



BA Manager Forum – January & February 2021

The following notes are a summary of the points raised in two breakout sessions that ran as part of four workshops on the subject of working more effectively with senior stakeholders. David Harper (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/david-harper-7b066a7/>) led the sessions and a total of 150 BA practice leaders attended the workshops.

Breakout Discussion 1 - What might you, as a senior BA, contribute during meetings with senior stakeholders? For example, when reporting on programme or project challenges?

Use the unique understanding that stems from knowing the wider stakeholders and their different perspectives. Potential to be translating information from SME's.

Provide the broader context and use BA tools/approaches to aid decision making. Information from the front line can be critical and help focus on the problem. Ability to deep dive if required. Thinking ahead with wider implications e.g., regulatory needs.

Provide reminders on the wider strategy and clarity on objectives.

Take the role of the customer and share their journey.

Understand what is practical to achieve, setting realistic personal objectives. Consider if you can be more pragmatic with functional solutions.

Drip feed key information and tailor as required. Think about the executive summary or the critical information. Be careful with the amount of detail.

Maintain an honesty and openness of approach. This builds credibility and the reputation as a trusted advisor. This approach may well contrast to PM "spin" on project status.

Focus on and maintain objectivity. A difficult skill to master but can help remove bias in decision making.

From doing your homework, have carefully prepared information and data. Again, always tailor the information your audience requires. Potential to use decision trees (impacts and consequences).

Tell the story that is easy for your senior stakeholder to understand and importantly to retell to others. Consider who they will be re-telling their story to.

Consider stakeholder worries/their personal situation and priorities. Where will their focus be. Consider hidden drivers and aim for collaboration (on the same side).



Reframe questions to gain the decision – “If we don’t do Y now X will happen” Be prepared where appropriate to challenge. Perhaps relay wider industry/competitor actions.

Consider your language. It should be simple and to the point. Stick to the facts.

Know when to listen and when to speak.

Invest the time in the preparation of visuals that will best convey the key message(s). Pictures or graphics in advance of a meeting can provide a best starting point.

If relaying bad news, have the risk mitigation plan/ways forward ready. Don’t simply be a harbinger of bad news. Have considered suggestions on actions to move forwards and the benefits of these actions and outcomes ready to present.

Highlight the areas that require most attention e.g., lack of expertise or unexpected complexities. Again, prepare for ways forward.

If necessary, be prepared to accept some risk yourself. There is then a sense of risk being shared and you can set the example to be followed.

Development of conflict management skills. The ability to use these skills can pay dividends and help overcome potential fears.

Remember the snooker and chess analogy and your next moves and/or potential trade-offs.

Where possible, build the relationship in advance of needing any difficult conversation. It’s as important to preserve the longer term relationship as it is to solve an immediate problem.

Value Stream mapping can be a useful tool to maintain the focus on potential value and remind all parties of the objectives and benefits to be realised.

“Bottom line up front” (BLUF). Relate to costs, the business case or investment decision.

Take your character into the room – *(be yourself more often with skill)*.

Consider how to “marinate and simmer” stakeholders.

Breakout discussion 2 - How might you overcome the fear factor when working with senior stakeholders? What personal attitudes and tactics might you use to achieve desired outcome?

Preparation, preparation, preparation

- Anticipate questions that could be asked + pros and cons of possible actions.
- Analyse the data and be ready with headline information – people like % savings for example.
- Rehearse with a colleague or consult with others who have taken on similar tasks/know the stakeholders.
- Socialise material with other stakeholders – potential to drip feed ahead of a meeting or decision point.
- Be prepared to take a question offline if required for a separate conversation.
- Take an open not defensive approach.
- Consider preconceptions that may need to be dealt with – need to rewind or context set.
- Take notes with you and be prepared to refer to them.
- Put your camera on and prepare any ice-breaker that may be necessary.
- Prepare to apologise if required.
- If you don't know, be prepared to say so. No waffle!
- Use a simple structure to make your points – e.g., evidence, justification and impact assessment.

Relate your information or story to the agreed strategy.

Focus on values and beliefs (yours and theirs) helps overcome the fear factor. You are on the same side! Be true to your beliefs and values – the only way to remain authentic and build trust.

Is humility required? Be prepared to admit a mistake to move on.

Senior stakeholders are human – do you have any personal information that provides common ground. Do your research and seek out any opportunity to establish an early rapport.

Maintain empathy throughout your dealings (but don't make it personal or take it personally).

Take time to understand the culture in the room and tune into this where possible.

See the senior stakeholder perspective; what do they need to know?

What is the worst that can happen... Examine your fears and what causes them.



Remember your role. You aren't there to slow things down but to do what you are paid to do and enable better decisions. Remember the value you bring and what is on your job description. **Being your job helps not to take things personally.** Ask the question – have I done what is reasonably expected of me?

Team with a colleague or stakeholder as a double act. If nothing else it can provide time to think and two heads are available to answer questions.

The power of silence. Be OK with taking the time to think and provide a measured response.

Draw on past experience of situations where you have found and shown resilience.

Meditation or use of a go-to piece of music may help increase confidence. Anchor to positive times/outcomes in the past.

Imagine yourself as an actor, taking on a role in a given situation. Consider the “power pose”.

Do something every day that makes you a little scared.

Fake it till you make it – Amy Cuddy. Push the comfort zone.

Take biscuits to meetings.

Suggested Reading

Feel the fear and do it anyway - Susan Jeffers

Why should anyone be led by you – Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones

Suggested Viewing

The Ecstasy of Wilko Johnson - BBC Imagine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLLPsGoBtF8>

Fake it until you make it – Amy Cuddy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVmMeMcGc0Y>

Why Should Anyone be Led by You? – Gareth Jones

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0q_iGQpT-Qo