement with them, it is highly unlikely that we will learn what is actually going on. If they don't know us, trust us, or question our value, why should we expect them to share with us? We may get a safe and sanitised version of the truth, or just the basics. Either way, we are setting ourselves up for failure. Efficient stakeholder management is not going to help us much here.

It has also come to my attention that stakeholders are not all the same. You may have observed the same phenomenon. What works with one stakeholder, may not "cut the mustard" with another.  And as well as the business requirements, these stakeholders further muddy the waters by having personal interests and agendas. We need to understand these, as they will impact the direction of the solution.

> "The overseas stakeholder was our "customer from hell", and had been for years. Following the Engagement Skills Workshop we had our next scheduled teleconference. I decided to change the format; rather than us announcing what changes they would get with our next release, we instead asked them what they would like to see. This was pivotal to the turn-around of the relationship. He is now one of our best stakeholders."

seeking, and the way in which those outcomes are achieved. They discover how to earn cooperation, respect and forgiveness from even the most difficult stakeholder. They understand how to be proactive and responsive rather than reactive and subservient. They become confident in asking for the commitment of time and resources from those stakeholders, in order to deliver positive and timely outcomes. They are on the path to becoming the "Trusted Business Advisor".

**But they have no idea about Stakeholder Management!**

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Participants of the JHW Engagement Skills Workshop, develop the skills to engage with stakeholders at a peer to peer level (regardless of seniority). They learn techniques to understand their business and personal requirements, to influence the outcomes they are

**Foot note:  We haven't dealt with herding butterflies, as it is no more useful than stakeholder management**