



8 Key “People” Questions to ask at the start of a Procurement Project

1. Who is the Project Sponsor?

If the Project Sponsor is not a senior manager from within the business (not Finance or IT) then consider stopping now. If the impending change is not driven by the business then the success will be limited.

2. What proportion of the Project Board is from the Business (not Finance or IT)?

Don't stack the project board with team members from the company administration divisions. The team must be predominantly from business operations. These are the people that understand the business and can identify, agree on and commit to implementing operational change.

3. What is your justification for this project?

Keep away from making the justification financial returns – it is only human nature to convert that into “reduced headcount in my department” and the knock-on effect of that is obstruction, concern and lack of holistic commitment. Significant justification can be built around good corporate governance, data integrity, improved systems of internal control and maximising purchases from approved suppliers. All these are genuine legitimate business improvement objectives that come without the connotations of bottom line savings.

4. What are the quantifiable benefits for this project?

A critical element of project planning is to define and quantify the benefits that will result from this project. For the success of the project to be measured and celebrated you may need to know what the current metrics are, what the targets are, what the value to the company will be of achieving the targets and the measurements required to track the outcomes. Without these published goals in place the project will become at best defocused, and at worst destructive.

5. Are you prepared to physically and culturally change the way you do things?

If you are not prepared to change the way the company operates then you will systemise the existing processes with all the inherent inefficiencies and achieve nothing beneficial. How are you going to prepare for and execute the change management that will be required?

6. Who will the final implementation plan be presented to and what will it contain?

Any project of this significance in an organisation will require a documented strategy and implementation approach. Who is the final target audience for this proposal and what will the expect/need to see? How will the proposal be used within the company – is it the foundation on which a decision is to be made or in support of an existing directive? Is the project to be linked to an existing business case or is it to build the business case? Is the proposal to be supported by a return on investment and if so does the information exist to calculate that ROI or does the proposal need to define that as well?

7. On a scale of audacity from 1 to 10 how would you rate this project?

Aiming high for a massive business improvement with the resulting significant benefits will bring the project into the spotlight of the Board and the senior management team. That is usually what you want; this focus will bring ownership and commitment from the top along with the associated pressure to deliver on the goals.

However aiming low has its advantages as well, it can lower management's expectations of the potential impact of the project and keep it under the radar to avoid obstructive and politically motivated interference.

You may need to think this one through.

8. What will cause this project to fail?

Identify the major threats to the success of the project, at the start and on an ongoing basis. Be agile in spotting them, mitigating against them and avoiding them. Define your critical success factors, monitor and pursue them. Plan to succeed.